

**NATIONAL PLANNING FORUM: *inspiring planning***

**DRAFT NOTE OF MEETING: MONDAY 6 JULY 2009**

**Local Government House, Smith Square, London**

**38 members and guests attended; there were 22 apologies for absence (see Minute Book)**

**1. WELCOME - Liz Peace NPF Chair and NPF Vice-Chair (Business)** welcomed members, particularly those who were attending the Forum for the first time. She added that Mark Southgate had stood down after many years service initially as a Vice-Chair and then as Chair. She introduced Geoffrey Brown from the RDAs Network to those who didn't know him - as the newly elected Vice-Chair (Government Agencies).

**2. FORESIGHT LAND USE FUTURES - Professor Mark Tewdwr-Jones (UCL)**

Mark's ppt presentation is at <http://www.natplanforum.org.uk> He added from a personal perspective that we need to think about the nature of the planning system deriving from the 1947 Planning Act, with land management based on Agriculture Acts, discretionary and science-based, alongside our aim of sustainable land use. There were issues of capacity, resources and vulnerabilities. We need to consider who should be responsible, at what level, and links between land use, development and taxation.

Specific questions and comments on his presentation (*responses in italics*) were:

- would the scenarios for England be available for comment? If not, could that be considered? The Welsh Assembly Government had found public engagement helpful in developing planning policy and their spatial plan. *There were no current plans to do so, but this point would be taken back to the sponsoring Departments (Defra and BIS).* The Chairman summed up the mood of the meeting by strongly urging the Project Team to be open with the scenarios.
- scenario work was very useful as it forced planners to think "outside the box". How would the project use the scenarios - as a learning tool or to test policy options? We needed to get better at handling different technologies eg the scope to explore the options for using underground space. We also needed to take a strategic view. The Chair noted that an article on the Arup exercise in scenario building was in the latest TCPA Journal, copies of which were available at the back of the room. *The project was starting to look at reactions to possible scenarios. Much would depend on the kind of political system we have in future. Underground space was being looked at, partly in terms of multifunctionality. Technology was the most difficult issue. Scenarios were being used as a tool for developing thinking.*
- we needed to consider why we were planning. Purpose (sustainability) was more important than the process, and planning based on a vision for place and targets. We should test these against likely scenarios to help tease out unintended consequences. *Some important planning principles have been lost because planning was being asked to solve everything (climate change, stopping terrorists etc) - "if planning is everything, it could be nothing". Planning was primarily about land and its capacity, so it needed to consider evidence from environmental science. Planners in LPAs needed to get to grips with this and this was likely to increase the debate about ethics.*
- scientific data doesn't represent a universal truth. If planners based their plans on scientific evidence it could cut out the views of local people. Would there be room for the dissenting voice? *There should always be scope for contention and values. People needed to be involved, democracy needed to shift.*
- we needed to allow time for debate, and also for politicians to show leadership and strong decision-making in the interest of local good.
- a growth prerogative underlay Government thinking. Had the team looked at an equilibrium economy? *Growth remained as part of the equation, the issue was whether this was still relevant.*
- there appeared to be more emphasis on the environmental leg of the tripod of sustainability. There were critical uncertainties – the forthcoming National Policy Statements and decisions of the Infrastructure Planning Commission would show how these would be dealt with. Had the European dimension being considered? *Sustainability was at the heart of the project. The social dimension could not be ignored, neither could Europe and the world, as decisions made outside the UK would affect us here. The team was building in different structures and influences; the question was how to respond.*
- having attended a Foresight event it was clear that the long timescale and global reach had to be balanced with local governance. It would be helpful to know how this work is going to be used. Clearly

there was buy-in from Defra and BIS, but would other Departments use the scenarios? There was concern that politics still focussed on short term action – culture change was needed in government.

- the Common Agricultural Policy has a huge impact on farming. How far was the project looking at different funding options? *Yes, different fiscal arrangements are being taken into account.*

Liz thanked Mark for a fascinating presentation and for answering members' questions. She was keen to use this opportunity to link with work being done for the Executive Board by Mike Hayes, NPF Vice-Chair (Professions) as a contribution to the wider debate about responding to recession and climate change. The paper on this agreed by the last Forum had been discussed with Steve Quartermain and had been well received. However, many of the actions proposed were now underway, and it had been agreed that there was a need to move on from that. The next presentation would allow the Board to test out reactions from members on which direction we should take.

Mike Hayes said that we were at a transformational moment, with the twin challenges of climate change and responding to recession. We needed to ask whether it was possible to have prosperity without growth and to look for new solutions eg using the green belt between Liverpool and Manchester for a variety of sustainable uses.

