

Item 2

Promoting locally-led planning (project update)

Purpose of report

For discussion and direction.

Summary

This paper provides an update on work underway on the project to promote a locally-led planning which was agreed as part the Board's work programme in September 2013.

Recommendation

Members are asked to comment on the proposed areas of work and agree next steps proposed at paragraphs 7, 11 and 15.

Action

As directed by the Board.

Contact officer: Caroline Green
Position: Senior Adviser
Phone no: 0207 664 3359
E-mail: Caroline.Green@local.gov.uk

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Background

1. At its meeting in September, the Board agreed a key focus for the LGA's work on planning should be to promote the role that planning plays in supporting growth and ensure that future policy supports local decision making on planning matters.
2. As part of this work the Board agreed to work with councils and the development industry to promote case study evidence of partnership working and fast and effective planning services and identify practice and policy solutions that will support further improvement and simplification of planning processes.
3. Further to discussion with the development industry, members are asked to comment on work to be taken forward in three areas as outlined below.

Promoting effective pre-application services

4. Early engagement between developers, councils and other partners through pre-application services allows issues to be resolved before applications are submitted, increasing the quality of schemes, reducing conflict, and securing community acceptance for applications. However, developers have raised concerns that the quality and cost of pre-application services vary across the country. Councils are keen to work with them to ensure that their services assist in bringing forward development more quickly and add value to all partners saving time and money. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) have expressed a strong interest in a collaborative approach to improving pre-application services.
5. The LGA is therefore working with the Planning Advisory Service (PAS), councils, developers and statutory consultees to provide a range of support tools and good practice to authorities and developers to drive improvement in and greater use of pre-application services.
6. This work will include:
 - 6.1. A set of principles for effective pre-application services which the LGA and national partner organisations would agree and promote to member organisations.
 - 6.2. PAS is leading work with input from developers on joint guidance highlighting good practice models and signposting further advice covering:
 - 6.2.1 A template for tiered offers of pre-application engagement by a LPA describing elements of good proportionate offer to meet the needs of a range of users.
 - 6.2.2 Planning Performance Agreements – More detailed guidance on how to use these effectively, examples from the sector of where they are being used well, and templates for a PPA suited to a 'small major' and a 'large major' scheme.

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- 6.2.3 Guide to an appropriate model for recovering costs of pre-application engagement – including principles of cost calculation and relating charges to the tiered service offer models.
- 6.2.4 Monitoring and Evaluation – encouraging councils to self-evaluate the effectiveness of their pre-application service by providing data collection tools to demonstrate the link between effective engagement and performance/value for money.
- 6.2.5 Good practice and principles in the involvement of members in pre-application discussions.
- 6.2.6 Good practice in engaging communities and relevant stakeholders in pre-application discussions

Proposed next steps:

- 7. The work on joint principles and support materials is currently under way. LGA endorsement of the joint principles will be subject to comment and approval from members.
- 8. It is envisaged that it will be launched at an event in December which will showcase case studies of successful partnership approaches.

Improving statutory consultee processes

- 9. Government Agencies as statutory consultees also have a role to play in ensuring that the planning process works quickly and effectively to support growth. Councils and developers are keen to make sure that engagement with statutory consultees does not lead to unnecessary delay to development. Ministers have signalled that they are interested in proposals for improvement to the current regime. In addition, the need to deliver reductions in their budgets means that the statutory consultee agencies are also looking at improving the way they engage in the planning process.
- 10. It is therefore proposed that the LGA produce proposals on how engagement with the statutory agencies could be improved, highlighting good practice and policy recommendations in three areas:
 - 10.1. Front-loading engagement
 - 10.1.1. Maximising engagement at plan-making stage to allow more effective targeting of engagement in applications.
 - 10.1.2. Effective and joined up pre-application advice services.
 - 10.2. Moving towards a single channel of engagement with statutory agencies across different government departments (towards a “one-stop-shop” model).
 - 10.3. Targeting resources to focus on more complex / priority projects and greater use of standing advice for the majority of applications.

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Proposed next steps:

11. Further to members views officers will develop more detailed proposals on the areas outlined above to be agreed by members and sent to Ministers and Shadow Ministers.

Promoting partnership and good practice in planning

12. Councils and developers share the view that further fundamental reforms to the planning system would not be helpful but there are areas within the current system where we can drive improvement through joint exploration and promotion of good practice.
13. The LGA is therefore working with councils and developers to identify and highlight areas of good practice and partnership approaches which are successfully supporting growth and policy recommendations that emerge.
14. Recent Ministerial announcements have confirmed that government is interested in the potential for reducing delays to development caused by planning conditions.

Next steps

15. LGA officers are working with councils and developers to produce a set of case studies highlighting effective partnership approaches to positive planning.
16. LGA officers are working with councils and developers to explore issues surrounding the use of conditions in further detail (including the extent to which such conditions are required by EU Directives and central regulation) and to present good practice models for proportionate and effective implementation of conditions.
17. It is proposed that this work is used to inform discussions with DCLG officials as they develop proposals on changes to conditions.

Financial Implications

18. This work can be delivered within planned budgets.