

South West Policy & Media Officer Update Report

Introduction – even more to report than usual

Drafting this report began in a week in which so many Government announcements were being made that it was difficult to take it all in !

Monday 18 October saw Energy & Climate Change Secretary Chris Huhne announce a further round of consultation on the six draft Energy NPS's; the go ahead for the latest programme of nuclear power stations, including 'Regulations Justification' on the safety of not one, but two reactor designs ; and a decision not to go ahead with the Severn Tidal Barrage on the grounds of potentially excessive costs and risks for the taxpayer. Tuesday 19 October saw the publication [following many bits of leaked information] of the new Government's Defence Review [otherwise known as budget cuts], with complex investment and employment implications for many parts of the UK, not least the South West. Then, on Wednesday 20 October, came the Chancellor's Comprehensive Spending Review announcements, including of particular relevance to planning, cuts in local government spending, and in key Government Departments such as CLG, DEFRA and DfT, though also included were some announcements about major spending on transport and other infrastructure.

Just as we were starting to grapple with the implications of all this, there quickly followed the National Infrastructure Plan (HM Treasury & Infrastructure UK) published on 25 October and then ' Local growth : realising every place's potential' Cm 7961, the White Paper from Secretary of State for Business, Innovation & skills, Vince Cable. Each of these, but the latter especially, has significant implications for planning. Then, on the following day, 26 October , Transport Secretary, Philip Hammond, so as not to be outdone, announced a further raft of road and public transport schemes to receive government funding.

All of these documents are in some way interconnected [joined up government at work ?] and this Update will attempt to highlight some of the major implications of all of this for planners in the South West and will also look at the 'bonfire of quangos'; the call for evidence on the economic health of rural areas; consultation on new Marine Protected Areas; progress on Cornwall's Eco-town scheme; the latest on new nuclear power in the region ; the Cala Homes High Court ruling ; and a brief report on 'hearing it for the South West !'

Further consultation on draft national energy policy; go ahead for new nuclear power stations; safety clearance for reactor designs ; and decision not to ahead with the Severn Tidal Barrage.

Chris Huhne's Department seemed anxious to get a number of things off its chest, all at the same time, with these related announcements ! To those not wise to the ways of government, it may seem odd that a programme of 8 new nuclear power stations [reduced from the previous 10 listed sites] has been given the go ahead and a significant renewable power source rejected before a strategic national policy framework, in the form of the Energy NPS's, has been agreed, but at least we now have a 'National Infrastructure Plan' [see below]. We should also remember that these are desperate times as far as getting new energy infrastructure in place is concerned !

The further consultation on the six Draft National Policy Statements follows the Government's consideration of the massive response to the first round of consultation initiated last November by the previous Labour administration [see my Update Report of 27 November 2009]. This consultation, which closed in February, with 'Parliamentary scrutiny' completed in March this year, resulted in over 3000 responses, with most of these [not unexpectedly !] relating to EN6 Nuclear Power. The RTPI's initial, national response, has welcomed reduction of duplication between the NPS's, but expresses concern that they still lack the strategic element required to properly assess alternatives and that policy is still not clearly distinguished from background and 'guidance'. Beyond this, the changes now proposed are largely matters of detail rather than of principle, so we will not go into them here. It is worth noting however, that, once again, Planning Aid has produced a helpful summary of each NPS, available on its website.

Revisions have also been made to the related Appraisals of Sustainability, the Habitats Regulations Assessments, and Impact Assessments. This second round consultation closes on 24 January 2011, with input to the Institute required by 23 December this year. Please let me have any particular comments you might wish me to pass on.

Operational safety clearance for the reactors, following the application of internationally accepted principles of radiological protection, signified by the 'Regulatory Justification' announcement, means that the Government has given the go ahead to each of two different reactor designs which will feature in the new power station programme – Westinghouse's AP 1000 and AREVA's EPR. It remains to be seen whether the Government [or any future administration] will be able to hold its stance of 'no public subsidy for new nuclear power'.

