



National Planning Forum

INSPIRING PLANNING

# **Fit for purpose spatial planning**

Proposals from the National Planning  
Forum Futures Working Group

October 2009

# Spatial planning has changed significantly in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century

English spatial planning has evolved at an unprecedented rate since the publication of the Green Paper *Planning: Delivering Fundamental Change* in 2001.

- The 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act re-affirmed the notion of a plan led approach to development; a strategic and local approach through change and engagement.
- The Barker and Eddington reviews made positive proposals for improving process – in the system generally and for major infrastructure projects in business effectiveness alongside other goals.
- The Sub National Review has introduced a new integrated approach to regional planning.
- The Homes and Communities Agency is integrating financial support for housing and regeneration and developing a new approach to partnership with the use of its and local authority planning powers.
- A range of local delivery vehicles and sub regional initiatives has been created where experiments are taking place in achieving a more effective, delivery-focussed planning through the close alignment of regeneration and growth strategies with planning powers and dedicated capital funding.
- Through the 2008 Planning Act the Infrastructure Planning Commission is creating a new organisation to determine proposals for strategic infrastructure in the context of National Policy Statements and the Community Infrastructure Levy is proposing new mechanisms for capturing land value uplift to help fund infrastructure provision.
- The Killian-Pretty review is proposing a series of process changes to create a more efficient service, particularly for householder applications.

While these hugely significant changes to process, procedure, purpose and the distribution of powers for spatial planning have been occurring there have been other equally significant changes:

- A broad acceptance that effective spatial planning requires a wide range of (often new) skills and that planning is an essential component of achieving positive change on the ground.
- Increasingly the implications of prioritising sustainability and climate change are being understood and embedded in the process; while the central importance of place-making, design quality, public realm and infrastructure are becoming established.

# Planning is required to deliver

Spatial planning underpins economic, environmental and social well being.

Government has placed spatial planning at the heart of its agenda for:

- achieving sustainability
- tackling climate change
- place-making
- environmental protection and enhancement
- business development and improved economic performance
- achieving a step change in housing supply
- delivering a wide range of infrastructure
- delivering high quality design outcomes
- achieving a step change in integrated service delivery at local level

To achieve these objectives Government is rightly demanding efficient process and performance, an integrated approach, an outcome focussed service, broader skill sets and meaningful community engagement; and has invested substantially in the education and training of planners and in the planning service at local authority level.

## But the world is changing fast and we face new challenges that planning must help tackle

- A growing awareness that the rate of climate change is increasing and that its impacts – rising sea levels, changing climate, extreme weather, food and water shortages particularly in the developing world – cannot be avoided and must be planned for and that this crisis demands co-operation on an unprecedented scale at local, national and international levels to reduce carbon consumption, mitigate the impacts and adapt to the new circumstances.
- The global crisis over secure energy supplies and food shortages and drought, partly as a consequence of climate change; but also because of growing populations, international migration, over-production and the search for work. Globalised markets, production and services produce global impacts.
- Recent economic events – the collapse of international credit markets, a global reduction in consumption and production, rising unemployment, falling currency values and shrinking economies – has created a social and political crisis around unemployment, enterprise, poverty and reduced career prospects; major gaps in the public finances; and, a loss of confidence in the old models of capital finance, the house market, development and regeneration and a new priority on (a different form of) economic recovery.

# There is a debate about what we value and how we decide

‘ . . . . a return to business as usual is not an option. Prosperity for the few founded on ecological destruction and persistent social injustice is no foundation for a civilised society. Economic recovery is vital. Protecting people’s jobs – and creating new ones – is absolutely essential. But we also stand in urgent need of a renewed sense of shared prosperity. A commitment to fairness and flourishing in a finite world.’

*Prosperity without growth?*

Professor Tim Jackson, Director of the Research Group on Lifestyles, Values and Environment at the University of Surrey  
Economics Commissioner : Sustainable Development Commission

‘If life is tougher, life has to be more productive. This means that current methods of development are just not sustainable and, if in five years’ time buildings are not sustainable, they will not let. Technology will be pushed to one side to produce sustainable buildings: if you are in an office complex you do not want to be an oasis in a desert. We need more modest styles, less “wiggly-wobbly” pretentious architecture, and a greater use of natural materials like stone and timber.’

*The future of building lies in a return to traditional values: Property Week 25.09.09*

Sir Stuart Lipton : Chelsfield Partners

‘ . . . times have changed. The financial crisis has discredited market triumphalism in both its laissez-faire and Neoliberal versions. And the election of Barack Obama has given powerful expression to the hunger for a public life of larger meaning that engages more directly with moral and spiritual questions. All of which suggests that the time may be right for a new kind of politics – a politics of the common good.’

