



Copers Cope Area Residents' Association



10 October 2020

To: Bob Stewart, Member of Parliament for Beckenham
cc: Bob Neil, Member of Parliament for Bromley and Chislehurst
Gareth Bacon, Member of Parliament for Orpington
Michael Tickner, Copers Cope Ward Councillor
Stephen Wells, Copers Cope Ward Councillor
Russell Mellor, Copers Cope Ward Councillor
Christine Harris, Kelsey and Eden Park Councillor
Diane Smith, Kelsey and Eden Park Councillor
Peter Dean, Kelsey and Eden Park Councillor
Alexa Michael, Chairman, Development Control Committee

Re Objections to 'Planning for the Future' government planning changes

Dear Bob

Thank you for speaking in the debate on planning Statutory Instruments on 30 September and raising some of the concerns we have about the wide sweeping so called reforms of the planning system. Thanks also to Bob Neil who referenced Beckenham in his speech.

You are so right that the community must be able to feel it has been listened to when there are changes, major or less so, to their local environment. These new Statutory Instruments (SIs) make many radical changes that will affect the wellbeing of English people in their own homes - as they apply only to England. What a pity, that despite widespread concern from MPs, like yourself, they were not annulled!

As you are aware, CCARA and WBRA have long opposed the Permitted Development Rights (PDR) to convert offices to flats without the need for planning permission. This has resulted in the loss of most of the offices in Beckenham, so much so that the Draft Council Local Plan had to be revised to take out reference to protecting the Beckenham Office Cluster which had been inserted to nurture employment in Beckenham and retain office accommodation for its future business needs. The commercial heart of the town has been lost, and is being replaced by homes below minimum space standards creating slum housing of the future. The SIs under debate included provisions to require PDR developments to include natural light and there are commitments to require minimum space

www.coperscope.org.uk & www.westbeckenhamra.org

To protect and promote the interests of residents in matters of local concern.

CCARA, founded in 1935, covering central and northern Beckenham.

WBRA, founded in 1945, covering parts of Kelsey and Eden Park, Clock House and Penge and Cator.

standards for future developments. But these will be of little use to Beckenham because all of our office blocks already have PDR under the old system. By not applying SIs retrospectively the government is failing to fix the unintended consequences of the initial PDRs and towns like Beckenham will suffer for it.

Now we have the prospect of more radical changes in the form of “**Planning for the Future**”. We hope you will study the new proposals very closely and join your fellow MPs that are opposing them. The debate on housing targets on 8 October on Planning and House Building very clearly demonstrated widespread cross party concern not only about the targets and the way they have been calculated, but also about the five basic proposals themselves.

“Planning for the Future” rips up our current planning laws and removes local input to individual planning decisions once some sort of master plan for an area is produced, incidentally one which a Planning Inspector can unilaterally amend if it is thought not to comply with the national plan. The proposals have a rather chilling dystopian air. The three zones would be decided through data and algorithms - we have not had good experiences of the use of algorithms have we?

Any local input would be pretty much limited to those who have access to smart technology. Design guides adopted at the outset would impose the same monolithic development everywhere – allegedly “beautiful” designs, but the consultation paper shows repeated photos of identical square built blocks and flat fronted houses. How suffocating such development would be, leaving little scope for future architectural innovation and creativity in the built environment. ‘Beauty’ is an emotion that is highly subjective; what one person considers to be beautiful, another does not. It is a human reaction to something, and is therefore unmeasurable and ‘ungradable’ - algorithms are not good at handling things that cannot be quantified. And Residents’ Associations such as ours simply do not have the time resources to engage with the detailed decisions on where and what these zones and design guides would be within the derisory six months supposedly allotted to this stage of the process.

Once adopted, such planning zones and designs will be in place for the foreseeable future. While it is in place, there is no mechanism for a household to object at application stage to any proposal that impacts on their life, including for example, bad neighbour businesses installing disruptive processes next to their boundary fence. Both Associations have helped many of your constituents to fight these proposals successfully in the past, but we would no longer be able to do so. Will you as our MP, our Councillors or the Council will have any influence over objectionable development? These proposals are a fundamental attack on the rights of people to have a say in their immediate neighbourhood!

Communities will have the opportunity to input into the review Design Guide every five years. Imagine what damage could be done to towns like Beckenham in 5 years with an algorithm in charge of planning! As our MP we are sure you would not like to preside over any irreversible and inappropriate development here in Beckenham.

The problem in providing more housing does not lie with the planning system. The Town and Country Planning Association says that there are outstanding permissions for between

800,000 and 1 million houses that remain unbuilt. This overhaul of the planning system is not necessary, it is ill-conceived and will no doubt, like its preceding PDRs, have significant and far reaching unintended consequences.

We ask that you work with the Government to reverse the proposals in this document and further assaults on the professionalism of architects working in the community.

Yours Sincerely

Chloe-Jane Ross, Chair, Copers Cope Area Residents' Association

Marie Pender, Chair, West Beckenham Residents' Association

Alan Old, Committee Member for Planning, Copers Cope Area Residents' Association