

**NATIONAL PLANNING FORUM: 14 DECEMBER 2006
CULTURE CHANGE WORKING GROUP:
PLANNING – RENEWING THE APPROACH**

A. Background

Purpose of this paper

1.1 The importance of changing the way the planning system operates (its culture) has been recognised by the UK Government as a key factor in the success of the reform agenda. The culture of planning is influenced by, and interacts with, a range of different cultures including government, local government, business, the professions, the third sector and communities themselves. Culture change is needed throughout all these overlapping interests if the planning system is to operate more effectively, hence the issue is multi-dimensional. Perhaps because of this complexity, the changes required have not been identified or spelled out clearly enough to date. This requires changes in people's behaviour and often long held ways of doing things.

1.2 This paper identifies the issues and aspirations, the specifics of what needs to happen, and those groups of people who will need to take action if we are to achieve new ways of working and deliver and positive, spatial, integrated, plan-led planning system in line with the vision set out in Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development¹. This "position paper" is based on emerging work by the National Planning Forum (NPF) Culture Change Working Group. **We welcome comments on its contents.**

What is planning?

2. The statutory purpose of planning² is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development (*development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*³). Planning involves preparing plans and making decisions on proposals for the use of land and buildings, taking account of wide ranging interests and considerations, in order to maximize benefit for land-owners, occupiers and the community in general, while avoiding or mitigating adverse impacts. It is a formative influence on the places where we live, work and enjoy leisure, and it involves people in all sectors with an interest in planning, as well as local communities. Planning has a clear and key role in place-shaping.

Does the planning system or its culture need to change?

3. Major changes to the planning system were introduced in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, and subsequent policy and subordinate legislation has added detail to the new spatial plan-making and decision-making. Since then there have been calls for further change as the reforms have not led to the instant changes some were expecting. However, the Barker II Interim report⁴ has indicated that "there is no appetite for a radical rethink" of the planning system, rather that the review should "build on those (the 2004 Act) reforms" to consider what further could be done to improve how the planning system works. Building on the reforms means not simply changing systems and processes but changing the whole culture associated with the planning system: to move it from a predominantly reactive, regulatory, process-oriented system focused on delivering development control decisions to a proactive, visionary, plan-led, integrated, delivery system focused on meeting the needs of the community.

4. Systems and processes can be improved, but to make the most of these changes the people affected by them - as well as those delivering them - need to make them work and be empowered to do so. There is a good deal of authoritative management literature that deals with the benefits of achieving this in both public and private sectors. While we don't need further major change in the planning system, changing what people do, and how they do it (the "culture"), is essential to achieving better performance and better outcomes. Culture change has been recognised as an important part of the planning reform agenda, but this element of the programme requires further clarification and wide ownership if it is to be successful. The reality is that it will require sustained effort to ensure effective engagement, training, motivation and appropriate incentives for all those involved in planning. This needs to be directed at planners, councilors, developers and the public.

Who and what needs to change?

5. The key players who, individually or collectively, make an important difference to how the planning system operates are:

- national government - which sets the overall legislative and policy context;
- regional assemblies – with responsibility for developing Regional Spatial Strategies; and
- local government - with responsibility for Local Development Frameworks, taking most decisions on planning applications, taking enforcement action where necessary, and in supporting implementation;
- government agencies such as the Planning Inspectorate, Environment Agency, English Heritage, Natural England and the Regional Development Agencies - all of whom contribute specialist advice and guidance;
- stakeholders including business, the voluntary/3rd sector, and professional bodies (planning, architecture, surveying and valuation, law, transportation) - operating within the system;
- developers and their advisors - who prepare master plans, bring forward development applications, put together funding packages, take the financial and other risks of progressing schemes, and move from decisions to implementation and construction;
- the media - both as communication channel, and a stakeholder in its own right; plus, last but not least,
- the diverse range of local communities whose input varies from agenda setting and active promotion of their areas to being the passive recipients of planning decisions.

