

LONDON CALLING

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White Paper 2007

Yet another tinkering with the system or finally a chance to get things right? Jon Barker takes an early look at the Planning White Paper.

According to Edward Fennel in *The Times*, 'It does not need a Machiavellian analysis to work out the correlation between the release last week of the White Paper Planning for a Sustainable Future and the Blair Government's commitment to further nuclear power stations'.

Planning reform is an area that the Blair government has looked at several times before in its 10 years in power. However, the current White Paper is partly déjà vu all over again, particularly with its efforts to speed up the planning process when it comes to major projects – something included in the Green Paper in 2001 and for which provision was made in the 2004 Planning and Compulsory purchase Act, but never implemented.

Simon Ricketts of SJ Berwin says the proposals will be good for ports and porches but little in between. The Royal Town Planning Institute welcomed the Planning White Paper as demonstrating a new commitment to planning by the

Government and hopes it will be the start of a change in the way in which government, business and the public view planning issues.

According to Kelvin McDonald, RTPI Policy Director the White Paper 'sets a lot of challenges. However, it does demonstrate that the Government has listened to the RTPI and others to moderate some of the wilder assertions about planning that have been made in the recent past. The devil, as always, is in the detail. A fundamental test of this apparent new commitment to planning will come in this year's spending review, in which we expect a level of resourcing that matches the Government aspirations for the planning service.'

Perhaps predictably Friends of the Earth have said that the white paper "will fast-track massive and damaging new developments, increase UK carbon dioxide emissions, and reduce the right of local people to object to schemes that threaten their communities" and they criticise the proposed ending of the retail needs test.

Also, perhaps predictably, CBI Director-General Richard Lambert has welcomed the government's planning white paper and its ambition to deliver the major infrastructure improvements the UK urgently needs and the greater weight to be paid to economic issues. The CBI also say that removing many small applications from the planning process will also free up more resources to handle the larger and more complicated projects which provide



Picture courtesy Caribb@flickr.com

greater economic and social benefits to communities.

Proposals

The White Paper includes a number of proposals, including

- A new way of approving major infrastructure schemes with a independent infrastructure planning commission to conduct inquiries and make decisions;
- The retail 'needs test' to be replaced with a new, as yet undefined, test of impact on town centres;
- removal of planning permission requirements for minor developments;
- simpler information requirements for planning applications;
- A new council 'duty to involve' local people in planning;
- reform of the as yet barely implemented LDF system;
- streamlining of national planning policy;
- new fast-track appeals system; and
- reform and proposals to increase planning fees.

In a break from the recommendations of

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the Barker report, wholesale changes to green belt policy are rejected.

A perhaps significant change that has not been highlighted in press coverage so far is a proposal that future applications which are not in line with local policies should only be turned down if "there is good reason to believe the economic, social and/or environmental costs of development are likely to outweigh the benefits". Councils will have to set out "clear and precise reasons" for refusing the application.

Major Infrastructure Projects

The independent commission would grant planning permission on significant waste, transport, water, energy and wastewater infrastructure. Decisions would be in line with the new national policy statements, unless adverse local consequences outweighed the benefits. Government is to explore devolving decisions on smaller infrastructure projects – with primarily local in effect – to councils.

Streamlining national policy

Government will conduct a comprehensive review of current planning policy statements in order to separate out policy from guidance and limit to that which is strategic and necessary. It will publish a detailed strategy and timetable for achieving change in summer 2007.

Local Development Framework (LDF)

A number of tweaks to the Local Development Framework (LDF) process are proposed including:

- Better community engagement: statutory consultation requirements plan are to be streamlined. The plan preparation phase will allow for consultation and appraisal of various options. The requirement to consult on preferred options (Regulation 26) would be dropped.
- Ability to revise plans during the process: authorities will be able to carry out the final statutory consultation on the plan before submitting it for examination; and, exceptionally, be allowed to make changes if necessary and then re-consult before submitting documents for examination. Legislation will allow the High Court to send a plan back to an earlier stage of the process rather than to the start.

