

RTPI NEWS

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Government prepares for consents time change in answer to recession

Measures to extend the standard implementation conditions of existing permissions and lift the development sector's confidence are being consulted on and members' contributions are welcomed, explains *Rynd Smith*

It seems to be scarcely the blink of a development control manager's eye ago when, in the heat of the economic boom, the government was consulting on proposals to reduce from five years to three the duration of the standard implementation condition applied to permissions.

The pace of urban change was so fast, the argument ran, that there was insufficient incentive for developers to start on site in a timely manner. And if the applicant was not prepared to implement a permission within three years, another developer surely would.

How times have changed. Current economic circumstances have raised concerns in the development sector that permissions with the now standard three-year commencement condition will expire before the upturn. The spectre of large numbers of permissions unimplemented or the cost of roll-forward renewal applications that do not raise fresh issues does little for economic confidence. The sector is therefore calling for a return to a standard implementation period of five years.

Housing and planning minister John Healey used his keynote speech at the recent RTPI Planning Convention to launch consultation on a mechanism for extending the time limits. His approach would implement a procedure for making non-material amendments to granted consents under section 190 of the Planning Act 2008. The minister proposes to use this legislation, which inserts section 96A into the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, to enable a new form for an extension of time for applications granted before October this year.

Applications will need to be made individually to local authorities — meaning that where there is a good planning reason not to extend time



Healey: tackling development viability issue awaiting economic upturn

“Where there is a good planning reason not to extend time on an existing planning consent an authority need not do so

an authority need not do so. This is an important point, because there had been concerns that the life of permissions would be extended automatically, leaving authorities with no discretion to consider whether situations have genuinely changed and a historic permission should be allowed to lapse.

A consultation shorter than the typical three months is being held on the basis that the economic circumstances require some urgency and the change proposed is not major. Responses to the DCLG must be made by 13 August.

Although the headline powers have been present since the 2008 act received Royal Assent, changes to the fees regulations and the General Permitted Development Order 1995 are required to switch on this system and ensure that the fee charged responds to its administrative rather than its substantive nature.

The fee point is a thorny one. Without changes to the regulations, an applicant for a minor and procedural proposal to extend the duration of planning permission could incur a fee appropriate to a new application for the same use. What is sought by the DCLG is a system whereby the applicant pays a minor administrative charge.

Under this proposed system, councils would retain the individual discretion not to extend an existing permission. They would also retain the mechanism to grant permission for a period longer than three years, which can be used with immediate effect for new applications because no change in the legislation or the regulations is required. Councils should clearly be considering the circumstances in which there may be valid reasons for granting consents with a longer life than three years.

The RTPI's initial view is that this new mechanism will be valuable. It appears to strike an appropriate balance between the need to extend the time available to implement permissions — currently subject to significant economic uncertainty — while also retaining the local discretion not to extend permissions where other significant factors would now indicate an outcome different from that originally envisaged. What are your views on this change? The RTPI is seeking responses via its website debate and values its members' opinions. Make them count by contributing before 1 August.

Rynd Smith is RTPI director of policy and partnerships. To join the debate, please visit www.rtpi.org.uk/item/2685/23/5/3. This is just one of a raft of proposals on which the RTPI is preparing policy positions to give to government. To contribute, visit www.rtpi.org.uk/the_rtpi/policy

NANCY HAMMONDS

Tracking national spatial ambitions

Experience from Ireland and Scotland shows that planning strategies are key to expressing government priorities, reports *Jenny Crawford*

What gives a society the capacity to support national-level strategic planning? Does spatial planning embody fundamental priorities such as environmental protection or social equity or simply reflect the dominant values negotiated through the political system? How effective is it in forging development paths that work for the many rather than just the most powerful?

Planners, politicians and researchers grappled with these questions at the recent Spaces of the Nation seminar in Aberdeen. The Irish–Scottish Forum for Spatial Planning event explored the relationship between spatial planning and evolving concepts of nation and identity.

The preparation of the Northern Irish regional development strategy was acknowledged as having led the way in setting out an integrated approach. With its political instigation coming from the peace process, it applied spatial planning concepts and analysis developed at the European level that offered fresh frameworks for political co-operation and negotiation.

The convoluted development of the strategy over the past nine years reflects the development of Northern Ireland's political identity, including fundamental tensions in north–south and east–west relationships and between community-level and national politics.

The Scottish national planning framework has also been embraced by the Scottish Government as an expression of the nation's "direction of travel", shared priorities and a focus for national co-ordination.

