

PAPER ON PREPARATORY FORWARD PLANNING WORK IN ASSOCIATION WITH TRANSITION COMMITTEES PRIOR TO RPA.

Agenda Item: 14

Summary: This paper sets out the proposed arrangements for preparatory forward planning work to be undertaken in association with transition committees prior to RPA.

Action required: To note and discuss.

Background

1. A fundamental part of the overall programme to reform the planning system in Northern Ireland is the provision of an effective, up-to-date development plan system. Planning Service proposes to introduce a new local development plan system with proposals designed to speed up the plan preparation process, ensure more effective participation from the public and other key stakeholders early in the plan preparation process, and provide a more flexible approach that is responsive to change and capable of faster review. It is intended that the new local development plan system will be in place for the transfer of planning powers to councils in 2011.

2. In order to facilitate the transfer of planning powers to local councils in 2011 Planning Service has been giving consideration to what work could be taken forward with Transition Committees/Management Teams in advance of RPA to ensure a smooth and effective transition from the old to the new local development system. As well as contributing to moving the development plan programme forward in advance of transfer, there would also be many advantages for Planning Service and Councils in working in this way, including –
 - early capacity building for all key players, including councillors existing council staff and planning service staff.
 - building of effective working relationship for existing development plan staff with future council colleagues

- opportunity to ensure early integration of the new development plan with the emerging community planning process
 - fostering of a closer working relationship between the Department and local government
 - early opportunity to assess the initial stages of the new development plan system and address any problems that might arise.
3. A previous paper on this topic was discussed at SLB earlier this year and the purpose of this submission is to provide greater detail on the way forward. In particular, it deals with the work to be undertaken with Transition Committees / Management Teams and it will establish which new council areas should be selected to undertake pilot preparatory studies for local development plans.

FORWARD PLANNING WORK TO BE UNDERTAKEN IN ASSOCIATION WITH TRANSITION COMMITTEES/MANAGEMENT TEAMS PRIOR TO RPA

4. In advance of 2011, it is anticipated that the Planning Service can begin working with the new council transition committees at two levels. Initial engagement in **all** of the new councils areas and, secondly, more intensive, detailed engagement in a small number of the new council areas. This is set out in greater detail below.
5. In relation to initial engagement, Planning Service proposes to undertake monitoring work along with Transition Management Teams/Committees to provide up to date baseline data for all council areas covering urban and rural housing, industrial development and retail development. The provision of this baseline data is an essential and time consuming first stage of the plan making process and will, therefore, provide a significant start to the development plan process for all councils in advance of RPA. It will mean that when the new councils take over they will be able to progress to prepare new plans quicker than would otherwise be the case. It is anticipated that the minimum output of this work will be a monitoring/baseline position paper for each of the council areas in advance of RPA and that there would be regular reporting on work

progress to the wider Transition Management Team and Transition Committee through the existing Planning Service representative.

6. As well as this work Planning Service also proposes to work with 3 Transition Management Teams/Committees to prepare pilot preparatory plan studies to inform local development plans. The scope and nature of this work is set out in detail at **Annex 1**. In summary, it will involve the following:
 - Preparing a draft Programme Management Scheme (PMS) covering a programme of work from the pilot study to final plan adoption.
 - Ensuring that the pilot study and eventual local development plan are integrated with the emerging community planning approach in councils.
 - Preparing a series of position papers for the following topic areas: Settlement Hierarchy; Housing Growth Strategy; Employment Strategy; Town Centre Strategy; Environment Strategy and Major Infrastructure Strategy.
 - Developing preliminary aims and objectives for the local development plan as well as draft options/preferred options. Final decisions in such areas will, however, need to be taken by new councils after the transfer of planning functions.
 - Preparing a draft Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) and commencing some preparatory data gathering for the Equality Impact Assessment, Sustainable Appraisal and any other relevant plan assessment.

7. It is proposed that in order to progress the preparatory pilot studies, it will be important to establish the appropriate management structures between Transition Committee / Management Teams and Planning Service. While this will ultimately be a matter for individual Transition Committees to agree, a suggested approach would be to set up a Pilot Study Steering Group made up of officers from Transition Management Teams, including the existing Planning Service representative and also including senior officers from the Planning Service development plan team. This steering group would be responsible for steering the pilot study and would regularly report on progress to the wider

Transition Management Team and Transition Committee through the existing Planning Service representative.

