



National Planning Forum
INSPIRING PLANNING

Fit for purpose spatial planning

Proposals from the National Planning Forum

October 2009

The National Planning Forum believes that investment in developing strong, positive, medium and long term spatial plans and delivery strategies for the nation, its regions and local communities will develop confidence in and commitment to a successful future for the communities of today and those of tomorrow.

The priorities for fit for purpose planning are:

1. Sound Strategy.

- Join up National Policy Statements to create integration, coherence, direction, vision and a national planning framework.
- Develop effective joined-up planning at regional/sub-regional level to integrate and prioritise transport, regeneration, housing, economy and environmental programmes.
- Invest in local development frameworks - train professional and political leaders to deliver effective plans and delivery strategies that achieve community engagement.
- Support an integrated 'development management' approach to individual proposals that deliver agreed plans.
- Plan for the (very) long term as well as the medium in order to deliver major infrastructure, developments and communities

2. Quality

- Set the bar high – aim for high standards of design, implementation and place-making.
- Support measures to reduce our carbon footprint; deliver renewable energy; create well-insulated, low energy, accessible, sustainable homes, shops and offices that are well served by public transport.
- Develop communities not just houses; integrate new communities with existing; place schools, multi-use public buildings and open space at their hearts; create places with a sense of place.

3. Effectiveness

- Promote training for all elected members and other decision makers.
- Continue to invest in improving and modernising the skill base for practitioners.
- Achieve community engagement at every level – from the 'big conversation' about national priorities to pre-application information and consultation.
- Create an efficient, reliable, robust process – well-managed, performance aware, disseminating best practice, cutting out unnecessary bureaucracy.
- Provide the right resource level - because spatial planning is an essential tool for meeting the new challenges.

4. Delivery

- Focus on planning's real purpose - making things happen on the ground – delivering development, infrastructure, homes, new economic opportunities and regeneration.
- Re-capture vision, create the evidence base, assess the resources, make the plan, determine the priorities and employ good project management to make it happen.

5. Stability

- Provide stability to enable recent reforms to bed in, lessons to be learnt, experience to be gained and new institutions and mechanisms to perform effectively. Change the policies as circumstances dictate; but don't change the system!

Introduction

In December 2008 the National Planning Forum produced a rapid response to the emerging economic and climate change crisis and recommended to the government, stakeholders and its members a series of short and medium term proposals to enable England's spatial planning system and local government, which is central to its delivery, to support economic recovery, development and infrastructure delivery; environmental management and protection; and tackle climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Subsequently there was recognition that the combination of world-wide recession, the threat of climate change and need to reduce carbon consumption and change behaviours represented a 'game-change' moment that had implications for the way we plan and what we plan for.

The National Planning Forum established a *Futures Working Group* to explore this new territory and produce this think piece. Clearly the work has been undertaken as a general election approaches, which provides an opportunity to make a clear statement about the importance of continuing to invest in a strong, effective, planning system to enable the emerging challenges and new opportunities to be properly addressed in spatial terms.

Good planning supports economic recovery, investment in essential infrastructure, community development and growth, environmental management and protection, development and regeneration and a healthy, profitable construction and property industry. It achieves sustainability, reduces carbon consumption, promotes and delivers good design, supports place-making and helps services to be delivered in accessible and efficient ways.

When planning is neglected or made subservient to other interests:

- There is uncertainty for business and investment decisions fail.
- Communities are disenfranchised and placed at the mercy of more powerful developers and landowners.
- Precious habitats, landscapes and buildings and areas of cultural, historic and architectural importance are threatened.
- Society fails to achieve the infrastructure its transport, energy and water distribution and waste disposal networks require; much needed new homes are not built and town centres are undermined by ill-thought through out of town developments.
- Project planning and delivery becomes uncoordinated and disjointed and the rational for prioritising investment decisions is lost.
- Failure to invest in good process, policy development, plan making and the development of workforce skills creates inefficiencies, delays, uncertainty and a loss of national, regional and local competitiveness.
- Democracy is discredited and local political leadership undermined.

The achievements of 100 years of town and country planning in England are manifest. In hard times we need good planning more than ever.

The National Planning Forum, with its unique cross-sectoral constituency, is Government's active, 'critical friend' – assembling evidence, building consensus, proposing reforms in a coherent, practice-based, thought though, independent manner and driving change through insight rather than dogma.

Spatial planning has changed significantly in the first decade of the 21st century

English spatial planning has evolved at an unprecedented rate since the publication of the Green Paper *Planning: Delivering Fundamental Change* in 2001.