Spatial planning has shaped the political debate on what should be decided by government and what is rightly the domain of local decision-making. It captures real dilemmas about energy infrastructure and aspirations for a low-carbon economy and has supported detailed scrutiny across a range of national interests through parliamentary committees. Interestingly, it has also raised national debate about the role of exemplars and design.



Aberdeen: playing host for forum

In the Republic of Ireland, the national spatial strategy has played a central role in targeting public investment in infrastructure. It is a co-ordinating mechanism for the national government, with major buy-in from key departments. It also represents an important focus for cross-border dialogue with Northern Ireland.

However, its delivery has been undermined by tensions with local government. This has led to the country's 88 planning authorities allocating land for half a million homes in a country of one-and-a-half million households. These real stresses between national and local decision-making are the focus of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2009.

The forum discussions highlighted that spatial planning and politics are two sides of the same development coin. The quality of one will reflect the quality of the other. The outcome depends on the quality of information and analysis and the capacity of institutions to communicate, learn and work together.

It also depends on the quality of leadership, accountability and transparency in both political and professional spheres. Across all three jurisdictions, there has been a significant shift in emphasis from the conceptual framework of strategy to how it operates.

As a result, spatial planning processes now have a real opportunity to demonstrate that they can enable national coherence and capacity of government to deliver effective responses to today's global challenges.

Jenny Crawford is RTPI head of research.

Research Bulletin

Latest library series publication explores strategic plan experience

The institute and publisher Routledge have developed the RTPI library series as cutting-edge texts in spatial planning theory and practice. The most recent publication is *Conceptions of Space and Place in Strategic Spatial Planning*, edited by Simin Davoudi and Ian Strange. It analyses experience in the UK and Ireland over the past decade and includes chapters on the Wales spatial plan by Neil Harris and Huw Thomas, Scottish national planning by Greg Lloyd and Graeme Purves, the Irish spatial strategy by Jim Walsh, the Northern Ireland regional development strategy by Michael Murray and English regional experience by Gordon Dabinett and Nick Bailey. Forthcoming titles include *Regional Planning for Open Space* by Arnold van der Valk of Wageningen University and Terry van Dijk of the University of Groningen in the Netherlands.

To order copies, please visit www.routledge.co.uk/books/series/RTPI_Library_Series

Spatial forum seminars to tackle rural and border issues

Following on from its seminar in Aberdeen last month (see left), the Irish–Scottish Forum for Spatial Planning has scheduled two further events later this year. The forum set up by the University of Aberdeen, Queen's University Belfast and the National University of Ireland Maynooth examines current practices in spatial planning in Ireland and Scotland. The first event, to be held on 18 September in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Rural Community Network, is Rural Planning and Development — Comparative Perspectives on a Rural White Paper, hosted by Queen's University Belfast. The second, on 19 November, is Development Corridors and the Role of Spatial Planning in Border Territories, hosted by the National University of Ireland Maynooth.

For more information, please email m.r.murray@qub.ac.uk or Brendan.Bartley@nuim.ie

Network offers perspectives on regions in recession

The European Observation Network on Territorial Development and Cohesion seminar in Prague in May explored the differential impacts of the recession on European regions. A report from the event and extra background information is now available on the ESPON UK Network's website. Information can also be found on the next call for projects, expected in September, which will include an invitation to submit requests for locally focused spatial analysis from public authorities.

For more information, please visit www.espon.org.uk or email research@rtpi.org.uk

Social sciences conference to look at research impact measurement

An Academy of Social Sciences conference in London on 16 July will consider the measurement of social science research impacts. This is a key indicator for assessing research under the forthcoming research excellence framework (REF) being drawn by the UK higher education funding councils and as part of their evaluation of proposals. Speakers include academy members Chris Bellamy, Phil Cowley, Elliot Stern and Peter Taylor-Gooby, Higher Education Funding Council for England REF project manager Graeme Rosenberg and Economic and Social Research Council director of policy of administration Phil Sooben.

For more information or to download a booking form, please visit www.acss.org.uk



Library series: texts cover spatial planning theory and practice

Bristol project accolade sets area empowerment example

A community group set up by Planning Aid now has a key voice in shaping development, says *Barry Pearce*

A community-based project in Bristol set up by South West Planning Aid (SWPA) made it all the way to the finals of this year's Homes and Communities Academy Awards celebrating sustainability innovations. While Lockleaze Voice did not win the Empowering Communities category, its inclusion in the short-listed six of 58 entries shows the esteem in which Planning Aid is held nationally and the value of its work.

