

NATIONAL PLANNING FORUM: *inspiring planning*

DRAFT NOTE OF MEETING: WEDNESDAY 17 OCTOBER 2007
Local Government House, Smith Square, London

1. WELCOME

Mark Southgate (MS), NPF Chair, Vice-Chair (Government and its Agencies) and Head of Planning and Environmental Impact, Environment Agency welcomed members to the meeting. Names of the 38 attendees, and 18 who had sent apologies, would be kept on file.

2. CULTURE CHANGE

(i) Draft Final Report: “Delivering Inspiring Places - The Role and Status of Planning”

The Chair invited further comments on the final draft; this had been revised to take account of comments made at the June meeting. Two further comments were made:

- to avoid disconnect with text on other forms of development page 40 should be revised to be more positive about private sector house-building – including the fact that it provides major investment and delivers the majority of new housing **Action: Secretary**
- paragraph numbers should to be added to the final version of the Report (and Summary).

With these amendments and additions members **agreed** to sign off the report. MS asked for any further comments to be made to the Secretary by Friday 26 October. This would enable them to be taken on board by the Culture Change Working Group (CCWG) when they meet. **Members endorsed Mark’s thanks to Janice Morphet, Tony Burton and Laura Hughes IDOX plc** for their excellent work. Their final report would give an excellent basis for further work. It would be posted onto the NPF web-site. **Action: Secretary**

MS invited comments on the Draft Summary Report prepared by the Secretary. Members considered that it was not exciting enough, needed much less verbiage, illustrations and more lay language if it was to reach a wider audience. The first part of the list on page 4 is too public-sector orientated; there was a need to encapsulate the conclusions at the end of the report as these are relevant to all sectors. **Action: CCWG to consider at their meeting**

(ii) Draft Action Plan

The Secretary summarised the Draft Action Plan (*ppt at <http://www.natplanforum.org.uk>*) adding that 2 other titles had been suggested by the Executive Board: Culture Change Manifesto, or Culture Change Challenge.

MS said he wanted to ensure that the membership was comfortable with the key themes and actions identified. The Environment Agency was now much more risk-based in its approach, focussing on the big issues rather than minutiae. It realises the challenge of developing their young and enthusiastic workforce. Relating to the RTPI- led “Learning Partners Initiative” had helped the Agency. It wants to celebrate good outcomes, rather than simply hit timeliness targets. It also wants to link the water sector with planning, to ensure that infrastructure is looked at in the round, and work more closely with other Government Agencies.

The 3rd sector largely comprises member-based organisations. Through them we could reach at least 1 million people, for example to communicate what planning can do, as well as to explain its limits. In relation to A5, the sector could contribute ideas, solutions, and help to challenge other sectors to change their culture and to deliver sustainable development.

Points from today’s discussion would be considered by to the Local Government Association LGA Environment Board. An article in the LGA magazine “First” would be a useful way of sending messages to local authority members.

From an officer perspective, local government needed to take on board the text from the Planning White Paper “*without effective spatial planning, councils won’t deliver..*”. Spatial planning requires input from planners, other officers, Members, and the private and voluntary sectors – all need to be involved if we are to succeed in this major enterprise. In particular, Chief Executives would need to be fully engaged, and planners would need to ensure they are playing their part. For example, POS is currently contributing to an important study of development management and the delivery of spatial planning.

The report had been discussed by the RTPI Executive. It raised an interesting question about the professions working together better for effective partnership working. We were at a key moment – we have won the battle about the role planning ought to be playing; the problem was the lack of numbers, capacity and skills in the public sector. We need to do more of the changes in the pipeline, AND to think “out of the box” to enable us to use scarce resources more wisely. The issues would be discussed further at the RTPI General Assembly in January.