All of the pieces required to enable a new age of nuclear power generation in the UK to begin thus seem to be in place as far as the Government is concerned, though there is still the not so small matter of planning permission to be secured and many agreements to be signed for individual schemes[see 'New nuclear power in the South West' later in this Update]. Also, the energy companies involved, such as EDF, are still expressing concerns about whether the cross energy sector 'rules' on carbon reduction benefits and other market obligations actually make nuclear power investment and generation commercially viable! The Office for Nuclear Development (OND) has recently indicated that there has been six to nine months 'slippage' in the new nuclear programme due to planning delays, the election and the long approval process for reactor designs.

Britain's first 'nuclear power age'

How simple [some might add 'and innocent'] it all seemed, by comparison, 55 years ago when the UK's first 'nuclear power age' was heralded in by the Government. In February 1955, a '10 year plan' was announced for building 12 nuclear power stations – a programme that was, then, ahead of anywhere else in the world. Barely 18 months later, Calder Hall Power Station at Windscale in Cumberland, was officially opened by the Queen and became the first such plant in the world to feed power into a national grid. The Financial Times, reporting the event, reported that the nuclear power programme would be 'pressed ahead to the limits of national resources and of technical possibility'. The Times talked of a 'courageous enterprise' which would, in time, provide Britain with 'an ample supply of electricity without the use of coal or oil'

The end of a Severn Barrage dream going back 100 years ?

Announcing the publication of the cross-governmental 'Severn Tidal Power Feasibility Study' [the latest in a long line of such studies stretching back to the 1970's], Chris Huhne stated that the Government did not see a strategic case 'at this time' for public funding for a 10 mile long tidal barrage costing up to £30 billion in the Severn Estuary. Basically the Government has decided that the costs and risks to the taxpayer and energy consumer would be excessive compared to 'other low-carbon energy options, notwithstanding the fact that the barrage could provide up to 5% of current UK electricity needs and would have an operational life of 100 years. There would also be considerable environmental implications for what is an area designated as internationally important as a wildlife habitat, adding to uncertainties over suitable compliance and regulation. However, the door is not finally closed on tidal power from the Severn. The Government has recognised that 'factors could change in future' and the feasibility study has identified potential 'triggers' for a future review, though this would not be before 2015.

Sheer scale and the relative simplicity of its technology appear to have conspired against the project this time around. It has been concluded that little new 'technology learning' spin-off would be expected – ironically, the proven technology was presented as a major factor in the barrage's favour when studies were carried out in the 1970's and 80's. However, two different engineering consortia are still working on other kinds of tidal power schemes for the Severn, which no doubt gives a little hope to local government and private sector interests on the South Wales side of the Estuary who have reacted with great disappointment to the Government's announcement.

Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty : The Strategic Defence & Security Review

Whilst this, together with the related 'National Security Strategy', published at the same time, are not planning matters as such, there are potentially significant implications for the South West as reductions and budget cuts lie at its heart. The local economy overall, employment opportunities and MOD land holdings will all be involved, though at this stage there are few confirmed details. For example, it would appear that Devonport is to be 'sustained but

rationalised' as a naval base and there are proposals to close Britannia Royal Naval College in Dartmouth and RAF Lyneham, whilst some of the region's Army bases may go. It is also likely that 'acquisition reform', which will be a major part of the work of a newly established Defence Reform Unit, will have an impact on civilian employment in Bath and at Abbey Wood, Bristol. On a more positive front, it has been announced in the Comprehensive Spending Review [see below] that £32 million is to be provided by the Government to support Augusta Westland in Yeovil, thus helping to protect local jobs and good for the economy of the South West as a whole.

