



RTPI

mediation of space · making of place

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Albert Joyce
Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Zone 1 A/1
London SW1E 5DU

Email response sent to: StatCons@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Dear Mr Joyce,

RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION PAPER: Improving engagement by statutory and non-statutory consultees

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the above. The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) is a membership organisation representing over 22,000 spatial planners. It exists to advance the science and art of town planning for the benefit of the public.

This response has been formed drawing together member views from the RTPI Development Management and Development Planning Networks, the National Association for Planning Enforcement, and individual member responses.

The RTPI supported the basis for the Killian Pretty review as an essential means of delivering detail in the government's response to recommendations in the Barker 2 report around development management. The RTPI commenced its response to the call for solutions by indicating its strong support for the identification and smoothing away of avoidable obstacles in the development management process.

In initially responding to the Killian Pretty review to its members, the RTPI made clear that whilst it is important that decisions are made promptly, the planning system should be judged by the quality of its outcomes, not just the speed with which those outcomes are delivered. The products of planning decisions, places and spaces and the buildings and landscapes that form them typically last for generations. Ultimately, their worth will be measured against their value to the community over their lifespan, not whether individual buildings gained approval within specified targets.

The Killian-Pretty Review recognised the willingness of planners in the public and the private sectors to do their best to deliver good and timely decisions, which create positive places for people. To date we have lacked a clear and systematic thinking between Government legislation and targets and the planning process which has been equally damaging to businesses, developers, councils and households. A simpler, more streamlined planning system is imperative especially given the challenging economic climate.

The RTPI supports the draft policy statement to improve engagement of statutory and non-statutory consultees as it provides a clear, succinct set of principles and policies to guide the consultation phase of the development process for consultees.

Consultation responses can be a significant cause for delay in the decision making process and the importance of the timeliness of responses should be emphasised. We support the timeframes for consultees to respond to LPAs to ensure that decisions are made in a timely and efficient manner and to reduce public sector resources. However, it is important for responses to planning applications to provide the most robust information/advice on a development proposal and therefore it is right that statutory consultees are able to extend the timeframe for responding where they genuinely require additional time.

With regard to the consultee's role in the planning process, the RTPI propose that this is where targets could be useful as there is a need to encourage consultees to become more involved in the full range of consultation processes, particularly in pre-application discussions for major applications.

It is acknowledged that there can be inconsistent approaches to pre-application discussions between different regional teams of the same national agency (i.e. Environment Agency, Highways Agency). Therefore, it is important for the statutory consultee to make clear their scope of involvement upfront as some anecdotal evidence suggests they can sometimes provide views outside their remit which may conflict with other advice. In this case, the consultation document provides for consultees to provide information up-front and the RTPI supports this objective.

The extent to which consultees are embracing the concept of development management should be acknowledged and the RTPI is committed to providing guidance and support for practitioners to migrate to this thinking. The emphasis appears to remain on Local Planning Authorities however; we believe further emphasis of the role of consultees should be made. The willingness of some consultees to engage in the pre-application process, and the quality of advice offered in some circumstances is highlighted as a significant concern.

The RTPI supports the use of CON6 in the consultation document, subject to the continuing use of the term 'objection' in appropriate circumstances. The continued use of the term 'objection' is considered desirable due to the clarity it provides for decision makers and for the purposes of calling-in applications. The use of comments to amplify and quantify comments, as outlined, is nevertheless supported.

The use of the term 'no objection', when this is provided by consultees or a County Council, can be an issue due to the resultant weakening of any subsequent decision taken by the decision making authority. In this case an amplified comment would be more effective. The use of 'holding objections' not only distorts response statistics but also causes delays in the decision making process. There should be a presumption against this practice.

The need to provide consultees with reasoning for consultation is not questioned; however e-planning provisions require attention to support such a demand. In addition, the RTPI are concerned that current systems do not allow for sufficient automated flexibility to enable this measure to be introduced without a significant administrative burden.

The RTPI supports the principle of the proposed code of practice, but feels that more clarity and detail in guidance and best practice should be provided, having particular regard to the role of consultees in the development management process.

If you require any further assistance, please contact Rebecca Coates, Planning Policy Officer on 020 7929 9466 or email rebecca.coates@rtpi.org.uk.

Yours Sincerely,



Matt Thomson
Acting Director Policy and Partnerships