

NATIONAL PLANNING FORUM: *inspiring planning*
DRAFT NOTE OF MEETING: THURSDAY 4 DECEMBER 2008
Local Government House, Smith Square, London
36 members and guests attended; 8 apologies for absence (see Minute Book)

1. WELCOME - Liz Peace, Chair of the National Planning Forum, NPF Vice-Chair (Business), and British Property Federation welcomed members and guests including Steve Quartermain Chief Planner and other officials from CLG.

2. RESPONDING TO THE RECESSION AND CLIMATE CHANGE - presentations were given by Sir Stuart Lipton Chelsfield LLP, Andrew Whitaker Home Builders' Federation, Simon Marsh NPF Vice-Chair (3rd Sector) / RSPB, and Cllr Mike Haines NPF Vice-Chair (Local Government) / Deputy Chair LGA Environment Board - ppts for (i) and (iv) are at <http://www.natplanforum.org.uk>

(i) Sir Stuart Lipton's key points were:

- we need more planners – now
- the planning process needs to be cooperative (not adversarial)
- national policy is too voluminous
- more certainty is needed for CIL and S106
- we need modern construction methods, less waste, simple and elegant architecture
- infrastructure and development need to be planned together
- need a surplus of housing land to reduce its price
- Government's role is to finance infrastructure and maintain the housing supply chain
- innovation should be encouraged to produce better product at lower cost

(ii) Andrew Whitaker:

- need to **Plan** positively throughout the recession with a view to the upturn
- be **Pragmatic** - there will always be a housing market
- **Prioritise** - get cash flow into the system and innovate
- **don't Procrastinate** - need to have sound plans that can cope with uncertainty and to negotiate S106s at acceptable levels

(iii) Simon Marsh:

- every sector needs to take action on climate change - the longer the delay the deeper the action needed
- we are in a natural resource crunch, as well as a credit crunch
- we need to take the opportunities presented, including delivering on renewables (there will be an RSPB publication on this in the New Year)
- new legislation: Climate Change Act requires carbon budgets; Planning Act 2008
- this Session - no Heritage Bill, but Flooding and Water Bill; also Local Democracy, Economic Regeneration and Construction Bill (including Sub-National Review provisions)

(iv) Mike Haines:

- likely to be local variations in the impact of the recession (study for the LGA)
- local responses include setting up coordinated action groups thro' the LSP
- planning application numbers are reducing
- Killian-Pretty recommendation to LPAs to retain planning staff for LDF work
- planning fee income is down, as is income from other sources, but Councils will want to keep Council Tax increases down
- for the longer term we need better energy performance from existing buildings

- future development viability?

Comments from the floor:

- should we revert to granting permission unless “demonstrable harm” is demonstrated? (but later noted that this would require primary legislation)
- planners need training in development economics
- neighbour disputes should be resolved outside the planning system (K-P recommendation)
- need to encourage more positive attitudes to factory built construction for new build and refurbishments, and to use of new materials eg fabrics (BMW using canvas for prototype Gina car)
- ACA has set up a joint task force with RIBA to test out propositions that could make an immediate difference and are talking to allied professions. Initial ideas: (i) induction courses in planning for architects (this had been taken up by London Metropolitan University with a course starting in January); (ii) all planning applications from now on to be for 5, not 3, years - not retrospective; (iii) immediate relaxation of the UCO to allow B1 (office/business) allocations to be used for C3 (residential) (iv) incentives for LPAs to introduce LDOs eg in next year’s HPDG
- counter argument to (iii) above as it would reduce employment land allocations and take away local discretion
- planning fees reverting to last year’s level, although there was a counter argument to this as fees are not a large element of the cost of projects, and it would mean LPAs losing money needed to support the planning service
- BRE charges for BREEAM assessments are excessive (eg more than the architect’s fee) and BRE have the monopoly - shouldn’t assessments be free?
- need to cut out duplication between planning and building regulations, and outsource compliance to accredited agents
- mediation has potential, as studies have shown, but it’s not necessarily most appropriate at appeal stage (as suggested in K-P) - there’s nothing to stop it happening now, provided it’s not seen as a “one size fits all” solution
- very few LPAs have standing groups with local developers in their areas - these are needed to build long term relationships
- planners tend to keep their distance from 3rd sector groups too - longer term engagement would have the benefit of sharing of expertise and local knowledge
- LAs need to use their new economic assessment duty to understand the issues and focus action
- concern that developers will seek to cut out S106 benefits - everyone needs to understand that the cheapest option is not necessarily the best
- need to upskill planners to deliver on renewable energy (in line with the Planning and Energy Act 2008), public land needs to be released, location of new development land needs to be sustainable, Community Land Trusts should be encouraged (Taylor Report recommendation), energy companies should work with house builders on new solutions.
- Government should pay LPAs to retain planners (eg via HPDG)
- important to establish what are the priorities, to use the skills we have across the sectors more flexibly eg via more secondments, and to upskill planners so that they understand the new technologies

