**Response from Theydon Bois Action Group, to Technical Consultation on**

**Reform of Planning** **Committees – July 2025**

I make this response on behalf of Theydon Bois Action Group (TBAG).  Theydon Bois is a village of approximately 1700 households, situated within Epping Forest District, and bounded by Epping Forest and Green Belt farmland.

**The current planning situation—As we see it:-**

**The Government proposes to build 1.5 million new homes within its 5 year term in office.** In fact, this is exactly the same number as the proposed 300,000 new homes a year sought by the previous government. We are of the opinion that the build out rates of approved permissions are controlled by developers who ‘land bank’ and ‘drip feed’ properties onto the market to control prices and keep them high, so as to maximise their profits. Developers build the majority of new homes and not governments or local authorities. Developers, particularly the larger companies, are very effective ‘lobbyists’ who endeavour to influence government policies in their quest to control markets and profits. Seven, house builder companies have recently been fined £100 Million to fund affordable homes, after UK Competition Watchdog, CMA, say they may be sharing commercially sensitive information that affects the price of homes!

**There are currently some 1.4 million extant, already approved planning permissions for homes**, **not yet built out by developers,** according to the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) and others. Yet, the Government seeks to blame local authorities for the poor build out rates by developers, saying there is too much ‘red tape’ and the planning system needs to be simplified to reduce determination times so as to make it easier for developers; who already have the right to go to the Planning Inspectorate if a minor application takes more than 8 weeks, or 14 weeks for a major determination.

We would suggest that the Government’s proclaimed ‘reform of the planning system’ is largely P.R. hype and political spin! It will not lead to ‘building the right homes in the right places’, and without local knowledge and third party input to the planning determination process, developers will continue to favour ‘shovel ready sites’ in the countryside, with the associated loss of food production, carbon sequestration and flood alleviation, rather than previously developed brown field land, closer to employment, infrastructure and transport links. **We firmly object to the removal of local knowledge and democracy** from the proposed planning determination process, with the establishment of a two tier system, whereby under Tier A, planning officers will be solely and exclusively responsible for making decisions on minor applications of up to 9 homes, and potentially up to 50 homes on so called medium developments without any involvement of a Planning Committee, so bypassing the views of residents, and Parish and Ward District Councillors, duly elected to represent their local residents under the democratic process. Many of the planning officers in Epping Forest District, are relatively new and do not live in or know the area and some are contract staff. They often work from home and do not carry out site visits, possibly relying on Google Earth instead.

What the Government needs to do is to ensure that, once developers gain planning permission, **they proceed to complete the development in a timely manner**. ‘Use it (the permission) or Lose it’, should be the rule, and not land bank and drip feed development to maximise profits, aided by a ‘store’ of already approved permissions for 1.4 million new homes, as yet not built out, and very close to the Government’s own target of 1.5 million new homes over 5 years. We welcomed the Government’s recent technical consultation on Build Out Transparency but, frankly, it lacked sufficient teeth to deter developers from land banking. It only applies to housing units of 50 or more and is not retrospective, so the developers get away with the 1.4 million approved permissions that they have already stored up!

**Please find below our response to questions to your technical consultation on Reform of** **Planning Committees:-**

Q1)---No. A loss of Democracy.

Q2)---No. A loss of Democracy. Up to 9 units is a significant development.

Q3)---No. A loss of Democracy. 10 to 50 units is a Major development.

Q4)---No.

Q5)---Yes. Objections received from Town or Parish Council or Ward District Councillor which may include local knowledge, unbeknown to the planning officer —Otherwise a loss of Democracy.

Q6)---No. There is a potential risk of corruption here. Loss of Democracy.

Q7)---No. So called Minor applications, up to 9 units, should not be in Tier A. Loss of Democracy. They should go before a Committee.

Q8)---Yes. All applications within or adjacent to Green Belt land must go before a Committee as well as so-called Grey Belt!

Q9)---Tier B

Q10)---Tier B

Q11)---Tier B. Enforcement can be weak here and a committee decision should add strength.

Q12)---Yes.

Q13)---N/A

Q14)---Yes. Nine

Q15)---Don’t know

Q16)---No. The current 10% failure rate, **actually means a 90% success rate.** This needs to be recognised!

Q17)---No. See answer to Q16. Reducing 10% to 5% seems irrational and a likely bullying approach by Government. At such a low level, 5% would in statistical theory, fall outside of what is called **‘Significance’** .

Q 18, 19, 20)--- No.

Thank you for the opportunity to take part in this technical consultation on:- Reform of Planning Committees

Dr John Warren—Chair, Theydon Bois Action Group

21 July 2025