

Appendix A: Preliminary Stakeholder Seminar – Environmental Interests

Wednesday 2nd October 2013

Seminar Notes

Attendees

- John Anderson – Ulster Architectural Heritage Society
- Anne Casement – Ulster Architectural Heritage Society
- Patrick Casement – Council for Nature Conservation and Countryside
- Jennifer Fulton – Ulster Wildlife
- Cllr. Shaun Gallagher – Northern Ireland Local Government Association / Derry City Council
- Michelle Hill – RSPB
- Helen Kirk – National Trust
- Paddy McAteer – Ulster Society for the Protection of the Countryside
- Terence McCaw – Royal Society of Ulster Architects
- Jonna Monaghan – Belfast Healthy Cities
- John Quinn – ARC 21 / Northern Ireland Local Government Association
- Diane Ruddoch – National Trust / NI Environment Link

Question 1 - Views on the proposed approach to preparing a SPPS

- The difficulty will be generating public interest. There has to be a media side to the consultation in order to raise awareness.
- Issue raised regarding OFMDFM's role in planning as there are going to be parallel systems (OFMDFM's powers are likely to make it a three tier system rather than a two tier).
- There is a need for one planning policy statement that covers all strands - it is not going to be easy as the scale of development is going to be different. For example, the agri-food strategy is a challenge within planning policy and the SPPS would need to cover the eventualities of that because the impact could be significant for society, particularly around water quality.

Question 2 – Views on the appropriateness of the proposed Core Planning Principles

- The CPP on 'sustainable development' should come first and all others will fall into place naturally behind that. A query was raised regarding where the natural environment fits within the core principles and the role of the planning system in enhancing the natural environment and biodiversity. One consultee queried whether it is necessary to have a sub heading for 'sustainable economic growth' as some would argue that not all economic growth is sustainable. Important point to make is that economic growth is effectively mentioned twice, giving it double the weight of social or environmental principles.

Question 3 - Views on bringing forward new planning policy provisions, e.g. for town centres and retail

- A query was raised as to why 'town centres and retail' is receiving special treatment. The reason is the existing PPS was published in 1996 and so is out of date and needs to be revised. Other PPS documents are simply being consolidated into one document.
- A question was asked regarding how the SEA process feeds into the review of town centres and what is being used to carry out the review i.e. is there another document from the DOE? It was noted that there is no detail on the proposed new policy yet but that it will be assessed against the SEA Objectives as normal.
- It was felt that shopping centres should be concentrated in city or town centres and not out-of-town.

- There is a need for special consideration for Conservation Areas in terms of town centres and particularly those with a significant number of historic shop fronts in them (i.e. listed buildings). They should have an additional tier of protection/consideration.
- The final subject policy says 'Other (e.g. Industry and Commerce/ Coast / Minerals / Public Services and Utilities'. Given the importance of the Marine Bill and Marine Plans, there needs to be specific consideration of the coast that goes beyond coastal settlements and renewable energy proposals. If the Marine Plan is going to be properly integrated into strategic planning, it will need to be cross referenced at a strategic level.
- The coast is a crucial area that could easily fall between terrestrial planning and marine planning. It is also the one area where there are significant possible changes due to climate change and sea levels rising. It is a physically fluid area that could change a lot.
- Coastal planning, waste management and minerals are all separate headings under the Scottish model.
- Minerals and waste will have to be addressed as they are important issues. Looking towards the future, decisions will need to be made at a strategic level regarding what is to be done with waste and how energy proposals such as fracking will be dealt with.

Question 4 – Views on how the SPPS will take economic considerations into account

- In relation to 'economic considerations' (paragraph 5.3 of the seminar discussion paper, dated September 2013), one consultee queried whether the new provisions are going to be subject to the SEA, given that this falls outside of either the Core Planning Principles of the subject policies, or will it be dealt with separately.
- Response from SEA consultant was that 'economic considerations' is mentioned here because it was included in the Planning Bill (NI) 2013 (since withdrawn), but not sure if DOE will keep it as part of the SPPS. Economic considerations will be assessed if it comes through as a core planning principle or subject policy.

Question 5 – Views on the level of detail to be provided in the SPPS

- The Scottish model (relating to the 2010 Scottish Planning Policy consolidation exercise) is a good model to follow. Would be useful to hear from senior planners in Scotland to hear about their experience / key learning points.
- Important that everyone has the opportunity to read and understand and be aware of what has been put in front of them. Provide practical points.
- Important to assess the environment within a built environment.

Question 6 – Views on the transitional arrangements

- PPS will continue to run and once the local plan is in place local authorities will apply their policies based on SPPS and their local plan.
- Clarification required regarding what is meant by retaining policies from PPSs.

Question 7 – Views in relation to the SEA of the SPPS

- It was noted that specific questions set out during the statutory consultation process would facilitate stakeholders in providing a direct response. Possibly look into a question based approach for the environmental report next year?
- One consultee noted that many would contest that AONBs are not protected landscapes in NI. There is a significant difference between AONBs in NI and England/Wales. There is no statutory management plan and they do not meet the IUCN definition of a protected area. AONBs are therefore more at risk from potential developments.
- The local councils are going to be able to adjust their plans to suit local needs - does that mean for instance they will be able to remove conversation area status or instigate conversation area status?

- Up until 2-3 years ago there was a greenbelt in line with most countries in Europe and now with the exception of protected zones such as the Antrim Coast the greenbelt has been removed. There was never an explanation as to why that happened.
- One consultee was encouraged by the fact that there were more options identified other than either streamline or don't streamline. It is important that those options are looked at.
- The status of international obligations / agreements within the civil planning policy statement was noted e.g. EU Landscape Convention and how this will be considered through this process.
- It is important to consult with Department for Social Development (DSD) officials across the region as to how the SPPS/SEA will take into account the funding spent in disadvantaged areas.
- It was established that the SEA would be high level and would not be looking at local issues such as wind farms and renewable technologies – it will be for the local authorities to interpret locally, raising the question that will each local council require an SEA?
- It was noted that it was positive to see human links and health issues feature and that it looked encouraging and that there should be a balance between the natural and built environments.