

NATIONAL PLANNING FORUM: *inspiring planning*
DRAFT NOTE OF MEETING: MONDAY 16 JUNE 2008

Local Government House, Smith Square, London

34 members attended, and there were 22 apologies for absence (listed in Minute Book)

1. Welcome

Mark Southgate, Chair, NPF Vice-Chair (Government Agencies); Head of Planning and Environmental Impact, Environment Agency - welcomed speakers and members - including Mhora Samuel (The Theatres Trust) who was attending her first meeting. The Trust is a statutory consultee, an NDPB with a social focus that also encompasses development, regeneration, design and the historic environment. He congratulated Mike Hayes (NPF Vice-Chair Professions) who had been made CBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours. The new Chief Planner Steve Quartermain - currently Director of Planning, Hambleton District Council, and President of POS - would be invited to attend our next meeting.

2. Planners for the Future - planning skills, recruitment and retention, and encouraging new entrants into planning

Presentations were given by **Ed Watson, Planning Advisory Service; Chris Shepley, Lorraine Airey and Philip Osei-Mensah, PaTH UK: and Sue Percy, RTPI**. A copy of their ppts is at www.natplanforum.gov.uk

Questions and comments were as follows (*responses in italics*):

- Planning Schools found it difficult to set up training partnerships with local authorities – this still appeared to be low priority;
- there was a need to make better use of the many people working in Planning Departments in technical and administrative posts;

RTPI's aim is to provide a ladder of learning, a ladder of training - traditionally this had focussed on graduates, but its offer for technicians and other support staff was now being strengthened.

PAS was encouraging local authorities to consider the opportunities provided for all staff (not just Planners).

PaTH had not yet taken people through the technician training route, but could do so in future (subject to availability of resources and placements).

- it was hard for the public sector to recruit Planners, so for example the Environment Agency was creating a route from technical assistant to graduate planner;
- CLG had developed a foundation degree (via blended learning) through UWE, Sheffield Hallam and Westminster Universities, however take-up to date had been slow;
- a high proportion of (almost half) are now in the private sector, highlighting the opportunity for in-house training. Arup has 250 planners around the country; mentoring had paid dividends. Private sector work was project based which provided a variety of work. Was it possible to provide similar opportunities in local authorities?

Project working was recognised as good practice – it was possible to use this method of working for policy planning and development management.

Some LAs were good, but many were too static. Experience in private sector could also be disappointing – firms were not used to training people and expected to take good people from local government.

More and more graduates were being attracted by the private sector, possibly because they felt they could get “stuck” in LAs. There was a problem with the target culture in LAs – RTPI had told the CLG Committee Planning Skills Inquiry recently that planning needed more qualitative performance management.

- was it still possible to join RTPI without having worked in the public sector? Until recently architects could validate planning applications under Regulation 3, but this was now more difficult under 1APP.

RTPI membership was not based on sector, but on competency/skill levels. Salaries were comparable (higher at the top in the private sector, but not at lower levels). LA planning jobs needed to be made more attractive. London Boroughs were reliant on overseas planners and had a high turnover – this was not healthy.

- LAs were short-staffed, leading to employment of part-time consultants, which was not necessarily good for continuity – surely it should be possible to organise part-time cover arrangements?
- there was a need for training to emphasise the broad context for spatial planning.
- changes to heritage protection would mean retraining, stressing the need to engage with all stakeholders.

The CLG Select Committee had been looking at these issues. Skills and the need to overcome shortages of planners were key issues for Steve Quartermain. Alice Lester had been seconded to CLG from PAS to work on this (and was present at this meeting). The institutional arrangements were in place (HCA incorporating ASC, ATLAS, PAS). Evidence to date indicated that skills gaps include generic ones – finance, negotiating skills etc. Much depended on how this is managed. Local authorities, the profession, private sector and Government all had a role.

- were public sector Planners key workers for housing purposes?

They could be, but this depended on the area.

- RTPI was addressing issues around skills. PaTH was a fantastic model - training new planners and widening diversity - however, it had proved difficult to roll out across the private sector. What help could NPF give? Were we taking a stand at the RTPI Convention? *Yes.* In that case, could we share this with PaTH? *Mark Southgate thought this a very good idea, as did Chris Shepley. Action: KP to arrange*

- Is there more that NPF members could do? For example could we arrange job swaps to extend peoples' experience?

The Environment Agency had developed a Technical Development Framework which they would be pleased to share with others. We could also do more to exploit the multi-sectoral nature of the Forum.

- HBF members considered that councillors in LAs (as well as officers) need training. *"Finders Keepers" (a PAS report - on their web-site) highlighted the need for collaboration between LAs, for example to share scarce specialist expertise.*

RTPI would be inviting employers to breakfast meetings shortly to discuss training needs

- A lunchtime meeting would be more convenient for employers outside London.
- It was important to include consideration of the role of the 3rd sector. Planning Aid had 700 volunteers – their activities developed the skills of these volunteers who worked in private, public and 3rd sectors.
- We were in a period of significant change including those in the Planning Bill, SNR etc. This meant that peoples' skills needed to be adapted more quickly than previously. Planners were involved in community engagement and joint working across organisational boundaries. RDAs and PINS would need to ensure they had the skills to tackle the new responsibilities for single integrated regional strategies.