MS suggested a focus on (i) whether the 5 priorities in the Draft Action Plan (DAP) were the right ones, and (ii) what actions their own organisations could undertake. We could learn lessons from what’s happening now, however the challenge was to look beyond this. Points made were:

- the need for an additional column for “Measures”, to enable progress to be monitored;
- however recognition that some of the best changes were difficult to measure;
- narrowing down to 5 key actions was excellent, but there was still potential to make the DAP more compelling;
- we could celebrate success arising from existing work, as well as take new initiatives;
- the Sub-National Review would have an impact at all levels of planning - the DAP should link to this;
- the strength of linking with the GPDO/deregulation agenda – this would send a good signal as this should also address the capacity issue;
- a focus on what we could do less of (to make room for spatial planning) was useful; but validation and the single planning application form could lead in the wrong direction. The Householder Development Consents Review could release resources - if it was kept simple with more detail dealt with under building regulations (though noted that this could put more pressure on building control);
- a plethora of reports relating to planning issue every week – it was important for the Forum for this one should stand out. The multi-sectoral aspect was important
- it would be important to capture media attention;
- it would be a feather in the Forum’s cap if this resulted in changes “on the ground”; CLG was willing to sign up for action.
- coordinated action would need to be linked to monitoring and review;
- the draft programme for the September 2008 Planning Summer School includes Partnership working as a theme for one day, so inputs – particularly those that could expand interest from professionals - would be welcome;
- action A1 should include the Treasury and DCMS, as both have important impacts on the planning system;
- a slight preference was expressed for the title Culture Change “Manifesto”, though there was also support for it to remain an “Action Plan”, or to be called a “Challenge”.

MS thanked those present - and in particular the members of the Culture Change Working Group and Research Steering Group - for their contribution to the draft. The Working Group would meet again [2pm on 30 October] to consider the views expressed and facilitate production of a revised draft. Members not currently involved in the Working Group who wished to attend should contact the Secretary asap. **Action: All Members** The revised draft would be circulated to members, and the Executive Board would consider it - and further responses - before approving a final draft for circulation to members for sign-off at the 10 December Forum. **Action: Secretary**

(iii) IMPLEMENTATION, PUBLICITY, LAUNCH ARRANGEMENTS

The report outlined options for the launch and invited views on timing. Several members considered that we should keep up momentum, and launch the document in December 2007. MS said it would be important to set out a programme leading to formal sign-off which allowed time for all members of the Forum to consider the drafts, and the opportunity to add (or substitute) to the Plan a small number of key actions which would have real impact.

3. COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT UPDATE - Paul Hudson and David Morris, Planning Directorate, Communities & Local Government [ppt at <http://www.natplanforum.org.uk> ; PH and DM responses to questions in italics]

(i) Planning White Paper (PWP) - the Department had received over 31,000 e-mail and 1600 substantive responses to the White Paper; analysis of these was in progress. The Major Infrastructure Projects (MIPS) elements in particular would require primary legislation; publication of the Planning Reform Bill is scheduled for November.

(ii) Housing Green Paper (HGP) - particular issues for planning were the imperative to complete the current round of RSS to ensure the right policies were in place for housing delivery; the need for the Secretary of State (SoS) to be clearer up front about housing numbers, locations and the economic growth context (this is possible under existing legislation); (in line with PPS3) the aim for land no longer to be a constraint on supply of housing and for local authorities (las) to demonstrate a 5 year land supply and help bring sites forward for implementation.

(iii) Pre-Budget Report (PBR) and Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR 07)

The PBR underpinned Government ambitions for housing delivery; it included over £1/2 bn for Housing and Planning Delivery Grant and Regeneration. The Planning Charge would enable local authorities (las) to set this out explicitly in the development plan, based on an assessment of infrastructure requirements. It would be a flat charge not linked to site development requirements; S106 would continue to cover the latter plus affordable housing. This was a significant step towards integration of the Local Development Framework, infrastructure provision and implementation. There was also a small but significant announcement on housing renovation, and one on a new power for las to levy Supplementary Business Rates - to raise funds for projects such as Crossrail.