The Comprehensive Spending Review

The Government's Comprehensive Review (CSR) has set out the spending budgets for each Department up to 2014-15. Overall, as widely expected, the picture is one of cuts, with CLG taking the biggest percentage cut of any Department, at 33% in its expenditure. The DfT, by comparison, has a 15% cut. Local authorities face a reduction in the funding they receive from CLG of 28% and capital funding to Councils in England will also fall, by 45%. Generally, the devolved administrations (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) have lower percentage reductions in budget.

The main planning related CSR announcements are as follows :

A special Open Source Planning Grant to support local authorities in the implementation of this 'new' approach [details to be revealed in the Localism Bill]

A £40 billion investment in new infrastructure, including £30 bn for transport, a third of which is for 'road, regional and local transport schemes'.

'Flagship Green Projects', including up to £1bn on commercial carbon capture and storage demonstrations [for fossil fuel power stations] ; £200 million for the development of low carbon technologies, including wind power and manufacturing at port sites; and the establishment of a Green Investment Bank, to be paid for by a £1bn starter fund and the proceeds from the sale of Government owned assets [There appears to be a link with the new National Infrastructure Plan here, where a number of 'infrastructure assets' are listed (see below)].

Capital funding for 'over 600 schools'.

A £1.4 bn Regional Growth Fund, allocated over three years (2011-2014) taking the place of the Working Neighbourhoods Fund, Growth Area Funding and the Thames Gateway Fund. This is to be accessed via bids [£1million minimum!] for project or 'programme' support submitted by the new Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP's) and others with suitable public/private partnership credentials. In allocating funds, Ministers will be advised by a new 'Independent Advisory Panel' chaired by Lord Heseltine. The first bidding round closes very soon – 21 January 2011- in practice eliminating any projects not already worked up in detail !

A £530 million investment to support 'broadband rollout'

A £2 billion investment in flood and coastal erosion risk management.

Significant changes to the way in which social housing is funded [which have caused considerable alarm among housing professionals !] including the end of lifetime tenancies, an increase in rent up to 80% of market rent and a cut to Government support to social housing overall of 60%.

New powers for local authorities to implement 'Tax Increment Funding', enabling them to borrow against locally raised business rates.

At the same time, it should be noted that the planning system, along with banking and schools [is this a first for such linking from government !?] is identified as a 'key area for structural reform to support economic competitiveness'.

Implications of the CSR for the South West

Identifying these implications is not easy, though the HM Treasury website does have links to the CSR by regions. Here we find rather general references to how this and earlier Budget measures will impact upon the South West's population and economy, including how growth will be assisted by the Green Investment Bank , how its local authorities will be able

to benefit from Tax Increment Funding and how 'appropriate projects' will be able to benefit from the Regional Growth Fund. Negative impacts are not dwelled upon and the detail is reserved for a rather small number of projects which will receive central government funding – M4/M5 Junction improvements (hard shoulder running & variable speed control ; Poole Bridge ; the Weymouth 2012 Transport Package ; and the support for Augusta Westland in Yeovil [see above] The promised 'broadband rollout' could provide significant benefits to the rural parts of the region, while there are many areas with flooding and coastal erosion problems which might qualify for a share of that particular budget.

It has been left to others to identify negative impacts ! For example, Travel Watch South West has re-emphasised that the region continues to have the worst record of any in terms of transport investment ; work by the South West RDA suggests that there could be 60,000 public sector jobs lost, rising to 115,000 for all sectors based on established multipliers, with little sign of how the private sector is going to fill the gap ; the National Housing Federation estimates that 80,000 private sector tenants in the region face housing benefit cuts, at the same time as grants for new social housing face massive cuts ; and the South West Federation of Small Businesses, whose members account for a higher proportion of private sector jobs in the region than nationally, fear that support is gradually being shut down, with no overall plan in place for business growth.

National Infrastructure Plan

Produced jointly by HM Treasury and Infrastructure UK [a division of the Treasury set up under the 2010 Budget], this first ever such plan, was launched by the Prime Minister on 25 October at the CBI Conference. The focus of this 52 page document is infrastructure networks and systems in energy, transport, digital communications, floodwater, waste management and in science. For almost certainly the first time in such a form, the plan identifies the role to be taken by central government in specifying infrastructure needs and how it is proposed to 'unlock' some £200 billion worth of public and private investment to meet identified needs over the next five years.