6. Further change needs to take into account this mix of sectors, and their different behaviours and motivations. The literature dealing with managing change differentiates between public, private and voluntary sectors. Policy needs to take into account, for example, that those involved in the public sector tend to respond to less easily definable and less easily malleable values than those in the private sector⁵. Thus change management needs subtlety of approach, and in the case of planning also needs to take account of the political context. Planning involves subjective judgements, and needs to be seen as a democratic, joined-up and inclusive process, informed by open and extensive stakeholder involvement.

7. The new planning system is beginning to be embedded. It requires different skills, abilities, knowledge and behaviours from those exhibited in the past. These include influencing, mediating, facilitation, and an ability to produce plans and make decisions that deliver positive outcomes. There is much greater emphasis for planners on building consensus and resolving conflicts, as well as providing certainty, timeliness and leadership – the ability to take a line about the acceptability or otherwise of proposed development. These are among the issues being addressed

in a CPRE/Demos study of “Future Planners”⁶, with a report due to be launched in December 2006. Other interests need to understand these changes, and play their part in making the adjustments required.

B. Culture change in planning: key messages

8. Culture change in planning involves further change in the way that people behave - not just the planners, not just communities – it affects EVERYONE because everyone comes into contact with the operation of the planning system or experiences its effects. This is a tall order, and so it is vitally important to ensure that there's a common understanding of:

(a) *what's new that makes it necessary for planners and people involved in planning to change their behaviour?* For example:

- ❖ we are now aiming to produce spatial, rather than land-use, plans; this involves an even wider understanding of economic, social and environmental issues and trends and bringing together various investment strategies and plans under a common set of objectives;
- ❖ there is less direct investment by local authorities, implying the need for more influencing, negotiation, mediation and enabling skills;
- ❖ the new plan-making requires use of sustainability appraisal in an appropriate, proportionate way to shape and hone and improve policy;
- ❖ there is greater emphasis on more strategic, less detailed, policy thinking;
- ❖ it requires delivery (in both plan-making and development management) to set timescales and so requires use of proportionate project management tools.

Some people have made the changes and others are starting to make them. We now need to increase the momentum, and ensure everyone knows and understands what is required, and responds accordingly.

(b) *what was inappropriate about the way things used to be done?* We need to move away from :

- ❖ regulation to empowerment with an overall context set by a development framework, rather than a development plan;
- ❖ controlling development to positive planning that improves places;
- ❖ being secretive and risk-averse, to being open and able to manage risk,
- ❖ concentrating on achieving targets, to the exclusion of common sense and emphasis on quality of content and process, where quality includes timeliness.

(c) *what do we need to do more of?* Planners, councilors, and others involved in delivering the new system need to

- ❖ shape the vision for their area from the contributions of all the players, and adjust it to enable the widest possible ownership of that vision amongst the communities and organisations in their area – others must see the benefit to them of a coordinated spatial planning approach;
- ❖ make an effort to improve their knowledge and to commit to life-long learning, ensuring that they know about the new system, and can explain the requirements and roles of other stakeholders in an understandable way;
- ❖ give confidence to others, and set a standard for their local development plan (LDF) that is both aspirational and realistic in terms of process and content;
- ❖ work in partnership to maximise benefits eg by making Local Area Agreements meaningful and produce tangible improvements;
- ❖ ensure work is project managed to get the best possible product (be it a decision/outcome or adopted plan) within available resources.

(d) what skills do we need and what behaviours do we need to change? We

need existing planners, as well as those being trained, who:

- ❖ understand the new system and show their commitment to it;
- ❖ can use new techniques with confidence;
- ❖ are positive, yet realistic, rather than negative and pessimistic;
- ❖ are pro-active, rather than reactive;
- ❖ work well in partnership with people from other organizations;
- ❖ have well developed people skills and can appreciate the priorities and working cultures of a diverse range of interest groups;
- ❖ understand the development process, finance and economic viability; and
- ❖ can integrate plan-making, decision-making and implementation.