- the vast majority of the housing stock is there now, the construction industry is laying off skilled workers, Government should use them to upgrade the existing stock – this would present good value for money – any work required should be “waived through”
- studies have shown that lowering VAT to 5% on refurbishment works could be self financing – if the EU is supportive and it is not contrary to State Aid rules
- major infrastructure development is the classic Keynesian response. The IPC will not be up and running until 2010 and could be fraught by grass roots reactions
- concern that the recession will be used as an excuse to weaken the planning system and impact on outcomes
- there appears to be potential in using Tax Increment Funding (TIF - see BPF web-site for details) to invest in specific deprived areas paid for by future tax returns

Summing up, the Chair said we had listed a large number of workable options under 5 main headings - skills development, cooperation, tweaking (rather than changing the system via primary legislation), modern construction components and methods, cross sectoral action. These would be recorded and sent to members for further comment, because in line with Steve Quartermain’s suggestion the Executive Board is keen to use the resource of the NPF, to be more pro-active in joining the debate on key challenges, and to take forward action on them. **ACTION: members to send any further comments to the Secretary BY 31 DECEMBER.**

3. KILLIAN-PRETTY REVIEW - Tony Thompson, CLG made a presentation - his ppt is at <http://www.natplanforum.org.uk>

Comments were as follows:

- 75% of the report is sensible, but it is still very managerial, with nothing about quality of outcomes and the environment as “customer”. It needs a wider context.
- there were several contentious recommendations: increasing PD rights were not necessarily compatible with the public’s views; concern that the advice of statutory consultees will not be taken on board sufficiently; recommendations that seek to reduce complexity – planning deals with complex issues and should seek integrated solutions; overhauling the national policy documents – while there may be things that can be done to simplify this, there should not be too much radical pruning in case essentials are lost
- cutting duplication would be sensible and perhaps producing short “guides” to policy
- cutting volume produced by applicants is sensible
- the new Part 1 GPDO caused mayhem because it was produced with no guidance
- the new PD system was meant to be based on impact but is still rules and measurement based
- agree the majority of recommendations but sceptical about LDOs
- planning has a range of customers, not just applicants
- length of planning documents is often driven by caution – trying to cover every issue to reduce the chance of successful Judicial Review

Liz thanked Tony for his helpful presentation and initial comments. CLG would find it helpful to have more comments over the next month. **ACTION: members should send comments on the Killian-Pretty Report to: tony.thompson@communities.gsi.gov.uk BY EARLY JANUARY.**

4. CULTURE CHANGE ACTION PLAN - Mark Southgate NPF Vice-Chair (Government Agencies), and PINS

Mark said that 12 organisations had now signed up to specific actions. These were 3 main groups of these: (i) capacity building, (ii) exchange/transfer of skills, and (iii) process re-design. He encouraged others to add more actions to which their organisation will commit, and ensure that their logo is on the Action Plan to be published in January 2009 by getting in touch with the Secretary. He also pointed out that we would monitor progress

Action: all members to respond to the Secretary with 1 commitment to action in line with the plan and to confirm permission to use their logo BY 31 DECEMBER.

5. DRAFT NOTE OF OCTOBER MEETING - this was agreed and signed by the Chair.

6. AOB - there were no items. The Chair wished members a happy Christmas and New Year. The meeting closed at 3.35pm.

NEXT FORUM MEETING - same time & venue - MONDAY 16 MARCH