

Press release

November 29 2006
For immediate release

Green safeguards help business too

Barker planning report should accept the economic value of the environment

Campaigners are hoping the final report by Kate Barker on England's planning system, which is expected this week, will recognise the value of the environment to the UK's economic growth.

In a welcome move, Kate Barker's interim report, published in July, accepted that there was little appetite, even amongst businesses, for large scale reform because improvements had recently been made to the planning system.

Now, Wildlife and Countryside Link, a coalition of environment groups, is urging Kate Barker to take recent reforms into account and make recommendations which place the environment at the heart of a robust planning system. In so doing, she should do four things:

- Recognise that strong planning creates high quality places in which both people and nature can prosper;
- Value the landscapes and wildlife of the natural environment because both boost the well-being of people;
- Acknowledge the economic benefits of a high quality environment in the countryside, on the coast and in urban areas;
- Maintain or even strengthen the involvement of the public, interest groups and especially local communities in planning decisions.

Fiona Mahon, Chair of Link's Land-use Planning Working Group, said: "The planning system has already been considerably altered and some improvements have become apparent very quickly. But the full implications of changes to planning laws take much longer to take effect and we urge the government to allow time for this before deciding on further reforms.

"The planning system as it stands is already fit to ensure that the construction of new homes, roads and other, major, infrastructure projects leads to economic, social and environmental improvements together. This can benefit business and people and safeguard the environment at the same time, both now and in the future."

Ends

Contacts:

Fiona Mahon, Chair of Wildlife and Countryside Link's Land-use Planning Group and Land Use Planning Manager at The Wildlife Trusts: 01636 670085 / 07957 989682 / fmahon@wildlifetrusts.org

Simon Marsh, Vice-Chair of Wildlife and Countryside Link's Land-use Planning Group and Head of Planning and Regional Policy, The RSPB: 01767 680551 / 0796 9245717 / simon.marsh@rspb.org.uk

Notes to editors:

- Chancellor Gordon Brown and Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott commissioned Kate Barker to review England's land use planning system in December 2005.
- She was asked to consider how the system could boost economic prosperity and at the outset, conservationists feared that protected landscape areas and wildlife sites such as National Parks, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and areas which are safeguarded by European law such as Special Protection Areas, would be seen as obstacles to progress.
- Ms Barker's interim report accepted that recent planning reforms had made improvements but that more were needed because of climate change, rapid population growth, increasing competition from abroad and the depletion of resources such as water in the south-east.
- Further planning reforms were announced in the Queen's Speech this month. Reforms could be in the form of a Planning White Paper, which would lead to a Planning Reform Bill.
- Wildlife and Countryside Link brings together voluntary organisations concerned with the conservation, protection and enhancement of the countryside. Link's Land-use Planning Working Group has recently published guidance for those responsible for putting the new spatial planning approach into practice, see http://www.wcl.org.uk/Spatial_Planning_Guidance.htm. This press release is supported by the following organisations:
 - Buglife – The Invertebrate Conservation Trust
 - Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE)
 - Council for National Parks
 - Friends of the Earth
 - Herpetological Conservation Trust
 - Ramblers' Association
 - Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
 - The Wildlife Trusts
 - The Woodland Trust