- Reduction in number and type of plans: New guidance will clarify that there is no blanket requirement for site allocations Development Plan Documents and no need for Secretary of State to agree Supplementary planning documents (SPD).
- Sustainability appraisals will only be required for SPDs with significant social economic and environmental effects not already covered in the overarching DPDs.
- Soundness test will be clarified to assess authorities' plans for infrastructure provision.

Minor consents

This is the area that has gained most publicity in the mainstream media - government wants to give greater freedom and flexibility to make minor extensions to homes, business premises, and for installing energy generation equipment (e.g. solar panels) when they will have little impact on neighbouring properties. This is expected to reduce the number of developments that need planning permission, however, determining that developments do not have an effect on neighbouring properties may take as much resource, and the potential increase in the number of Article 4 directions could make the rules even more complex.

Appeals and call-ins

Government perceives a continuing need for ministers to determine a limited number of cases that are greater than local importance but the number of call-ins will be reduced. PINS will receive some Secretary of State appeals powers (e.g. listed buildings and tree preservation orders).

As can be seen, the Planning White Paper has a large number of elements that the Government believe will help the planning system become more efficient. However, it remains to be seen whether the planning system will be 'unblocked' by these measures or whether the allegation that 'land banks' of house builders and supermarkets are keeping land prices artificially high will be found to be a significant cause of slow housing growth. In any event, planning lawyers will continue to be busy!

The above article does not necessarily reflect the view of the RTPI or RTPI London. The CLG consultation ends on 17th August 2007. RTPI London will be submitting a consultation response to HQ to incorporate into a global RTPI response. To contribute to this response please contact the Consultations Secretary, Michael Fearn through the RTPI London office: London@RTPI.org.uk or 020 7426 0680 by 17th July.



Spot the Building!

The winner of the 'Spot the Building Competition' in the last London Calling was Phillip Ware of the Planning Inspectorate. Congratulations to Phillip who wins a £20 gift voucher. Thanks to all those who entered – the picture was of course of the Thames Barrier (as was the picture in the previous edition that no one recognised!). Back to normal after the roll over, there is a £10 voucher on offer to the first name pulled out of the hat! Answers please, by 31st July 2007, to jon.barker@atkinsglobal.com Good luck!

The Planning Training Partnership

In the last London Calling, Tim Edmundson and Liz Rawson presented a summary of their report for London Councils on the problems faced by London boroughs in recruiting and retaining planners.

One of the recommended actions to help address the problems was to work with universities to develop on-the-job training courses to aid career development and progression of staff to more senior posts. Graham Harrington and Janice MacLean outline a possible solution from the University of Westminster.

The provision of staff training opportunities is essential for any organisation to help maintain staff competence. This is particularly true for Local Planning Authorities, given the dramatic changes that have taken place in the statutory and theoretical planning framework over the last few years. These include a new development plans system, major changes to development control powers and procedures, the increasing importance of securing sustainable development and the emergence of 'spatial planning' as the guiding theory in all planners do.

In addition to keeping up with change, Edmundson and Rawson argued that training for existing staff could also help to address problems of recruitment and retention. The London Councils report found that the most difficult group of staff to recruit are experienced planners, and difficulties recruiting this group have increased. In 2003, 66% of boroughs reported difficulties recruiting such staff; by 2005 93% reported problems. Retention of such staff was also reported as problematic. 65% of boroughs acknowledged difficulties, and 48% said that the problems had increased since 2003.

Providing training for existing staff enables them to cope with changing demands and gain experience of new areas of work, aiding their retention. It can also enable staff to develop the skills necessary to progress to more senior posts more quickly and thus could increase the supply of suitable internal applicants for more senior posts. The School of Architecture and Built Environment (SABE) at the University

of Westminster has developed a new initiative to address the above need and to deliver a set of four pilot courses - The Planning Training Partnership (PTP) programme is aimed exclusively at planners and others working in planning in public sector agencies. The aim of the programme is to provide a series of short courses to develop the knowledge, skills and techniques that public agencies consider to be the most urgently required by their staff. It is being overseen by a Steering Group of representatives from a number of London Boroughs, together with London Councils, the Greater London Authority and the Government Office for London.

What Makes the Initiative Different?