Q&A on Items (i) –(iii):

- Would there be a commitment similar to that in the HGP ie a 10% top-slice for green infrastructure in Growth Areas in the Planning Charges consultation? And how would the distribution of regional and sub-regional portions of the infrastructure fund be organised? *The detail is yet to be finalised and the legal framework needs to be set in place; this would take time. In the meantime, work was already in hand in Local Development Framework preparation on costing for required infrastructure, and this was reflected in one of the tests of soundness.*
- Much time at the South East EiP was wasted on debating housing numbers, so it was pleasing to hear of the new approach. How prescriptive is this going to be? It would also be helpful to have pointers to locations; could this deal with urban extensions and cross-boundary locations? *These would be derived with advice from the National Housing and Planning Advisory Unit, including overall numbers and the % affordable. The level of prescription is under consideration, although one possibility is that the SoS would issue a Direction on the required levels for testing. Robust evidence would be expected if the allocations differed from this.*
- Would advice on housing numbers for RSS apply to London? *No.*
- As there could be problems in applying a single Planning Charge (PC) across a whole district, could the door be left open for different charges? Also could the figures be audited so that Inspectors can concentrate on testing their soundness? Urban extensions should not be an issue for RSS, but would like to see guidance on Joint Core Strategies. *There would be flexibility on this, although the Department would not want to see too many different rates. Problems for PINS in dealing with the basis for the PC were not envisaged, although capacity to develop these might be an issue.*

- The intention is that IAs should submit sound plans to PINS, supported by an audit trail that can be agreed collectively between the parties. Experience has not been good on this aspect to date, so PINS is discussing accessing advice from RICS, RTPI and others.
- IAs are nominating themselves for eco-towns, growth points etc; presumably there was an assumption that these would be reflected appropriately in RSSs and LDFs in due course.
- IAs may wish to encourage development in some areas and not in others. A differential PC could act as an incentive, legislation shouldn't inhibit different rates in different parts of an IA.
- West Northamptonshire Development Corporation has been working on an infrastructure charging system for 2 years; a problem is that the charge is unlikely to meet or exceed infrastructure costs. The scheme will need a discounting/index linking facility. It will not help with forward funding. However, this way of working does have important potential benefits in terms of encouraging IAs to work together sub-regionally to bridge RSS and LDFs.
- Wasn't there provision for tariffs in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004? Ministers seem concerned about the issue of start on development via limited action on site. Developers have no incentive to do this; those who do are mainly landowners and others who use the planning system to raise funds. Concern that if RSS only specify locations for eg 75% of the housing needed, how the other 25% would be assessed environmentally. *There needs to be a clear legal basis for a district-wide charge to fund an infrastructure programme beyond site requirements. The issue of token starts on site is to ensure that all land with planning permission is developed within reasonable timescales. The SoS figures are likely to be ranges.*

(iv) Sub-National Review (SNR)

Improvements in GVA are not uniform across the country, within regions or even neighbourhoods. Features of the SNR were the role of IAs and the focus on streamlining - not adding another tier. There was a need to create a new, single Regional Strategy (RS) focussed on regional issues over a 10-15 year horizon, reflecting key national priorities for growth, housing and 1 or 2 other objectives, possibly including something environmental and underpinned by sustainable development (sd). Whilst the SNR focus was on economic development, sd remains the overarching priority. Proportionate processes would be needed, and the impact on RDAs and other stakeholders need to be considered.

Q&A on Item (iv):

