

**NATIONAL PLANNING FORUM
DRAFT SUMMARY CULTURE CHANGE
REPORT**

October 2007

The National Planning Forum

The National Planning Forum (NPF) is the largest cross-sectoral forum focussing on planning in England with over 100 members from all 5 sectors involved in planning – Government and its Agencies, local government, business, the professions and the third sector. The NPF commissioned a study to identify the key changes in culture that are needed if we are to achieve the full potential of the new planning system. The aim is to use this report as a basis for preparing and finalising a realistic and achievable Action Plan to underpin further changes in the culture of planning, to which the NPF and its members can sign up.

The NPF took as its starting point for this work the Government's commitment to planning in Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development as an activity that "shapes where people live and work and the country we live in (and) plays a key role in supporting the Government's wider social, environmental and economic objectives and for sustainable communities". In drafting the study specification¹, the NPF also took into account the Government's signal on the central role for planning in local government delivery¹ and the importance of a local economic focus. Following a competitive tender, the NPF commissioned IDOX plc to undertake the study, with a team comprising Professor Janice Morphet, Tony Burton and Laura Hughes.

The IDOX Report: "Delivering Inspiring Places - The Role and Status of Planning"²

This report commissioned by the NPF highlights the need for all those involved in planning to be aware of, and participate in, the new agenda, relating to the new structures and imperatives while continuing to strive to deliver sustainable development. It emphasises the need to understand the key drivers impacting on places including changes in population structure,

declining numbers in the workforce, culture change, energy security and diversity, globalisation, localisation, the role of cities and sub-regions.

At local level it notes that politicians and chief executives are increasingly providing leadership and vision, both through their own council programmes and with their local partners in the Local Strategic Partnership. They work directly with these partners to maximise the effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery and to create clear investment frameworks for the private sector. Planning has a key supporting role – helping to turn evidence based needs and community preferences into delivery at all scales, from town centres, enhanced suburbs, rural communities to more specific improvements such as wider footways, new benches or planting on the village green. Planning's strategic interventions and attention to detail at the point of delivery enhance places, deliver new public facilities, quality environments and create secure investment conditions - whether in urban or rural environments .

Enhancing the local economic focus combines an emphasis on people and places, and complements the other key element of sustainability - the environment. Opportunities for entrepreneurship are being created at local level through skills development, support for business start ups and the development of business environments that are efficient and sustainable. Planning has a part to play through the creation of new facilities and in helping to maximise the use of existing infrastructure investment through the efficient use of capacity.

The value of our places, both in terms of the built and natural environment, underpins the nation's economy. Recent reminders of the role of property in supporting businesses such as major retailers or attracting investment from private equity are the daily focus of the financial markets. Planning makes and supports this strategic value yet it is rarely seen in this role, more often being seen as a means of providing national infrastructure for business. Yet the daily enhancement of value, the promotion of greater efficiency in the use of the nation's infrastructure stock and improvement of business settings goes

on each day as part of the local responsibility and contribution that planners make to delivering places.

Major projects around the country have shown the benefits of regeneration and new development in key places – from St Pancras Station in London to the Sage in Gateshead, from Laganside in Belfast to the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff, from Manchester to Plymouth, Taunton to Kings Lynn. These are now key landmarks and repositories of local and national pride that planners have contributed to. Other places don't necessarily have new buildings or land mark features but they are still very important. We recognise the integrity of our urban and rural areas and want to maintain this environmental quality for the future, so there are many examples of planners helping to revitalise market towns, develop parish plans and enhance natural areas and biodiversity. All places need to be supported by this attention.

Preparation of the Local Development Framework (LDF) provides a powerful tool to translate the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) into a framework for action. Integrating this with development management (not development control) will ensure delivery of the spatial part of the vision, enabling local communities to benefit from improved environments supported by planning gain via S106. The role of the Executive in leading, and the whole Council in approving, the LDF is vital to ensure the development plan is sound, and that it responds to both local issues and wider aspirations.

Planning is part of the wider public sector and it needs to respond to the reform agenda so that it can influence the way that services and investment are delivered locally. This will require action by Leaders, Executive Members and Backbenchers, Chief Executives, Chief Officers, Planners and other Officers in local authorities and national parks, but it will also require changes in the working methods of developers, investors, planning consultants and others working in and for the built and natural environment.

In order to be effective it has become clear that planning and planners should:

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- link with Sustainable Community Strategies (SCS), Local Area Agreements (LAA) and Multi Area Agreements (MAA)
- have a key role in each local authority's delivery and implementation programme
- use a common consultation and engagement strategy, taking full account of public feedback
- share a common evidence base with partners, accessible to the public
- integrate spatial planning and development management
- engage with the Local Infrastructure Programme and Regional Infrastructure Programme
- ensure active horizontal and vertical integration at regional, sub-regional, local and community levels
- support development and training for all those involved in planning

The professional and technical press has an important role to play in helping to disseminate key messages and encouraging a more positive view of planning. Media more generally need to be engaged to support the change to a more positive view of planning, emphasising the benefits of earlier public engagement and constructive participation. This would be helped by positive messages about planning and planners from political and executive leaders.

Working more effectively with partners is a vital new skill for planners, together with a drive to ensure greater clarity about what is to be delivered, where, and by when, and auditing this. We also need to move away from the adversarial approach that has characterised planning in the past to one that seeks "win-win" solutions. We need to deal with the blame culture, and we should consider whether planning needs "re-branding".

There is a major opportunity for planning to play a key role in delivering places. However, to do so, the planning system - and every planner - needs to adjust to major changes in context as well as in the range of issues such as climate change. We don't necessarily need more planning, we do need better planning. And we can achieve this by using planning's tradition and experience and adding the new skills that will help do justice to the places and

people that we serve. Planning has delivered some inspiring places – and it can do this and more, now and in future. The conditions, and the demands, are in place for a renaissance in planning across the whole country.

However this will only occur if we develop greater confidence, use the available tools and resources wisely, work more effectively with partners, learn new skills and ways of working, and develop consensus around sustainable spatial strategies and solutions.

Conclusion

Having considered the issues around culture change, including those set out in the report “Delivering Inspiring Places – The Role and Status of Planning”, the NPF has committed to ensuring that planning plays a full part in the new place shaping agenda. It intends to do this by means of an Action Plan - prepared by NPF members – that takes the key messages in the report and applies these to our day-to-day work. By activating members and their networks in this way, via individual action as well as cross-sectoral cooperation, the NPF aims to make a substantial contribution to tackling the barriers to, and realising the full potential of, spatial planning in the new context.

References

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1. Research Specification “The Role and Status of Planning” ; NPF ; March 2007
 2. Delivering Inspiring Places – The Role and Status of Planning ; IDOX plc ; August 2007