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## **Opposition Priority Business: – Town and Country Planning and Strategic Planning**

On June 14<sup>th</sup>, the Department of Communities and Local Government announced that Enfield Council is currently in line to be placed in 'special measures' allowing developers to bypass its planning department.

Councils that determine fewer than 30 per cent of major applications within 13 weeks over a two-year period are to be stripped of their planning powers.

In such cases, developers will be given the option of submitting major applications directly to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS), rather than the local planning authority. Given some of the historic decisions of PINS affecting Enfield, this will be disastrous.

This threat somewhat undermines the Labour Party's claim that it has made Enfield a 'Place to Do Business'.

However the threat comes as no surprise. The Conservative Opposition's consistently held view remains that the Labour administration is good at talking but spends a great deal doing very little. Its shortcomings in strategic planning can be evidenced by:

- (i) a failure to compulsorily purchase the Middlesex University Site for regeneration;
- (ii) a failure to act quickly to provide new school places, with the consequence that existing sites are being expanded above a size that was previously considered to be undesirable and with the consequence that the planning authority is determining applications after the council itself has entered into contracts for the construction of the sites;
- (iii) a failure to procure critical services from external suppliers in good time to ensure that value for money is achieved (e.g. Honeysuckle House);
- (iv) inadequate business planning in relation to the future of Southgate Town Hall operating against the public interest due to a poorly tendered scheme;
- (v) the failure to redevelop housing sites that have remained vacant at Parsonage Lane and Forty Hill etc.

The public has concerns about the planning process. It always has. However if the DCLG is threatening to put the planning department into special measures, this gives further credence to any concerns the public may have.

The criticisms made against the council in relation to planning are as follows:

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- (i) a failure to determine planning applications quickly enough, with the consequences that businesses are affected;
- (ii) a failure to consult adequately;
- (iii) pre-determination;
- (iv) the extent to which decisions are delegated;
- (v) lack of timely enforcement;
- (vi) the level of planning contributions being required by Enfield are a deterrent to development; and
- (vii) the quality and length of reports.

The Conservative opposition has recently been informed of the loss by the Council of relevant papers that concern the potential enforcement of an alleged planning breach. We therefore have the issue of document control, an issue that was identified by the Conservative opposition in relation to the management of sensitive child protection papers.

The Conservative Opposition recommends to Council that it commissions a peer review of all aspects of planning, requests a report that identifies existing practice within Enfield, how such practices compare with a number of authorities that are suitable for benchmarking and with recommendations, if there is any scope for improvement.

At the date of submission of this report, 8<sup>th</sup> July, the Member and Democratic Services Group is currently recommending the commissioning of the Planning Advisory Service to undertake a review, with a very narrow scope, namely to review how the planning committee is currently operating.

The Conservative Group queries why an external advisory service is necessary to perform such a limited scope of work, that could otherwise be performed by officers and councillors but recommends that the scope of services to be provided by the Planning Advisory Service be extended to cover those matters the subject of criticism referred to above.