

Wales Planning Conference 2011

Workshop Report:

Sustainable Economic Renewal

Workshop Facilitators: Cristina Howick, Roger Tym & Partners and Neil Hemington, Welsh Government

The new Minister for Environment and Sustainable Development, John Griffiths AM, set the scene for the 2011 conference with his announcement of the publication of a new study on planning for economic renewal and a Cabinet Written Statement responding to the Study's recommendations. Of great significance to the economic renewal agenda will be the presumption in favour of sustainable development – emphasising that the answer to development proposals which satisfy planning criteria should be 'yes'.

The Sustainable Economic Renewal workshop was based upon the study and was led by Neil Hemington of the Welsh Government and Cristina Howick of Roger Tym and Partners.

Neil outlined the purpose of the study which was two-fold. Firstly, it was intended to evaluate how well the planning system serves national economic development objectives and secondly it was intended to set out the scope of new national planning policy and guidance.

Cristina then identified a series of recommendations which included amendments to Planning Policy Wales (including a new Chapter 7) and a new Technical Advice Note (TAN) which will be supported by an online data source. The recommendations also allow for dissemination and training, strengthened links between planning and economic development policies and new arrangements for strategic planning across local authority borders.

The amended Planning Policy Wales is intended to ensure that planning should not constrain economic growth. Instead it should create a good environment for business by ensuring a supply of land for development and steering development to the right place. The revision is also intended to ensure that appropriate economic policy is translated at the local level.

The proposed new TAN is intended to provide an understanding of how planning and the market interact and will be used to define and measure economic impacts. It is also proposed that the TAN will be mindful of market realities, that is it will focus on the fitness for purpose of land and will ask local authorities to review existing employment sites to identify which are still fit for purpose. Importantly, perhaps, the proposed TAN is intended to be a concise, practical document to be used by people without a specialist economic background.

The need for closer links between planning and economic development functions, particularly in the preparation of Local Development Plans and the implementation of national initiatives such as Enterprise Zones and Local Development Orders was also identified.

Finally, it was suggested that planning would be more effective if a strategic approach could be taken to planning for economic development in order to fill the 'strategic planning gap'. It was suggested that a duty could be placed on local planning authorities to co-operate. Alternatively, a more radical higher tier of planning which might be

concentrated on a number of 'city-regions' rather than across all of Wales was suggested.

After the presentation a lively debate followed. A key area for debate was the notion of the strategic planning gap and how it might be filled, in particular the role of the Wales Spatial Plan in filling that role.

This report was produced by Peter Thomas, Senior Planner, Vale of Glamorgan Council

This paper is a report of proceedings of the workshop and does not necessarily reflect the views of the author, their employer or that of any individual attending the workshop, including the facilitators, or the RTPI.