

South West Policy & Media Officer Update Report – 25 September 2009

Introduction

This summer has seen the now customary flood of government planning documentation. Consultation reports, new, final policy and procedural guidance, directives and just 'information' have covered, amongst other things, Eco-towns, renewable energy, planning for the historic environment, planning for coastal change, planning application processes (in the wake of the Killian Pretty Review), the new Community Infrastructure Levy, the IPC and Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, regional strategies and the appointment of Leaders' Boards, local authorities and Local Strategic Partnerships in England, and the proposed Local Economic Assessments. Covering each of these fully would require an over-lengthy report, so I have attempted to focus as far as possible on implications for the South West. Firstly however, we will look 'closer to home' at the Institute's planning and climate change initiative; SW Regional Strategy implementation work, airport development proposals in the region, planning for climate change in the region and Eco-towns and the South West.

Planning to live with Climate Change – the 7 Commitments

Members will probably now have had time to absorb the details of the '7 Commitments' (published in mid June '09) which emerged as a result, in part, of the consultation exercise to which the RTPI SW contributed. Somewhat hidden away amongst much other material on climate change on the Institute's website is an 11 page report providing a summary of the consultation findings. It is not that easy to relate this back to the (lengthy) consultation document published in February eg. the four sets of 'specific questions' posed at the end, but clearly there was a certain urgency about 'honing down' the 60 or so potential actions in time for a high profile launch at the Planning Convention in June. This Commitments document is seen very much as a first stage in the process of producing an Action Plan for the 'new vision' which will see some, if not all, of the actions incorporated as part of 'an intensive and fertile period of business and project plan development to take forward' many of the proposals put forward by Institute members. From an RTPI SW point of view, the emergence of such a national business plan can be seen as both positive and most welcome.

The South West RSS

I reported in July on the reasons for the delay in publication of the 'final' RSS. At the time of writing the present report however there had been no further word from DCLG on the matter, which can only serve to fuel further speculation about a need to make significant changes in the light of the legal challenges to the RSS's in the East of England and the South East.

Meanwhile, the ways in which the RTPI SW might contribute to the on-going regional policy process is gradually emerging as a result of a meeting I had with Stuart Todd of SW Councils at the end of July. The Monitoring Implications Report and [Regional Strategy] Implementation Plan are both expected to 'rolled out' in draft in stages this Autumn by SW Councils and we expect to have an opportunity to comment on these in due course. As yet, there is no 'public face' of the proposed new Single Regional Strategy. Further, more formal RTPI involvement will be dependent on the work currently going on jointly by SW Councils and the RDA to produce a 'stakeholder consultation plan'. The intention here is to broaden the network of contacts, which could well include arrangements for professional bodies to act as 'sounding boards'. In all of this some delicate politics has already been involved in dissolving the former close working relationship to the process previously enjoyed by the 34 members of the Regional Assembly representing the social, environmental and economic partners. This group has been re-badged 'SW Partners', but will have consultee status only in future. In the meantime on the strategy implantation front, a further programme of 'Planning for Growth & Delivery' events, which will involve government departments and key agencies is planned and to with the RTPI SW is to be alerted.

The Government's growing concern about the strategic policy 'delivery' is now reflected in the South West by an RDA led initiative which seeks to build up a picture of 'capacity' available among public sector, private sector and professional bodies to best achieve regional objectives on the growth and new housing delivery in particular. Having provided information on the roles and responsibilities of the RTPI SW, including projects in which we are currently involved, I attended a meeting in Bristol on 13 July at which plans were discussed to produce a brochure for local authorities on what services and funding are available and to use memoranda of understanding (as used in the South East) between funders and their attendant bodies/agencies to improve working together. As an

attempt to produce more joined-up funding and policy implementation such an initiative is welcome, though the nature of any continuing role in this for the RTPi SW is as yet unclear.

Airport development in the South West

The national media, both popular and technical (with the notable exception of 'Planning') generally sees airport development 'planning battles' as being centred on Heathrow, Stansted and Gatwick. Whilst major airport related development proposals at Exeter are currently being taken through the planning process reasonably smoothly, a significant 'battle' is looming elsewhere in the region. Bristol International's £150m expansion proposals were formally submitted to North Somerset Council in early August. These plans would see the airport's capacity increased from the current level of 6 million passengers per annum to 10 mppa. Though the principle of expansion here has already been agreed by central government (Airports White Paper 2003 & 2006 Review), there is serious concern locally, with both Bristol City Council and BANES registering their opposition to the plans: in the latter case against officers' recommendation!

Planning for climate change in the South West

Hard on the heels of the publication, in mid June, of the latest UK Climate Change Projections (UKCP09, from DEFRA) and a report on the Government's Climate Change Adaptation Programme, have come the publication, on 15 July, of the 'UK Renewable Energy Strategy 2009' and the 'UK Low Carbon Transition Plan'. Within these are 'route maps' meeting targets to increase the amount of renewable energy and reducing emissions and further support for Planning Performance Agreements for renewable and low carbon energy applications. Some might argue that these sit somewhat uncomfortably with the advice from Steve Quartermain, also issued in mid-June, that the new projections, in themselves, 'should not require regional and local plan-making to be slowed down or decisions on planning applications to be deferred'. Nevertheless, these are all reminders of the very important emerging role for strategic planning in all this.

