

NATIONAL PLANNING FORUM: *inspiring planning*
DRAFT NOTE OF MEETING: MONDAY 16 MARCH 2009

Local Government House, Smith Square, London

27 members and guests attended; there were 19 apologies for absence (see Minute Book)

1. WELCOME - Mike Hayes NPF Vice-Chair (Professions) welcomed members on behalf of Liz Peace, British Property Federation, Chair of the National Planning Forum and NPF Vice-Chair (Business) as a problem with her diary had prevented her attending. Jonathan Seager, BPF was representing her at this meeting.

2. HOMES AND COMMUNITIES AGENCY - Trevor Beattie, Director of Strategy, Policy, Performance and Research, Homes and Communities Agency gave a presentation about the work of the HCA. His ppt is at <http://www.natplanforum.org.uk>. In opening the Q&A session the Chairman highlighted the reference in his last slide to “preparing for the new world” and the link made between regeneration and delivery via planning. Questions and comments (*responses in italics*) were:

- there were problems in delivering S106 affordable housing because of difficulties in obtaining shared equity mortgages. *TB said that there was a problem with availability of all types of mortgage products at the moment, but Homebuy Direct provide an additional product which was already proving to be of value to many homebuyers.*

§ would HCA use Croydon as an exemplar? *Best practice as in LB Croydon was always important, and was being spread currently by HCA ATLAS, HCA Academy and by HCA regional staff in their normal work with each local authority. Exemplars would be useful in providing learning about new ways of working - eg to deliver Code for Sustainable Homes levels 4 and 5 - and were of value in the medium to long term.*

§ LAs were being given credit/freedom to borrow but not additional cash, however many were strapped for cash because of loss of income or the effects of past borrowing. *HCA had inherited the Decent Homes and Housing PFI Credits agenda.*

§ a map of regeneration projects in this week's Regeneration magazine showed virtually none in the north - particularly the North West and Pennines. *TB found this puzzling because the North West - and in particular Manchester and Warrington - had benefited from major investment and there had not been any slackening of the activity of the HCA in the North of England. He would look into the basis for the figures used.*

§ welcomed the emphasis on the HCA supporting local authorities with LDF work. The Planning Inspectorate was investing in this also and was keen to spread the positive message about the need to press ahead with plan-making now and not to delay. *HCA would continue the emphasis on the need for long term planning - at the national as well as local level.*

§ current uncertainty, the lack of credibility eg relating to housing numbers, and immediate concerns about eg town centres with 20% vacancy rates were understandable, but we needed to develop capacity for long term thinking and new models of delivery that recognised current resource constraints. *The HCA is putting in investment in a mix of infrastructure, land and expertise in exchange for an equity stake in projects, depending on what was required eg at Bedford where they have built a road to provide access to housing land. SEEDA already has good infrastructure funding, but HCA is looking to establish a National Infrastructure Fund.*

§ HCA's role in infrastructure delivery was vital. There was a major focus on homes, but there also needed to be support for commercial projects eg in town centres. Funding was a particular issue with a need to consider alternatives such as Tax Increment Funding (TIF - details on the BPF web-site). Would HCA support LAs in borrowing, and would they act as “banker”? *HCA has not specifically supported TIF, but there was a need for creative solutions such as this. Regional Infrastructure Funds were important too. The key was working out what was best in each case.*

§ There was an interesting marriage between localism and a national approach to bring in high level skills and resources. How was this being energised and resourced? *More than half of HCA's staff were based in regional offices and they were actively talking to local authorities in the first instance.*

§ How did HCA evaluate where to invest? How would new private rented stock be funded and managed? *The Corporate Plans of English Partnerships and the Housing Corporation had been published in summary form, but HCA would move this on to consult on more detail on its Corporate Plans with RDAs and others in central government, and aimed to involve others externally. TB considered that it was still possible to attract sufficient funding to achieve high quality standards. He was impressed by RSLs' capacity to manage stock so this could be an option for private rented property. HCA is also looking at options to bring some of the nearly 1m empty homes back into use through the HCA's "single conversation" with local authorities, which is its central business process.*

Mike Hayes thanked Trevor Beattie for an informative presentation and for responding to the issues raised in the Q&A session. Many of the issues linked to those in the next paper and he was delighted that Trevor could stay on for the next item.

