

# DRAFT RESPONSE SERVICE

As part of the Rural Opportunities Bulletin, RSN will regularly provide concise potential responses to key current consultations. These are not intended to be definitive or to reflect the views of RSN and may include potentially opposing responses to reflect different views designed to assist individual organisations in compiling their own response. We do however recognise the pressure members are under and we hope this service will assist.

## **Review of Planning Practice Guidance – Department for Communities and Local Government, December 2012**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/review-of-planning-practice-guidance>

On 21 December 2012 the government welcomed the report of the review of planning practice guidance led by Lord Taylor of Goss Moor. The government is seeking views from users of the planning system on the recommendations made in the report. The government state that “the Review Group’s recommendations propose a radical change to how government prepares and maintains a suite of planning practice guidance, in order to support the National Planning Policy Framework and ensure effective planning delivery that can encourage growth and sustainable development.”

The consultation closes on 15 February 2013.

### **Consultation Question 1 – *Do you agree with the recommendations of the Review Group overall?***

**Draft Response:** Yes. This review was greatly needed in order to create a clearer system of planning practice guidance for local authorities, planners, developers and the public. Over 7000 pages of existing guidance stretching back over many years makes a complicated system even more complex and the review is welcomed.

### **Consultation Question 2 – *Do you agree with the proposed recommendations for a much reduced set of essential practice guidance in the format recommended? (Recommendations 1,2,3,5, 6)***

**Draft Response:** Yes. As stated, guidance should be clear, up to date, coherent and easily accessible. A web-based live resource is fully supported but must be effectively managed in order to meet the over-arching principles. Removing best practice from guidance, often available through other organisations, will go some way to reducing the burden of maintaining up to date guidance. An open annual review of guidance would be valuable as a regular check that guidance is up to date and coherent.

Recommendation 5 concerns the need to enable material to be readily printable and date stamped to confirm its validity at the time used. This will be essential in relation to specific applications and plan making carried out.

### **Consultation Question 3 – *Do you agree that standards for future Government Planning Practice Guidance should be implemented by the Chief Planner in DCLG, but with decisions on what to include within guidance still to be taken by Ministers? (Recommendation 4)***

**Draft Response:** A clear document management system will be required to be put in place and it is entirely appropriate that the Chief Planner has the ultimate responsibility for the web resource in maintaining required standards and acting as gatekeeper for all information included.

**Consultation Question 4 –** *While access to all planning guidance online will be free of charge, do you think it would be appropriate to offer planning professionals an additional service involving immediate notification of every revision to the guidance, and to make a small charge for this service? (Recommendation 6)*

**Draft Response:** The review states that planning guidance should be easily accessible. It is entirely appropriate, therefore, that access to the online resource should be free of charge. Providing an additional notification service for revisions could be a useful addition for those who wish to take advantage of such a service. However, this should not be charged for but rather an additional service which individuals or organisations can opt into. This will maintain simplicity and avoid any potential future divergence in the information made available to different groups.

**Consultation Question 5 –** *Do you agree that the new web based resource should be clearly identified as the unique source of Government Planning Practice Guidance? (Recommendations 7-9)*

**Draft Response:** Yes. In order to achieve its objectives of clarity, coherence and accessibility, it is essential that any material produced only constitutes formal government planning guidance once it is admitted to the website.

If the new website is to signpost organisations providing best practice guidance, criteria will need to be drawn up to determine which organisations can be referenced. This may well be a time consuming process and divert limited resources away from the prime objective of maintaining the website. Organisations providing best practice examples will have their own methods of reaching their market place and it is suggested that the website does not include such references. In addition, this will avoid any potential implied government endorsement of such organisations or the best practice highlighted.

**Consultation Question 6 –** *Do you agree with the recommended timescales for cancellation of guidance and new/revised guidance being put in place? (Recommendations 10-13)*

**Draft Response:** Yes. The present guidance suite is described as “unfit for purpose.” It is, therefore, essential that the new system is introduced as swiftly as possible, allowing for necessary consultation on individual matters as required. The proposal to carry out a second formal consultation once the new system is up and running is also supported in order to identify any initial operational issues which may arise.

**Consultation Question 7 –** *Do you agree with the recommendations for cancellation of existing guidance documents? Are there specific, essential elements of current guidance material that should in your view be retained and considered for inclusion in the revised guidance set? (Recommendations 14-16)*

**Draft Response:** Yes. As the review recommends, it will be important that the implementation of a new system does not simply consist of cancelling a series of existing guidance documents with others remaining unaltered. It will be important for all elements of existing guidance which are to remain to be amended to reflect the new approach. Only in this way will the objectives of clarity and coherence be achieved.

**Consultation Question 8** – *Do you agree with the recommended priority list for new/revised guidance? (Recommendations 17-18)*

**Draft Response:** The list covers a number of important areas. In particular, new guidance in relation to Neighbourhood Planning and Viability would be timely. Viability is a significant current issue in relation to a number of planning applications and policy decisions. Clarity around this issue for planning authorities, developers and communities would be very valuable to ensure all approach the issue in the same manner. Prioritisation of guidance in relation to Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) and Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) is also very welcome to help reduce confusion in changing economic circumstances and help organisations and communities to reach agreement regarding future housing development.

**Consultation Question 9** – *Are there any further points you would like to make in response to the Review Group's report? Do you have additional ideas to improve and/or streamline planning practice guidance?*

**Draft Response:** This is a very welcome and timely review. Providing clear, up to date, coherent and easily accessible guidance will help to reduce the costs associated with plan making and planning applications and enable simpler interaction across organisations and individuals. We look forward to the implementation of this new system and further opportunities to help develop and influence the system as it goes forward.