

NATIONAL PLANNING FORUM 16 MARCH 2009

EXECUTIVE BOARD PAPER: RESPONDING TO THE RECESSION AND CLIMATE CHANGE - A CROSS-SECTORAL PERSPECTIVE

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

- i. The **National Planning Forum (NPF)** is the largest cross-sectoral forum focussing on planning in England, with a mission “to inspire planning”. Our membership offers a unique opportunity to consider planning issues from a cross-sectoral perspective and to influence constituent organisations on appropriate ways forward.*
- ii. A paper was drafted to summarise and provide feedback to Communities and Local Government (CLG) on the stakeholder debate at our December 2008 Forum meeting about how best to respond to the recession and climate change. An initial draft was considered by the NPF Executive Board.*
- iii. This revised version has been endorsed by the National Planning Forum Executive Board and is offered as a contribution to policy-making following discussion with the CLG Chief Planner.*
- iv. The NPF sees the impact of the recession and the necessity to respond to climate change as the two key drivers for planning. This paper sets out a short term response. The Executive Board intends to engage NPF members in a continuing debate on the medium/long term impacts on the planning system, as a contribution to the future shape of planning in a changing world.*

**Liz Peace, British Property Federation
Chairman, National Planning Forum and Vice-Chairman (Business sector)
25 February 2009**

THE CONTEXT

1. Key issues relevant to planning in the current economic context taking account of the imperative to adapt to climate change were covered in presentations to the National Planning Forum December 2008 meeting by Sir Stuart Lipton (Chelsfield) British Property Federation Major Developers Group and Cllr Mike Haines (Teignbridge District Council) Local Government Association. Their presentations - together with the note of meeting containing points made by the other presenters Andrew Whitaker, Home Builders' Federation and Simon Marsh, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and issues raised in the debate that followed - can be viewed at: <http://www.natplanforum.org.uk>
2. This paper is based on the perceived need to ensure that the planning system is used as flexibly as possible to encourage the types of activity needed to help us emerge from the recession, whilst at the same time not letting up on the continuous drive to create quality buildings, spaces, places and environments to support the transition to a zero/low carbon economy. Our proposals take account of the outcome of the Killian-Pretty Review.

KEY CONCLUSIONS

3. Our key conclusion is that Government needs to:

(1) Make planning less of a burden – but without compromising on the quality of the eventual output

- get on with implementing the Killian Pretty recommendations to help to speed up the system
- focus on simplifying and reducing the volume of information, cutting out unnecessary bureaucracy, reducing the time everything takes
- examine the role of mediation at every stage of planning as a matter of urgency
- make local authorities put more emphasis on pre-application discussions
- give Planning Performance Agreements a boost by incentivising them, and
- as a really quick win instruct local authorities to grant planning permissions with a life of 5 years, not 3

(2) Find imaginative ways of maintaining resources/improving skill levels in local authority planning departments

- encourage forward planning for the upturn and a climate-constrained future – the role of planning is to think long-term
- make it a priority for local planning authorities (lpas) to focus attention on completing the Local Development Framework (LDF) process
- give Housing and Planning Delivery Grant (HPDG) to enable lpas to retain skilled planners to get on with the LDF process
- persuade/incentivise lpas to use the downturn to improve training
- work with the consortium of interests (British Property Federation, Planning Advisory Service, Planning Officers' Society, Royal Town Planning Institute, Planning Inspectorate) who are working to set up a development economics training module

(3) Drive a more constructive and realistic approach to infrastructure funding and provision

- emphasise to Ipas the need to take a realistic approach to developer contributions that acknowledges the issue of viability and the current lack of available private sector funds to meet all the different levels of requirements
- make sure the public sector spends wisely all the money that it has at its disposal
- deal with the consequences of the Roanne ruling¹ which is a barrier to sensible and cost effective regeneration
- don't push CIL until we start to see some real recovery
- encourage innovative forms of funding infrastructure eg TIFs

(4) Encourage innovation in planning and construction

- promote modern methods of construction and new building methods as a way of cutting costs and producing more sustainable buildings
- use public sector research and other budgets to provide simple, one stop shops for advice and education

(5) Don't let up on the sustainability agenda – but implement it wisely

- stress that this is about resource consumption and sound economics as much as it is about climate change
- help Ipas to understand the role of planning in reducing energy needs and expanding green supply
- manage the relationship - or lack of it - between planning and Building Regulations
- focus on finding ways of improving the existing stock by using the fast declining construction industry
- encourage refurbishment by supporting a reduced level of VAT for reconstruction

SPECIFIC ACTIONS

4. In addition to the above, which are primarily for Communities and Local Government, there are a number of specific actions that should be pursued or considered by the following sectors:

Government Agencies:

- ensure informed policy-making, more join-up, and a focus on devising integrated solutions across the public sector²
- liaise more closely on planning policy, practice and delivery
- share identified good practice within Government and beyond
- champion sustainable communities and low carbon developments that are resilient to climate change and deliver real economic benefit
- encourage secondments and structured professional development for staff²

1: Jean Auroux v Commune de Roanne: ECJ judgement January 2007 - interpreted EU procurement rules as requiring the local authority to have selected its development partner via a full tender process

2: Action included in the NPF Culture Change Action Plan

2:

Local Government:

- commit to put planning at the heart of local government, focussing on responding to local needs and aspirations through sound plan-making and responsive development management²
- retain planning staff for LDF work despite the downturn
- continue the drive for better energy performance from existing buildings
- negotiate realistic levels of S106 planning gain

Business:

- encourage more partnership working across sectors and spread best practice including support for training and development²
- encourage an improved standard of planning applications to that of the best in the sector
- be prepared to contribute towards and/or undertake infrastructure improvements²

Professions:

- develop closer links between professional institutions involved in the built and natural environment and construction to improve understanding, cooperation and delivery²
- encourage and support development of training courses for planners in development economics, climate change and renewable energy²
- encourage cross-skilling of professionals and support pathways into the professions for “hard-to engage” groups such as black and ethnic minority graduates

Third sector:

- engage positively in the planning process (spatial planning and development management) and help to devise integrated solutions²
- contribute to a study to investigate how neighbour disputes can be resolved outside the planning system (via mediation)

2: Action included in the NPF Culture Change Action Plan