

The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Secretary of State of Housing,
Communities and Local Government
Planning Directorate
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Councillor Vincent Stops
Chair, Planning Sub-Committee
Hackney Town Hall
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29 October 2020
Ref: MCO201029-02

Dear Secretary of State

Planning for the Future – Response from Hackney Council Planning Sub-Committee

I am writing to you in my capacity as Chair of Hackney Council's Planning Sub-Committee to share the views of the substantive majority of elected Members who are currently Planning Sub-Committee Members responsible and accountable for Planning decision-taking in Hackney. These views are informed by an in-depth understanding of how our existing Planning system works and how it can and does successfully deliver new homes, jobs, shops, infrastructure and community facilities for the people of Hackney.

I would like to thank you for providing an opportunity for Local Planning Authorities to comment on your proposals to dramatically change our nation's Planning system. Particularly in terms of the impact your proposals will have on how we engage with local residents, businesses, developers and wider communities in relation to our decision-making processes. I hope that you will consider the Sub-Committee's comments carefully and seriously.

It appears that the Planning White Paper makes a fundamental error in assuming that our nation's existing Planning system is no longer capable of delivering the growth our residents need. That assumption could not be farther from reality. Far from being a drag anchor for growth, our existing Planning system is successfully facilitating growth across Hackney. My fellow Committee Members and I are very supportive of development proposals that bring growth to our Borough. We recognise it helps meet the needs of our residents, businesses and delivers sustainable neighbourhoods for our community. Our support for new growth is clearly evidenced by our performance - with nearly 90% of all major applications determined on time. More importantly, we



are successfully delivering on our London Plan housing target, which given our existing high density urban environments is quite an achievement. We have done all of this within the parameters of a Planning system that your Government believes is failing.

The Planning Sub-Committee would like to add our voice in objecting to your proposals to centralise policy-making and to a large extent decision-taking. This key aspect of your White Paper is a harmful and fundamental shift for our nation's Planning system. It appears that your intention is to remove the discretionary element in Planning decisions and indeed determinations, where currently proposals are assessed in relation to local policies and a balanced judgement made. Our existing and established Planning system provides the decision-taking process with flexibility and allows us to adapt to market and social changes responding to needs and shaping development to meet these needs.

Your approach, particularly in relation to the new zones/ areas, permitted development and design codes, in a pursuit of certainty and speed, will have undesirable consequences. We consider the existing system's flexible and adaptive approach that allows Local Planning Authorities to balance conflicting considerations will be replaced by mechanistic and binary approaches. The Government's proposals are likely to result in protracted legal challenges on the nature and wording of proposed zones and codes, rather than generating a real discussion of planning merits.

I would also like to support the views expressed by our elected Mayor in saying that we are very concerned about the significant democratic deficit that will come about should your proposals be taken forward. Your proposals to centralise plan-making and decision-taking could irrevocably erode public confidence in the Planning system and its ability to plan for future growth in the interests of local communities. Hackney prides itself on working closely with local residents, businesses and communities in planning and delivering the growth that the Borough needs. This is evidenced through our work on our Local Plan, LP33, and its emerging area-focused Area Action Plans and Supplementary Planning Documents, as well the decisions that the Sub-Committee is responsible for. We have placed local community involvement and engagement at the heart of the Planning determination process.

The Planning Sub-Committee believes that this has helped us secure decisions that deliver growth with consensual support from those most affected by it. Your proposals will introduce a democratic deficit that will erode all of the Council's good work to date.

Your proposals will effectively remove the need for a local Planning Committee. You will effectively remove the ability for the views and opinions of local residents, businesses, developers and landowners to be aired publicly. I would like to ask you - who will be accountable when your new system goes wrong? Will you stand before those residents, businesses, developers and landowners and take responsibility?

We are confident with the effectiveness of our current Planning system and I know that it can deliver the good quality places and growth that your Government is keen to see whilst ensuring that this growth is planned and meets the needs of a growing community. Your proposals do not support sustainable and inclusive growth.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'V. Stops', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Councillor Vincent Stops
Chair, Planning Sub-Committee