

NATIONAL PLANNING FORUM: *inspiring planning*
DRAFT NOTE OF MEETING: TUESDAY 15 DECEMBER 2009
Local Government House, Smith Square, London
47 members and guests attended; there were 21 apologies for absence (see Minute Book)

1. **WELCOME - Mike Haines, NPF Chair, LGA and NPF Vice-Chair (Local Government)** welcomed members and guests. He was pleased to announce that **Brian Waters** would take on the role of **NPF Vice-Chair (Professions)** from 2 January 2010 when Mike Hayes becomes NPF Secretary.

2. **BOB NEILL MP, SHADOW MINISTER FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT** gave an address on Conservative policy on planning. Questions (*responses in italics*) were as follows:

Has thought been given to how regional infrastructure will be prioritised and funded? Would Local Authorities' views be taken into account? *Sub-regional collaboration would be encouraged. Local authorities would have more flexibility including the ability to raise finance from bonds, a power of general competence, encouragement to set up local delivery vehicles with other public agencies and the private sector. The Sustainable Communities Act and Total Place pilots were yielding interesting results; these would be rolled out, also sensible MAAs and LAAs.*

Strategic planning skills were in short supply - 3 years of the sub-national review had sapped morale, and staff numbers had reduced due to demographics - professionals with skills and expertise needed to be valued and nurtured. *Finance would be tight but experienced strategic planners would be needed so capacity would need to be unlocked. For example there could be potential to take small scale/impact developments out of development control to release resources for more complex work.*

The proposal for a National Spatial Framework as advocated by the NPF was welcome, but there was concern in the RSPB about the gap between national and local planning in the context of the National Year of Biodiversity in 2010; Regional Spatial Strategies had been good at delivering large scale habitat creation. There was also concern about planning for the large parts of the country that don't fall into city regions. *Environmental protection would be kept as part of national policy and there would be continuation of the duty to cooperate; cross border issues were important. He invited members of the Forum to get back to him with comments on any gaps or issues in the Conservative Party Planning Green Paper due to be published in January.*

It was good to hear that the community is interpreted as wider than the local authority. We have had years of politicians saying that the community will have more say – what would be different with a Conservative Government? *This approach was not just a knee jerk reaction, it is rooted in a localism agenda that would apply across the board. The Planning Green Paper will talk about the specific, but for example there would be a suitable national framework, encouragement of good practice, and a lighter touch from Central Government.*

Planning is complex but every attempt at reform has added to that complexity. Will this new agenda be deliverable? *Political will is necessary to set the right context, the recession would concentrate minds but it was important to note that this would not be a quick short term fix.*

A former strategic planner in the Greater London Council called for a return of Standing Conferences eg SERPLAN. It was nonsensical to separate London from the South-east as was done now. *He had sympathy with this - the model had a good deal going for it - and would relay this point to Caroline Spelman MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.*

If elected would the Conservatives equalise VAT on refurbishment and on new build to provide an even playing field? *This was an issue for George Osborne as Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer.*

There were a lot of elephant traps as a result of civil servants drafting policy and regulations who had no experience of planning; examples included the electronic planning application form and abolishing Local Plans just as full coverage was being achieved. Pilots and involving 'real people' would avoid this. *The aim was to do less, better, regulation. Francis Maude is dealing with the Whitehall reform agenda. It was important to ensure there are more people with outside experience - a need for more cross-pollination - this was consistent with recent appointments. There was also an important role for non-Executive Boards.*

The Chair thanked Mr Neill for his very informative address and for taking the time to respond to questions from members of the Forum.

3. CULTURE CHANGE ACTION PLAN 1ST MONITORING REPORT - GRAHAM JONES (POS)

The Chair welcomed Professor Janice Morphet and Tony Burton of IDOX plc who he was pleased could join us for the whole meeting. The Secretary explained that she had made a number of amendments to the IDOX report following its consideration by the Executive Board; the recommendations and 12 suggestions remained the same.

Graham Jones then took members through its implications on behalf of the Executive Board. His presentation is on the web-site at <http://www.natplanforum.org.uk> Comments were as follows:

- GJ's presentation should be included in the Executive Summary;
- 12 suggestions were too many – there should be a vote on the top 3;
The suggestions referred to different sectors which could make deciding the top 3 difficult;
- Not a lot had happened on the Action Plan – was it sensible to add to the list?
GJ clarified, and JM confirmed, that these were not suggested as new actions, simply a means for achieving change on the existing Manifesto for Change;
- There were 3 important messages (linked to Bob Neill's address): the website; the role of the various sectors of the Forum and need for these to be more pro-active; and keeping up momentum on working with Local Government Leaders;
- It was important to refer to Leaders' Boards and to the concept of financial incentives to encourage development;
- More self assessment was needed; bodies in the NPF were not taking a holistic view; the suggestion that each gives themselves a score to indicate progress was helpful;
- NPF is a well kept secret – it needs to raise its profile.

It was **agreed** that GJ's slides would be posted onto the web-site and all members asked for (i) further comments, (ii) a self assessment score for their organisation in relation to the 'Manifesto for Change' commitments, and (iii) their 'top 3' actions – all by the end of January.