There were key tensions - individual v community, ethics in public life, politics and governance - which had been highlighted in a Government publication last week "*Building Britain's Future*" and there remained disparities at all levels. He didn't envisage a need to reinvent the planning system however we did need sensible subsidiarity, to have better governance at regional level, longer planning horizons and space to think. Spatial planning needed to be part of the "Infrastructure UK" advisory body.

Grass roots action was developing - eg in 10 organisations in Lambeth that encouraged members to insulate their homes, cycle and re-cycle more, and in Transition Towns - but were these being supported? We needed clearer priorities and better skills, particularly in relation to the zero carbon agenda.

Liz suggested that we await comments and questions until the end of Steve Quartermain's presentation.

### **3. CLG PLANNING UPDATE - Steve Quartermain, Chief Planner, Communities and Local Government**

**The Local Government and Economic Development bill** - had left the Lords and finished its Committee stage on 18 June. Royal Assent was anticipated in the summer/autumn and whichever is achieved, draft guidance was planned for consultation over the summer.

**RSS delivery** - since 2004 8 RSS had been subject to full revision. There had been 6 challenges to the SE RSS. The SW RSS was still under consideration

**Killian-Pretty** - implementation was still on track. There were 5 work streams - increasing PD rights; improving planning application processes; better information to users; improved capacity and performance in LPAs; and review of PPSs. Work was underway on improving the application process and validation, and extending PD rights for minor extensions to commercial buildings. CLG had also progressed a matter raised at the March meeting viz enabling 5 year permissions.

**CIL** - there would be consultation on draft regulations over the summer

**Eco-towns** - a draft PPS would issue for consultation later this month.

**LDFs** - over 200 DPDs had been submitted for examination. CLG were continuing to see them as a high priority and are still offering support to LPAs to speed their production.

**Climate change and renewable energy** - John Healey had confirmed at the Planning convention that being in a recession was not the time to let up on our drive to mitigate and adapt to climate change. There would be consultation over the summer on a White Paper on Renewable Energy.

**NPS/IPC** - the latter continues to take shape. The Route-map published in January 2009 gave the detailed programme. Finalising draft NPSs for consultation was taking more time than anticipated.

Members' questions and comments were as follows (*SQ responses in italics*):

- had Steve been involved in the Foresight Land Use Futures work? *He had been to a Foresight event,*

*and was prepared to think about whether the planning system is fit for purpose. Planning is a means of delivering outcomes, not just a process.*

- NPSs represented a bridgehead, a change in the system for considering major infrastructure. How different would the process be for engaging people compared with previous consultations? *It is proving a huge challenge to get the NPSs into the shape needed by the legislative requirements before consultation. However, there would be robust consultation with a wide range of consultees with different perspectives.*
- Would the NPS comprise statements that predetermined outcomes, or would they give options? *The first iteration would be a streamlining of existing policy.*
- Presumably the NPSs could be broadened out in the second iteration.
- Professor Tim Jackson's paper raised a fundamental question. It was vital that the Foresight work considered a no-growth option. *The issue for this work was where the scenarios lead. The most favoured out of a list of "wants" was happiness - this means a home, job, open space and a safe environment, so we need to develop the social-economic agenda.* The Foresight work must take into account that - after a certain income - happiness "flat lines".
- should we require a strategy (not necessarily a spatial plan) everywhere? *CLG is prioritising those LPAs where plans are needed. LDFs need to be fit for purpose. MT-J: Administrative boundaries become a problem. There may not be one planning system everywhere, but functional relationships between places for example eco-trading, which doesn't fit our current planning system.*
- RTPI is engaging its members to get to the core of concerns about climate change. RTPI has adopted 7 commitments to action - to support behavioural change; support adaptation of existing places; research recommendations on legislative and policy change; improve practice; RTPI Awards to have a climate change driver; publicising best practice case studies; and significantly develop emerging and existing planners to take forward the agenda. RTPI is looking for co-partnership on this and would welcome interest from the NPF and its members. The link to the RTPI's Seven Commitments paper is: <http://www.rtpi.org.uk/download/6440/Sevencommitments.pdf> Any NPF member who would like -either individually or collectively - to consider partnering the RTPI to deliver projects under development to deliver the seven commitments will find a link to the relevant page of our website from the paper.
- is happiness a key, because it is the ultimate goal? *MH: the current economic model has failed globally and locally – the choice is to continue to exploit some people to enrich ourselves or to learn to share. As Tim Jackson said we need the "ability to flourish as human beings within global capacity".*
- the Foresight Land Use Futures work should be a mechanism for a wider conversation. There are lots of advantages in scenario building including encouraging dialogue about drivers, influencers. It takes the emphasis from the plan and moves away from the adversarial. It leads to individual behaviour change.
- this is about empowering vis á vis prescription. We need to change the process so that the rules change, make a paradigm shift.
- the question is "what do we do?" In another 11 months we will have another Government; they are likely to abolish RDAs, focus on "bottom-up" planning, reinforcing the power of local authorities and the anti-development lobby. Conversations with opposition politicians to date have proved unproductive.
- many of Mike Hayes' questions were the same ones asked by Civic Amenities Societies. The Foresight presentation was also very stimulating, but the reason the public wants to get involved in the planning system is to secure better outcomes. The whole country is precious – it should all be treated well ie as if it were a Conservation Area.
- should there be a PPS on Happiness? Could the Forum invite Bob Neil MP to address us? *Chair: this would be considered but might need to be in a separate meeting or part of meeting as civil servants could not attend.*
- the local agenda needs to bridge between public concerns and elected members. This is not generally well done. There could be an opportunity to do it better - there are models for this. 50 or 60 years ahead the current recession could be seen to have led to a huge sea-change or it could look like a blip. However we may not have seen the full fall-out yet.
- from a property perspective "we ain't seen nothing yet". Bad debt is still in the system and banks won't lend until this is sorted. Our communities will need us to think radically. *It is good to be involved in this debate, but the current Government has no plans for a new Planning Act. However it is useful for the Forum to be looking at these issues.*
- the exploration of issues has proved very useful.