Our infrastructure is still just about 'world class', but creaking. As the Foreword says, for several decades the UK's approach to infrastructure investment 'has been timid, uncoordinated, incremental, wasteful in its procurement and poorly targeted' Sadly however, the document starts off in negative tones in its reference to the role of planning. The planning system is seen as one of the problems in the delivery of infrastructure, rather than acknowledging the vital role it plays in its planning and implementation. The treatment of spatial planning in the document [sadly the term 'spatial' is never used] is therefore a prescription for how it can be 'improved' in order to help deliver infrastructure more effectively. There are references to the Regional Growth Fund and to the Local Growth White Paper, which at least provide reassuring evidence of joined-up government , but the material of most direct relevance to planning is 'collected together' under the heading 'Delivery and the Planning Regime'

In what is essentially a carry-over from the Labour administration, the Plan talks about the need for 'effective and timely' delivery and the new 'fast track' consents system for nationally significant infrastructure projects. The difference now is that 'high value for money' and the need for 'transparency' in the consents regime are seen as important, with the IPC converted into a Major Infrastructure Planning Unit within the Inspectorate, advising Ministers who would make the final decisions. The NPS system is to be continued and, as noted above, latest drafts of the Energy NPS's are now out for consultation. Furthermore, an up-dated timetable for the publication of the remaining NPS's is promised by the end of 2010, as is the Localism Bill, seen as part of ' a radical reboot of the planning system', helping to facilitate sustainable development and the provision of infrastructure. [quite how making the system more 'local' and less strategic in its focus will help to deliver projects which are, by definition, 'strategic nationally', is not explained].

Finally, this section of the Plan refers to a consolidation of existing [national?] planning policies into a 'a simple document which will set the framework for local and neighbourhood plans'. It must be assumed that this is a reference to the raft of PPS's and PPG's and is, as such, highly ambitious ! It is not clear whether or not this single document is to become the 'national spatial strategy' long called for by the RTP1 and many others.

In dealing with infrastructure data requirements, the Plan notes that, generally, quality is poor and information uncoordinated. At the same time there are said to be 'pockets of excellence' and it would be nice to think that work in our region, such as the recently produced 'South West Infrastructure Planning Advice Note', is seen as one of these 'pockets'. Perhaps it would have been too much to ask of this new Coalition Government for this Plan to refer overtly to the huge body of data assembled for RSS work in the English regions, and which needs to be both made available and drawn upon !

Few could argue with the laudable, but very ambitious 'Four Goals for national infrastructure investment', including a hierarchy for such investment, but there might be more concern about the list of potential infrastructure asset sales, including all or part of HS1, the Royal Mail and the 'Student Loan book'. There is also some information about investment plans for particular transport infrastructure projects, such as, in the South West, the M4/M5 junction improvements and Poole Bridge, and about transport budgets generally said to help 'promote greater localism', including a 'Local Sustainable Transport Fund' of £560 million, enabling local authorities outside London to bid for Government support for 'interventions supporting local priorities' [?]. Finally, most local transport authorities will probably welcome the move to simplify the whole funding process by replacing 26 different grant schemes by just four !

The Government proposes to publish an up-dated version of the NIP, setting out more detail on long term investment needs and priorities, by the end of 2011 and to this end, a note was published on 3 November setting out how this updating will be done.