- The 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act re-affirmed the notion of a plan led approach to development; a strategic and local approach through change and engagement.
- The Barker and Eddington reviews made positive proposals for improving process in the planning system and for the delivery of major infrastructure projects.
- The Sub National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration has introduced a new integrated approach to regional planning and greater clarity so that policy is managed at the right spatial scale.
- The Homes and Communities Agency is integrating financial support for housing and regeneration and developing a new approach to partnership using its own and local authority planning powers.
- A range of local delivery vehicles and sub regional initiatives has been created where experiments are taking place in achieving a more effective, delivery-focussed planning through the close alignment of regeneration and growth strategies with planning powers and dedicated capital funding.
- Through the 2008 Planning Act the Infrastructure Planning Commission is creating a new organisation to determine proposals for strategic infrastructure in the context of National Policy Statements and the Community Infrastructure Levy is offering new mechanisms for capturing land value uplift to help fund infrastructure provision.
- The Killian-Pretty review is proposing a series of process changes to create a more efficient service, particularly for householder applications.

While these significant changes to process, procedure, purpose and the distribution of powers for spatial planning have been occurring there have been other equally significant changes:

- A broad acceptance that effective spatial planning requires a wide range of (often new) skills and that planning is an essential component of achieving positive change on the ground.
- Increasingly the implications of prioritising sustainability and climate change are being understood and embedded in the process; while the central importance of place-making, design quality, public realm and infrastructure are becoming established.

Planning is required to deliver

Spatial planning underpins economic, environmental and social well being and Government has placed spatial planning at the heart of its agenda for:

- achieving sustainability
- tackling climate change
- place-making
- environmental protection and enhancement
- business development and improved economic performance in the context of economic recovery
- achieving a step change in housing supply
- delivering a wide range of infrastructure for transport, energy, utilities, flood management, culture and the green environment
- delivering high quality design outcomes
- achieving a step change in integrated service delivery at local level

To achieve these objectives Government is rightly demanding efficient process and performance, an integrated approach, an outcome focussed service, broader skill sets and meaningful community engagement; and has invested substantially in the education and training of planners and in the planning service at local authority level.

But the world is changing fast and we face new challenges that planning must help tackle

- A growing awareness that the rate of climate change is increasing and that its impacts – rising sea levels, changing climate, extreme weather, food and water shortages particularly in the developing world – cannot be avoided and must be planned for and that this crisis demands co-operation on an unprecedented scale at local, national and international levels to reduce carbon consumption, mitigate the impacts and adapt to the new circumstances.
- The global crisis over secure energy supplies and food shortages and drought, partly as a consequence of climate change; but also because of growing populations, international migration, over-production and the search for work. Globalised markets, production and services produce global impacts.
- Recent economic events – the collapse of international credit markets, a global reduction in consumption and production, rising unemployment, falling currency values and shrinking economies – has created a social and political crisis around unemployment, enterprise, poverty and reduced career prospects; major gaps in the public finances; and, a loss of confidence in the old models of capital finance, the housing market, development and regeneration and a new priority on (a different form of) economic recovery.

There is a debate about what we value and how we decide

Across the spectrum fundamental questions are being asked about wealth creation, the nature of prosperity and well-being, governance, design and life-style as the imperatives of economic recovery and climate change action take hold.

‘. . . . a return to business as usual is not an option. Prosperity for the few founded on ecological destruction and persistent social injustice is no foundation for a civilised society. Economic recovery is vital. Protecting people’s jobs – and creating new ones – is absolutely essential. But we also stand in urgent need of a renewed sense of shared prosperity. A commitment to fairness and flourishing in a finite world.’

Prosperity without growth?

Professor Tim Jackson, Director of the Research Group on Lifestyles, Values and Environment at the University of Surrey
Economics Commissioner: Sustainable Development Commission

‘If life is tougher, life has to be more productive. This means that current methods of development are just not sustainable and, if in five years’ time buildings are not sustainable, they will not let. Technology will be pushed to one side to produce sustainable buildings: if you are in an office complex you do not want to be an oasis in a desert. We need more modest styles, less “wiggly-wobbly” pretentious architecture, and a greater use of natural materials like stone and timber.’

The future of building lies in a return to traditional values: Property Week 25.09.09

Sir Stuart Lipton: Chelsfield Partners

‘. . . times have changed. The financial crisis has discredited market triumphalism in both its laissez-faire and Neoliberal versions. And the election of Barack Obama has given powerful expression to the hunger for a public life of larger meaning that engages more directly with moral and spiritual questions. All of which suggests that the time may be right for a new kind of politics – a politics of the common good.’