(e) how can we achieve this? We need to enable:

- ❖ councillors to understand the needs and to allocate the budget;
- ❖ senior officers to provide training and development opportunities for all their staff;
- ❖ for the staff themselves to be able to gain extra skills (as part of personal development plans) during office hours if possible, and to be motivated to do so out of hours if necessary;
- ❖ capacity to be created to address priority issues, for example the challenges of the global economy, more rapid population growth, climate change, resource depletion and biodiversity, by various means including encouraging deeper understanding of these issues and possible responses; and
- ❖ by drawing up an Action Plan to show how we can get from “where we are now” to “where we want to be”, including a focused marketing and communication strategy.

9. This is a similar and parallel challenge to that set in the UK Sustainable Development Strategy (*Securing the Future: delivering UK Sustainable Development Strategy*) that “behaviour changes will be needed to deliver Sustainable Development.” Culture change will help to deliver on the statutory purpose for planning to contribute to achieving sustainable development (SD). A model is provided by the Government’s approach to culture change for SD⁷ which illustrates a new, comprehensive approach to policy making which seeks to catalyse by enabling, engaging, exemplifying and encouraging.

10. The National Planning Forum (NPF) comprises representatives of the wide spectrum of interests in the planning system and is thus in a good position to add its influence and weight play a key role in this culture change IF THE CHANGES WE NEED TO MAKE ARE CLEAR. The involvement of a cross-sectoral group is vital if we are to secure the engagement of all sectors in an agreed Action Plan. Behavioural change takes time and requires personal and organisational commitment. It is therefore important to set the correct direction of travel, with ‘sign-posts’ to mark the way, and to show progress and achievements along the way.

What are the key messages?

11. The messages need to be consistent, and they need to be agreed if they are to drive action and change. The following gives the flavour of key messages developed by the NPF Culture Change Working Group for particular audiences:

12. **Everyone** needs to recognize that planning is an important part of the democratic process. It is a means of objectively managing competing social, economic and environmental interests relating to the use of land in an increasingly complex world. It is a way of delivering better quality development in the public interest - not of protecting private interests.

13. Everyone needs to be aware that planning can deliver better “win-win” solutions and that good stakeholder and community involvement can greatly increase the chance of this happening. Good planning can produce built and natural environments which offer a better quality of life for everyone. However, it is also true that, when it is ineffective or goes wrong, it can lead to poor quality outcomes that are in no-one’s best interest.

EXAMPLE: Proposals for a £20 million Environment Agency flood management scheme at Sutcliffe Park, Greenwich and Lewisham, South London, involved the Agency in constructive discussions with many different interests. This resulted in changes to the original scheme so that it now provides far wider benefits for the local community and the area as a whole. The flood management scheme provides protection for over 600 homes and businesses and a poor site has been turned into open parkland with a restored river and improved amenity space which is now more widely used (73% increase in use and longer visits). It illustrates the benefits of thinking beyond a single issue and working with partners who bring with them other skills, experience and expertise to create better outcomes.

14. The **UK Government** could help by emphasising that the planning system doesn’t need further major change, but that it does need continuous improvement. DCLG Ministers could reinforce that message by giving incentives to local planning authorities and communities to be positive about encouraging quality sustainable development. They, and Ministers in other Government Departments with responsibilities for issues that have spatial implications - in particular transport and energy - need to take account of those implications in formulating policy and taking decisions.

15. **DCLG officials** and those in **Government Offices, the Planning Inspectorate** and officials in **DEFRA, DTI and the Department for Transport** have a special role to play in supporting and nurturing the new culture. They should take care to send positive signals in policy documents and other material, and to ensure that their people - and stakeholders they relate to - are aware of the changes they need to make to engage effectively with the new planning system. They should take a view on further changes they could make to support and enhance planning.