The Planning Training Partnership has three distinctive characteristics. These are:

- It is based on the belief that most people learn best by 'doing'.
- It is focused on the needs of public sector planners
- It is a genuine partnership between participating agencies, staff and the University

Active Learning – "Students learn 10% of what they read, 20% of what they hear, 30% of what they see, 50% of what they see and hear, 70% of what is discussed with others, 80% of what they experience personally, and 95% of what they teach to someone else".

The PTP aims to complement the many one-day conferences and seminars that are available by providing 'hands-on' courses of three half day workshop sessions. The focus is on 'learning by doing', with participants working together to investigate hypothetical and real-life case studies. Sessions will be between two and three weeks apart to enable participants to reflect on their learning and link it to their work experiences – thus "embedding" the learning.

Public Sector Focus. As outlined above, the PTP is focussed on the needs of those working in planning in the public sector, with the direction and priorities provided by a Steering Group of representatives from public sector agencies.

Partnership. The PTP is a genuine partnership between participating agencies, staff and the University. The success of the Partnership relies on the active participation of public sector planning agencies as it is staff from these agencies that deliver the training, supported by University staff. This is designed not to be too onerous, with officers only being expected to give a couple of brief presentations in the subject area, with their main contribution being the provision of feedback in group discussions on case study activities completed by participants. In exchange for this commitment, their employers (the Lead Agencies) will gain 5 half price places for any course in the PTP programme.

Who Benefits?

The partnership approach which is at the heart of the PTP should ensure that lead agencies, lead staff and participants all benefit. The benefits can be summarised as follows.

Lead Agencies

- will gain discounted places for any course in the PTP programme;
- can use their involvement in the PTP programme as evidence to support any application to become an RTP Learning Partner; and
- benefit from training which is 'hands on' and can be more cost effective at developing skills and knowledge than conventional conferences.

Lead Staff

- develop their generic skills through gaining experience of training (advice on effective workplace training can be

available to lead staff from CEPLW if required);

- learn about other agencies' practices which could be taken back to the workplace; and
- get the opportunity for structured discussion of issues from their workplace with participants from other public agencies.

Participants:

- benefit from updating their knowledge in the topic area;
- gain deeper understanding of the subject through case studies activities;
- develop and enhance their generic skills; and
- can – if they are RTPI members – use

the hours to contribute towards their annual CPD requirements.

The Pilot Courses

Courses on Enforcement, Healthy Urban Development and Conservation are planned for the autumn at the University's Marylebone Campus. To register your interest in attending one or more of these, please e-mail Olga Lavrentieva on lavreno@wmin.ac.uk. Further information on the Planning Training Partnership can be found at www.wmin.ac.uk/ptp.

Find out more and get involved

If you want to get involved in the Partnership by helping to deliver

courses or by becoming a member of the Steering Group, please contact Tim Edmundson, Head of the Department of Urban Development and Regeneration at Westminster University at T.Edmundson@wmin.ac.uk

Graham Harrington is a freelance planning consultant with experience of planning practice in the public and private sectors (ghpa@orange.net) and Janice MacLean has worked as a planner in local authorities and currently lectures part-time at Anglia Ruskin University (Jmaclean123@aol.com).

Celebrating Planning in London

Richard Lemon, one of the judges of the London Planning Awards has news of this year's London Planning Awards

It was with great pleasure that I accepted an invitation earlier this year to be part of the panel of judges for the London Planning Awards 2007. The Awards, run jointly by London First, the Mayor of London and the RTPI, aim to:

- Recognise excellence and showcase examples that are leading the urban renaissance in London
- To raise expectations and standards and promote awareness of good practice
- To improve the profile of planning and the morale of those involved

Last year's winners included the Docklands Light Railway Planning Team, Tibbalds Planning & Urban Design, the Emirates Stadium/Arsenal on the Move, Silvertown Quays and Acton Town Centre, and demonstrated the high standard of planning and planners in London.

This year's Awards launch on 11 June 2007. Award categories will include:

- Best built project
- Best conceptual project

- Best community-based planning initiative
- Best new public space
- Best personal contribution to London
- Excellence in affordable housing delivery

The Awards may be given to local authorities, consultants, community groups, developers, public agencies, partnerships and other teams. All entries will be expected to fulfil the objectives of the London Plan and demonstrate how they meet specific criteria outlined under each of the award categories.

