

DRAFT NOTE OF A MEETING OF THE NATIONAL PLANNING FORUM

THURSDAY DECEMBER 15th 2011

LOCAL GOVERNMENT HOUSE, SMITH SQUARE, LONDON

40 members and guests attended and there were 13 apologies for absence – names recorded in the Minute Book.

All the presentations made at this meeting can be viewed at <http://www.natplanforum.org.uk/pres2011.html>

1. Welcome and opening remarks

Brian Waters: Chair of the National Planning Forum and NPF Vice-chair (Professions) welcomed members and guests and particularly those attending for the first time, including:

- London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies represented by Michael Bach.
- Councillors Keith House and Ed Turner representing the Local Government Group
- Ian Barrett from Defra
- Helen Lancaster from Natural England
- Andrew Cottam from the HSE
- Rodger Pidgeon from Planning Summer School
- Julie Foley from the Environment Agency, and
- James Lloyd from the National Trust

2. Changes to the English planning system in 2011 and update on current issues

DCLG Chief Planner, Steve Quartermain overviewed the wide range of reforms to the English planning system being undertaken by the Coalition Government. He stressed that much that was proposed was still in development and outlined the progress being made on:

- Planning reform generally
- The Localism Act
- Growth Review
- National Planning Policy Framework
- Duty to co-operate
- Simplification
- Penfold Plus
- The Planning Guarantee
- Neighbourhood Planning

In discussion the following points were raised:

- The loss of published planning performance statistics for local authorities in London (by Brian Waters) – SQ indicated he was investigating why this had happened while emphasising it was the responsibility of local authorities to publish their own statistics for the benefit of their communities.
- Corinne Swain asked about arrangements for producing guidance following the publication of the NPPF. SQ replied that guidance fell into two broad categories: (a) that intrinsically linked to existing PPSs, e.g. PPS 25 on Flood Risk Assessment – there was a danger of creating a vacuum if this guidance was lost as the PPSs were superseded by the NPPF; and (b) everything else including guidance government will still be required to produce; guidance that might be produced by the sector and here there is a debate around who might sanction its authority and use – the RTPI were leading on this work; and anything else that organisations in the field might want to produce.

- Michael Bach asked about the draft NPPF and the correct interpretation to apply to the notion of a plan led system whose purpose is to deliver growth, which he did not think was very clear and about how PPG 13 on Transport could be incorporated into the document. SQ made it clear that Section 38(6) of the 2004 Planning Act (that decisions should be taken in accordance with the development plan) still applies.
- Ian Phillips quoted from the NPPF Impact Assessment, which describes the under-provision of green infrastructure as an example of market failure and asked whether the government had plans to deal with this and any other examples of market failure. He also referred to the Natural Environment White Paper and asked if this was to be taken more on board in the final draft of the NPPF. SQ explained that the reference in the NPPF Impact Assessment was to the role of planning in helping to redress market failure in the provision of green infrastructure. There was a wide range of views on what might constitute market failure. He further explained that government was moving away from repeating already published policy and guidance – documents needed to be read as a suite, there would not be widespread repetition.
- Colin Haylock asked about the status of neighbourhood planning currently being progressed under the existing planning system (i.e. 1990 and 2004 Acts); the challenges and opportunities of neighbourhood planning in areas of mixed residential and business use; and how the Department was learning from the experience of the neighbourhood planning front runners.
- Mhora Samuel asked about how the NPPF would take on the recommendation from the Portas Report that town centres should be destinations for socialising, culture, health and well-being. SQ indicated this was under consideration.
- Tony Burton of Civic Voice asked whether there would be measures to encourage plan preparation. SQ replied that government would be looking at guidance. It was not government's job to tell local government to produce plans – local government should be able to see the benefits for themselves.
- Graham Jones asked whether the duty to co-operate was a duty to agree. SQ responded by expressing the hope that local authorities understood the consequences of saying 'no'.
- Cllr Ed Turner asked about progress on planning fees and freedom and flexibility in placing strong policies in plans in view of the viability tests that will be applied to the examination. SQ said that planning application fees were with ministers for decision and that ministers were encouraging the use of area specific policies in the context of well-evidenced, robust, deliverable, viable plans.

The Chairman thanked Steve for his contribution

3. Laying the Foundations: a housing strategy for England

Kelvin Macdonald, Policy Advisor to the RTPI, at very short notice, presented an overview of emerging housing policy and the issues surrounding it in the light of the recently published government report *Laying the Foundations: a housing strategy for England*; which was followed by a discussion.

4. Green Infrastructure Partnerships

Ian Barrett of DEFRA and Stephen Russell, and Ian Phillips of the Landscape Institute jointly presented the DEFRA and the Landscape Institute recently produced strategy for developing green infrastructure through the Green Infrastructure Partnership.

5. Proposed National Planning Forum project to celebrate positive planning

A discussion took place introduced by the Chair, supported by Tony Burton of IDOX around whether there was a role for the National Planning Forum to support positive planning by identifying and publicising best practice in planning delivery and practice. A variety of views were expressed as to the value of this exercise and the ability of the NPF to undertake it given the range of initiatives produced by a range of organisations.

6. Update from the Executive Board

The Secretary updated the meeting on the subscription exercise, Mediation in Planning and the intention to become an incorporated body.

7. The minutes of the meetings of September 22nd 2011 were agreed and signed.

8. AOB