



RTPI

mediation of space - making of place

PLANNING POLICY AND PRACTICE @ RTPI: 2009

PPPC09/24

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POLICY PRIORITIES AND PARTY CONFERENCE FEEDBACK

Report by Matt Thomson, Head of Policy & Practice

Recommendation:

The committee is asked to consider the approach to prioritising the policy function's workload outlined below, and consider approving a set of initial priorities for the function to work with.

1. Background

- 1.1 A long-standing need for the RTPI's policy function to more clearly focus and openly state its activities is being heightened by the loss of "corporate memory" caused by the departures of Robert Upton and Rynd Smith.
- 1.2 Activities such as preparing a RTPI manifesto for planning (see tomorrow's *Planning* magazine) and influencing the thinking of the main political parties prior to a general election, have confirmed that the Institute's policy positions on any number of planning issues need to be formally agreed and made explicit, and that key objectives of the Institute need to be prioritised.
- 1.3 This paper begins to set out a roadmap to prioritisation, and seeks committee members' views on the priorities identified. At this stage, the committee is asked to consider the issues that the Institute would most wish to promote.
- 1.4 This consideration will need to be followed up in due course by identification and approval of:
 - A set of RTPI policy positions on each priority issue; and
 - Work priorities: the prioritisation of particular projects.
- 1.5 The approach to priorities identified through this paper and discussion at PPC will go on for further debate in a broader context at General Assembly on 14 October. The intention of the discussion at GA is to further focus these priorities into objectives for the Institute to seek to embed in the main political parties' thinking on planning in the run-up to a general election, starting with the proposed hustings in the afternoon of 14 October.
- 1.6 It is not intended that discussion either at PPC or GA should necessarily identify or set the priority of particular work projects, but should begin to define the criteria on which such projects should be

prioritised. Ongoing work on the Institute's corporate and business plans will also need to be taken into account.

1.7 A verbal update on progress with the party conferences will be given at the meeting.

2. Context for priorities

1.8 This report builds on discussion of the principles of priorities between Rynd Smith, Jenny Crawford, Trish Cookson and Matt Thomson. That discussion resulted in identification of priorities broader than simply the Institute's policy function, however, many of which would be beyond the direct remit of this report, and so this paper focuses on those priorities most relevant to policy work.

1.9 The priorities discussed below are not formed in a vacuum, and flow from a number of key published RTPI statements of intent. The main inputs into the process so far are as follows.

- The object of the RTPI from our Royal Charter: "*to advance the science and art of planning (including town & country and spatial planning) for the benefit of the public*" – our actions should both promote and progress the activity of planning in the public interest.
- The 2001 "New Vision" set out principles for spatial planning, and our work should demonstrably advance these:
 - SPATIAL - dealing with the unique needs and characteristics of places
 - SUSTAINABLE - looking at the short, medium and long term consideration of social, economic and environmental effects
 - INTEGRATIVE - in terms of the knowledge, objectives and actions involved
 - INCLUSIVE - recognising the wide range of people involved in planning
 - VALUE-DRIVEN - concerned with identifying, understanding and mediating conflicting sets of values
 - ACTION-ORIENTED - driven by the twin activities of mediating space and making of place.
- The 2009 Seven Commitments on Climate Change give a specific policy context that should be mainstreamed into all policy work:
 - 1 Promote behavioural change
 - 2 Adapt existing places
 - 3 Work towards responsive legislation and policies
 - 4 Improve current practice
 - 5 Celebrate best practice
 - 6 Compile a compendium of best practice
 - 7 Develop climate change education and skills.
- Finally, although the idea was put together hurriedly for display panels at the 2009 Planning Convention and as such has no formal status, the five pillars of "Your RTPI", give a clear direction to what the Institute as a whole aims to achieve:
 - Empowering communities
 - Raising standards
 - Supporting members
 - Shaping policy
 - Developing knowledge

1.10 Those activities that perform best against these principles should be the ones that are prioritised by the Institute.