ACTION: All to respond to secretary@natplanforum.org.uk by FRIDAY 29 JANUARY please.

4. CLG PLANNING UPDATE – STEVE QUARTERMAIN, CHIEF PLANNER COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Steve's slides are on the web-site at <http://www.natplanforum.org.uk> NPF's agenda is to ensure more engagement with CLG. CLG is very willing to road-test new ideas. Key messages were:

- the direction of travel for CLG is clarity in fewer words - it is vital that people pick up the messages without them being spelt out;
- climate change is the No: 1 priority – a revised Annex to PPS1 would issue shortly;
- CLG have listened on CIL and there are changes in the guidance which is due out soon; the aim is clarity, equity and raising funding for infrastructure;
- Eco-towns – 9 further proposals for urban extensions and other developments to pick up the higher standards; decisions would be made soon on the first four Eco-towns bids for the first tranche of £60m being made available;

- a letter to CPOs had issued to explain how the IPC works with the Town and Country Planning Acts;
- there had been correspondence in Planning recently about Development Plans. It was important to remember that the old system didn't work; and this one isn't new - it has been in use for 5 years and it is delivering. The whole of England would be covered by a published LDF at least in draft form by 2011;
- he had been struck by a point from the previous item - lack of willingness to change is a real issue;

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

- eco-standards developed for the eco-towns now appeared to be being applied across the board. Ecotowns were no longer required to be free-standing. Weren't there now more serious threats to the Green Belt from urban extensions? *No, eco-towns are not being rail-roaded – they need to be acceptable in development plan terms – this is eco-delivery through the planning system. What was the point of self-containment, what's changed? Self-containment is still an option. It is perfectly legitimate policy evolution to apply eco-standards to other types of development.*
- Is there to be a December Killian-Prety package? *Yes. What is the position on fee levels for flexible (time scales) for planning permission? 5 years after introduction of the LDF system more progress would have been expected. This was expected to be December depending on the availability of a Parliamentary slot.*
- Has the Section of the Economic Development Act relating to Regional Strategies been initiated yet? *It would be in April 2010. Guidance on how the strategies would work had issued already.*
- Were changes to the GDPO imminent? *Changes are made on 2 set dates - October and April.*
- What was the expected timing for issue of PPS 4? *December 2009.*

The Chair thanked Steve Quartermain for his helpful and informative presentation.

5. (i) TAKING THE NPF FORWARD - the Secretary reported that she and Mike Hayes had drafted this report to summarise the Executive Board's view on the way forward in the light of the previously discussed need to spread the costs of the NPF more equitably across the membership. An attempt had been made to reflect the views of members in what was proposed. The Executive Board wants to promote more effective (for them and the NPF) and pro-active involvement of members - for example Geoff Brown's initiative of holding a meeting of Government Agencies represented on the NPF. Individual contributions would be reasonable and subject to 1-1 negotiation. **ACTION: Secretary**

(ii) MEDIATION - the Secretary reported that good progress was being made on this project supported by the Planning Inspectorate and the Planning Advisory Service. The Newsletter currently in draft would issue before Christmas. An interim report on the results would be made by the project lead - Leonora Rozee - to the March Forum. Kay would continue as Secretary to the Steering Group until June 2010.

(iii) PLANNING AND BUILDING CONTROL - Mike Hayes gave an update report - his presentation is on the web-site at <http://www.natplanforum.org.uk> This was a very difficult set of issues. The task of pulling the report together had proved more difficult than had been envisaged, however a final draft was nearing completion and would be circulated to the Working Group before being brought to the next meeting. **ACTION: Mike Hayes**

(iv) FIT FOR PURPOSE SPATIAL PLANNING - speaking to a ppt presentation which is on the web-site at <http://www.natplanforum.org.uk> Mike Hayes said he was pleased to note that Bob Neill had referred to 3 of the 10 proposals [2. a spatial vision for England, 3. joined up national policy statements, and 10. action at local level]. There was now a need to (a) follow up for a response from the Government and the Liberal

Democrats; (b) a need to check how each party's policies match up to our 10 proposals; (c) preparation of a foundation statement to underpin future responses; (d) approaches to journals to reprint extracts/print feature articles; (e) Sector responses to the document; and (f) integration with the Culture Change Action Plan.

ACTION: Vice-Chairs and Secretary

The Chair noted the progress made on current projects, and promising future prospects. He thanked the Secretary, Mike Hayes and Leonora Rozee for their efforts.

7. DRAFT NOTE OF OCTOBER MEETING - the note was agreed and signed by the Chair as a true record of proceedings. All action points had been taken forward.

8. AOB - the Chair thanked the Secretary very warmly for her work for the Forum over the past 4 years and wished her well for the future. He made a presentation on behalf of the Executive Board of a very beautiful brooch, together with a card signed by members. The Secretary responded that she had thoroughly enjoyed her time with the NPF and wished the organisation well in the task ahead.

DATES OF THE NEXT 2 MEETINGS:

**THURSDAY 4 MARCH 2010
WEDNESDAY 23 JUNE 2010**

- at 12.45pm for 1.30pm in LG House, Smith Square, London

Dates for Forum meetings in October and December will be fixed and notified to all members in the New Year.