Local growth : realising every place's potential

This White Paper, published on 28 October 2010, as Cm 7961, by the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, provides the clearest indication to date of how the Coalition Government sees the future planning system, in England. In essence, this is as a facilitator of economic growth, with the emphasis on local policies and decisions, sweetened by financial incentives and 'unencumbered' by strategic policy direction, except where central government dictates otherwise. The document talks about 'ending the culture of Whitehall knows best', 'handing power back to people' and 'meaningful decentralisation'

Setting out 'The case for change', the previous approach to sub-national [ie. regional] economic development, based on centrally driven targets which sought to narrow [the difference in] the growth rates between regions and which worked against the market, based on an artificial representation of functional economies [ie. regions] , is said to have failed. Also said to be flawed is the belief that planning could both determine where growth should happen and stimulate that growth, with regional and other strategies stifling 'natural and healthy competition between places'.

The proposals for 'Shifting Power to the Right Levels' involve increasing democratic accountability ; abolishing the RDA's and establishing the first phase of 24 new Local Economic Partnerships (LEP's); and creating directly elected Mayors in the 12 largest English cities [which would include Bristol]. A long list follows of ways in which local authorities 'will be expected to support growth'. One of these is the provision of 'high quality services' supporting business investment and individuals, which will certainly be a major challenge for local government operating with fewer and fewer resources. Sadly there is no recognition that the planning system is one of these services, though there is acknowledgement of the importance of such things as a 'responsive supply of land', use of statutory powers, and 'supporting [the improvement of ?] local infrastructure.

As might be expected, the document deals at some length with LEP's under the heading 'the emerging local economic development landscape' it is revealed that just 24 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP's) have been selected, out of the 62 bids, to move on to the stage of establishing their boards. Of the seven bids from the South West, only two are so selected –

Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly and the West of England. The LEP's will be expected to fund their own day-to-day running costs and to work with each other as larger entities, both in geographical terms and in common interest 'clusters', such as aerospace in the South West. Such grouping is also suggested for potentially more successful joint bidding for a share of the new Regional Growth Fund. [quite what happens over the large areas having no LEP, as in the South West is not clear !] Almost in the same breath, the document goes on to deal at some length with the abolition and 'winding down' of the RDA's, for which primary legislation will be required – A Public Bodies Bill for those in the regions of England and the Localism Bill for the London Development Agency. 'New delivery structures' are promised to take over the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) process to 'ensure minimal disruption to existing committed programmes, whilst existing European rural development programmes currently delivered by RDA's are to be part centrally administered (mainly by DEFRA?) and part handed over to LEP's and local authorities.

The section in the White Paper entitled 'Increasing Confidence to Invest' contains the bones of the Government's planning system reform proposals. These are all about 'actively encouraging growth' and ensuring 'that people have greater ownership' of the system. The 'actions' said to be required to achieve this include : A national presumption in favour of sustainable development [nothing new] ; giving 'local communities' [not defined?] new Right to Build powers; reforming and streamlining national planning policy and guidance to produce a 'simple [single?] national policy

framework' ; a new statutory duty to co-operate on local authorities, public bodies and others involved in plan-making ;and new ' powerful incentives for local authorities to deliver sustainable economic development'. These include - the 'New Homes Bonus' scheme ; consideration of options to enable councils to retain locally-raised business rates ; and proposals to enable councils to offer local discounts on business rates.

There is at least some acknowledgement that one of the main functions of the planning system is to protect and promote important environmental and social interests, but this is somewhat buried in talk of actively encouraging growth and of removing centrally imposed policies and targets which alienate communities. The soon to be abolished RSS's are said to be part of this alienation, as well as being expensive [compared to what ?] and slow to prepare. Overall, there is much talk about 'system'[just like the previous Labour administration] and little about policy at the local level and what happens if, or rather when, different 'local communities' or 'neighbourhoods' propose conflicting priorities and policies ? In practice, the amount of local power being offered is limited . Although it is suggested that central government will in future limit its involvement to issues of national importance (key infrastructure and sustainability projects) a large measure of central , strategic control will remain. The document states that 'neighbourhood plans' [never explained or defined], 'will need to respect the overall national presumption in favour of sustainable development as well as other local strategic priorities, such as the positioning of transport links and meeting housing need'.