*A new citizenship: Reith Lectures 2009*

Professor Michael Sandel : Professor of Government, Harvard

# Towards a fit for purpose spatial planning system

The 'credit crunch' and subsequent severe economic downturn, the realisation that there is a limit to non-renewable resources and that essentials such as water and food cannot always be guaranteed; and the reality of climate change fuelled by society's carbon consumption require:

- a rethink about lifestyle, the sources of economic wealth, transportation, land use, design and development
- a focus on (a green) economic recovery
- achieving new energy supplies, including 15% renewables by 2020
- a major investment in achieving low carbon footprints through design, technology and retrofit
- difficult choices about priorities for infrastructure investment.

Increasingly society understands it must live sustainably – ecologically, socially, culturally and economically - and to do so it must plan carefully – for the long term, engaging citizens in a continuing debate about the choices on offer and the consequences of the decisions we make.

Recent economic events and a developing understanding of the impact of humankind's activities on the planet have created a sense of uncertainty about, and even fear of, the future. The National Planning Forum believe that investment in developing strong, positive, medium and long term spatial visions, plans and delivery strategies for the nation, its regions and local communities will develop confidence in and commitment to a successful future for today's communities and those of tomorrow.

# What might a post recession England tackling climate change look like?

- Fewer car journeys; greater use of public transport, cycling and walking; and more commuting and deliveries by electric vehicles
- A different transport landscape – particularly rail (including HS2) and cycling – and a consequent changing urban form
- More ‘local’ and community living - as people reduce the carbon cost of transport in food, commuting and leisure – including home-working
- Less disposable income – perhaps fewer shops; but possibly a resurgence for town centres
- Expansion of internet retail, learning, communication, entertainment
- Multi-functional use of rural and open landscapes – and more intensive use of urban landscape and a greater investment in green infrastructure
- More investment in sea defence, flood and river management and green infrastructure
- Increased volunteering and community activity
- A different, broader based economy – high speed broadband, low carbon, biotechnology, life sciences, digital, advanced manufacturing and financial services
- New manufacturing opportunities as global transport costs increase
- Low carbon, factory made housing on medium/high-density developments with advanced investment in community facilities and local services, connected to public transport or integrated with existing towns
- A different design of space and place - adapted to the impact of climate change
- A different energy landscape as wind, tide, solar, nuclear and bio energy resources are developed

# 5 Challenges and Opportunities

## 1. Responding to climate change

- Understanding its implications, implementing mitigation and adaptation measures, encouraging behavioural change
- Developing the technologies of carbon reduction
- Cutting UK greenhouse gas emissions by 34% below 1990 levels by 2020 and by 80% by 2050

## 2. Securing the future

- Achieving energy security
- Ensuring water supplies
- Encouraging local food production
- Developing resilience to extreme weather events and pandemic

## 3. New transport and accessible locations

- Developing public transport, electric vehicle propulsion, cycling and walking and the infrastructures they require – including HS2
- Delivering the right spatial and locational response to deliver efficiencies from new transport investment to reduce commuting and create energy efficient distribution networks



# 5 Challenges and Opportunities

## 4. Enabling economic recovery

- Developing a broader-based economy, exploiting ‘green’ economic opportunities - including new start-ups - in the context of *Building Britain’s Future – New Industry/New Jobs*
- Providing low carbon sites and premises for the industries of the new economy in accessible locations in the context of the *UK Low Carbon Industrial Strategy*
- Finding new delivery models for development and regeneration
- Addressing regional disparity in economic performance
- Combating unemployment – especially amongst young people

## 5. Developing sustainable places and communities

- Providing more, affordable, low carbon, built for life homes and the services, facilities and infrastructure new communities require
- Retro-fitting the existing housing stock to reduce its carbon consumption
- Protecting habitat and environmental quality, managing the marine environment and increasing bio-diversity
- Combating the heat island effect, improving air quality and managing noise reduction
- Investing in education, health, community and youth facilities at local level
- Managing pressure on urban, rural and open landscapes from food production, bio-fuels, renewable energy, flood risk management, local recreation and leisure
- Developing green infrastructure

# Challenges and opportunities for spatial planning

## **More effective**

- Providing efficiency and certainty to the development industry and all planning's customers
- Reducing bureaucracy, complexity and overloading in both plan making and development management
- Maintain efficiency, but improve effectiveness

## **Outcome focussed**

- Achieving high standards of design and sustainability performance
- Discovering what works and communicating best practice

## **Engaged and engaging**

- Responding to the diverse voices of community and single interest groups and achieving meaningful community engagement at all scales