Liz thanked Steve for his wide-ranging update and for his very helpful responses to questions. It would be useful to take Mike's paper as a starting point. We could have a Task Group and a couple of meetings between now and 13 October to consider whether in the new context we are happy to run with the existing planning system or whether we want to start with a clean sheet. It would help the Executive Board to receive more comments and contributions to the debate, hence the following:

**ACTION: ALL to send comments on - or reactions to - the paper and to indicate their willingness to take part in a Task Group to take it further to Mike at [Mike@michaelhayesconsulting.com](mailto:Mike@michaelhayesconsulting.com) cc Kay at [secretary@natplanforum.org.uk](mailto:secretary@natplanforum.org.uk) by 31st July.**

[Michael Hammerson Civic Amenity Societies + James Carr RIBA volunteered immediately after the meeting]

#### **4. ITEMS FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD**

**a. New NPF Vice-Chair (Government Agencies)-** confirmed as Geoff Brown, East Midlands Development Agency representing the RDAs Network.

**b. Responding to Recession and Climate Change** - update on next steps included under Item 2/3

**c. Culture Change Action Plan Monitoring** - after winning a competitive tender monitoring work on this is being undertaken by IDOX. They will report to our next meeting on progress and implications for roll-forward of the plan. Graham Jones has taken on oversight of this work from Mark Southgate.

**d. Update on Mediation** - we are making good progress on the Mediation Project Plan. Agreement has been reached with The Planning Inspectorate to contribute a further £5k on top of their usual £5k this year to enable us to fund 3 demonstration mediation projects before the appeal/examination stage - on enforcement, a major development, and an Area Action Plan. Leonora Rozee will continue to chair this work for NPF. Katrine Sporle added that mediation plugs the gap between dissenting communities and other players. She had received a request that the Administrative Justice and Tribunal Council be involved in the Steering Group for this work. Liz said that this would be very useful. Katrine agreed to supply contact details to the Secretary. **Action: KP to follow up**

**Planning and Building Control** - Mike Hayes is taking forward the recommendation of the last meeting to find ways of improving the interface between Planning and Building Control. Terms of Reference have been drawn up and a meeting would be held with the Working Group on 23 July.

**e. Business Plan and Work Programme 2009/10:** An updated copy had been circulated. The Chair recorded thanks to English Heritage for their contribution. Although our funds were in good shape currently, in view of likely future tightening in public sector finance the Executive Board would be considering the proposition that all members be asked to make a small contribution to our funding in future.

**5. DRAFT NOTE OF MARCH MEETING** - the note was agreed and signed by the Chairman as a true record of proceedings. All actions had been completed.

**6. AOB** - the Secretary:

(i) reported that LACORS were holding regional events on the Environmental Health/ Planning interface. She had attended a South West England regional meeting. The London and South-east event was on the afternoon of 14 July. The organisers would like more planners to attend. RIBA and PaTH expressed interest and were sent details.

(ii) said that she would be stepping down after 4 years as Secretary at the end of the year, and the position of Secretary would be advertised - probably next month.

**7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING - TUESDAY 13 OCTOBER, then TUESDAY 15 DECEMBER 2009, both at 12.45pm for 1.30pm in LG House, Smith Square.**