GOVERNMENT MINISTERS AND OFFICIALS SHOULD:

- ***consult on the basis on which decisions with spatial implications will be made,***
- ***make clear and decisive announcements on issues with spatial implications, indicating timing if further work is needed before a decision is made***
- ***ensure consistency (eg between Government Offices and Agencies)***
- ***move from a simplistic target culture to an agreement culture where a timely, quality decision rather than simply a speedy one is the aim (for example through the Planning Delivery Agreement approach)***

16. The new plan-making system requires **spatial planners** to take a different approach; involving the community with other stakeholders in developing a workable vision for their area and in making it happen. The process is almost as important as the plan itself, as spatial plans require ‘buy-in’ if they are to be implemented

effectively – it is rarely within a local authority’s control to implement the plan. A plan is much more likely to be followed if the engagement process has been effective and open. Furthermore a robust evidence base is critical to a spatial planning system which is focused on delivery. Spatial planners need to find innovative and efficient ways of collecting and sharing information – including collaboration with neighbouring authorities.

17. Despite the shorter timescales and more certainty provided by project management, determination and drive will be needed, with attention to the soundness of content as well as process. Local authority Senior Managers need to be encouraged to take full advantage of Planning Delivery Grant (and the new Planning and Housing Delivery Grant) to build up their development plan teams so that they can tackle the new “front-loaded” system and produce exciting yet realisable development plan documents.

SPATIAL PLANNERS AND THEIR MANAGERS SHOULD:

- ***build and maintain a good development plan team***
- ***ensure staff have training in the new ways of working***
- ***share information and expertise with a wide variety of partners***

18. Spatial planning needs substantially more working across professional and local authority boundaries. Clearly this will involve skills beyond planning as we now know it to deliver this, but spatial planners have unique role in encapsulating the type of place we are aiming to create, and their skills in development management to help get there. Emerging research⁸ shows that those involved in spatial planning are positive and understand the new requirements (ie change is starting to happen), but others need to embrace and adapt to the change. There needs to be greater understanding from **other local authority officials** of the need to integrate their work with the spatial plan. Structures can help - in her Interim report, Kate Barker recommended that local authorities have a professional planner as one of their corporate directors⁴ - but this is also down to individual relationships.

19. In the meantime, **development managers** will need to continue to make recommendations on planning applications in the context provided by adopted development plans and other material considerations. Planners need the confidence to be less cautious and ‘risk averse’, by learning to manage risk and ways of reducing uncertainty, moving away from reliance on a detailed set of development control policies to working within the spatial framework provided by the suite of LDF documents. The more up-to-date the development plan, and the more sign-up to it, the better chance planners have to demonstrate their skills in improving quality of outcomes.

20. Development management has started to transform itself from the perception of a negative, controlling activity into a more creative activity, which places far more emphasis on pre-application discussions and on information to improve applications before they are submitted. Government should support this by encouraging local authorities to report on the value added to the environment by planning activity, alongside other more easily measurable targets.

DEVELOPMENT MANAGERS SHOULD:

- *be pro-active in offering pre-application advice (“invest to save”) to all potential applicants*
- *project manage major applications to improve certainty for all*
- *link with the work of their development plan team and ensure that their decisions take account of the evolving framework*

21. In order to achieve the best outcomes **all planners** – be they dealing with development management, plan-making, enforcement or implementation - must work in a transparent way and be inclusive, building trust with all stakeholders through honesty and clarity about what is open for debate. They should be keen on personal learning and development to enhance their skills, and open to new ways of working with the aim of ensuring continuous improvement in planning processes.

22. They form the bridge between stakeholders, between those used to dealing with planning issues and those whose contact is rare, but whose input is nevertheless important. They must be prepared to ask the right questions in the right way, to increase understanding and explode any myths. They need to ensure that everyone with an interest is welcome to the discussion table, and be clear what decisions they can make and what are for others. They must thus understand their scope for action, and take responsibility for their own decisions, showing leadership (at all levels) that is appropriate to the issues and circumstances.

ALL PLANNERS SHOULD:

- *talk to, and learn from, colleagues in their own, and adjacent, authorities*
- *keep abreast of new procedures and policy via continuing professional development, and pass on knowledge to others*
- *make links between their work and delivery on the ground*
- *be willing to work in partnership with others and not be professionally defensive*

23. **Local authority members (councillors)** are community leaders and decision-takers. With a positive outlook they can be truly visionary. Their decisions should be taken with an open mind, but this does not preclude them talking to people including constituents and developers, listening to their proposals and concerns, and giving them factual information. All Members (not only those in Cabinets) should ensure that they have a role in developing the LDF for their area, helping to engage all groups, and to ensure that local information is taken into account.

