

National Planning Forum-inspiring planning

ANNUAL REVIEW 2004/5

1 Introduction

This is the second Annual Review since the re-launch of the Forum in June 2003. The Forum has met five times in the past year, four times in formal session and again at the Annual Conference. All meetings were held in London. Membership of the Forum continues to increase and currently stands at about 125 representing organisations from all sectors.

The NPF Executive for 2004/5:-

- Chair Liz Peace
- Vice Chair Mark Southgate
- Vice Chair Henry Oliver
- Vice Chair Cllr. David Sparks (until 04/05)
- Vice Chair Cllr. Richard Kemp (from 04/05)
- Vice Chair Michael Coupe (until 04/05)
- Vice Chair Mike Hayes (from 04/05)
- Secretary Graeme Bell
- Representative from ODPM Eamon Mythen
- Representative from LGA Stephen Conner

Throughout the year the NPF has received considerable administrative, office and logistical help from the LGA, accounting services from the TCPA and office facilities from the British Property Federation.

Attendance at Forum meetings has fluctuated between 50-60 people

2 The 2004/5 Programme

NB. At the outset of the year, Forum members were asked to indicate their preferences for topics for debate. The programme followed those preferences.

- **June 2004 : The importance of design in planning and development.**

This session was held at City Hall, preceded by a river trip on the Thames (courtesy of the LGA) to view both old and more particularly, new development (facilitated by CABE). This initiative resulted in the establishment of a design group and the production of a *Manifesto for Good Design* and a *Good Practice Note on Local Planning and Development Awards* which have been endorsed by many NPF members.

A presentation on the new Planning Advisory Service was given by the IDeA.

Concerns were expressed about the practice of selling plots of countryside and these concerns were passed to the ODPM. CPRE mentioned that the Hertfordshire Society was running a 'test case' in the county.

- **September 2004: Community engagement**

This session was held at the Prince's Foundation, Shoreditch and took community engagement as a theme. Presentations by a number of organisations resulted in the compilation of a *Good Practice Note on Community Involvement in Planning*, again endorsed by many Forum organisations.

Concerns were expressed about the lengthening time taken to handle appeals following an ODPM decision to shorten deadlines. PINS agreed to speak to the NPF in December.

- **December 2004 : Infrastructure**

The Christmas session debated the level of infrastructure needed and estimated costs, to deliver the sustainable communities envisaged in the Government's plans. Presentations by Roger Tyms and Partners and others gave case studies. Various means of closing the funding gap were postulated and this led to a further meeting of interested parties at which a list of key points were drawn up for discussion with ODPM and others. All sectors appeared to share concerns that there may be an 'infrastructure drag' and equally, all sectors felt they could play a part in informing the resolution of the issue.

PINS held a very well attended side meeting about planning appeals.

Richard Simmons (new CX CABE) and Sarah Richards (new Director PAS) introduced themselves to Forum members and discussed how we could work to mutual benefit.

- **April 2005 : S. 106 Agreements**

Presentations and discussion centred on streamlining the present arrangements and exploring how new means of capturing the uplift in land values for securing community benefits may be achieved without putting a brake on development. As this was the run up to the General Election the Forum decided that the best outcome would be to call for a meeting with ODPM once civil servants were 'out of purdah'. Colleagues mentioned that in some parts of the country, planning gain was difficult to achieve and what was more important was developing long term relationships with developers in public/private partnerships. Some of the recommendations emerging from the discussion, including county/regional networks of local authority Contribution Officers, are being examined by Forum members for inclusion in their individual work programmes.

NB. At all meetings except April, the Forum was grateful to staff of the ODPM for attending and discussing progress on the Planning Bill/Act and the planning reforms. These discussions were most helpful.

3 Annual Conference: Inspiring Planning

This was held on Monday 7th March in London. Keynote presentations were given by Rt. Hon. Keith Hill MP, Minister for Planning, Sir Brian Briscoe and many other distinguished speakers. Breakout sessions offered the 180 delegates the opportunity to probe in greater detail the topics which concerned them the most. Response forms demonstrated that delegates found the event very useful and rewarding.

4 Research and branding

The Forum commissioned a research report from Planning Officers Society Enterprises on *The Conditions for Creative Planning*, funded by the British Property Federation. This report outlined a series of recommendations including the removal of householder applications from the development control system, councillor training and improved pre-application discussions. This latter point has been elaborated in a *Good Practice Note on Pre-application Discussions* which has been endorsed by the Forum.

Discussions are continuing with POSE on a commission for a follow up research project.

Discussions were held in October with Rita Clifton, Chairman of Interbrand regarding a proposed workshop on improving the image of planners and planning. Progress on this has been slow.

The Forum has continued to facilitate discussions with partner organisations on a possible National Spatial Framework, funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

5 Web site and publications www.natplanforum.org.uk

The Forum web site carries several pages of text as 'home pages' and now includes all agendas and minutes of meetings. The Forum published four Good Practice Notes through the year and the research report-all of which are posted on the site. Maintaining the site in a timely way has proved difficult and alternative arrangements are being considered for 2005/6.

6 Press and publicity

The NPF has benefited from considerable press coverage in Planning magazine, four times making the front page (including the headline article). An article was placed in First, the Local Government newsletter. Greater efforts must be made in future to spread the message beyond the limits of the planning profession itself.

7 Budget 2005/6

Considerable progress has been achieved in establishing a workable budget for the Forum for 2005/6. ODPM has committed 25K (up from 10K) and a spectrum of Forum members are now subscribing to funds. This is valuable both in demonstrating cross sectoral support and also securing greater ownership of the Forum and its workings. Income for 2005/6 is presently:-

	£K
ODPM	25
LGA	2 plus 'in kind'
BPF	5
PINS	5
RTPI	5 tbc
PAS	5
RICS	1
HBF	1
CABE	1
TCPA	free accountancy services
TOTAL	£50K

Colleagues will see that the position of Secretary is to be advertised on £25K (iro). Even with oncosts, this will provide the Forum with a reasonable operational budget for the first time and the opportunity to raise the level and effectiveness of outcomes. Several other forum members are seeking authority to forward subscriptions from their organisations and it is hoped that this can continue.

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