Mark Southgate thanked all the speakers for their informative presentations and helpful responses to comments and questions.

3. PPS 12: A presentation was given by David Morris, Communities and Local Government. A copy of his ppt is at www.natplanforum.gov.uk

Questions and comments were as follows (*responses in italics*):

- concern about whether the 2-part development plan had come through clearly enough. Other areas such as the context provided by LSPs were better. The Manual was good, as was the focus on infrastructure planning. The regional context was important to inform

implementation plans, but there were a lot of gaps in planning and funding at sub-regional scale.

There would be scope to reinforce the PPS on regional and sub-regional issues in due course. The Department would be consulting on the Single Regional Strategy and CIL in the next few months, and this would give the opportunity to add further detail on these issues in future.

- concern that too much detail was being put into primary legislation and that this was affecting progress on plan-making, and fee income to LAs deriving from planning applications. *The majority of the planning system would continue to be shaped by secondary legislation. The balance depended on legal advice. There were only 2 small clauses in the Planning Reform Bill affecting LDFs. CLG would be trying to ensure that the majority of the SNR was covered by secondary legislation.*

- impressed by the overall succinctness of PPS12, but thought preparation of Supplementary Guidance by a range of organisations was an unnecessary complication. *There would be secondary legislation dealing with this when the Bill goes through, so there would be an opportunity to look at this again. There would be a judgement about whether such guidance has as much weight at a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) – being subject to public and stakeholder consultation would give it more weight, and provide greater certainty.*

- more clarity would be welcome on what requires an Area Action Plan and what is more suitable as SPD.

LAs needed to look at the value added by an AAP. If for example most of the land was owned by one landowner a jointly prepared Master Plan might be as suitable, and save time.

- The planning system needed all sectors to be engaged if it was to work better, therefore concern was expressed that the Roadshows only involved the public sector, and PINS was doing outreach work only with LAs. Could there be Roadshows on LDFs for the private sector?

CLG meetings had been held with all the LA Chief Executives in each region because of the importance of ensuring that they supported the delivery of the planning service. PINS had been working with Government Offices and LAs to ensure they focussed on priorities. LAs should involve the private sector and 3rd sector in plan preparation.

- people were worried about the degree of central direction. With the emphasis on speed, flexibility, reduced consultation, less detailed policy, and RDAs being given responsibility for producing the Integrated Regional Strategies, there was a risk of losing the confidence and support of the public.

Central direction to LAs was reducing. Government was moving away from requiring enormous detail on process, and was focussing instead on outcomes. Strategic policy (in a Core Strategy) could be supported by an SPD.

- LAs were terrified by their lawyers.

There was a wider issue about the risk of judicial review (not just in planning) which required us to get the balance right.

Mark thanked David Morris for his very helpful presentation and responses.

4. Update from the Executive Board (EB):

(i) Delivery Working Group

The Chair said that we were considering commissioning work in the autumn on Delivery in practice, and how it might be improved by cross-sectoral action as a basis for a substantive piece of work in our 09/10 Work Programme. He invited further volunteers to join the Delivery Working Group chaired by Mike Hayes. They would meet (probably in August) to consider this. KP would contact representatives of organisations involved previously – CLG, LGA/POS, PINS, PAS, NIF, PEBA, Heritage Link, County Surveyors Society, CBI and ACA - plus BIAC and The Theatres Trust. **Action: others interested in joining were asked to contact the Secretary.**

(ii) Culture Change Action Plan

The Secretary reported that plans for a Press launch for our Manifesto and the research Report commissioned to underpin it were being finalised. The target date was Friday 4 July for a Press launch with News and an analysis feature in Planning Magazine, followed by an Interview later. Members would be sent a copy of the Manifesto and Report and these would be posted onto our web-site.

Work continued on the draft Culture Change Action Plan. The Executive Board wanted to focus on a few key changes that would make a real difference, that were measurable, with clear lead organisation and time targets. They want to finalise that in the next 4 months – so the Secretary would be in touch again over the summer.

(iii) NPF Business Plan 08 - 11

CLG had agreed the Business Plan with a few small changes to the 08/09 Work Programme. The final version would be posted onto our web-site shortly. The Secretary reported that - on the basis of this Plan and Work Programme – we were to receive £26k this year (an increase on last year's figure). Thanks to continued support from our major contributors our finances were in a healthy state.

5. Draft Note of 17 March Meeting: this was **agreed**, and signed. There were no matters arising.

6. Future Forum Meetings (same time, same venue):

Tuesday 14 October – focus on development management, possibly including:

- presentation by POS Enterprises on the “Development Management and Spatial Planning” project,
- 1APP? Chris Kendall, Planning Portal;
- Public Engagement? Dave Chetwyn, Planning Aid
- CIL/S106? CLG speaker

Thursday 4 December – agenda tbc

7. AOB: Mark said that this was his last meeting as Chair of the Forum. Members asked for their thanks for his commitment and hard work to be acknowledged in the note of meeting.

Action: KP

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 3.45pm.

NEXT FORUM MEETING - same time & venue - TUESDAY 14 OCTOBER