- Whatever the flaws, spatial planning has increased via RSS. There would be a need to take forward best practice into the new approach. The English Regions Network is working actively with CLG on the issues. It would be challenging to complete all the RSS Reviews before the new system is introduced.
- Welcome for much of the SNR, and its recognition of the role of RDAs. Regional Economic Strategies (RES) have been very successful in tackling the key issues, and they have Addressed sustainable development more than perhaps is credited. The new RDAs would need to be different from the current ones. Guidance was needed on transitional arrangements.
- The language was seductive, but hides challenges. There has been progress on RSS, with a common evidence base in most regions. The challenge is to derive a common vision (RSS/RES); this would be easier in the Midlands and the North than in the south where there are fundamental political differences. *This was one of the key issues – the proposal was for RDAs to develop the RS, with scrutiny by local government. The LGA is that this amounts to a veto, so we need a process requiring RDAs to reach agreement, with a mechanism to break deadlock if there are conflicts with national policy.*
- There was a risk that RS would be high level and meaningless, but it needs to inform low tier documents and achieve buy-in. Surely long term means a minimum of 20/25 years? *Government considers long term as 15-20 years.*
- Delighted to see proposals to strengthen regional work – perhaps edging towards a National Spatial Framework. The duty to address economic development was a good thing, but this didn't mean it happened. In Growth Areas jobs are crucial as well as housing. Running an economic development team at IA level is expensive, and there are other players – Chambers of Commerce, Universities, Colleges etc making this a crowded field. It would be helpful to highlight good practice and ensure added value.

- Would a Regional Planning Charge (as per a paper by John Rhodes) be taken forward? *They are not expecting 2 tiers of PC, although the PC needs to be capable of funding regional/sub-regional infrastructure.*
- How confident are you that the planning service is able to deliver? *There is some concern that this will be challenging for Ias. Over the next few weeks, Richard McCarthy is addressing regional roadshows addressing Local Government Chief Executives on the issue of integrating Community Strategies, LDFs and economic development, asking them to keep it centre stage.*
- Were there implications for London? If not, why not? *Some aspects would relate to London, but the extent is yet to be decided but for, example, the RS won't.*
- Would the sd duty be extended? *This would be covered in consultation – it was current thinking to do so, although there was not necessarily a need for legislation.*
- Don't want to see RSS and RES simply bolted together. What was the likely timescale? *The new RS is some years down the track. The 2 documents may need to be run together for some time. The process would be clarified in a statement on transition the current round of RSS should be complete by 2011. If there was a gap on housing numbers a judgement would be needed on the best mechanism for each region. New powers would be needed – it would be 2010 before these could be put in place. It is likely that all of the new RS would need to be statutory (rather than just part going to Ministers for decision).*
- The presentation had confirmed fears that the changes would lead to confusion for years - the Government should not go ahead with this, but should try something else!
- Government could do something really radical such as tackling regional/sub-regional boundaries, for example the sphere of influence of London extends to all the South-East plus parts of other regions. The boundary of West and East Midlands doesn't make sense, neither does the East of England boundary with Lincolnshire.
- Agreed with the comment that current SNR proposals were unworkable (supported by 7 others, with 1 thinking that they were).

MS commented that the Government had stated its view; now the issue was to consider how to deliver this. A consultation paper was due in December; hopefully this debate had given some food for thought. He thanked Paul and David for their very helpful presentations and responses.

4. ISSUES FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD – the Secretary gave feedback from the Board's meeting with Bernadette Kelly, Executive Director Planning and Senior Managers, Communities and Local Government on 8 October. This had included a positive discussion on the Draft Action Plan (as discussed today), note being made of the good progress being made on actions in this year's Business Plan, and clarification of the process required for submitting a bid for funding from CLG for 08/09 onwards. The latter will require submission of a Business Plan for next year, so the Executive intends to bring a draft of this to the December Forum meeting.

5. DRAFT NOTE OF 21 JUNE MEETING – was agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record of proceedings.

6. DRAFT AGENDA FOR 10 DECEMBER FORUM MEETING

There would be a presentation by Kevin Murray, Board member of the Academy for Sustainable Communities and Past President of the RTPi, plus consideration of the Final Draft Culture Change Action Plan, and the Draft Business Plan for 2008-11.

7. AOB: ATLAS Guide for Large Scale Development: Kelvin Hinton, ATLAS, gave a short presentation - his ppt is on the web-site at <http://www.natplanforum.org.uk>

8. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

This would take place on **MONDAY 10 DECEMBER**, at the same time and in the same venue.

MEETINGS IN 2008: MON 17 MARCH MON 16 JUNE TUES 14 OCT THURS 4 DEC