3. RESPONDING TO THE RECESSION AND CLIMATE CHANGE - Mike Hayes (Chair); and Steve Quartermain, Chief Planner, CLG. Mike said that the paper circulated had been prepared by Liz Peace and the Secretary as a result of the debate at our last meeting. He added that he would ask Steve Quartermain to respond to the actions suggested for CLG in paragraphs (1) and (2) in due course. Paragraphs (3), (4), and (5) had potential for action by NPF, indeed many of the actions were already part of our Culture Change Action Plan. However more was needed to encourage much greater innovation in building to meet climate change imperatives, and to prepare planners and Councillors for this challenge. The Executive Board needed to know whether members of the NPF think that we have covered the key issues in this paper and, if not, what we should add. This was the short term response; further work would be needed on the issues and new ones that emerge over the next year.

Steve Quartermain picked up on themes (1) and (2) by confirming that work was underway to address the bullet points within them - including via CLG's response to the Killian-Pretty Review which had covered several of them and set out tight timescales for further work. He was pleased that the reaction to this had been broadly positive. Themes (4) and (5) set a similarly challenging agenda. Much was not new, but the issues were important. With new construction methods, planners needed to get used to approving developments that looked unlike those they had approved in the past; there were key interfaces in particular between planning and building control on these which he had been considering with colleagues. He would be reconvening the CIL stakeholder group over the summer to consider draft regulations. It would be important for the NPF should look at what action they could take re points under (4) and (5). The debate that followed included (*SQ responses in italics*):

§ the key issue would be how to maintain momentum on forward planning, including developing a shared long term vision, with HCA becoming a delivery partner. This involved the deeper issue of how people were going to live post-recession. There was a clear role for education and engagement about this along the lines of the CABI publication "The Hallmarks of a Sustainable City". *CLG was engaging with Leaders and Chief Executives to encourage work on forward planning, celebrating success by writing to those that had achieved a sound Core Strategy (CS), offering support (including from PAS) to those that were working on CSs, encouraging use of Housing and Planning Delivery Grant (which is not ring fenced) on plan-making, and including the need for a Core Strategy in the recently published guide for the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) Inspection Regime.*

§ there was a need to raise awareness that good design is key and to encourage place-making everywhere – including in areas of decline – noting that there were signs that this was starting to happen.

§ there was a clear case for VAT to be reduced on refurbishment work to encourage re-use of redundant buildings for commercial activity as well as housing particularly in marginal areas. The EU has signalled that this is acceptable.

§ uncertainty arising from local government reorganisation was confusing things. More guidance and meeting PINS earlier in the process would help considerably. *CLG and PINS would be keen to give advice where needed, but the regulations are very clear and they are keen not to overload people.*

§ the relationship between planning and building regulations is not high profile but needs to be better. It would be helpful to convene a task group to consider how best to manage the relationship. The Planning Portal is developing useful advice on this. We need to cut out duplication. There was also a need to consider the interface with Environmental Health. *CLG hoped to take forward action to clarify “who does what” in relation to planning and building regulations.*

§ planning permission should be for 5 (not 3) years. There was a default power to grant planning permission for 5 years; what was needed was a national steer from CLG to apply this (eg via a Chief Planner letter). *SQ confirmed that it was possible for new consents to be granted for 5 years, but it was important to note that applying it retrospectively would require primary legislation.*

§ could there be quick guidance issued to encourage flexibility re S106s? Some local planning authorities were suspending S106 policies in parts of their area in response to the recession, but some were being inflexible. *Government policy was clearly set out in Circular 05/05 Planning Obligations. SQ would consider encouraging good practice examples of the flexibility that can be shown by LPAs on S106s to be posted onto the Planning Portal.* Edinburgh City Council has introduced a policy that allows developers to build now, but pay S106 contributions later.

§ A recent HBF Press Release on Killian-Pretty supported the need for more culture change. In particular he agreed with the point about the need for flexibility on S106s. Reality is needed, not more change to the system which was robust enough to outlast the recession. We need to use the recession as a time to think through how best to build for the future.

