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Revised Draft CIL Charging Schedule and Draft S106 Planning Obligations and CIL SPD

Dear Planning Policy Team,

I write in response to the consultations on the above-named documents on behalf of the Liberal Democrat group at Southwark Council.

Overall, I am pleased that officers have put a significant amount of work into getting these documents right, and I am happy with most aspects of both documents, and the changes that have been made since the first draft. However, a number of issues still need to be addressed, and I would like to take this opportunity to raise these concerns formally.

Firstly, it is very important that the charging levels are consistent with existing council policies. The Southwark Plan, which was independently assessed and agreed to be implementable by BNP Paribas, establishes the council policy of achieving a minimum of 35% affordable housing on large housing developments – a percentage that is regrettably not regularly achieved in our borough at present. We need to be absolutely sure that the new CIL charges are set at a rate that does not further compromise the implementation of this policy.

I also have concerns about the distribution of the funding once it has been collected, particularly about the split between local and borough-wide distribution. All efforts should be made to ensure that the portion of the funds that is to be spent locally is genuinely spent on improvements in the communities affected by the development. Although they will be used as a last resort, the current Community Council areas are far too large to be used for this purpose. Rather, examples where the development does not fall within a neighbourhood plan or opportunity area should be examined on a case by case basis to ensure those residents whose lives are affected by the development can benefit from the new investment.

Government guidelines state that the percentage of the CIL charge that should be spent locally should be set at 15% with a cap at £100 per council tax dwelling, or 25% with no cap for areas with an adopted neighbourhood plan. This distinction has quite rightly been made to encourage the adoption of neighbourhood plans, and the council's decision to eliminate this distinction has the potential to damage the progress that is being made in developing more neighbourhood plan areas across the borough. Whilst the decision to spend more money locally is welcome, it would be useful to understand the council's thinking behind this decision.

Taken in conjunction with the possibility of spending local CIL funding in much larger areas if a neighbourhood plan is not in place, this measure will inevitably lead to local CIL funding being invested further away from the communities who have been affected by development, and according to an agenda that is not set by local people. The 75% remaining CIL is already being put towards borough-wide infrastructure projects that will benefit a greater proportion of residents.

Thank you for considering these points, I hope that they will inform your work on the consultation documents.

Yours faithfully,

Councillor Adele Morris
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