The panel of judges, which also includes Stuart Walburn from London First and

Kevin Reid from the GLA, represent the chairman of London First, the Mayor of London and the President of the RTPI. We are aiming for a record number of entries to the Awards, and I look forward to seeing all the projects and initiatives. The closing date is 20 August 2007. Entry forms will be available from the RTPI website at www.rtpi.org.uk. For more information about the Awards, please contact Judy Woollett at the RTPI: judy.woollett@rtpi.org.uk.

Richard Lemon is Honorary Secretary of RTPI London and a Senior Consultant at Roger Tym & Partners



Adapting to Climate Change Impacts:

A Good Practice Guide for Sustainable Communities,

Changes in seasonal and extreme weather conditions are impacting on both our population and infrastructure. As the Stern Review concluded, adaptation to climate change – that is, taking steps to build resilience and minimise costs – is essential.

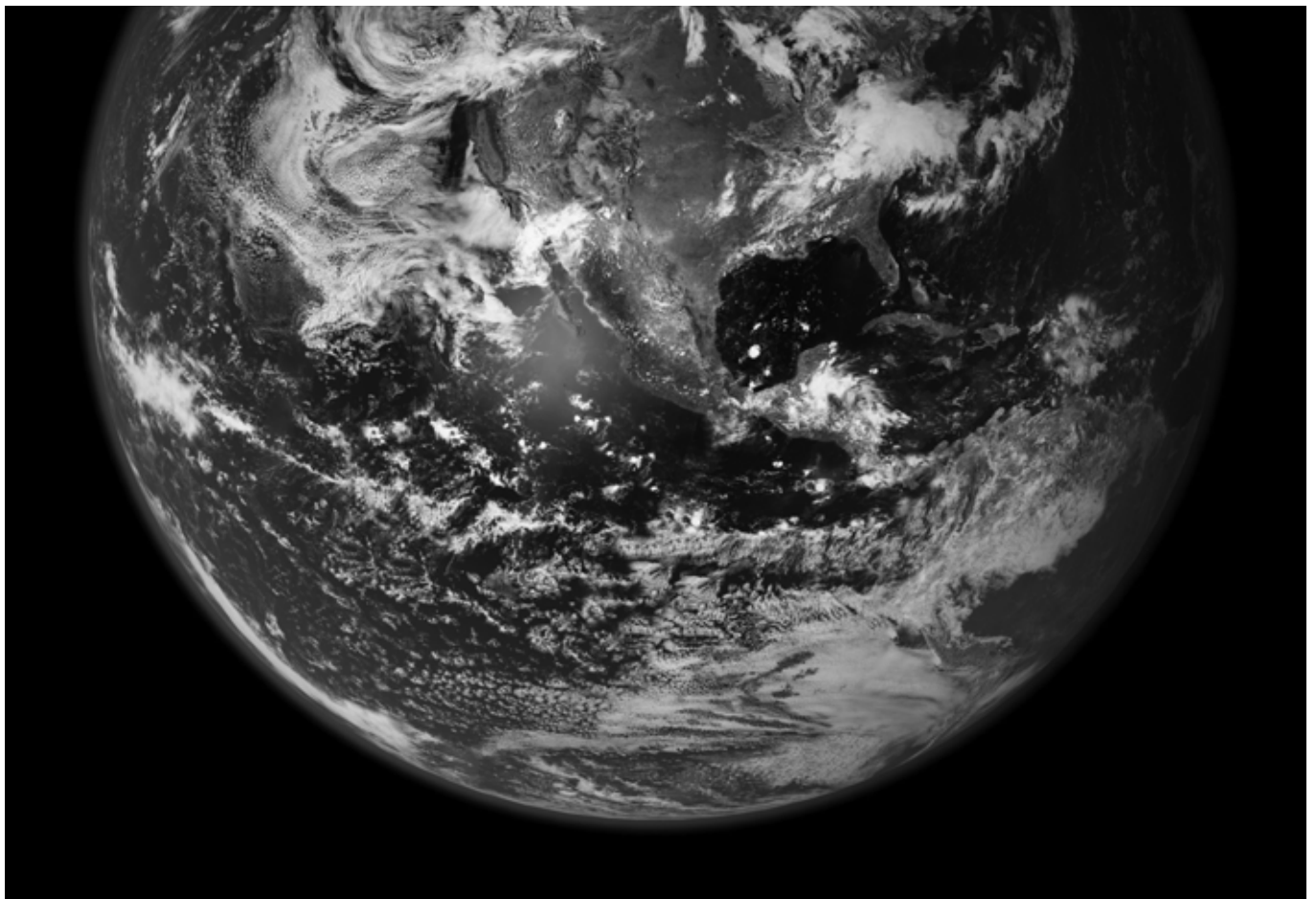
Some of the more immediate risks posed by inevitable climate change include flooding, over-heating and water resource shortages, all of which have recently affected the United Kingdom's economy and the well being of the population.

