

DC-CABE Bishop's review of design support consultation HTF response 30 June 2011

1. **The introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the systematic reforms of the Localism Bill will create a different national planning landscape for design policy. What are the key issues of planning policy that Government should take into account in order to deliver on their promise of good design through the new planning system?**

The status of the Draft NPPF and the value of the Localism Bill are yet to be resolved. Localism places little emphasis as yet on local identity and definitions, particularly those to do with sustainability, sustainable development, community, neighbourhood, design, context, and even what planning might mean in the new political environment are ill-defined and potentially confusing, often used inconsistently within both the Bill and the NPPF. Government appears not to understand the relationship between place (old and new) and an area's ability to attract investment, especially higher value development and skilled (knowledge-based etc.) employment. There are added issues with CLG struggling to reconcile localism and growth agenda. Existing guidance is vague. This is an opportunity for DC CABE to press for better definition, guidance and engagement with Government over its role, and for better definition, guidance and engagement with Government concerning planning policy and design within the NPPF and the Bill.

2. **In your experience, what are the specific issues affecting the delivery of well-designed development? Are there any particular issues at the moment?**

Inadequate skills and capacity in local authorities represent a significant barrier to good design. Continuing public sector cuts, loss of qualified staff and resources will only increase this - measures need to be made to close this gap. Loss of regeneration funding (RDAs, LSPs and so on) means that under-performing areas can and will only attract poor quality development (or no development at all in many instances).

3. **What are the existing sources of design support across England?**
 - a. **How accessible are they?**
 - b. **Who delivers them?**
 - c. **Who accesses this support?**
 - d. **Will this change in response to the localism agenda, and if so how?**

How effective are these means of support, and at what point in the planning and development process are they best delivered?

The wealth of existing, quality guidance available to those in planning and development endorsed by CABE remains valuable and valid. Reduced resources suggest that future emphasis should be on making better use of the guidance available - either through refining what is available; better direction to what is available; producing targeted versions of what is available to help audiences less fluent with the design process (e.g. neighbourhood groups engaging with the localism agenda); or a combination of these.

Design guidance should be offered to those involved in the design process from the outset. Even as CABE has offered guidance to planning authorities on core

strategies, so it and local design reviews should help at the design brief stage, ensuring that all elements of context (physical, social, economic, cultural) have been considered, and their relation to new development and design understood.

4ai. Have you ever been involved in Design review?

Members of our organisation and Executive have.

4aii. If yes in question 4ai, how many roles?

Members of our organisation and Executive have been involved in more than one role.

5b. In your view does DR work best

As a final seal of approval at the end of the planning process, or

As part of an iterative process with multiple engagements with the panel from pre application discussions through to the final decision

Or both

Both.

5c. Is this still a valid model of support for good design?

Yes.

5d. Given the increased role of local people in the developing proposals, do you think that there should be community representation as part of the design review process? How might that work?

It is important not to confuse design review (design expert input) with effective community engagement (community awareness and empowerment - part of the evidence base). Front-loaded engagement of communities is essential, in particular before the brief/design stages, as this allows communities to influence fundamentals like use, layout, movement, connections and so on. It needs to be understood that communities are the end-users of design and will in many, if not most, cases have a very clear idea of what will and will not work in actuality. Design review could be applied to neighbourhood plans.

5e. If payment for Design Review were to be introduced, what charging might be appropriate? Can this be reconciled with perceived and actual conflicts of interest?

No comments.

5f. What are the factors that led you to use Design review?

N/A

5g. How do you assess which Design review panel service you will use?

N/A

6a. Have you been involved in Enabling, if so how?

Members of our Executive Committee have been/are CABA enablers.

6b. What is the relationship between local delivery agencies, such as architecture centres or civic societies and a more central resource such as Architecture Centre Network, Civic Voice, or design council CABA in terms of providing support to local authorities and communities?

They provide a conduit for dissemination of best practice, guidance, and delivery. Developers and communities need access to these bodies in order to gain the requisite support. That support needs to be available and easily accessible - it also needs to be advertised in such a way that local authorities and communities know how to access it.

6c. Should a central body be providing:

Hands on support to local groups?

Or more indirect support such as pooling best practice? X

6d. Do the requisite skills exist at local level to support the localism agenda?

Yes.

6e. What types of design support are required e.g. for communities procuring new buildings and spaces, neighbourhood planning, local authority support in incorporating emerging neighbourhood plans into core strategies etc?

Easily understood and accessible design report is required. HTF are pleased to note that CABA will be able to provide some amount of support for local communities but feel there needs to be consistent strategy and guidance in how all communities can access this support. This will probably need to include online support (toolkits, guidance) some kind of direct hands-on support (through local delivery partners in order to use resource effectively) and guidance to local authorities in how to engage and work with communities (and vice versa).

6f. Given the multiple providers of design support/enabling, is there a need for guidance to ensure consistency of quality and approach?

Yes.

7. Are there any other key issues that you think should be considered as part of this review?

With reference to question 6d - while some expertise required to support the localism agenda exists at local level this is not consistent across the board and it would be pertinent to consider appropriate delivery mechanisms to give consistency and fill gaps. Partnership working between central and more local organisations should be one way forward.

Dr Noël James

Director

Historic Towns Forum

T: 0117 975 0459

F: 0117 975 0460

W: www.historictownsforum.org