In the South West, the challenge is being taken up by the recently agreed Climate Change Action Plan, a continuing programme of workshops across the region organised by bodies such as RegenSW and, as reported in my July report, the SWRIEP funded Climate Change Support [for local planning authorities] Project, which has now reached the stage of considering consultants' bids for key aspects of the work. (the contact for this is jane.lavick@swcouncils.gov.uk).

Eco-towns and the South West

On 16 July a further raft of Eco-towns material was published by DCLG: to be exact, the final 'PPS: Eco-towns – A supplement to PPS1' and five other related documents, including a 'Location decision statement' listing just four schemes which have made it through the process to this stage. The Institute's national response was one of both relief and general support. Suggesting that 'common sense had finally prevailed', it applauded the evidence that the Government had made significant efforts to respond to the many concerns raised in the various consultations. [as members will recall, the consultation response submitted to Botolph Lane by the RTPi SW featured significantly in the national submission subsequently made at the end of April jointly by the RTPi & CIH!] At the same time, the Institute remains concerned that 'measures to monitor and manage transport-related carbon emissions still lack vigour'

The really significant news for the South West however is that the St Austell China Clay Community is one of the four schemes still in the running. (the others are Whitehill-Bordon, Rackheath and North West Bicester) This will no doubt have been welcomed by many in Cornwall: not least because of the major economic regeneration and environmental improvement opportunities offered. At the same time, the scheme's place in this final shortlist could be seen as surprising, since not only is it likely to prove one of the most costly in terms of the public sector financial input required, it is also probably the most complex – involving a cluster of 'mini settlements' rather than a single one.

However, high on the list of 'positive' factors underlying this latest short-listing process, has been evidence of local authority and local community support for a particular scheme and which the China Clay Community generally has. There is also now to be more tangible central government financial support for eco-town development in the form of a £60m 'Eco-towns fund', details of which, including the proposed bidding process, were announced on 17 August. The CCC will thus be able to bid for a share of this fund, together with the other

three short-listed schemes based on the submission of an 'Eco-town Programme of Development. The existing local communities in the area will no doubt be pleased to note that this Programme has to include 'consideration of projects which would enable the existing community to better prepare for eco-town development'.

Summer 2009 central government consultations etc – in order of publication

- 15 July UK Renewable Energy Strategy 2009
UK Low Carbon Transition Plan
Renewable Energy Capacity in RSS's: Final Report
- 16 July PPS : Eco-towns – A supplement to PPS 1
Eco-towns : Location decision statement [the latest shortlist of four]
Eco-towns : Draft PPS – summary of consultation responses [an impressive consultant's report on the 7,600 responses]
Eco-towns : Sustainability Appraisal & Habitats Regulations
Assessment of the draft PPS + Addendum to same
Impact Assessment – PPS : Eco-towns
- 20 July Consultation paper on a new planning policy on development and coastal change [physical]. Closes 12 October **Comments please**
- 24 July Consultation paper on a new PPS 15 : Planning for the Historic Environment. Closes 30 October .
Comments please
- 30 July Planning applications etc ex Killian Pretty Review process :-

Taking Forward the Government's response to the KP Review: Progress report
Improving Permitted Development : Consultation Closes 23 October **Comments please**
Streamlining information requirements for planning applications
Consultation Closes 23 October **Comments please**
Publicity for planning applications : Consultation **Comments please**

Benchmarking the costs to applicants of submitting a planning application. [for guidance/information]
- 30 July Community Infrastructure Levy

Detailed proposals and draft regulations for the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy :
Consultation Closes 23 October [160 pages about the new levy to come into force in April 2010].
Comments please

Proposed Community Infrastructure Levy : Consultation Partial Impact Assessment [a further 24 pages, for information]

Proposed Community Infrastructure Levy : Consultation – Reference Documents [for information]
- 6 Aug Policy Statement on [the new single] Regional Strategies and Guidance on the establishment of [local authority] Leaders' Boards. DCLG Consultation Closes 30 October [61 pages dealing with process, the implementation of Part 5 of the LDED&C Bill, schemes for the establishment of Leaders' Boards & sustainability appraisal of the strategies. Annex 1 contains the 'bones' of the new strategies which are to have six main principles. Final Policy Statement will replace PPS 11] **Comments please**
- 11 Aug Consultation on proposed amendments to PPS 25 : Development & Flood Risk.
- 8 Sept The new Infrastructure Planning Commission system

A raft of documents dealing with the definition of key infrastructure projects ; the 11 proposed new National Policy Statements (covering Energy, transport and water & waste infrastructure respectively) including the consultation arrangements for their preparation between the end of 2009 and 2011 ; and how the IPC (based in Bristol) will examine and decide appropriate applications. Independent advice on the whole process is to be available (to qualifying individuals or groups) from RTPI Planning Aid, which has already worked with the Government to produce an 8 page 'glossy' leaflet on the subject. [the full details are set out in the Planning Act 2008 Chapter 29]

This is all intended to both speed up and simplify the system for dealing with such applications, but the sheer complexity of what is proposed suggests that the new Commissioners (including of course former RTPI Secretary General Robert Upton) will find this quite a challenge and that Planning Aid's advice will be much in demand !

This is not a 'consultation' but comments are welcome please.

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September 2009**