

South West Policy & Media Officer - Update Report

Introduction

This first report includes brief items on another new PPS; further Government announcements and development guidance on Eco-towns ; feedback on the most recent CIC South West Committee meeting and feedback on the SWHI 'Housing Summit' .

Eco-towns

The initiative gained a slightly different complexion at the end of November, with the announcement, by Planning Minister John Healey, of a 'second wave' of four schemes, all backed by the relevant local authorities, with a closer than hitherto relationship to emerging development plan policies and not free-standing. This goes some way towards meeting RTPI criticisms about Eco-towns' transport links and their being non-plan led. At the beginning of December, further Government supported guidance was published by the TCPA in the form of an 'Energy Worksheet' on 'Developing Energy Efficient & Zero Carbon Strategies for Eco-towns' intended to help developers, planners and those who will 'manage' these new settlements. In addition to DCLG and DECC, some 19 different bodies have apparently had a hand in this so the range of current expertise probably can't be faulted !

'**PPS 4 Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth**' was issued by DCLG at the end of December. Probably the first real evidence of PPS rationalisation, co-ordination and shortening, its 37 pages replace the former 'PPG 4 Industrial, Commercial Development and Small Firms' 1992 ; 'PPG 5 Simplified Planning Zones' also 1992 ; 'PPS 6 Planning for Town Centres' 2005 ; and, the economic development sections of 'PPS 7 Sustainable Development in Rural Areas' 2004. Published at the same time were a summary of the 472 responses to the PPS 4 Draft issued back in May and 'related practice guidance' on 'need, impact and the sequential approach' when planning for town centres and a PPS 4 Impact Assessment – so actually, almost 250 pages in total. The town centres guidance features a controversial new 'impact test' to replace the previous 'needs test' approach.

CIC South West

The profile of the RTPI SW within this particular regional body was maintained on 2 December at a committee meeting, followed by a special exhibition and reception at the Architecture Centre in Bristol, marking the 175th anniversaries of both the RIBA and the CIOB. Matters discussed at the meeting included the contrasting ways in which member bodies both respond to the policy consultations of others (eg central government) and develop and promote policies of their own. It emerged however that, not only was the CIC active in promoting its own policies, but it had also already produced a new general election 'Manifesto for the Built Environment' and had for some time been producing schools careers packs. There was reference to the planned CIC SW 'political debate' (18 March 2010, Exeter) and to the need to organise a 'young professionals' cross-disciplinary event (based possibly on the RICS Matrix format) and to identify a young professional contact within each member body. The next Committee meeting is scheduled for 18 March '09, in Exeter.

South West Housing Initiative 'Housing Summit 2010'

On 15 January, Brett Spiller, Jean Marshall, Bob Maynard and your Policy & Media Officer, attended the SWHI's first 'Summit' conference at Sandy Park, Exeter, together with some 160 other delegates and speakers. In a very full programme, a morning of high level speakers, including Robert Napier the national Chair of the HCA, Stuart Whitfield, SW Chair of the CBI, Matthew Taylor MP(now very much a rural housing/economy expert !) and John Howell MP (joint author of the soon to be published Conservative Green Paper on Planning) rammed home the extent of the house building 'crisis' in general and affordability in particular. There was also the not insignificant matter of 'changing the mind set ' of nimby councillors ! The afternoon session comprised an interesting collection of eight different 'housing accolade' presentations which, in their various ways, gave a much more optimistic picture of what can be achieved, at the local level, by professionals and others to address this 'crisis'. Included in these was the RTPI South West's 'accolade' for the 'Infrastructure Planning Advice Note' of the SW Strategic Leaders' Board and SW Councils, introduced by Brett. Jean Marshall was at the receiving end of an accolade, on behalf of South Somerset District Council, for an 'exemplar' affordable housing scheme planning application process in Yeovil. Apart from the mindset issue mentioned above, if one theme emerged supreme from the day it was the importance of partnership in finding solutions

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