A new citizenship: Reith Lectures 2009

Professor Michael Sandel: Professor of Government, Harvard

Towards a fit for purpose spatial planning system

The 'credit crunch' and subsequent severe economic downturn, the realisation that there is a limit to non-renewable resources and that essentials such as water and food cannot always be guaranteed alongside the reality of climate change fuelled by global carbon consumption require:

- a rethink about lifestyle, the sources of economic wealth, transportation, land use, design and development.
- a focus on (a green) economic recovery.
- achieving new energy supplies, including 15% renewables by 2020.
- a major investment in achieving low carbon footprints through design, technology and retrofit.
- difficult choices about priorities for infrastructure investment.

Increasingly society understands it must live sustainably – ecologically, socially, culturally and economically - and to do so it must plan carefully – for the long term, engaging citizens in a continuing debate about the choices on offer and the consequences of the decisions we make.

Recent economic events and a developing understanding of the impact of mankind's activities on the planet have created a sense of uncertainty about, and even fear of, the future. The National Planning Forum believes that investment in developing strong, positive, medium and long term spatial visions, plans and delivery strategies for the nation, its regions and local communities will develop confidence in and commitment to a successful future for the communities of today and those of tomorrow.

What might a post recession England tackling climate change look like?

- Fewer conventional car journeys; greater use of public transport, cycling and walking; and more commuting and deliveries by electric vehicles.
- A different transport landscape – particularly rail (including HS2) and cycling – and a consequent changing urban form.
- More 'local' and community living - as people reduce the carbon cost of transport in food, commuting and leisure – including home-working and locally based culture, leisure and recreation activities.
- Less disposable income – perhaps fewer shops; but possibly a resurgence for town centres.
- Expansion of internet retail, learning, communication, entertainment.
- Multi-functional use of rural and open landscapes – and more intensive use of urban landscape and a greater investment in green infrastructure.
- More investment in sea defence, flood and river management and green infrastructure.
- Increased volunteering and community activity.
- A different, broader based economy – high speed broadband, low carbon, biotechnology, life sciences, digital, advanced manufacturing and financial services.

- New manufacturing opportunities as global transport costs increase.
- Low carbon, factory made housing on medium/high-density developments with advanced investment in community facilities and local services, connected to public transport or integrated with existing towns.
- Different designs for space and place - adapting to the impact of climate change.
- A different energy landscape as wind, tide, solar, nuclear and bio energy resources are developed.

Challenges and Opportunities

Society faces five great challenges:

1. Enabling economic recovery

- Developing a broader-based economy, exploiting 'green' economic opportunities - including new start-ups - in the context of *Building Britain's Future – New Industry/New Jobs*.
- Providing low carbon sites and premises for the industries of the new economy in accessible locations in the context of the *UK Low Carbon Industrial Strategy*.
- Finding new delivery models for development and regeneration.
- Addressing regional disparity in economic performance.
- Combating unemployment – especially amongst young people.

2. Responding to climate change

- Understanding its implications, implementing mitigation and adaptation measures, encouraging behavioural change.
- Developing the technologies of carbon reduction.
- Cutting UK greenhouse gas emissions by 34% below 1990 levels by 2020 and by 80% by 2050.

3. Securing the future

- Achieving energy security.
- Ensuring water supplies.
- Encouraging local food production.
- Developing resilience to extreme weather events and pandemics.

4. New transport and accessible locations

- Developing public transport, electric vehicle propulsion, cycling and walking and the infrastructures they require – including HS2.
- Delivering the right spatial and locational response to deliver efficiencies from new transport investment to reduce commuting and create energy efficient distribution networks.

5. Developing sustainable places and communities

- Engaging communities in meaningful participation in plan-making and planning decisions.
- Providing more, affordable, low carbon, built for life homes and the services, facilities and infrastructure new communities require.
- Meeting the needs of business and employment - providing well designed, low carbon accommodation for offices, distribution, manufacturing and retail in accessible locations integrated with sustainable communities.
- Retro-fitting the existing housing stock to reduce its carbon consumption.
- Protecting habitat and environmental quality, managing the marine environment and increasing bio-diversity.
- Combating the heat island effect, improving air quality and managing noise reduction.
- Investing in education, health, cultural, community and youth facilities at local level.
- Managing pressure on urban, rural and open landscapes from food production, bio-fuels, renewable energy, flood risk management, local recreation and leisure.
- Developing green infrastructure.