This section of the document goes on to state that local authorities will be expected to produce 'local development plans' [don't they already do this ?] for which procedures will be simplified and streamlined, though it remains unclear whether this is a reference to reforming the LDF system.

The fourth and final section, 'Focused Investment' deals with the new Regional Growth Fund at some length and other 'sources of strategic investment' such as enhancements to 'regional' [surely a term left in by mistake !] and 'urban transport systems' ; investment in more broadband in remote areas [no mention here of the South West] ; and support for low carbon energy and climate change adaptation.

The document concludes with an Annex about the 24 LEP's, including a map of their locations, but no information about why certain bids, such as the other five in the South West, have not been successful, and a further Annex summarising what is termed 'Future Economic Development Delivery', including 'growth hubs', transport schemes, the future role of the Homes & Communities Agency, and the potential future 'strategic planning role' of LEP's !

Transport Secretary's road and public transport schemes announcement

On 26 October, Transport Secretary Philip Hammond announced the go-ahead for 16 central government financed road and public transport schemes to add to the list of eight already announced in the CSR. The South West is not however very well represented. Nine of the 16 schemes relate to motorway and other trunk road improvements in the north and around the M25. The rest are seen as 'key local infrastructure projects' termed the 'supported group'. Here, the region is represented, in the shape of the 'East of Exeter Package' involving improvements to M5 Junction 29 to provide access to housing and employment growth areas and the Taunton Northern Inner Distributor Road, to provide additional cross-town capacity and access to areas of brownfield development land.

The announcement also covered 'progress' on some 59 other schemes, divided into three groups on which no commitments have been made. The 'development group' (22 schemes) is linked to a 'funding pot' of £600 million and invitations to bid for a share of this 'over the next few months'. The South West schemes in this group are the Bath Transportation Package , the Bristol Bus Rapid Transit – Ashton Vale to Temple Meads , and the Weston-Super- Mare Package. In practice, the DfT has 'invited' those submitting these schemes to re-visit their bids to see if savings can be made, with final decisions on these now expected by the end of 2011. The 'pre-qualification group' (34 schemes), said to require further DfT analysis to decide whether or not they can move up into the 'development group' includes in the South West, the Camborne-Poole-Redruth Transport Package, the Kingskerswell By-pass (South Devon Link Road), the South Bristol Link – phases 1 & 2, and the A338 Bournemouth Spur Road Maintenance. A third 'group' to be 'considered for conditional approval' [ie. a long way off !] includes the Isles of Scilly Link.

A bonfire of quangos ?

At the end of September, the BBC and a number of newspapers published a leaked list of quangos and other public bodies under scrutiny by the new Government. According to this list, 177 faced abolition ; 4 were to be privatised ; 129 were to be 'merged or consolidated' down to a minimum of 57 ; and a further 94 were still 'under review'. The abolition list confirmed that the English RDA's , the National Housing & Planning Advice Unit and the Infrastructure Planning Commission were to go, whilst other bodies on this list of particular relevance to planning included British Waterways & the Inland Waterways Advisory Council ; the Commission for Integrated Transport ; the Commission for Rural Communities ; the Sustainable Development Commission ; the Expert Panel on Air Quality Standards; the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution ; the Olympic Park Legacy Company ; the Renewables Advisory Board and a number of Development Corporations, including those for London Thames Gateway, Thurrock Thames Gateway and West Northamptonshire. On the merged or consolidated list were English Heritage and Sport England , whilst the still under review listed included the Environment Agency ; CABI ; Natural England [not all that long ago 'downsized' from English Nature !] ; the Forestry Commission ; visit England ; and the UK Atomic Energy Agency ; and the Homes and Communities Agency.

