



DCN EVENT

Planning and the National Planning Policy Framework

Lichfield – 6 October 2011

MEETING REPORT

Background

The District Council's Network (DCN) is a Special Interest Group of the Local Government Group. It is a single voice for districts to central government and national organisations. It represents over 180 district councils.

The DCN Planning and the National Planning Policy Framework event held at the Lichfield Garrick Theatre on the afternoon of 6 October was organised to allow district councils to explore the impact and implications of the Framework, examine the links with other policy proposals such as New Homes Bonus and shape the DCN's response to the consultation which closes on 17 October.

The event was chaired by Cllr Gillian Brown, Leader of Arun District Council and DCN Planning Lead.

Ian Thompson, Chief Executive of Stafford Borough Council gave a presentation that set the scene for the discussion about the impact and implications of the Framework.

Simon Wood, Head of Planning at Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council gave a presentation that set the scene for the discussion about links with other policy proposals.

Councillors and officers from 26 district councils took part in the discussions.

Introduction

Cllr Brown referred to the DCN response that would highlight concerns about the clarity of the draft Framework, the presumption in favour of sustainable development, viability, land supply, the protection of employment land and transition arrangements. She advised that the DCN was proposing to request a delay in implementation until 2013 to give councils time to adopt core strategies.

Impact and implications of the Framework

Major topics of discussion included land supply requirements, sustainable development and transition arrangements.

There was general support for the suggestion by Cllr John Fuller (Leader, South Norfolk) that because the strategic intent of planning authorities is clear there is need for protection until core strategies receive a certificate of soundness. It will take time for the Planning Inspectorate to visit all councils and in the meantime why should councils suffer from speculative development. He felt that there should be protection to the point where the Planning Inspectorate accepts or rejects the local plan.

Cllr Alan Cullens (Executive Cabinet Member for Planning and Performance, Chorley) expressed concern that the Planning Inspectorate were already using the draft Framework as guidance (Cllr Brown advised that this issue had been raised with Greg Clark at the DCN assembly in September and the Minister said that he would contact the Planning Inspectorate to discuss their use of the draft Framework.)

Cllr Mike Rook (Leader, Harborough) advised that his council are working with the regional spatial strategy's housing numbers as there is evidence to support the numbers.

Cllr David Hughes (Deputy Leader, Malvern Hills) said that the Government needs to recognise that councils are working hard to put in place core strategies. He also noted that developers are submitting application early before the introduction of the community infrastructure levy.

Cllr Michael Ranson (Leader, Ribble Valley) observed that if one quarter of the houses in current development proposals in Ribble Valley are granted permission the core strategy will be worthless.

Simon Wood (Head of Planning, Hinckley and Bosworth) advised that his council has an adopted core strategy but he felt that it is not a 'bible' that protects against inappropriate development. The Planning Inspectorate is still approving development that is not locally supported.

Paul Lankester (CEO, Stratford-upon-Avon) noted the draft Framework gave neighbourhood plans precedence over the local plan and the draft Framework should be clarified to make it clear that precedence only applies where a neighbourhood plan proposes extra development.

Karl Roberts (Head of Planning, Arun) suggested that a national definition of sustainable development is 'dangerous'. It should be defined locally.

Neil Roberts (Development Executive, Lichfield) commented that many local people don't want any houses but when you work with them and dig down villagers realise something has to happen. However they do not want a national definition of sustainable development forced upon them. He expressed concern that the Planning Inspectorate will not be able to cope with the rush of appeals that will follow the introduction of the Framework.

Links with other policy

John Heminsley (Planning Services Manager, Cannock Chase) considered that the New Homes Bonus has replaced Planning Delivery Grant and is therefore not new money.

Cllr Mike Rook (Leader, Harborough) felt that in financial terms many councils are going backwards fast and there is pressure to give something back when growth incentives are needed to survive. The use of the word 'bonus' creates high expectations. He also wondered how developers will cope with front loaded CIL.

Cllr John Fuller (South Norfolk) advised that his council has done some modelling on the incentives for growth. It is estimated that a village will receive £20,000 for 12 houses which is not enough for a new village hall. On business rates retention the district would need another major employer like Lotus of six supermarkets in order to receive £35,000. South Norfolk District Council is putting the New Homes Bonus into its community fund and distributing it through its five neighbourhood boards.

He noted that many developers are trying to beat the introduction of CIL and advised that his council was looking at a figure of £12,500 for houses within 10 miles of Norwich and £7,500 elsewhere. There had been discussion about whether or not garages should be included. He wondered what other councils were going to charge and Shropshire, Dagenham and Redbridge were all referred to. These councils were thought to setting rates within the band being discussed in South Norfolk. Leicestershire councils are working together on CIL but have not yet calculated the charge per house. The charge in Chorley was probably going to be £6-7,000 per house, developers were talking about an average CIL charge of £7,000 a house. Many councils will have a nil charge for commercial development in order to encourage inward investment.

Paul Lankester advised that there was a strong possibility that formula grant will disappear in two years and the New Homes Bonus and Business Rates Retention should be seen as the replacement. Stratford-upon-Avon will be returning the New Homes Bonus to the community in the first two years but after that it will go into the corporate budget.

Brian Cox (Chairman of Regulatory Committee, South Staffs) commented that communities would not welcome wind farms and Paul Lankester advised that whilst councils would receive the benefit of rates on wind farms, the rateable value is one-fortieth of that for warehousing.

Cllr Ricky Bower (Cabinet Member for Planning, Arun) advised that his council is using the New Homes Bonus to fund a neighbourhood planner and parish grants. He noted that there is already a serious infrastructure deficit that would be made worse by additional development. He added that the county council needed to take this issue more seriously.

Craig Jordan (Development Executive, Lichfield) considered that neighbourhood planning is not the only answer to encouraging greater community involvement. Rural master planning has helped local people overcome fears about growth. Neighbourhood plans are designed as a threat to the local planning authority and this is a trust issue.

Simon Wood commented that the Framework will result in a big change of culture for planning officers.

Cllr Mike Rook (Leader, Harborough) considered that local support for the core strategy was evidence that localism had worked.

Paul Lankester referred to the links between neighbourhood planning and the open public services white paper. He also referred to the evidence that parish plans provide. Ian Thompson referred to the issues of neighbourhood planning in unparished areas.

Summing up

Paul Lankester summed up the key points of the afternoon's discussion. He commented that the DCN response would strongly challenge the requirement for a rolling land supply of five years plus 20%. He noted that there was no desire for a national definition of sustainable development and there is a mistrust of the Planning Inspectorate. Developers are trying to beat the introduction of CIL and the infrastructure deficit is getting worse. The new Framework will require a change of culture and a need to trust communities that prepare neighbourhood plans.

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