## **Coherent and robust**

- Achieving coherence through the policy hierarchy - PPS/NPS/RS/LDF – the golden thread
- Making regional strategies work
- Developing more effective and efficient LDF's
- Developing confidence in the evidence, targets and outcomes of planning
- Embedding development management to achieve quality outcomes and effective use of resources
- Building confidence in new systems and agencies for delivering new development and infrastructure, particularly the HCA and IPC

## **Skilled**

- Developing skills in development economics, project management, environmental assessment and the metrics of carbon reduction

## **At the heart of things**

- Ensuring spatial planning is central to place making, infrastructure planning and delivery, public sector service delivery, community engagement, private sector-led development, environmental protection and enhancement , economic recovery and climate change mitigation and adaptation

## The National Planning Forum believes fit for purpose spatial planning

- Is **vital** if we are to address the unprecedented challenges and grasp the unique opportunities
- Is **essential** to enable communities to have a clear vision for their future and a strategy for achieving it and for delivering the nation's homes, business premises, energy, food, transport, utilities, leisure and quality environment
- Must be for the **long term**, as well as for the short and medium terms – to provide the direction of travel and the certainty investors require in an age where major shifts in lifestyle, location, infrastructure, movement and energy are required
- Must recapture **vision, confidence and leadership** nationally, regionally and locally
- Requires **cross sector collaboration** and wider **community engagement**.
- Requires continued support to **develop skills** in all the sectors, engage communities and train the planners of the future.
- **Engages and excites**, enables debate and encourages commitment, provides certainty and confidence and underpins investment
- Should be - elegant in its design and governance, understandable and inviting engagement and ownership **simple, legible and illustratable**
- Is **outcome focussed** – seeing good process as a means to the end, not the end itself

# 10 proposals for fit for purpose spatial planning

1. Commit to leading a continuing '**big conversation**' at national, regional and local levels to debate the issues and the choices that have to be made and find solutions; engaging all the stakeholders - communities, politicians, utility providers, interest groups, developers and delivery agencies – using the consultation processes around national policy statements, regional strategies, sustainable community strategies and local development frameworks.
2. Develop a **spatial vision for England** that describes and evidences a credible, long term future and delivers certainty, confidence and commitment and facilitates the discussion about priorities and outcomes.
3. Institute **longer term strategic planning** at all levels, including the proposed 'Infrastructure UK' advisory body, to ensure climate change challenges are met by taking appropriate action on transport, energy, green infrastructure, utilities, lower carbon footprints in construction and building management and the location and development of sustainable communities. Develop vision and a clear direction of travel to deliver certainty and ownership.
4. Require **evidence, sound analysis and practical options**; clarifying a shared vision for each area to meet 21<sup>st</sup> century needs; assessing its governance and achieving clearer decision making that is iterative and hierarchical – particularly at regional and sub-regional scales.
5. Commit to **stability** – a period with less tinkering with the system and more focus on achieving better outcomes via better engagement with all the stakeholders.

# 10 proposals for fit for purpose spatial planning

6. Create a **joined up approach to the production of national policy statements** to ensure a common high standard, consistency and integration and clear relationships with planning policy statements and regional strategies – employ more planners at national level and in regional offices to facilitate this
7. Strengthen the cross-sectoral **culture change** programme that seeks to develop a commitment to a planning that integrates with other services and sectors and embraces delivery and change management as its key outcomes to develop leadership, skills and mentoring
8. Develop **regional strategies and sub-regional plans** that integrate transport, utilities, green infrastructure, and respond to climate change through the intelligent location of economic development, new homes and retrofitting existing buildings and places. Create strong, delivery focussed, visionary **local delivery frameworks** that set the framework for local decisions and create sustainable communities by reducing flood risk and carbon emissions and adapting to the new economic, social and environmental conditions. Including a more integrated planning approach to rural and urban areas
9. Support the **new measures and agencies** – the Homes and Community Agency and the Infrastructure Planning Commission – to achieve their purpose and develop the skills and leadership of local government to be their equal partner
10. Support sustainability and climate change initiatives at **local level** – e.g. CAN, Transition Towns, local food production, new local meeting places, local green infrastructure, facilities for cycling and traffic reduction, youth centres.

## The National Planning Forum will continue to work to:

- Strengthen leadership across the sectors and make links to other service areas
- Develop both strategic and local responses – researching and proposing improvements, identifying innovation and best practice including:
  - Spatial planning that meets society’s changing needs
  - Culture change in planning
  - Mediation in planning
  - Co-ordination between building control and planning
- Engage in the ‘big’ conversation – values/ethics/process/outcome/delivery/choices/policy
- Research the future – building on and working with the Foresight Project
- Create shared agendas and joint commitment across sectors
- Develop individual sector responses