24. Members who deal with planning issues should – like their Officers – keep their knowledge of planning up-to-date. They have a special role in ensuring that in their local planning authority, and in bodies that they belong to such as Regional Assemblies, the importance of the LDF is recognised, and that the LDF is considered as the corporately-owned spatial plan.

LOCAL AUTHORITY MEMBERS SHOULD:

- *look for opportunities and partnerships within and outside their local authority which will improve plan-making and decisions in the area*

cont'd Local Authority Members should:

- ***keep an open mind when taking decisions, and ensure these are seen to be made only on planning grounds***
- ***be prepared to join in pre-application discussions having regard to the advice on propriety provide by the LGA and Planning Advisory Service⁹***
- ***update their knowledge of the planning system and planning policy regularly, and support their colleagues and officers in doing likewise***

25. **Planners in Government Agencies** have a particularly vital role as watchdogs of government policy, as advisors on technical requirements (such as the important role of the Environment Agency relating to flood risk), and as providers of information and commentary on that information. They can help to find workable policies and solutions on the ground. At a regional level strategy alignment and mutual reinforcement is critical, particularly between the Regional Development Agencies, charged with promoting sustainable economic development, and the Regional Planning Bodies.

PLANNERS IN GOVERNMENT AGENCIES SHOULD:

- ***ensure they keep abreast of new policy developments, and encourage colleagues in their Agency and others they come into contact with***
- ***look for opportunities to maximise the benefits of plans and schemes proposed by their, and their partner, organizations***
- ***ensure there is consistency of message being delivered from within and across their organization***
- ***ensure that their advice is timely, proportionate and easily understood***

26. **Developers and those advising businesses and landowners** need to ensure that they take a more pro-active and less reactive role, be prepared to share more of their information and expertise earlier in the process (“frontloading”) as this will improve the quality of plan-making, projects and planning applications. They need to focus their submissions to help decision-makers, improve clarity and cut out inessential (or incomprehensible) detail. They need to work with others from the earliest stage to contribute to evolving a suitable framework for each area, and respect the integrity of the adopted development plan when putting forward development proposals.

DEVELOPERS, LANDOWNERS AND THEIR ADVISERS SHOULD:

- ***input at the earliest stage into spatial plan-making***
- ***share as much relevant information as possible about their plans and proposals with local authority planners***
- ***develop effective community engagement strategies to help shape plans and proposals***
- ***request Planning Delivery Agreements to increase certainty in delivery of decisions on planning applications***

27. **Professional institutions** will need to inform and support their members in improving skills, and check on any members who are slow to adapt. They need to continue to enforce high professional standards, whilst encouraging a more pro-

active, consensus-building and less adversarial style. Skills in facilitation, mediation and visioning need particular attention, so that teams of people with a broad understanding of the skills mix needed, and with the right mix of specialist and generalist skills, can be developed.

PROFESSIONAL INSTITUTIONS SHOULD:

- *support members in improving their skills to operate the new system, including mandatory training where appropriate*
- *liaise with other Institutions to improve their understanding of the new procedures and to encourage multi-disciplinary working*
- *take responsibility for explaining and delivering the new procedures*

28. **Educational institutions** have a very important role in educating new entrants to the planning profession, as well as providing courses for existing practitioners. The latter provides further impetus to short and longer term secondments out and in, to improve the links between academics and practitioners and their skills in doing the job, conducting research, lecturing and teaching.

EXAMPLE: The University of the West of England has developed a successful distance learning course on spatial planning in association with DCLG. The course is modular, which enables people to accommodate learning within the requirements of their jobs, and to put that learning to immediate practical use.

