

# **NEWS RELEASE**

## **FOR IMMEDIATE USE**

### **Attainable, affordable and accountable – a planning system that works for all**

20 February 2002

The County Councils Network (CCN) has, after extensive consultation with key stakeholders, formulated an alternative model in its response to the Planning Green Paper.

“The CCN is in favour of making the planning system more responsive; but these reforms must be comprehensive and cover all aspects of the system from the local to the national”, says John Sellgren, Director of CCN. “We are confident that our model will provide a planning system which is attainable, affordable and accountable. We considered various options with a range of agencies representing the business, environmental, community and government sectors on 13 February and received very strong support for this model, it is favoured by counties and the one which we are likely to recommend to the Government”.

The CCN model (which follows) builds on the parts of the current system which work and are proven. However, it recommends radical changes to those parts of the system which many recognise cause delay, lack of predictability and transparency. It passes three key tests:

- \* creates a system which is faster, more accessible, more transparent and more efficient
- \* improves democratic decision taking
- \* assists the broader public service modernisation agenda being pursued by central and local government

## **Planning green paper : an attainable, affordable and accountable model**

### National level

Shorter, more tightly focussed statements on national policy.

National policy on such things as airport capacity joined up to form a national strategy for major infrastructure investment.

A national strategy providing a framework for regions in relation to each other - for example major infrastructure investment, economic development or catering for housing pressures.

Policies on issues such as green belts or out of town shopping set out succinctly.

Clear national policy not replicated at other plan making levels;

### Regional level

**Statutory Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS)** - strong and binding with broad scope, comprehensive across the English regions.

RSS would:

- provide a sustainable, long-term, locally-distinctive vision for the region;
- specify policy appropriate to the regional level, consistent with national policy;
- provide a long-term planning framework for other key regional strategies, e.g. Regional Economic Strategies, Regional Sustainability Action Frameworks;
- identify priorities for regional infrastructure, for other public agencies (e.g. Environment Agency, Highways Agency, Strategic Rail Authority, Health Agencies) to reflect in their investment programmes;
- provide a binding framework within which Integrated Development Frameworks are prepared;
- set targets and indicators where appropriate.

RSS would be prepared so that they:

- deal broadly with issues which need to be addressed at regional level, but not identifying specific sites or locations nor attempting to prepare sub-regional strategies;
- incorporate consultation - without preconceptions;
- are transparent - conducted according to current best practice in local government for public decision-making;
- are inclusive - ensuring that all sectors of the community and all parts of the region have an effective "voice";
- are democratically accountable - non-elected stakeholders would have no part in the formal adoption arrangements.

Regional Spatial Strategies would also allocate housing targets for each area specifically identified for the preparation of cross boundary Integrated Development Framework (see following section) and to administrative county areas - this proven process would save significant time and be efficient.

### Sub-Regional

This level would have two key elements; Integrated Development Frameworks and Area Action Plans

**Integrated Development Frameworks** prepared by the Principal Authorities (Metropolitan, Unitary and County Councils). Preparation in two-tier areas would be done in partnership with the District Councils. Together they would give comprehensive geographical coverage of each Region and provide key links to Community and Economic Strategies, Local Transport Plans and Public Service Agreements.

Integrated Development Frameworks would be subject to an Examination In Public process which has worked well at this sub-regional level (District Local Plan Inquiries have been inefficient, costly and time consuming).

They would:

- act as a bridge between Regional and Local Action areas, linking plan making and implementation;

- provide 'joined-up' planning - allowing Economic Development, Transport, Housing Waste, Minerals and full consideration of natural resource and environmental issues to be considered, with local communities directly involved;
- provide broad location guidance - identifying key locations for development & infrastructure, sufficient to establish principles for development and identify Action Areas for more detailed planning, allocating housing to each district;
- give real economies of scale - about 50 - to cover the whole country instead of more than 250 separate plans at District level proposed by the Green Paper;
- free up limited District Council resources to concentrate upon the preparation of Action Plans, development control and 'community based' regeneration projects;
- specify affordable housing policies and allocate by district (housing needs surveys would contribute to the process);
- avoid duplication of policies in every district;
- be efficient for all those involved.

Integrated Development Frameworks would be approved by the Principal Authorities (jointly where necessary) but the Regional Assembly would have Call-in powers if they consider that proposals conflict with the Regional Spatial Strategies. In the absence of directly-elected Regional Assemblies, the Secretary of State would retain Call-in powers.