The leaked list also included 350 'bodies to be retained'. Among these are the nine National Parks Authorities ; the Broads Authority ; the Committee on Climate Change ; the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management and the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority [both of which look to have an increasingly important role in the years ahead !] ; the Olympic Delivery Authority ; the Ordnance Survey ; and the Planning Inspectorate [which we now know is to take the abolished IPC team under its wing] Also to be retained is the recently created Marine Management Organisation, which has a huge task in front of it rolling out the new Marine Plans.

More recently, certain things been clarified on the quango front. For example, we now know that the HAC is to continue, but in slimmed down form, with certain of its regions, including the South West, 'merged' with others; British Waterways is to become a charity [apparently at its own request] ; and the Forestry Commission is to have many of its land holdings sold off [a plan being greeted with much alarm in some areas, including our own Forest of Dean !] If nothing else, the whole exercise has served to remind many of us of just how many quangos there now are.

The economic health of rural areas

The Commission for Rural Communities, one of the quangos to be abolished, has been gathering evidence for its last report to Government. The subject is the current economic health of rural areas and the invitation to submit evidence has highlighted, amongst other things, the impact of the recession on rural housing provision. Hard evidence on such matters is always important in making a case for action or policy change, but surely we already know that over large areas, particularly in the South West, 'economic health' is not good ? We also know that, over the region as a whole, the provision of affordable rural housing is one of the most intractable planning issues we face.

New Marine Protected Areas

Natural England has just completed consultation on 10 possible sites/areas within English and Welsh offshore waters for new 'Marine Protected Areas' under the European 'Natura 2000 Sites' provisions. Four of these are around the coast of the South West – Lyme Bay & Torbay ; Prawle Point to Plymouth & Eddystone ; and Lizard Point & Lands End & Cape Bank.

Clay Country Vision – Cornish Alps to Eco-town

Significant progress has been made with this complex, costly and hugely ambitious regeneration project in the St Austell area of Mid-Cornwall. A joint venture company, Eco-Bos, has now been set up to deliver the plan for the development involving six sites, covering 700 hectares in total, which were formerly part of Imerys' china clay mining and processing operations. The company includes Imerys, the Eden Project and Orascom Development Holding AG, a Swiss based town development and management company with a 'global reputation'. Eco-Bos is working closely with Cornwall Council, which, amongst other things, is preparing the statutory policy framework (Core Strategy etc). An overall 'Vision' and Draft Master Plans for the first two sites have been prepared by Terence O'Rourke Ltd. The Baal and West Carclaze site could accommodate up to 2,500 new homes and more than eight hectares of employment land and use a range of renewable energy sources, including geo-thermal, solar, biomass and wind. The draft plan for Par Docks includes a new

marina and waterfront facilities, a hotel and between 500-700 new homes, all again drawing on a range of renewable energy sources. The Clay Country Vision scheme has been entered in the 'planning process' category of the 2010 RTPI Planning Awards competition, in which it has been shortlisted for a national award. It has also been considered as an entry in the South West's own Planning Achievements competition.

New nuclear power in the South West

The proposed new nuclear power plants at Hinkley Point in West Somerset and Oldbury-on-Severn in South Gloucestershire are in the van as far as testing out the new 2008 Act /NSIP/ IPC planning system is concerned. Reference has already been made earlier to progress on the still draft Nuclear Power National Policy Statement and the reactor design approvals, and to the general consensus nationally that the nuclear power station programme has suffered 'slippage' of six to nine months due to planning delays, the general election and the length of the reactor design approvals process.

The second stage of the consultation on EDF's Hinkley Point scheme ended somewhat acrimoniously on 4 October, following a process lasting more than 20 weeks involving the publication of over 9,500 pages of material ! The local planning authorities involved – West Somerset District, Sedgemoor District and Somerset County Councils – are concerned that many matters remain unresolved and that insufficient information has been made available for a proper consideration of the proposals. EDF, for its part, has seen no reason for further consultation and insists that it remains on course to submit a planning application to the IPC this winter. West Somerset's response states that ' whilst the national need' [for such new nuclear facilities] ' as set out in the draft NPS's, is acknowledged, as well as the benefit the Government sees in the early delivery of new nuclear power at Hinkley Point, the proposals, as they stand at present, result in adverse impacts of the development outweighing any benefits to the local community'. The County Council considers much key information still to be lacking and has suggested that EDF has a significant amount of further impact assessment work to complete prior to any application being submitted.