Over the next twenty years a significant amount of new housing will be required in the UK, and particularly in the south east, London and the east of England. The government's response, as set out in the Sustainable Communities Plan,

is to develop integrated communities at appropriate sites across the three regions. It is therefore vital we think from the outset how buildings and infrastructure can be adapted to cope with the climate they are likely to experience over their lifetime.

The Adapting to Climate Change Impacts: A Good Practice Guide for Sustainable Communities http://www.london.gov.uk/climatechangepartnership/sustain_comm.jsp report sets out the climate change adaptation issues that planners and developers should consider at each stage of the development process, and ways to respond to them. It includes real life examples of different techniques and solutions for different development contexts; town centre renewal, flood risk areas (flood zones)

and high density urban development. It will help planners and developers implement current planning guidance, including Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Communities. It links up with the government's wider approach to climate change adaptation as an output of Defra's cross-regional research programme as well as with Adapting to Climate Change: A Checklist for Development. http://www.london.gov.uk/climatechangepartnership/docs/adapting_to_climate_change.pdf Through use of these documents planners can help ensure that the new communities we construct are truly sustainable – that they remain comfortable, safe and attractive places for many decades to come.



Young Planners Quizzed in London

Young planners from across London and beyond took part in another quiz on Thursday 29 March 2007. Quiz goers were challenged to answer questions on a wide range of topics, including films, current affairs and the arts and planning.

Prizes were sponsored by recruitment consultant Judd Farris, who also helped to organise and run the event. A team from London Borough of Barking & Dagenham came out on top, with the London Borough of Tower Hamlets in second place. A team made up of planners from London Borough of Lambeth, Chiltern District Council and London Borough of Hackney took third place.

According to Judd Farris Property Recruitment Associate Director Nina Ramskill 'Everyone had a fun evening and seemed to enjoy themselves. We look forward to sponsoring future RTPI London Young Planners events.'

We are hoping to hold another event for young planners later in 2007 as part of its programme of events for RTPI members in London so watch out for publicity!

Young Planner of the Year Award 2007

Closing date: **Friday 28
September 2007**

How about a week in Las Vegas next Spring with all expenses paid? This could be you as guest of the American Planning Association at their 2008 National Planning Conference. In addition the prize package this year includes a free place at the Planning Summer School to be held at the University of St. Andrews between 6- 10th September 2008. In return the winner will be asked to give a short presentation at the School about his/her experiences at the APA Conference.

If you are aged under 35 then persuade your employers, colleagues, friends or relations to nominate you.

Details of the award and an entry form can be found on <http://www.rtpi.org.uk/item/426/23/5/3> or contact the awards office on 020 7929 9473.

New Zealand Planning Institute (UK branch)

Over the last year a small group of New Zealand planners in London has been working to establish a UK branch of the New Zealand Planning Institute. The role of the branch is to not only represent NZ planners in the UK but to create a supportive network for the sharing of ideas and experience, socialising and learning. Whether it is adjusting to the UK planning system or keeping in touch with what is happening in NZ, there are many issues kiwis face that the NZPI UK branch aim to assist with.