- 1.11 In taking this approach, it is hoped that the RTPI will be able to focus its policy function on achieving outcomes that deliver good quality, sustainable spatial planning that is accessible to and responsive to the communities it affects, and, above all, enables planners – our members – to work effectively, with confidence, and free from unnecessary obstacles.

3. The policy function

- 1.12 The RTPI's policy function's main role is to deliver the "shaping policy" pillar of the RTPI's work. It is successful in doing this, both proactively – through stakeholder liaison activities, for example – and reactively – through policy and legislative consultations.
- 1.13 The reactive element has a tendency to dominate, because it often seems more urgent and tangible, driven as it is by headlines and deadlines. Because consultations are often very complex and high profile, they can distract attention from more strategic work, even though the potential outcome of a consultation may be less effective and may have less relevance to planners in the workplace.
- 1.14 The proactive element is, however, often more effective, with officers working behind the scenes before a policy is published for consultation. This does, however, require a greater clarity of purpose and understanding of the Institute's broad position on matters before an individual can have the confidence to influence the thinking of a government department.

4. Priority issues

- 1.15 It is suggested that the committee initially identifies a limited number of principles for spatial planning that it would wish to focus on promoting through its policy function. These could be selected from the menu below, or through further suggestions from the floor.
- a. **Effective national planning:** a national spatial planning framework for England and the UK to enable proper national and international investment decisions in the national interest.
 - b. **Effective strategic planning:** addressing the need for some decisions to be made at a larger than local level: meeting the needs of local communities and communities broader than local.
 - c. **Mainstreaming climate change mitigation and adaptation:** delivering the Seven Commitments, and also working to resolve conflicts between climate change/carbon reduction priorities and other aspects of sustainable development, including natural and built heritage.
 - d. **Enabling delivery of housing to meet need:** this may be more than a single priority in that it covers addressing the current economics of housing supply; identifying 21st century mechanisms for providing affordable housing; developing better methods for assessing housing need and demand; better communicating the need for housing to communities and the benefits it brings.
 - e. **Enabling delivery of infrastructure:** another potentially multiple priority: ensuring the system for planning and delivering nationally significant infrastructure (NSIPs, NPSs) is robust and accountable; ensuring mechanisms for planning for and funding local and sub-regional infrastructure (infrastructure plans, CIL) are robust and accountable and mainstreamed into spatial planning.

- f. **Planning for economic recovery:** Identifying the tools necessary for planning to assist with bringing forward the upturn in economic activity necessary to climb out of recession, and to create a sustainable basis for the economy post-recession.
- g. **Tackling over-regulation, process-focus and jargon in the planning system:** Working with government and its agencies to reduce the burden of bureaucracy in all aspects of planning to enable practitioners to get on with their jobs of meaningfully engaging with communities to creatively make sustainable and high quality places.
- h. **Delivering quality development:** Defining what constitutes quality development; resolving conflicts between e.g. energy performance, security, local distinctiveness and heritage; working with other built environment professions to promote solutions.
- i. **Communicating the value of planning to society:** Explicitly demonstrating the added value that planning brings to the economy, environment, people's quality of life, meeting the needs of communities and balancing their competing demands.
- j. **Achieving integration of planning and related systems:** Working to reduce unnecessary duplication in the activities linked to spatial planning, including sharing evidence and consultation, and integrating planning, heritage, building regulations, environmental health and licensing regimes where appropriate.
- k. **Communicating the meaning of "spatial planning" and promoting its values:** Demystifying and mainstreaming the concept of spatial planning; focusing the public consciousness onto plan-making.
- l. **Communicating the meaning of "development management" and promoting its values:** Resolving the conflict between the government/profession expectation of development management with communities' continued expectations of development control.

5. Using priorities

- 1.16 Once priorities have been identified and approved, they can be used in two ways.
- 1.17 Firstly, in identifying which projects to prioritise, whether through business planning or on an *ad hoc* basis, it is anticipated that the policy function would assess projects against the priorities identified, and focus efforts on those projects – including consultations – that represent the most effective means of delivering on those priorities.
- 1.18 Secondly, in undertaking projects (and in work generally) the priorities can be used by way of a checklist to ensure that as many of the Institute's objectives as is practicable are promoted through our work.