Whether this situation merely indicates a number of 'local issues' still to be resolved or whether it is symptomatic of a more fundamental problem with the untried 'front-loaded' pre-application process introduced under the 2008 Planning Act, remains, as yet, unclear. It is also somewhat unfortunate that this has happened despite the fact that a pioneering Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) was entered into last year (2009) by the three planning authorities and NNB Generation Company Ltd (EDF). This sets out the collaborative working arrangements for exploring the 'scope, impacts and potential' of the project, all in the context of the Planning Acts and relevant national and local policies, and in no way prejudicing the respective Councils' independence and decision-making powers. It also provides the basis upon which the Councils can secure financial resources [for the payment of consultants etc] to enable them to efficiently and effectively progress the project, - an important provision for local authorities of very modest means !

The PPA has been entered in the 2010 RTPI Planning Awards competition, in which it has been shortlisted for a national award. It has also been considered as an entry in the South West's own Planning Achievements competition.

A hitch in the 'planning system rebooting' process ?

In a case brought against the Government and Winchester City Council by Cala Homes (South) Ltd, the High Court has ruled (10 November 10) that Secretary of State Eric Pickles acted unlawfully back in July in revoking RSS housing targets, and, by extension, all other strategic policies, in advance of the necessary legislation required to abolish the RSS system. The Government has seen this ruling as but a minor irritant to its 'planning rebooting' process, with the Secretary of State claiming that planners must still recognise the proposed abolition of the RSS's as a 'material consideration'. Others will see this as vindication of the claim made by the RTPI and many others that the July announcement has left a policy vacuum and much confusion within the development plan system in England. This vacuum has seen, firstly, authorities rushing to reduce planned new housing figures in their areas (eg. North Somerset by 10,750 , Bristol by 9,560 , Torbay by 5,000, according to National Housing Federation, Oct 2010) and now, since the ruling, developers seeking to gain consents on the strength of RSS figures before the Localism Bill becomes law.

Some might also see it as ironic that a previous example of central government 'heavy-handedness' saw the Labour administration impose many of these same new housing targets on reluctant local planning authorities when finalising RSS's. Successful High Court actions then were in respect of new housing development areas being prescribed at the

Secretary of State's Proposed Changes stage without due appraisal or consideration of alternatives. Nowhere was this more of an issue than in the South West, where CLG handling of the RSS process, from submitted draft onwards, antagonised many local authorities who had worked hard to achieve an acceptable cross-region consensus on levels and location of growth for the draft document.

Hearing it for the South West !!

Your Policy Officer was one of the speakers at an event held in Exeter on 9 November entitled 'Let's hear it for the South West', organised by South West Stakeholders. High level speakers from GOSW, South West Councils, SWRDA and the South West Observatory [all endangered species now!] were supported by a team from the SWS Executive Committee, in reflecting upon the prospects for the region now in the light of cuts and central government changes. Amid the prevailing air of gloom, there were however rallying calls to raise the voice and profile of a region apparently 'left out in the cold' once again when it comes to public investment. In an attempt to look more on the bright side, my presentation emphasised that spatial planning – far from being one of the problems, as the Government seemed to be seeing it – was actually part of the solution to investment and sustainable development. In a lighter moment, Alistair Reekie of GOSW, reminded us of what a long history regions have. Contrary to a belief that they date from the 1930's and one Ernest Bevan, they were invented by the Normans for administrative purposes. As such, the South West – apart from present day Gloucestershire for some reason – was identified in the Domesday Book in 1086.

Geoff Walker
SW Policy & Media Officer SWPolicy@rtpi.org.uk
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