

The Royal Town Planning Institute believes that the 2007 White Paper on planning provides a unique opportunity to consolidate and take forward the significant developments made in the culture and practice of spatial planning. It must send a clear and unequivocal message that the Government sees spatial planning as a key part of the solution in addressing the major national issues of climate change, equitable economic growth, urban and rural regeneration, social cohesion and environmental enhancement. It must reinforce the fact that the new planning is now about delivery – it is not about process, it is about outcomes

The RTPI looks to the White Paper to embody the findings of the Barker Land Use Review that, in the words of the Secretary of State, *planning is a valued and necessary activity that can deliver positive economic outcomes, alongside important social and environmental objectives*. It needs to demonstrate the contribution of spatial planning in fulfilling local government's new role in 'place-shaping' and, importantly, the recognition by the Stern report on the *Economics of Climate Change* that planning is one of four key policy areas in the Government's fight against climate change.

The RTPI has commissioned University College London and Deloitte to study *Effective Practice in Spatial Planning*. A summary of this is in the delegates pack. This describes the operation of a planning system that is very far removed from the negative images promoted by those whose blinkered self interest cannot accept the reality of a reformed system. The RTPI commends this report both to Government and to those who care not only about the future of planning but about the ability of this nation to achieve democratic sustainable development.

The last thing communities and local authorities need is further uncertainty due to threats of further significant reform of the planning system. However, the RTPI recognises that further incremental development of the system is needed, and is working with the Government on specific proposals to carry forward reform. The White Paper needs to set any such proposals firmly within the context of a clear Government understanding of the purpose and potential of spatial planning.

The RTPI looks to the White Paper to deal with ten issues with which we have particular concerns.

- **Tackle Climate Change – don't argue over Green Belts**

The RTPI welcomes the CLG's emerging messages on planning and climate change. Planning is one of the few policy areas that can help both the mitigation of, and adaption to, climate change. If it is to reach its full potential, however, it must engage more fully in the management of demand rather than in the regulation of supply. For example, the RTPI has argued for that green belt boundaries must not be seen as sacrosanct. They need to be transformed into areas which make a positive contribution to urban renaissance and the enhancement of quality environments.

- **Democracy, Strategy and Major Infrastructure Proposals**

We welcome moves to provide a more effective way of deciding on major infrastructure proposals. We believe that any proposals must clearly embody the ability to challenge the need for schemes – rather than just their impact. The system must involve clarity and comprehensiveness of the policy framework within which decisions are made; clear accountability of those informing and making decisions; a transparent process with clear opportunities for public involvement; an articulated distinction between matters of national and local relevance; and evidence-based decisions. Importantly, we believe that the policy framework for decision making will need a clear understanding and expression of the spatial differences and impacts of those policies.

- **Presumption in Favour of Policy**

The RTPI opposes any move away from a plan-led system and, in particular, the Barker Review proposal for a presumption in favour of development in certain circumstances. We would simply point to another part of this report which states, '*While it might be thought that a system based on a presumption in favour of development would support economic growth better than one based on plans, this plan-led approach is to be supported as it provides an effective balance between certainty and flexibility.*' We trust that the Government will take this message on board and not progress any proposals for a presumption in favour of development. The uncertainty caused by an appeal-led approach to land release is the antithesis of good planning – the Barker recommendation risks a return to that system.

- **Community Choice and Competition**

We believe that spatial planning has the key role to play in achieving the types of development that people really want. This extends to encouraging a range of easily accessible shopping. The policy of revitalising town centres has been one of planning's successes and the RTPI cannot understand why the Barker Land Use Review, which champions the cause of fair competition, should risk throwing this away by abandoning a needs test for shopping developments. This is likely to compound the issues of monopolistic tendencies.

- **Funding Sustainable Communities**

There is an urgent need to develop an effective system of funding the infrastructure that turns bleak development into sustainable communities. Our commitment to this principle is unwavering, but on the basis of past experience and of current practice we do not believe that Planning Gain Supplement is that system. Nor do we believe that the Barker recommendations on direct developer payments to communities or 'side-payments' to individuals form part of a reasoned approach to this issue. We urge that the White Paper does not include these. Not only does this approach raise concerns of perceptions of probity but, more widely, there is the need for an innovative approach that aligns the spending cycles of local authorities and other bodies with spatial plans so that these become local investment strategies.

- **Measuring Outcomes – not Processes**

The RTPI has long campaigned against the pernicious regime of process-based targets and is pleased to be working closely with Communities and Local Government to develop outcome-based measures of planning. These must be reflected in the reduced number of performance indicators promised in the local government White Paper. More immediately, we would strongly advocate the commonplace adoption of Planning Delivery Agreements as the most effective means of bringing certainty and mutual endeavour to the processing of major applications.

- **Resourcing Planning**

Spatial planning cannot achieve its potential whilst it remains under-resourced. The RTPI has welcomed the Government's programmes to increase resources through the Planning Development Grant and fee regime, but the fact remains that the investment required to meet the demands of delivery expected of Local Planning Authorities, - revamping plans and meeting deadlines - significantly exceeds the resources currently available to them. We call for enhanced funding for the planning service and look forward to working with the CLG to support their efforts to achieve this in this year's Spending Review.

- **Putting Communities at the Heart of Planning**

The RTPI is at the forefront of community involvement through its Planning Aid Service and its Community Planning Project. On the basis of this experience, we urge the Government not to change the requirements for community involvement in plans until it has achieved the consolidated approach to consultation recommended in the Local Government White Paper. To remove one stage of participation now – in advance of wider changes being implemented - would be short-sighted and potentially harmful to the credibility and effectiveness of the system.

- **Integrated Integration**

The RTPI is leading the way in providing guidance on how planning can work with Local Strategic Partnerships and integrate with Sustainable Communities Strategies and Area Agreements. The guide written for Communities and Local Government – *Planning Together* - is to be launched on 31st January. The planning White Paper must build on the integrated approach set out in the Local Government White Paper and reflect the messages in *Planning Together*.

- **Professionalism and Changing Culture**

With over 20,000 members in spatial planning, the RTPI is a leading culture change within planning. We believe that the attributes of professionalism – including championing of equality and community involvement, a reliance on evidence and an ethical approach – is at the heart of this change. We welcome moves to recognise the status of the Chief Planner in local government and are taking our own positive steps to enhance skills through, for example, our Learning Partners scheme.

The RTPI looks forward to working closely with Government departments to achieve a White Paper and any subsequent legislation that embodies the new roles, status and potential of spatial planning - in the planning system's Diamond Jubilee year.

To find out more about the RTPI's position on the White Paper and to join in the debate - visit our new website at www.rtpi.org.uk or e.mail policy@rtpi.org.uk.