§ BPF had suggested that the power to extend planning permission (taken away by the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act) should be reinstated in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill. *Such a clause would need to be within the scope of that Bill.*

§ it was important for local authorities to focus on outcomes rather than issues, and deal with practicalities.

Mike Hayes thanked Steve Quartermain and members for their helpful contributions to the debate, and

(i) asked for any other comments on the paper or the issues raised in discussion to be sent to the Secretary **by the end of the week**. He urged members to focus on taking responsibility for leading on specific actions. Liz and Kay would finalise the paper and send it formally to Steve as means of energising action on key imperatives;

(ii) suggested that the NPF should set up a Task and Finish Working Group to consider synergies and recommend action to reduce overlap between planning and building regulations. Andrew Whitaker, Brian Waters, Simon Birch, James Carr, John Anderson, BPF, Andy Rogers and Steve Quartermain expressed interest in being involved in this Group.

ACTION: (i) All (ii) KP to prepare draft TOR for a Planning and Building Regulations Working Group and to ask for further expressions of interest

4. OTHER ITEMS FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

a. Culture Change Manifesto and Action Plan Next Steps - Mark Southgate, Planning Inspectorate, Vice-Chair (Government Agencies) said that the Culture Change Action Plan had been launched early last month. Copies were available for members. Consultants would be engaged to chase progress on the commitments made and monitor progress for a report back next October. John Anderson noted that the Commonwealth Association of Planners' logo had not been included. KP apologised for this omission. MS proposed that the version on the web-site be updated to reflect the support of CAP. He suggested that this was an active document and so he invited other member organisations to add actions to the Plan. Vice-Chairs would convene sector meetings over the summer to discuss and take forward joint actions using the 3 key questions: What are we doing currently? What more can we do? Who will lead this work? **ACTION: Vice-Chairs with Secretary to set up Sector Groups; members who have signed up to commitments to ensure they are progressed; all members to consider new commitments.**

b. Business Plan and Work Programme for 2009/10 - the Secretary outlined the key features of the draft which had been discussed with CLG officials. Our finances were healthy and would cover the work outlined in Annex 2, however the major budget input was from CLG, so the Executive Board would be considering at its next meeting asking members to contribute £500 (or equivalent) in future years to fund an expanded programme and to strengthen governance.

Steve Quartermain said that he was pleased to see the progress being made to refine the Work Programme. This should be considered as "work in progress" – more effort would be needed to sharpen it up to ensure the NPF makes a difference to outcomes.

Suggested improvements to the draft Business Plan and Work Programme would be very welcome, and should be sent to the Secretary by the end of this month. **ACTION: All**

5. DRAFT NOTE OF DECEMBER MEETING AND FOLLOW-UP ACTION - the note was agreed and signed by the Chairman as a true record of proceedings.

Mark Southgate reported that the new Householder Appeals Service would be rolled out in all areas from this April as set out by Sean Canavan at our October meeting. The Planning Inspectorate was keen to reduce the volume of information not required for appeals, and to decide on what is proportionate.

6. AOB - the Secretary reported that:

- (i) TCPA would be holding an environmental education roundtable event on 7 May in their offices in London - anyone interested should contact James Harris 0207 930 8903;
- (ii) she attends meetings of the Planning Advisory Service Local Development Order (LDO) Steering Group and had circulated a questionnaire from the PAS researchers (ENTEC) on LDOs, and another for White Young Green who were working for CLG on non-minor material amendments;
- (iii) she will input into the HCA Academy Task Group on Skills;
- (iv) she had attended a Zero Carbon Hub event related to the Zero Carbon Definition consultation.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING - there would be a change from the date advertised for the next meeting (Thursday 11 June). The **NEW DATE** is **CONFIRMED** as **MONDAY 6 JULY**, at the **SAME TIME** as today's meeting and in the **SAME VENUE** - **LG HOUSE**.

Other Forum dates this year remain as previously announced ie: TUESDAY 13 OCTOBER and TUESDAY 15 DECEMBER, both at 12.45pm for 1.30pm in LG House, Smith Square.