

National Planning Forum: Inspiring planning

Draft Notes of the Meeting held on 14th June 2005

Local Government House, Smith Square, London

Liz Peace (Chair of NPF) welcomed colleagues to the meeting.

NPF Debate-Planning for Climate Change

Presentations were given by Mark Southgate (Environment Agency), Liz Wilson (Oxford Brookes), Mark Goldthorpe (SE Climate Change Partnership) and Hugh Ellis (FoE). Copies of Powerpoints are attached.

Key points emerging from the discussion were:-

- If the science is right (and clear consensus now that it is) then it's vital to factor climate change (CC) into planning decisions *now*. Timing is of the essence if we are to catch the present round of regional strategies and a common front is needed if we are to persuade government to act.
- The NPF is uniquely positioned as a cross sectoral organisation to issue a clear and imperative call for action. Govt needs every encouragement to act on this cross Departmental issue.
- CC is *prima inter pares* among the important issues facing us all. (Although the expressed counter view is that it is unrealistic to pick out cc as more important as housing or jobs, etc.)
- Scaremongering is counter-productive to securing a rational response to a serious and pressing issue-and emphasis can be given to some positives. We need to raise awareness and build professional capacity to deal with cc sensibly.
- A target should be set for all development to be carbon neutral in 5 years.
- PPS1 together with other PPS/PPG's offer a very valuable policy framework for all parties to bring cc into play. LPA's can use policy to give cc as much weight as they choose, if they have the will.
- When LPA's refer to cc, it is often as a reason for refusal, councillors do not generally see it as an over-riding issue as the public in general would rank education, NHS, homes and jobs above cc.
- Developers would welcome greater certainty on cc issues but any new guidance or regulation should be lucid, timely and relevant. All practitioners would welcome 3 small things they can do tomorrow, not a lengthy tome.
- Tougher Building Regs. are being rolled out as a means of reducing emissions, saving energy and conserving water. The Building Research Establishment is at the forefront of research and practice.
- Any attempts to improve new build will be peripheral while the great bulk of existing stock remains defective. Investment in energy efficiency will give good pay back and lots of little changes can accumulate big benefits.

- We need a Dept. of Sustainable Development to join up the agenda and offer strong leadership. Present govt policies are unsustainable and inconsistent eg. aviation policy, road building programme, housing in the SE. Inexpensive, reliable, integrated public transport for example, would send the right signal.
- GIS and new IT modelling and graphics should be harnessed both to help inform the public about the implications of cc and also decisions made by developers and LPA's. CC implications need to be understood by a wide audience, not a fringe, if politicians are to feel confident promoting the agenda.
- LPA's must back up consultants who steer developers towards cc friendly decisions, and developers should be rewarded for this (eg carbon neutrality) both in officer recommendations, speed of decision and CSR league tables.
- CC needs to be tackled internationally. Our competitors could steal a march if we took unilateral action.
- Incentivising all parties in the development process to take more of the CC agenda on board (it already receives some) will pay dividends and we should explore ways to do this.

It was agreed that the Secretary would, in the light of this debate, draft and seek agreement from the Executive to a COMMUNIQUE on the issue of Planning for Climate Change.

Formal Agenda

1. Apologies: Vice Chairs Cllr. Richard Kemp, Mike Hayes and others as notified. The Forum sent best wishes to Stephen Conner on hearing of his illness.
2. Minutes: Agreed and signed
3. No matters arising
4. Concordat: The Secretary reported that he was still receiving comments on the draft. The Chair indicated her concern (shared by others) that it should be shorter and more action oriented-complementing the portfolio produced for the 2004 conference. The Secretary agreed to consolidate comments and amendments and then take stock in consultation with the Executive.
5. ODPM update: Richard Goodwin spoke to this item (see attached Powerpoint). Of particular note were:-
 - the performance figures for planning applications which demonstrated a positive response from LPA's in handling times.
 - SEA revised guidance to be published in august
 - EIA amendments to be published in July following the consultation
 - SA-see ODPM website for answers to the most commonly asked questions, inc retrospective application of SA to UDP's and local plans. Revised guidance to be published in the autumn.
 - S106. Good Practice Guide to be published soon.
 - Barker: suggested changes out for consultation in the summer.

In questions, Lucinda Turner (CBI) supported by the POS, London P&D Forum and BPF, highlighted the perverse consequences of the targets which resulted sometimes in refusals rather than negotiations in order that targets are met. The Chair mentioned she was seeking an early meeting with ODPM to discuss her ideas for delivery contracts between developers and LPA's, which could lift certain planning applications out of the normal regime.

Esther Kurland mentioned CABE's handy new pamphlet which accompanies PPS6. 'Planning for Town Centres: Guidance on Design and Implementation Tools'

In response to a question, Katrine Sporle (PINS) reported that PINS had clawed back much of the backlog on written reps and should have the backlog eliminated by the end of the summer. The backlog of hearings is also being actively addressed and times should be well down by the end of 2005.

6. Annual Review 2004/5: The Chair presented the Annual Review and took colleagues through some of the key result areas. She mentioned a very useful meeting with Brian Hackland and other colleagues from ODPM which has resulted in a substantial increase in funding to the NPF. This will enable a Secretary on a full time or nearly full time basis to be appointed and still leave funds for a small operational budget.

Mark Southgate reported that he was optimistic that a workshop on culture change would be taking place shortly with a marketing company recommended by BURA. He urged any Forum member who is interested to contact him on the issue. Mike Ash added that it was on this agenda that the NPF could make its most useful contribution and this should be reflected in the roll forward of the Business Plan. Paul Watson agreed and reflected that culture change should be embraced by all in the planning and development process and by all departments of state.

The Secretary reported that the next LGA Annual planning Conference was to be at Birmingham in February-a follow up to the Manchester summit. It was agreed that it would be sensible to 'piggy back' on this event.

The report was received.

7. Elections to chair 2005/6: Henry Oliver (CPRE) was elected with acclaim.
8. Topics for debate: Andrew Rogers (ACA) suggested 'the definition of development and the removal of minor applications from the planning system' arising from the creative Planning report. Mike Ash reported that Les Sparks was leading on a study for ODPM on this topic at the present time. The Chair asked colleagues to come forward to the Secretary with other suggestions asap.
9. Dates for 2005/6: 21 sept, 13 dec, 14 march, 20 june, 22 sept.
10. Advert for Secretary: The Secretary reported that the advert for his replacement appeared on Friday June10th in Planning. He asked colleagues to circulate the advert within their own organisations (see agenda papers).
11. AOB: In responding to the Chair's remarks, the Secretary thanked colleagues and said he wished the Forum well on his departure. The Forum now had a robust budget and a good attendance. It was essential for all members of the Forum to participate actively if the NPF is to punch its weight and add value to the planning and development process.