

New legislation for major planning reform

Date of meeting: 11th January 2008

Item number on agenda: Consultation / Publication Register

Purpose of report

To outline and raise awareness of the new Planning Bill currently going through the parliamentary process, and to gain CRHB's view on an approach to developing understanding of the Bill's implications and impact on sub regional housing delivery.

Decision / Action

Does CRHB wish to learn more about the Planning Bill? If so, need to discuss how best to go about this, who to liaise with and what outcomes we aim to achieve.

Reform of the planning system

The Planning Bill was introduced on 27 November 2007. The legislation builds on the proposals set out in the Planning White Paper and introduces a new system for nationally significant infrastructure planning, alongside further reforms to the town and country planning system.

The Planning White Paper *Planning for a Sustainable Future* (previously on Consultation Register for CRHB) set out our detailed proposals for reform of the planning system, building on Kate Barker's recommendations for improving the speed, responsiveness and efficiency in land use planning, and taking forward Kate Barker's and Rod Eddington's proposals for reform of major infrastructure planning. These proposals were consulted on over the summer of 2007. The Government's response to the consultation was published on 27 November 2007. Its conclusions have informed the proposals in the Planning Bill.

The Bill makes provision:

- To establish the Infrastructure Planning Commission and makes provision about its functions
- To authorise projects to develop nationally significant infrastructure
- About imposing a Community Infrastructure Levy and connected purposes.

Outline

The Bill aims to make the planning system quicker, more transparent and easier for the public to become involved. It will reform the planning system for major infrastructure projects which is increasingly struggling to deal with the challenges of the 21st century - climate change, protecting the environment and the need for new homes.

The Bill will establish a better system for dealing with those decisions with opportunities for public participation locked into each stage of the process. It will strengthen accountability and ensure decision-making is transparent and fair with sustainable development at its heart.

The changes are expected to bring the average time for decisions on major projects down to under a year, ending years of unnecessary delays on the infrastructure the country needs to tackle challenges of a modern world and help tackle climate change. On average £300m a year will be saved, nearly £5bn by 2030.

Communities will have a greater say, with the Bill including a package of measures to strengthen public participation in setting national infrastructure policy, developing individual projects and planning decisions themselves.

The Bill simplifies the local town and country planning system, improves the appeal process and puts a duty on councils in preparing their local plans to take action on climate change. Local councils will be able to set charges on new developments in their areas to contribute to community infrastructure like roads, schools and hospitals.

Under the Bill

- Ministers will set national priorities for infrastructure following public consultation and Parliamentary scrutiny.
- In so doing, drawing up the national statements, Ministers will be under a duty to contribute to sustainable development and to carry out an appraisal of their policy's sustainability.
- Developers will have a legal duty to consult the local community, local authorities and key stakeholders on projects as they prepare them.
- Planning inquiries will be made more accessible to the public, protecting the public's rights to be heard. The Bill makes it clear that any person who registers an interest can give oral evidence at relevant stages of the inquiry.
- Decisions on applications will be taken by an independent Commission consisting of leading experts from a range of fields within a clear framework of legal duties.

Hazel Blears said:

"Through quicker and high quality decisions our Planning Bill will help deliver on the Government's long-term vision for Britain in relation to housing, climate change, energy security, transport provision, and prosperity and quality of life for all.

"The new measures show that it is possible to deliver not only a faster and more efficient planning system, but high quality decisions with greater community involvement.

"There will always be controversial projects that stir opinion and require difficult judgements to be made. However having a stronger system will ensure all opinions - particularly those of the public are heard sooner. Making good judgements in less time is of benefit to everyone. Long-lasting stale-mates that finally stagger to a conclusion are no good for anyone."