Because developers and business need certainty and the planning strategy needs to be flexible enough to respond quickly to changing circumstances, the Integrated Development Frameworks will be continuously monitored and formal Quinquennial reviews undertaken (every five years).

**County-scale community strategies** deal with issues which correspond closely with the key planning, transport, and economic development issues and so would be addressed in Integrated Development Frameworks. County Councils are leading players in the delivery of these services.

**Area Action Plans (AAP)** prepared by local communities would focus on how plans would actually work on the ground. County Councils, as providers of key local services, would help prepare them.

If planning applications are to refer to AAPs it is essential that they go to public consultation before they are adopted.

Examples where AAPs might be appropriate are:

- areas of growth (such as major expansion of a settlement)
- areas of restraint because of special environmental characteristics or under severe development pressure
- urban regeneration areas
- business planning zones; and
- major development projects (such as a port or airport) requiring significant infrastructure planning.

Topic-based SPG such as design guidance, natural resources plans and coastal strategies would provide an additional level of detail where appropriate.

Where the community planning process is being undertaken at both county and district tiers, partnership arrangements are already in place to ensure that these activities nest together effectively. Such partnerships already involve key players who will have an interest in the Integrated Development Framework, and therefore will provide an efficient way of linking into the local community planning and development process.

### **Notes to Editors**

For further information contact Sue Forsyth, PR Adviser to CCN 01245 231289/231826 or John Sellgren 020 7664 3009.

**The County Councils Network (CCN)** is the largest Special Interest Group within the Local Government Association (LGA), representing all 35 English county councils. CCN exists to promote the voice of counties within the LGA and the values and interests of the English Counties. These authorities cover 84% of the geographical area of England and provide services for 46% of its population.

**The proposals in the Green Paper** have been widely criticised for their lack of public accountability. However, it is less well known that the proposals would put pressure on the skills of qualified planning staff in local authorities, conservatively estimated at a collective deficit of over 2,000 years of professional experience. The proposals in the Green Paper are also estimated to add some £43m in one-off costs through transition with ongoing costs of £60m per annum. All of this for a system which is unproven in its ability to deliver the faster, more predictable and customer friendly outcomes which are sought.

**The alternative model** contains two tiers of comprehensive plans, addresses the sub regional issue and the widely acknowledged gap between the region and the district, and critically enables better integration between land use, spatial development issues and other key strategic planning processes in transport, the economy, learning and skills, and health and social care. The model is predicated on plan making cycles taking place in parallel and being binding on the next tier which will address the log jam and delay of the current cascade system. The alternative model could be implemented quickly and without the disruption of a structural change.

## **The Integrated Model : A Synopsis**

### Regional Spatial Strategies: Tier One

These would be prepared as envisioned in the Green Paper by regional planning.

### **Once agreed, the Regional Spatial Strategies would be binding on:**

#### Integrated Development Frameworks (IDF): Tier Two

Integrated Development Frameworks (IDF) would comprehensively cover the region. They would set a vision for their area, specify strategic objectives and establish criteria and policies within which development control would operate.

Each area would be covered by a single IDF. The boundaries for an IDF would generally match or fall within the boundaries of principal authority administrative areas (any single or combination of county, unitary or metropolitan authorities). Exceptions to this could include a number of nationally important cross boundary or cross-region development areas. An example could be Thames Gateway. In these cases the Secretary of State would specify the requirement for an IDF to be developed specifically for such an area. Similarly, by local agreement, other cross boundary areas could be specified by the principal authorities as requiring their own IDF.

The IDF's would incorporate other sub regional issues as necessary. For example through the IDF regional housing totals would be allocated. The IDF would also enable the integration of spatial development and other sub regional strategic functions such as minerals, waste and transportation. They would also enable, through the Community Strategy process the broader integration with other elements of the social economic and environmental development of an area.

The IDF's could be prepared to a rolling programme of 5 or 10 years updated and rolled forward annually as has been successfully achieved through the Local Transport Plan process.

### **Once agreed, the Integrated Development Framework would be binding on:**

#### Area Action Plans

Within the IDF, hot spot, local regeneration or other locally identified areas which required targeted plans would be identified. Broadly as envisaged in the Green Paper. As a matter of principle we believe that all councils must have a substantive added value role in relation to the spatial development of their areas. This builds on current expertise. The relevant principal authorities would have the lead role in the preparations of the IDF's. In

two tier areas both County and District Councils would have a statutory duty to participate in the preparation of IDF's. District/Borough Councils would remain the lead authorities on Action Plans and development control.