

HOUSE OF COMMONS

SELECT COMMITTEE FOR HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS

EVIDENCE OF HIGHFIELD RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION, SOUTHAMPTON

1 Highfield Residents Association (HRA) covers Highfield and Portswood in central Southampton. It is the largest and most active residents' association in the City with several hundred paid-up members. Dealing with planning policy and applications takes up the biggest proportion of the Association's time and resources, and much of the issues involve use and abuse of PDR. HRA therefore welcomes this opportunity to submit its evidence to this timely investigation. HRA also associates itself with the evidence submitted or due to be submitted by its national representative body, the National Organisation of Residents Associations (NORA).

2 In theory, PDR facilitates potentially beneficial and even necessary development. In practice, it limits both the ability of local authorities to improve their areas and the capacity of local communities, such as those represented by HRA, to influence developments. Nor is there much evidence that PDR expands the housing stock. As HRA has argued previously, the shortage of (especially) affordable housing (both for owner-occupation and rent) is nothing to do with the planning system: it is chiefly due to reliance on the private sector for the supply (even if the Government, partly for ideological reasons and partly because of its links with private developers, refuses to acknowledge this).

3 There are two aspects of PDR on which the Association wishes to comment specifically.

4 The first is whether or not changes of use within Class C should be included in the Committee's inquiry. Based on our experience in Southampton, there can be no doubt that concentrations of HMOs,

such as those associated with the expansion of higher education, have the capacity to significantly change and unbalance the character of settled residential areas. The Association therefore wishes to associate itself with the submission by the National HMO Lobby and in particular its proposal that the last three words of Class L should be deleted so as to refer to the conversion of small HMOs to dwelling houses only. There is ample evidence that without the need for planning permission an existing HMO can effectively double its occupancy.

5 The second is to point to the way in which PDR are being exploited to create developments that are completely out of character with the immediate environs and which would almost certainly be rejected if they were subject to proper planning controls. In roads made up of semi- and terraced houses, a house can put up a rear extension of up to 8 metres. This creates a ‘tunnel’ effect to an adjoining property (which may well be an HMO). The photos below show how a whole new roof extension and dormers were installed in a local house, completely destroying the architectural integrity of a row of Victorian houses from the late 1890s. This is only one of a number of recent local examples that could be quoted. The Association invites members of the Committee to visit Gordon Avenue in Southampton to see the effects of the current abuse of PDR by local developers.





6 In short, the PDR system as it currently operates is much too open-ended and too open to abuse, certainly as regards domestic dwellings and HMOs. The Association would like the Committee to propose to the Government that ways are found to prevent these abuses without undermining the use of PDR where this is genuinely helpful to desirable developments. We would be very happy to be involved in such a discussion.

Roger Brown (Professor)

Acting Chair, Highfield Residents Association, Southampton

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