The opportunity for a fit for purpose spatial planning system

More effective

- Providing efficiency and certainty to the development industry and all planning's customers.
- Reducing bureaucracy, complexity and overloading in both plan making and development management.
- Maintaining efficiency, but improving effectiveness.

Outcome focussed

- Achieving high standards of design and sustainability performance.
- Discovering what works and communicating best practice.

Engaged and engaging

- Responding to the diverse voices of business, community and single interest groups and achieving meaningful community engagement at all scales.

Coherent and robust

- Achieving coherence through the policy hierarchy – planning policy statements / national policy statements / regional strategies / local development frameworks – the golden thread.

- Making regional strategies work.
- Developing more effective and efficient local development frameworks.
- Developing confidence in the evidence, targets and outcomes of planning.
- Embedding development management to achieve quality outcomes and effective use of resources.
- Building confidence in new systems and agencies for delivering new development and infrastructure, particularly the Homes and Communities Agency and the Infrastructure Planning Commission.

Skilled

- Developing skills in development economics, project management, environmental assessment and the metrics of carbon reduction.

At the heart of things

- Ensuring spatial planning is central to place making, infrastructure planning and delivery, public sector service delivery, community engagement, private sector-led development, environmental protection and enhancement, economic recovery and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The National Planning Forum believes fit for purpose spatial planning

- Is **vital** if we are to address the unprecedented challenges and grasp the unique opportunities.
- Is **essential** to enable communities to have a clear vision for their future and a strategy for achieving it and for delivering the nation's homes, business premises, energy, food, transport, utilities, leisure and a quality environment.
- Must be for the **long term**, as well as for the short and medium terms – to provide the direction of travel and the certainty investors require in an age where major shifts in lifestyle, location, infrastructure, movement and energy are required.
- Must recapture **vision, confidence and leadership** nationally, regionally and locally.
- Requires **cross sector collaboration** and **wider engagement** with business and the community.
- Requires continued support to **develop skills** in all the sectors, engage communities and train the planners of the future.
- **Engages and excites**, enables debate and encourages commitment, provides certainty and confidence and underpins investment.
- Should be elegant in its design and governance, understandable and inviting engagement and ownership - **simple, legible and illustratable**.
- Is **outcome focussed** – seeing good process as a means to the end, not the end itself.

10 proposals for fit for purpose spatial planning

1. Commit to leading a continuing **'big conversation'** at national, regional and local levels to debate the issues and the choices that have to be made and find solutions; engaging all the stakeholders – developers, communities, politicians, utility providers, interest groups and delivery agencies – using the consultation processes around national policy statements, regional strategies, sustainable community strategies and local development frameworks.
2. Develop a **spatial vision for England** that describes and evidences a credible, long term future and delivers certainty, confidence and commitment and facilitates the discussion about priorities and outcomes.
3. Create a **joined up approach to the production of national policy statements** to ensure a common high standard, consistency and integration and clear relationships with planning policy statements and regional strategies – employ more planners at national level and in regional offices to facilitate this.
4. Institute **longer term strategic planning** at all levels, including the proposed 'Infrastructure UK' advisory body, to ensure climate change challenges are met by taking appropriate action on transport, energy, green infrastructure, utilities, lower carbon footprints in construction and building management and the location and development of sustainable communities. Develop vision and a clear direction of travel to deliver certainty and ownership.
5. Require **evidence, sound analysis and practical options**; clarifying a shared vision for each area to meet 21st century needs; assessing its governance and achieving clearer decision making that is iterative and hierarchical – particularly at regional and sub-regional scales.
6. Commit to **stability** – a period with less tinkering with the system and more focus on achieving better outcomes via better engagement with all the stakeholders.
7. Strengthen the cross-sectoral **culture change** programme that seeks to develop a commitment to a planning that integrates with other services and sectors and embraces delivery and change management as its key outcomes to develop leadership, skills and mentoring.
8. Develop **regional strategies and sub-regional plans** that integrate transport, utilities, green infrastructure, and respond to climate change through the intelligent location of economic development, new homes and retrofitting existing buildings and places. Create strong, delivery focussed, visionary **local delivery frameworks** that set the framework for local decisions and create sustainable communities by reducing flood risk and carbon emissions and adapting to the new economic, social and environmental conditions. Including a more integrated planning approach to rural and urban areas.
9. Support the **new agencies** – the Homes and Community Agency and the Infrastructure Planning Commission – to achieve their purpose and develop the skills and leadership of local government to be their equal partner.
10. Support sustainability and climate change initiatives at **local level** – e.g. Community Action Network, Transition Towns, local food production, local places for meeting, culture and sport, local green infrastructure, facilities for cycling and traffic reduction, youth centres.