The neighbourhood planning group was set up in 2007 on a former council estate to give those living and working in the area an opportunity to influence changes being pressed on them by outside forces, especially housing development. SWPA was there to kick-start the group and introduce the community to the complex but important world of planning.

Now Lockleaze Voice has started to take responsibility for its own actions and develop its own momentum. Two years since it was formed, it has had a big impact on local planning applications and, understanding that decisions need to be planned, even has its own community plan prepared in partnership with Bristol City Council.

The council has been very supportive. In sponsoring the award entry, it said: "Lockleaze Voice has become a key partner in shaping the investment and development commitments in the area. Being promoted by SWPA, it means that the forum is independent from the council. This provides both residents and the local authority with a vital and impartial mechanism for discussing how we plan the future of this part of Bristol together."



Award ceremony: category finalist

The idea of a neighbourhood forum is not new, so Lockleaze Voice may not sound particularly groundbreaking. However, Lockleaze is not a well-heeled community with a host of amenity societies and residents' groups to press their case. It had little previous record of community involvement in local affairs. It was an area that had become classically disempowered.

This is being turned around, not via the usual route of a short-term government agency injections of cash and officer-led teams taking over planning but by the community itself, with help from SWPA, working for the long haul in a genuinely bottom-up co-operative style.

Planning needs to be not just for the public but with the public. Just maybe, as the judges of the awards seem to have found, a community-led approach of the Lockleaze Voice kind is where planning has to be.

Barry Pearce is a community planner and regional manager of SWPA.

RTPI Bulletin Board

Events

Summer Reception

6 July. RTPI West Midlands. Erasmus Darwin House, Beacon Street, Lichfield.
A drinks reception and presentation of RTPI West Midlands Planning Achievement Awards at Erasmus Darwin House will be followed by a guided walking tour of Lichfield, before returning for supper.
Cost: £16; £11 for students and licentiates.
To book, please visit www.rtpi.org.uk/ct/EVENT/788/11/events/788

Perfect Presentations

7 July. RTPI. The Hatton, 51-53 Hatton Garden, London.
This highly practical seminar, conducted by Nick Blasdale from PPM Training, aims to develop skills to handle demanding presentation situations. The emphasis is on structured techniques and the development of self-confidence. Delegates will learn the golden rules for conveying information, blending sight and sound, simplifying messages, holding interest and maintaining personal impact. They will be led through seven steps for designing high-impact presentations, learning how to get the most from their voice, how best to use visual aids, how to handle interactions and questions and how to understand an audience, as well as finding out strategies for controlling nerves, channelling energy and presenting to small groups and individuals.
Cost: £469 + VAT; RTPI members £369 + VAT; licentiates, unemployed and retired £120 + VAT.
For more information and to book, please visit www.rtpi.org.uk/ct/EVENT/762/11/events/762

Section 106 Agreements — Time for Review?

29 July. RTPI development management network. Town Hall, Tunbridge Wells.
This event will discuss ways forward with section 106 agreements in the light of the current financial climate. Views from local authority and private perspectives will be heard and there will be the opportunity to discuss ideas with fellow network members.
Cost: Free.
For more information, please email rhian.brimble@rtpi.org.uk

Thinking Smart First — Making Sustainable Transport Work

17 July. Highways Agency, Lateral, 8 City Walk, Leeds.
This half-day session is a free opportunity for continuing professional development. It will provide an insight into the DfT's latest guidance on travel plans and the planning process, the Highways Agency and regional dimensions, key case studies including details of area-wide and residential travel plans and their contribution to sustainable travel. Speakers include Sheila Holden, author of DfT travel plans guidance, Highways Agency influencing travel behaviour programme manager Graham Riley, Yorkshire Forward senior transport manager Jonathan Brown and Mouchel smarter choice technical director Jon Harris.
Cost: Free.
For more information, please email natalie.barnham@mouchel.com



RTPI
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UPDATED FOR 2009

4th Annual Understanding the Design Appraisal Process Conference

14 July 2009 • London

- Delivering genuine sustainability in the built environment
- The importance of 'placemaking'
- Beyond eco-towns – learning from Europe
- Planning in the historic context
- Values and quality – assessing sustainable urbanism
- It's public realm – but is it any good?
- Building for life

Chair: Jon Rowland, Principal, Jon Rowland Urban Design



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