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS SHOULD:

- *make sure they understand the skills required and can contribute to continuing professional development by de-mystifying the process*
- *develop practical, focused, modules that help existing practitioners to understand the advantages of the new system, and the need for change*
- *undertake regular short secondments to gain a deeper understanding of changing planning practice*

29. **ALL STAKEHOLDERS** should celebrate success and spread best practice – something that needs more focus. At the RTPI Planning Convention (in July 2006) Baroness Andrews, the Planning Minister, emphasised the value of planning. This was an important signal, and now needs to be built on. Whilst good work is being done by the Planning Advisory Service and the Planning Officers' Society on action learning and by the RTPI and RICS on dissemination of good practice for LDF preparation, more practical tools are needed. These could include, for example, the workbook commissioned by the Department of Communities and Local Government for the Advisory Team on Large Applications (ATLAS) to help those dealing with major applications.

ALL STAKEHOLDERS SHOULD:

- *devote time and effort to disseminating and rewarding good practice*
- *encourage continuous learning*
- *encourage job shadowing and secondments to enable more people to improve their skills, foster existing partnerships and create new ones*
- *identify champions who can encourage and foster good practice in their*

sector and work with champions in other sectors

30. COMMUNITIES need to move from opposition to constructive discussion, recognising that discussion from early stages can lead to agreement, whereas opposition wastes time, energy and costs. Communities will need to be attracted to take the time to engage with plan-making. Positive experience of early involvement in plan-making and constructive feedback should help. Although it will clearly not be possible to move away completely from having differences of opinion on individual planning applications, there is potential for moving some from being anti-development to being for the right kind of development. This may require the receiving community to see more benefit accrue to them, rather than (in their opinion) being left to bear all the costs.

31. With rights go responsibilities; people need to act responsibly and have the confidence and maturity to recognise that everyone may not be able to have everything that they want. It will mean making time to engage with the planning process in their area (this is where the new tighter timescales and clarity of these will help), in other words, recognising that they have to put something in to get something out (“ask not what planning can do for you, but what you can do for planning”).

COMMUNITIES SHOULD:

- ***be helped to understand planning better eg via the ‘Handy Guide to Planning’ produced by RTPI Planning Aid and the Urban Forum***
- ***be prepared to engage in constructive dialogue with local authorities and developers on development plans and development proposals***
- ***recognize the need to compromise, because it is unlikely that everyone will be able to have all that they want***

Where and when do these messages need to be given?

32. Particular audiences could be targeted with a programmed series of presentations from key opinion-formers or champions. The same messages could be tailored as necessary, and incorporated into presentations to all stakeholders. Examples of good practice, and guides derived from them, should be incorporated so that the message remains relevant and fresh as time moves on. The workload involved in delivering these key messages, and the feedback received, needs to be shared. Good communication, including two-way links with the media, is vital.

C. Conclusions

33. Culture change in planning is happening, but it is not sufficiently focused at present, and the momentum required to energise the system has not yet been achieved.

34. The key messages outlined in paragraphs 12 - 31 above form the basis for devising an Action Plan including - as a first stage - a seminar with key opinion formers to test out the reasoning, to focus on key messages which support the culture change, obtain commitment, and to include the key messages in programmes of focused communication and skills training which will help embed new ways of working.

35. It will be vital that the messages are conveyed by people who understand the practicalities of how the new behaviours can be put into action, the benefits that will

accrue to their audience from making the changes, and who can illustrate these with appropriate examples.

References and Notes:

1. Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development
2. Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (S38)
3. Simplified definition derived from the Bruntland definition
4. Kate Barker, Barker Review of Land Use Planning -Interim Report (July 2006)
5. Tony Prosser et al Law, Economic Incentives and Public Service Culture, CMPO Bristol University (2005)
6. See Chapter 5 by Peter Bradwell and Inderpaul Johar (Demos) on the project blog: <http://www.demos.co.uk/projects/futureplanners/blog/workshopandnarrative>
7. See: <http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/what/priority/changing-behaviour.htm>
8. Forthcoming research commissioned by the RTPi
9. Positive Engagement – A guide for Planning Councillors – see the Planning Advisory Service web-site www.pas.gov.uk