

National Planning Forum: *inspiring planning*

Draft Notes of the meeting held on 19th September 2005

Welcome from the NPF Chair Henry Oliver

Debate: Planning Timetable Agreements (PTA's)

Graeme Bell presented the draft NPF proposal for PTA's, in response to the ODPM's consultation on Planning Delivery Contracts, together with a Note of the meeting held at the ODPM on 22 July. GB mentioned that there was only one aspect of the report that had received no support-the involvement of Govt. regional offices. There was a growing raft of evidence that targets are sometimes having a perverse outcome, with LPA's refusing applications (or urging withdrawal) to ensure their performance targets and PDG does not suffer.

John Stambollouian (ODPM) welcomed the contribution of NPF to the debate and reported that ATLAS should have proposals for piloting PTA's (or equivalent) by the end of September. These will include recommendations regarding those applications requiring EIA. This would then be discussed with the PAS prior to piloting. A key issue was incentivising LPA's to use PTA's and ODPM are not averse to additional fees being levied to cover LPA's costs if this is what would encourage take up. Models should be entered into freely with no compulsion, indeed variety was a good move at this early stage. LPA's who use PTA's could be given credit for good practice, but there was no enthusiasm to extend data collection or assessment, it was a means to an end.

In discussion the following points emerged:-

- Objectives for PTA's were suggested as ensuring (i) better applications and (ii) more certain timescale.
- PTA's should have a general applicability rather than be available solely for major applications
- Incentives, not sanctions, for LPA's or developers to use PTA's were needed.
- How PTA's affect PDG is critical to take up and ultimate success.
- In 2 tier areas both tiers may have to sign up eg Highway Authority, if the PTA is to work
- PTA's welcomed but it doesn't address the growing problem of LPA's effectively issuing outline consents for full applications, leaving virtually all matters reserved.
- Anything which improves the present situation is welcomed and there is no shortage of volunteers eg Bellway Homes (other offers to PAS please)
- PAS could usefully promote project management training.
- For PTA's to work, signatories need to include statutory consultees. This will need to be kept proportionate.

- For many LPA's the pattern varies- no majors for 2 years then 4/5 together. This is difficult to manage and simplicity is crucial
- The Scottish system allows half the Fee to be returned if targets aren't met (*check*)
- Some developers say they would be prepared to pay an additional fee if it guarantees a decision date and a sanction if it is missed
- Is the emphasis on applications diverting attention from vital policy and plan making?
- The current emphasis on targets leads to perverse behaviour. Solicited withdrawals hide the real extent of the problem.
- Local communities mistrust 'contracts' and 'performance fees'
- As soon as a draft model PTA is received by the Secretary he will circulate it to NPF colleagues for info and comment.

It was agreed to ENDORSE the principle of the PTA embodied in the report, and to recommend to all NPF members the piloting of such arrangements as widely as possible. John Stambollouian was thanked for his efforts on this initiative and for contributing to the discussion.

UPDATE FROM ODPM

Richard Goodwin reported that it had been a busy summer and that autumn looked as if it would be busier still.

To follow

FORMAL AGENDA

The Chair welcomed Kay Powell to her first meeting. She will take up her appointment as Secretary on November 1st.

1. Apologies.

Vice Chairs Liz Peace, Mark Southgate, Cllr Richard Kemp and Mike Hayes, together with others as notified.

2. Draft Notes of meeting on 14th June.

With the change of *prima inter pares* to 'first among equals' these were agreed.

3. Matters arising.

The Secretary reported his presentation on the work of the NPF to the LGA Environment Board in July. He suggested to the Forum that members may wish to extend an invitation to the Secretary to attend an appropriate meeting of their body as a way of increasing mutual understanding and generating ideas for useful work.

4. Planning for Climate Change

The Secretary introduced the draft communiqué and the draft *Policyfile*

Key points emerging from the discussion were:-

- A PPS on Climate Change would emphasise the importance of the issue and give a clear policy steer
- An action plan would be helpful in addition to the *Policyfile*. Tools, protocols, best practice notes etc. were needed to encourage policy implementation.
- A dedicated PPS may not be an easy document to draft as there is still uncertainty over key areas. It could serve to confuse rather than clarify. A Ministerial Statement would be much quicker and arguably as effective
- PPS's operate on a land use basis and aren't well suited to cross cutting issues eg design. Good Practice Guidance is what is required.
- S39 of the Act giving Sustainable Development as the cornerstone of the planning reforms should be included in the *Policyfile*
- The issue is not policy but upskilling staff and capacity building in this complex area and offering practical examples of putting this into effect
- Bullet 5 of the Communique should include 'water efficiency'
- PPS9 wording in the *Policyfile* needs to be checked

NB Colleagues were asked to email the Secretary with any further detailed comments before cop on 26th September, and to forward logos if their organisation wished to be associated directly with it.

On this basis the Forum ENDORSED the Communique, AGREED the *Policyfile* and urged members to disseminate the information as widely as possible. (NB In further consultation with ODPM it was decided to re-name the *Policyfile* as a *Quickfile*.)

5. Draft Business Plan 2005/8 and Work Programme

Kay Powell introduced this item and called for support and suggestions for future work. Colleagues made the following suggestions:-

- The NPF should extend its links with, and potential to influence, a wider range of organisations eg health, infrastructure and insurance providers etc. to facilitate spatial planning.
- The emphasis should be on making the new system work better, with practical and innovative ways of securing better planning and development
- The NPF should concentrate on x cutting issues where it can make common cause
- The NPF can make a powerful contribution by monitoring and advising where the new system is creaking. Market assessments could consume large resources.
- Can NPF be used as a sounding board for the ODPM/Baker LDF research? PAS (SR) offered to disseminate this work in the New Year.
- The provision and funding of infrastructure remains a serious issue. NPF should keep it on the agenda

- **Management processes for involvement of communities in RSS and LDFs should be an issue for NPF.**

The Chair said that the Plan should include work on the implications of climate change, SEA, spatial planning, community involvement, delivery and design; the next item considered how this might be done.

6. NPF Working agenda and *modus operandi*

The following points were made:-

- **NPF should outreach to organisations that are now within the scope of spatial planning**
- **NPF should concentrate on gaining access to and influencing policymakers in Govt. on the realities affecting members.**
- **Working groups need to be small and cross sectoral**
- **The LGA conference rooms are more suitable for debate than Room 8.01**
- **NPF membership should be wide and not just for fee payers**
- **The regions (agencies/assemblies) are increasingly important and should be represented**

In winding up the debate the Chair and the incoming Secretary stressed the importance of the wider membership involving themselves in the work of the Forum and of contributing in cash or kind. In turn the NPF can be useful to individual members by taking up an important issue from one and making it the concern of all.

7. 2006 Conference

The suggested approach was ENDORSED. The Chair asked colleagues to contact the Secretary with potential contributions.

8. AOB None.

Date of next meeting 13th December 2005.

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