

Mid Wales Regional Committee MID 02-02(p1)

Date: Friday 8 March 2002

Time: 10.30am to 1.00pm

Venue: Knighton Community Centre, Knighton

Presentation to the assembly regional committee – key points

Introduction

- CSC welcomes the review of the planning system
- It is pleasing to see the positive references to the ability of the system to deliver sustainable development & economic regeneration in Wales
- Everyone would welcome a faster, more focussed plan making system
- Does faster mean less community involvement ?

Plan making

- Great stress placed on local development frameworks to follow UDPs
- More focussed on key areas welcome (though some may say over specific on details) but this means less clarity in remaining areas. What certainty does this give to potential developers ?
- "A clearer community involvement is essential" : 51 evening meetings in communities ? Discussions with the major drivers of change; ward meetings with members etc etc. What more is expected ? How long would that take ? Is the Assembly proposing additional resources ? Unrealistic to expect more involvement to be quicker or cheaper.
- Collaborative working is sensible though the Assembly needs to recall that the spill-over effects and strategic matters overlap regional boundaries. For Ceredigion this may mean that we will need to work with Carmarthenshire & Pembrokeshire on some matters; with Powys and Gwynedd CCs on others. NAFW needs to make it clear that it expects arrangements to be fluid.
- Plans affect the value of land. There needs to be an inquiry system which gives landowners and others an opportunity to make their case for or against a plan allocation in a manner which satisfies Human Rights legislation.
- The transitional arrangements seem to have been ignored by some commentators.

Development Control

- No general problem with the calls for certainty, consistency, clarity & speed..... but
- Standard application forms may ignore local concerns (Brecon Beacons NP have space for a design statement)
- Contracts are inappropriate, formal, legalistic documents. They give the appearance to an outsider of matters being tied up. The development control process places a great emphasis on consultation and this inevitably brings up unexpected matters which both the authority and the applicant need to address. What is needed is a clear statement from a local authority of what information they expect from an applicant to determine an application and what they intend to do in that determination. This is best done in an informal advice.
- Where would the money come from to pay consultees to respond to planning applications ? Would it be suggested that consultees are " being paid to object ?" How does one measure the quality of an objection ? Would consultees give a response for the sake of earning a fee when in reality they had little concern and in the absence of a fee system would not have responded? These matters are dismissed in two paragraphs later on in the consultation under the heading of resources. They are not wholly consistent. There hasn't been an increase in application fees since 1997. Local authorities have had to fund increased costs from their budgets. Increasing fees to 1997 levels would be a start. Any additional costs such as payment to consultees will need funding either from application fees or other sources.
- It should be noted that Ceredigion is consulted on large renewable energy developments for which it receives no application fee. (The application is determined by the DTI.) The public expects the local authority to examine all aspects of the application and consult fully. In a major proposal accompanied by a detailed Environmental Statement the costs of handling an application will run into five figures. Arrangements should be made to fund local authority work in this area.
- Planning fees could not be ring-fenced unless they clearly met the whole costs of the development control service.
- What is the difference between a certified master plan and an outline planning application ? Is it just a change of words ?
- Is it proper for officers to deal with planning applications where there are objectors ? In Ceredigion we believe that members are elected to make decisions when objections are made to applications on planning grounds.
- Local development orders could cause great confusion as to what permitted development rights exist in any particular County.
- Reducing the validity of planning permissions to 3 years would be welcome : what would be even more welcome would be the tool to end planning permissions where a "technical" rather than a real start has been made in development just to keep it alive. At present compensation has to be paid and in reality local authorities cannot end a planning permission even though it may have been granted in very different times decades ago.
- Improved consultation procedures mean more resources.
- Are the Assembly suggesting that a local authority application to site a portakabin at a school should be referred to the Assembly for consideration ? There needs to be a sense of proportion.

Finally

- The proposals, with appropriate amendment, can help the planning system to focus on what is important.
- They refocus, they do not reduce the demand for resources.
- They will mean more control in some areas (design briefs for sites, action plans etc)
- More public involvement means more time not less