

The Regional Planning vacuum : issues & opportunities

Dr Geoff Walker

RTPI SW Policy & Media Officer

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Structure

- Some context
- A little Regional Planning history nationally
- Regional Planning in the South West
- The 'vacuum' without an alternative – the RTPI response
- Issues – questions and matters of concern
- Opportunities – nationally and within the South West
- Where to now ?

Some context

- A South West RSS abolished before its even been completed !
- Some will feel hugely frustrated. Others have started to celebrate
- Early days and little detail as yet , so an initial response
- An English matter (not London).Scotland, Wales & NI still have strategic/ 'regional' systems in place.
- Its all up to the LDF's now, where some positive signs nationally, though problems in the SW.

Regional Planning history nationally

- A concept with changing fortunes, with successive Governments 'blowing hot and cold'
- A difficult concept for 'public' engagement. Most think and respond in local terms and cannot identify with a 'region' (or even a County)
- 1960's – 1970's Regional economic plans, early 'planning conferences', sub- regional studies and Structure Plans
- 1980's – the 'wilderness years'
- 1990's – start of the revival, Regional Planning Guidance & Structure Plan reprieve (SWRPC 1989 ->>)
- 1998 – RDA's Act includes Regional Assemblies. Labour's 'regional agenda
- 2004 - P&CP Act ->> Regional Spatial Strategies (in 8 Regions)
- 2007 - The Sub-national Review (more houses !!)
- 2008 - Planning Act introduces a 'parallel' system (NPS / IPC)
- 2009 - Local Dem, Econ Dev & Cons. Act introduces new regional mechanisms and Single [integrated] Strategies
- 2010 - Regional Planning abolition based on 'Open Source Planning'

Regional Planning in the South West

- Early 1960's – northern area LPA's and Devon and Cornwall CC's separately consider growth problems
- 1967 – SWEPC's 'A Region with a Future'.
- 1971 - 'Sevenside : A feasibility study' DOE/Welsh Office
- 1974 – SWEPC's 'A strategic settlement pattern for the South West'
- 1989 – South West Regional Planning Conference
- 1993 – Conference's 'Regional Strategy for the South West'
- 1994 & 2001- first and second versions of RPG 10
- 2000_- Conference gives way to SW Regional Assembly
- 2001 – Work starts on RPG/RSS 'review'
- 2006 - Draft RSS submitted to central government
- 2007 – Examination in Public of Draft RSS
- 2008 - S of S's Proposed Changes. All other Regions have RSS in place!
- 2009 – (Ex SNR), SWRA replaced by SW Councils & Leaders' Board, with the latter responsible jointly with the SWRDA for a new Single Strategy
- 2010 - All of the above, plus the Draft RSS abolished !

The 'vacuum' without an alternative

- Unless we act quickly to put an alternative in place, the 'rapid abolition' [sic] of the strategic regional planning system in England, will leave a policy vacuum in which confusion and inconsistency could be the order of the day.
- This is particularly serious when we are facing major strategic infrastructure development decisions.
- And, when the support of the planning system is needed in re-building the economy. Initial response of the RTPi and others
- But, are there not also opportunities here ?

Issues 1– questions

- We do not as yet have the ‘big picture’ of what the new system will look like or much detail about transition arrangements ?
- The regional economic and spatial planning system remains in place, as does the huge evidence base. Will all this constrain LDF progress ?
- How will the necessarily region-based interface with Europe and its public sector funding streams be handled in future ?
- What is to happen to the Government Office for the South West (and counterparts elsewhere) ? It has a critical role in planning support and facilitation.
- Are local planning authorities to be given extra resources to determine more things ‘locally’ and to take on more strategic work in wider area ‘partnerships’ ?
- How will ‘nimbyism’ be kept in check, without ‘higher level’ policy?

Issues 2 – matters of concern

- Abolition of the regional tier of the Development Plan will put extra pressure on an already struggling LDF system. In the South West, just seven Core Strategies, 16 other DPD's in place. Plus two Core Strategies and one DPD currently under examination.
- Abolition of regional quangos and other bodies with a regional brief will require complex 'unpicking' of project and funding streams
- In particular, RDA 'wind-down' will lead to a dissipation of valuable skills and major concerns for the many dependent bodies
- The new Government will not be able to revoke the long list of issues which require addressing at regional level.

Opportunities – nationally and within the South West 1

- Reduction of complexity – now widely accepted that both components of the 2004 Act system are over complex and over specified (in content, procedure & ‘soundness’ requirements)
- Having a single level of Development Plan will make things easier to understand and save time and cost in professional services
- Most people feel better able to relate to policy matters at the local level they know
- LPA’s will be able to concentrate resources on completing the Core Strategy process and ‘unencumbered’ by unsupported RSS policy

Opportunities 2

- The Planning Inspectorate will be able to concentrate resources on LDF document 'soundness' The daunting prospect of early RSS review, even in the South West, has been lifted !
- The Government Regional Offices (or successors ?) will have only one level of sub-national spatial policy to deal with
- Was Regional Planning ever realistic in the South West ? New sub-regional alliances of common interests, which work better, can now be formed.

Where to now ?

- Much of the new system as yet remains unclear, so any assessment must be initial
- Whatever system is in place [remains!] issues facing the South West needing a strategic response will still be there. These cannot be 'revoked'
- Local government has, in the past, joined together to deal with this (in spite of central government) and will do so again
- A new 'regional conference' within two years ??
- For more detail see: *'Regional Planning : where does it go from here ?'*
Geoff Walker 8 July 2010.

Geoff Walker 14 July 2010 SWPolicy@rtpi.org.uk