

Consultation Response

Consultation: Final Report of the Barker
Review of Land Use
Planning

Consulting body: HM Treasury

Date: 05 March 2007

About the National Heart Forum

The National Heart Forum (NHF) is the alliance of 50 organisations working to reduce the risk of coronary heart disease in the UK. Member organisations represent the medical and health services, professional bodies, consumer groups and voluntary organisations. Members also include many individual experts in cardiovascular research. Government departments have observer status. The views expressed in this submission do not necessarily reflect the opinions of individual members of the alliance.

We are pleased to have the opportunity to share our views on the Barker Review of Land Use Planning. As the Barker Review is considered by Government, we want to stress the importance of considering the health impacts of planning decisions. Health is a critical part of sustainable development. Growing rates of obesity and other avoidable chronic diseases, such as coronary heart disease and diabetes, are over-burdening the National Health Service and generating huge social costs, including reduced quality of life and reduced healthy life expectancy.

Health improvement as a clear policy goal for development

Improving health and wellbeing should be central to planning and there should be a clear planning framework set by national and local government promulgated widely for developers to respond to. Too often planning is developer led, focused on short-term economic gains rather than long-term sustainable development goals. Developers should set out how their proposals will add to improving the community's health and wellbeing. Public health departments within the NHS and Local Authorities can assist by advising and scrutinising proposals. In particular, undertaking independent health impact assessments should be a required part of the development and planning process. This is to become routine in London and is enshrined in EU law but as yet is not routinely undertaken in the UK.

Key policy objectives that need to be set out by Government include prioritising pedestrians and cyclists and reducing the individual and environmental health damaging impacts of cars.

Communities need to be encouraged to be more engaged in planning and the planning system should enable them to have support and appeal processes at least on par with developers who are usually from outside the communities.

The importance of physical activity

Physical activity is an important part of reducing risk for many chronic diseases, yet Britain has very low rates of physical activity. While the evidence base is still growing, it is clear that the built environment has a significant impact on rates of physical activity and this must be taken into account during the planning process.

For example, mixed-use development plans, where shops are within easy reach of homes and streets are hospitable to pedestrians and cyclists, will encourage people to walk or cycle rather than drive. Unfortunately, growing urban sprawl means many shopping centres are virtually inaccessible without a car. Providing safe, well-

maintained parks and other green spaces provides an opportunity to engage in physical activity, improving physical and mental health, and can also increase social inclusion. But all too often, green space is sacrificed to new developments.

Blueprint for Action

The National Heart Forum joined with CABE and Living Streets to develop a *Blueprint for Action* – recommendations for national and local policymakers, planners, architects and public health advocates for creating a built environment that provides better opportunities for people to engage in everyday physical activity. Many of these recommendations will also help us reduce carbon emissions and achieve environmental objectives. These recommendations have been presented to the Department of Health and other Government departments.

We have attached the *Blueprint for Action* – which is still in draft form – and hope you will consider its recommendations as you move forward with changes to the planning process. We would be happy to share the final version, and the full report consisting of seven expert papers, if you are interested.