PROPOSED PILOT PREPARATORY PLAN STUDIES

8. Having reviewed the resource implications, Planning Service is of the view that it will be possible to commence three pilot studies for local development plans in three of the new Council areas within the current business year. A further pilot study with another of the new councils could be commenced in the next business year following completion of the ongoing Independent Examination for the Banbridge, Newry and Mourne Area Plan.
9. In considering potential pilot studies Planning Service took into account the following factors:
 - the status (notional end date) of current development plans
 - the need to prioritise those plans which are already well beyond their end date
 - the need to ensure a continued provision of an adequate land supply to meet housing and other development needs.
 - the need to carry forward, and not waste, work already completed on stalled plans.
10. In light of all of these considerations, Planning Service recommends that pilot preparatory studies for local development plans should be undertaken for:
 - **Omagh/Fermanagh Council area,**
 - **Derry/Strabane Council area**
 - **Antrim/Newtownabbey Council areas.**

Furthermore, it is proposed that a fourth pilot preparatory plan study for the **Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Council area** should be commenced in the next business year, as staff become available after the completion of the BN&MAP independent examination.

11. A letter will be sent in advance of the SLB meeting from the Planning Service Chief Executive to each of the 26 council Chief Executives advising them that this proposals paper was being tabled at SLB. It is proposed that contact be made with the Transition Committees to commence this preparatory plan work in November 2009.

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PILOT PREPARATORY PLAN STUDIES TO INFORM LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS

1. There are a number of key areas of preparatory work which can be undertaken in advance of RPA, which would enable new councils to move quickly to the Preferred Options Paper stage after receiving planning powers. This would significantly speed up the subsequent publication of a draft local development plan. The key areas of work are as follows:

A) Draft Programme Management Scheme

2. As part of the new local development plan process, District Councils will be required to agree a programme management schemes (PMS) with DOE. The purpose of the PMS is to help ensure that the plan process is efficiently managed and that the public, stakeholders and consultees are aware of key milestones in the process. In order to avoid any potential delays in plan preparation, it is proposed that a draft PMS, covering a programme of work from the pilot study to final plan adoption, is prepared to be ready for submission and agreement by DOE shortly after the transfer of planning powers.

B) Link with Community Planning

3. After RPA, it is anticipated that the new councils will wish to begin to shape their areas, through both the local development plan, and the new power of community planning. It is envisaged that local development plans will include a spatial land use reflection of the Council's Community Plan. Planning Service is proposing that new local development plans will provide a vision of how places should change and what they will be like in the future. In addition, it is envisaged that they will support the implementation of the vision by indicating where development, including regeneration, should take place, and what form it should take.

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4. To achieve this there will be a need to ensure that the pilot study and eventual local development plan are integrated with the emerging community planning approach in councils. Furthermore, it is important that this linkage is established at the earliest opportunity and also that any duplication of work between the two processes is avoided. One suggested way of achieving this would be to undertake some of the early informal community engagement and visioning jointly for the community plan and local development plan. This is the preferred approach in the other jurisdictions and would not only help inform initial plan preparation but would also help establish an agreed vision which can be implemented through community and local development planning.
5. In addition, there will be other areas of preparatory plan work as set out below that will be useful for both processes and for which it may be possible to collaborate and share. Planning Service officials will continue to work closely with Local Government Reform Officials in the run up to RPA as policy on both Community Planning and land use planning progress towards finalisation.
6. It is recognised that a number of Transition Committees / Management Teams have already begun to develop Community Planning ideas for their respective areas. Where possible it is essential that pilot studies for local development plans are integrated with such work. This can be achieved by including spatial issues within community engagement and visioning exercises.
7. In association with this, preparatory work on the proposed Statement of Community Involvement could also be carried forward before RPA (See (E) below).

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(C) *Position papers on local development plan topic areas*

8. In order to provide Councils with comprehensive base line data from which to start preparation of their local development plans, it is proposed that Planning Service will prepare a series of position papers for each topic area. Such position papers would include;

- Settlement Hierarchy – overall settlement hierarchy, identification of any new settlements
- Housing Strategy – land commitments, growth strategy including distribution of housing across settlement hierarchy;
- Employment Strategy – employment need, land use implications and perhaps identification of strategic employment sites;
- Town Centre Strategy – broad functional hierarchy across settlements in terms of service provision and retailing, indentifying town and district centres;
- Environment Strategy – countryside assessment to indentify regional and sub regional environmental designations;
- Major Infrastructure – major infrastructure such as transport routes, key public service provision and major waste sites.

(D) *Preparation of preliminary options/preferred options*

9. Although the majority of preparatory work will involve data collection, work could also include developing preliminary aims and objectives as well as options/ preferred options. Final decisions in such areas will however need to be taken by new councils after the transfer of planning functions.

(E) *Other plan related work*

10. There are a number of associated documents and processes which councils will be required to produce in the new plan system. It is, therefore, considered beneficial to undertake some preparatory work on these in advance of RPA. Of

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particular importance will be the council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), which needs to be published in advance of any formal plan consultation. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to commence some preparatory data gathering for the Equality Impact Assessment, Sustainable Appraisal and any other relevant plan assessment.