The NZPI UK branch is seeking to provide opportunities for fellow kiwis to

meet and discuss planning issues, having experience, both in New Zealand and in the UK, and to learn from others. We hope to assist kiwi planners who have come to the UK by introducing them to the British planning system enabling a smooth transition to work. We also aim to offer support and to act as a first point of contact to anyone who is looking to move to New Zealand, either on a temporary or permanent basis and who wish to continue to work in Planning.

As in the UK, Planners are a highly sought after and with the boom of the building industry and varied resource

management issues New Zealand offers a challenging work environment for Planners.

With at least 140 kiwi planners in the UK, many of whom are in London and the south-east, the branch has attracted significant interest. To date, there have been two successful events, a social event to launch the branch in November and an AGM and wine tasting in March with more planned for the future. The next NZPI event is with the Planning Institute of Australia on the 6th June 2006. To find out about this event or for more information on the NZPI branch contact ukbranch@nzpi.org.nz.

Tests of Soundness Seminar

This event, jointly badged with PAL and sought to explore the lessons learnt so far from the examinations into the new style development plan documents.

There were three excellent papers presented from Keith Holland (Planning Inspector Manager at the Planning Inspectorate), Nigel Eveleigh (Planning Policy Manager from Epsom & Ewell Borough Council) and William Upton (Barrister in the Chambers of Stephen Hockman QC, 6 Pump Court).

Keith Holland majored upon the level of culture change brought in by the 2004 Act which was something that many local authorities and developers had so far completely failed to comprehend. The majority of LPAs were still overly focussed upon the preparation of the type of policy suited to a traditional local plan and were having difficulty in considering how broad aims were going to be delivered. He gave some depressing statistics regarding the slippage rates for emerging LDF documents when compared with the original expectations set out in LDSs (rates currently running at about 85%). For the development industry he also had some hard words saying that the evidence was that developers were failing to engage in the crucial formative stages and that little flexibility can be given to those seeking to promote sites late in the process.

Nigel Eveleigh talked us through his Council's experiences of taking its core strategy through the process of examination. He reiterated Keith's comments about the shift in culture now required to negotiate the process and the need for early involvement by all parties. His advice to others was the early appointment of a dedicated programme officer to act as an "adaptable broker between the inspector and the LPA" and ensure the smooth running of the examination. He further counselled that the evidence base needed to be "properly mustered and recorded and made publicly available" and that the credibility of the entire exercise should be increased through the involvement



officers at senior levels. In the Epsom & Ewell case the scene was set by the chief executive who appeared for the Council on the opening day of the public examination. The Inspector's report is now awaited and we wish his Council well with the outcome (*).

William Upton had represented Maidstone Borough Council for the Examination process into two recently adopted development plan documents concerning open space and affordable housing. In both cases the Council had local plan policies that required updating in a timeframe that meant that awaiting the adoption of the core strategy was not an option. The Maidstone experience showed that subject specific short DPDs could fulfill a key role in plugging policy gaps whilst other policy evolved.

To conclude, the evidence from the Inspectorate, in particular, clearly shows that the system is in danger of grinding to a halt and that the case studies discussed at the seminar are very unusual

in terms of the advanced stage reached. Only the day before the seminar two of the neighbouring authorities to Nigel's had withdrawn their core strategies from impending public examination in the light of "exploratory" discussions with the appointed Inspectors. This evidence rather calls into question the "recent improvements" to the planning system being trumpeted in the White Paper and the Government's assertion that little further change is necessary to the development plan process whilst it is allowed to bed in.

Michael Fearn, London Branch Executive Consultations Secretary and Regional Director of Shire Consulting

(*). Since the seminar the Epsom & Ewell plan has been found to be "sound" by the Planning Inspectorate

RTPI London Score with Indigo Planning at first London football tournament

Planners from across London took part in the inaugural RTPI London five-a-side football tournament on 27 April 2007. The tournament was sponsored by Indigo Planning, one of the largest independent planning consultancies in the UK, and took place at 'Goals' in Wimbledon.

After a hard fought series of league matches followed by equally tough knock out stages, a team representing GVA Grimley came out on top, with Icen Projects taking the runner up spot.



The winners of the 2007 RTPI London football tournament, GVA Grimley



The valiant runners – up, Icen Projects



The team entered by the sponsors, Indigo Planning

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