

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS  
ALL-MEMBER MEETING**



Date: 7 February 2013

Subject: **SEEC response to Lord Taylor review of planning guidance**

Report by: Nick Woolfenden, SEEC Head of Policy Co-ordination

**Recommendation:**

Members are asked to discuss and agree SEEC's response to the consultation on Lord Taylor's proposals to streamline national planning guidance.

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 During 2012 the Government established an independent review group, chaired by Lord Taylor (Lib Dem), to inform a radical streamlining of national planning guidance. The Government's aim is to produce a more accessible and effective set of national guidance, dramatically reducing the 7,000+ pages in 200 documents that exist at present, to support local implementation of the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 1.2 The Government has welcomed the review group's recently-published findings<sup>1</sup>, particularly:
- That effective guidance is important to delivering the planning system.
  - However current guidance is not up to date or fit for purpose.
  - The greatest priority is establishing a single, coherent and up-to-date on-line suite of essential guidance.
- 1.3 The Government is currently consulting on Lord Taylor's findings, closing on 15 February 2013<sup>2</sup>. We recommend SEEC responds to the consultation, welcoming the sensible streamlining proposed by Lord Taylor, but emphasising the need for effective local government involvement in shaping revised guidance. National guidance should also be flexible enough to respond to local circumstances and avoid over-prescription.

**2. SEEC's proposed response**

- 2.1 Members' views are invited on proposed responses to questions in the Government's consultation (shown in bold) set out below. Individual authorities are also encouraged to respond reflecting local views.

**Q1 Do you agree with the recommendations of the Review Group overall?**

**Q2 Do you agree with the proposed recommendations for a much reduced set of essential practice guidance in the format recommended?**

SEEC welcomes the Government's aim to streamline planning guidance and ensure it is fit for purpose and update or cancel obsolete or contradictory information. To support and enable the localist planning system, national guidance should be flexible to respond to local circumstances, rather than prescriptive. We endorse Lord Taylor's view that "guidance should support

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/39821/taylor\\_review.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/39821/taylor_review.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/review-of-planning-practice-guidance>

the application of local skills and judgement, not automate them". Government should involve councils in developing new guidance to ensure it supports effective local implementation.

**Q3 Do you agree that standards for future Government Planning Practice should be implemented by the Chief Planner in DCLG, but with decisions on what to include within guidance still taken by Ministers?**

We are content with this proposal, but emphasise the importance of local government member and officer involvement in scoping guidance and shaping its content to ensure it is as effective as possible.

**Q4 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?**

**Q5 Do you agree that the new web based resource should be clearly identified as the unique source of Government Planning Practice Guidance?**

Free access to online planning guidance is critical as the main source resource. Electronic notification of revisions to guidance should be free of charge given the importance of keeping all users up to date to ensure compliance and the ease with which this can be achieved by email.

**Q6 Do you agree with the recommended timescales for cancellation of guidance and new/revised guidance being put in place? ie majority of update to be complete by July 2013.**

We agree it is important that new streamlined guidance is put in place urgently to support local implementation of the National Planning Policy Framework. Local government must be given effective opportunity to engage in development of new guidance, and we support Lord Taylor's recommendation that further opportunities for engagement must be provided once the new system is operational to ensure it is fit for purpose.

**Q7 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?**

**Q8 Do you agree with the recommended priority list for new/revised guidance?**

Individual local authorities will respond with specific comments on the revised guidance set. However we agree with the proposed recommended priorities for effective and proportionate guidance on:

- Duty to Co-operate
- Viability test
- Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) and Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA)
- Climate change and renewable energy
- Flooding
- Environmental Impact Assessment & Sustainability Appraisal
- Biodiversity
- Clarification of rules on prematurity and propriety re local determination of planning applications, including new guidance on financial considerations.