The National Planning Forum will continue to work to:

- Strengthen leadership across the sectors and make links to other service areas
- Develop both strategic and local responses – researching and proposing improvements, identifying innovation and best practice including:
 - Spatial planning that meets society’s changing needs
 - Culture change in planning
 - Mediation in planning
 - Co-ordination between building control and planning
- Engage in the ‘big’ planning conversation about values, ethics, process, outcome, delivery, choices and policy
- Research the future – building on and working with the Foresight Project
- Create shared agendas and joint commitment across sectors
- Develop individual sector responses

The National Planning Forum

The National Planning Forum (NPF) was re-launched in 2003 as the largest cross-sectoral forum focussing on spatial planning in England with a mission to inspire planning and planners.

Since then it has taken a leading role in supporting more creative planning, facilitating culture change, championing the need for a national spatial framework, taking forward a pilot project to evaluate the costs and benefits of mediation in planning jointly with the Planning Inspectorate, improving the interface between planning and building control and imperatives for spatial planning to take us out of recession and help meet the challenges of climate change.

Its membership comprises representatives of the five main sectors involved in spatial planning – business, local government, the professions, government agencies, non-governmental organisations and the voluntary and community sectors; including:

GOVERNMENT AGENCIES (includes sponsor Departments)

Communities and Local Government
Communities and Local Government Planning Research Network (Leeds Met University)
Audit Commission
Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment
Commission for Rural Communities
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Environment Agency
English Heritage
Homes and Community Agency Academy
Homes and Community Agency Advisory Team for Large Applications
Health and Safety Executive
Natural England
Planning Inspectorate
Planning Portal
Regional Development Agencies Network
Sustainable Development Commission
The Theatres Trust

BUSINESS

Arup
British Chamber of Commerce
Association of Town Centre Management
British Property Federation (Chair)
British Retail Consortium
British Urban Regeneration Association
Confederation of British Industry
Country Landowners' Association
Future Cities Forum
Home Builders' Association
Home Builders' Federation
National Farmers' Union
National Retail Planning Forum
Tesco
The Guardian

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

County Surveyors' Society
East of England Regional Assembly
Greater London Authority
Local Government Association

National Association of Local Councils
North West Regional Assembly
Planning Advisory Service
Planning Officers' Society
Planning Officers' Society Enterprises
South East of England Regional Assembly
South West Regional Assembly
Society of Local Authority Chief Executives

PROFESSIONS

Association of Consultant Architects (Planning Advisory Group)
British Institute of Agricultural Consultants
Chartered Institute of Housing
Commonwealth Association of Planners
Conference of Heads of Planning Schools (Liverpool University)
Institute of Historic Building Conservation
Institution of Highways and Transportation
Law Society (Planning and Environmental Law Committee)
London Planning and Development Forum
Planning and Environment Bar Association
Planning Magazine
Planning Summer School
Positive action Training Highway (PaTH)
Royal Institute of British Architects
Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors
Royal Town Planning Institute
University of Westminster

THIRD SECTOR

Campaign to Protect Rural England
Civic Amenity Societies
Groundwork UK
Friends of the Earth
Heritage Link
National Housing Federation
Planning for Real
Planning Aid England
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Shelter
The National Trust
The Princes' Foundation
Town and Country Planning Association

The NPF Futures Working Group comprised:

Liz Peace, Vice President for Business and Chief Executive of the British Property Federation (Chair)

Jonathan Seager, British Property Federation

Sarah Holmes, Planning Aid

Michael Hammerson, Civic Amenity Societies

Ivan Moss, National Farmers Union

Jayne Ashley, Sustainable Development Commission

Sarah Burgess, Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment

James Carr, Barton Willmore, Architects, Royal Institute of British Architects,

Councillor Derek Bateman, Cheshire County Council, Local Government Association

Geoffrey Brown, East Midlands Development Agency, Regional Development Agencies Network, NPF Vice-Chair (Government Agencies)

Councillor Mike Haines, Teignbridge District Council, Local Government Association, NPF Chair (Local Government)

Simon Marsh, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

Jan Molyneux, Consultant, Planning Summer School

Graeme Bell, Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation

Fiona H Howie, Campaign to Protect Rural England

Corinne Swain, Arup

Neil Fourie, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Graham Jones, Planning Officers Society

Kay Powell, Secretary to the National Planning Forum

Mike Hayes, Rapporteur to the Working Party, Consultant, NPF Vice-Chair (Professions)