

A Changing Planning System?

Essex Property Forum, 10 June 2010

County Councillor Peter Martin, Leader of Essex County Council



Planning is for people



Is the planning system broken?

- Out of touch with ordinary people's lives?
- Too centralised and bureaucratic?
- Key decisions being imposed on local communities?
- Not enough community participation & engagement?
- Too negative & adversarial?
- Stifles local imagination & lacks incentives (one size fits all)?
- Prevents valuable development taking place?
- Major LDF delays – so not fit for purpose

The new government



Recent Reform Announcements:

CLARITY (in general terms):

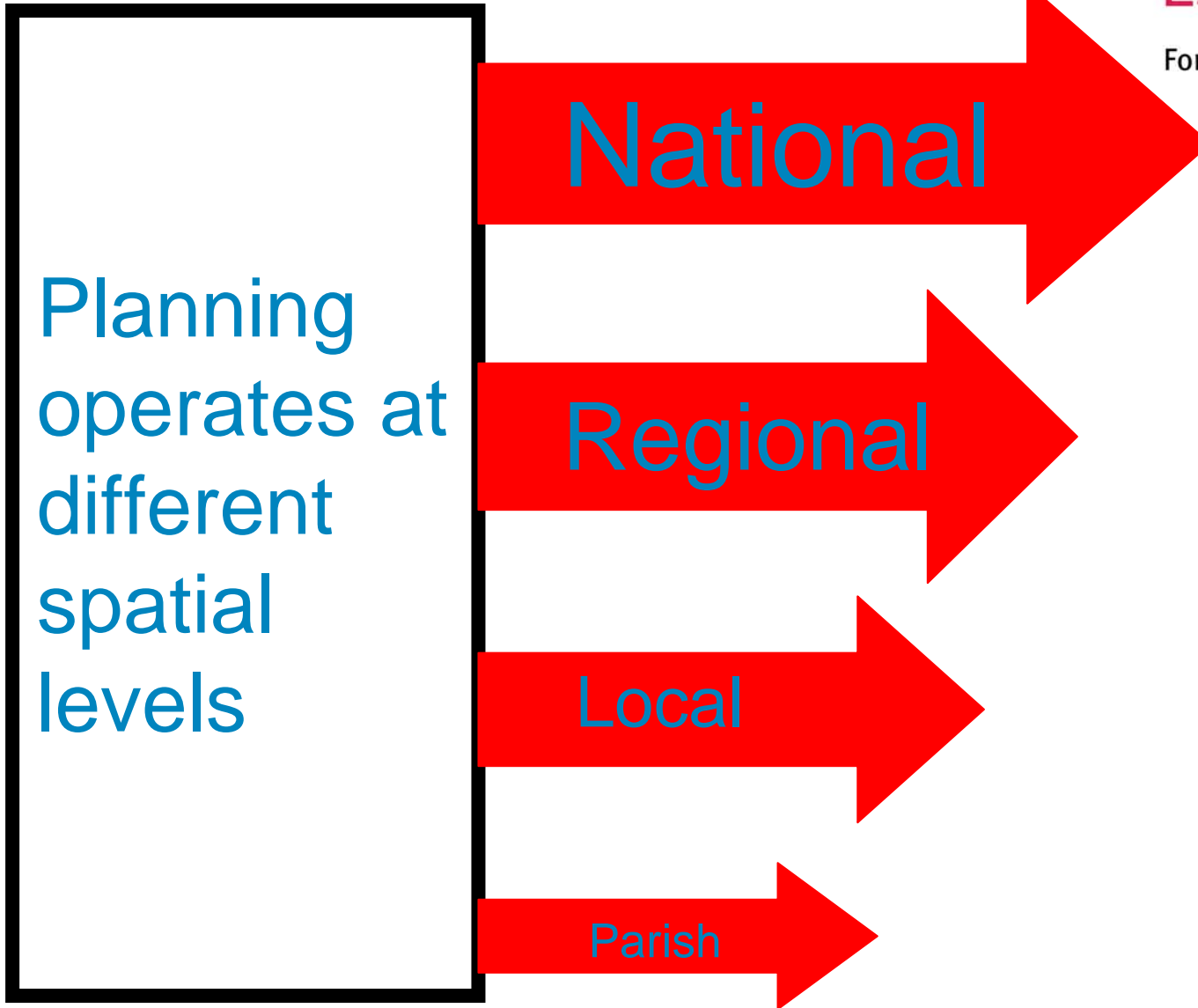
- **Coalition Programme Document**
- **Queens Speech**
- **Decentralisation & Localism Bill – on the way shortly**
- **Eric Pickles Letter – regional spatial strategies to be abolished**

UNCERTAINTY (on the detail):

- **Open Source Planning Green Paper – proposals?**
- **Timetable & Transitional Arrangements**

Main Themes of Reform:

- Streamlining national planning guidance – making it simpler in scope, and more concise
- Freeing local government from central and regional control over planning matters
- Making decision-making structures for planning much more democratic
- Giving local people more input into the planning and housing decisions that affect them
- A more efficient and more local planning system
- Giving local communities a real share in local growth – with a new system of financial incentives



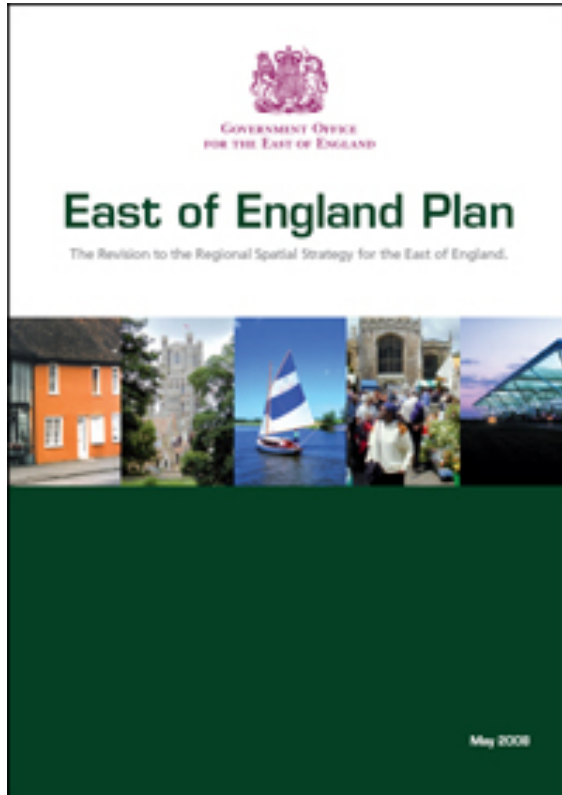
National Planning: Main Changes 1

- There will be a simpler and consolidated National Planning Framework covering all forms of development & setting out national economic, environmental and social priorities
- The Framework will be debated and voted on democratically by resolution in both Houses of Parliament
- Operating within this broad Framework, local people and local authorities will have much more flexibility to produce their own distinctive local policies
- Centrally driven and prescriptive national and regional housing targets will be abolished

National Planning: Main Changes 2

- The unelected Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC) will be abolished
- IPC to be replaced by an efficient & democratically accountable system providing a fast-track process for major infrastructure projects
- 3rd Heathrow runway to be cancelled; extra runways at Gatwick and Stansted will not be approved
- Replacement of existing nuclear power stations may be allowed providing they are brought forward in the planning process (in conformity with the National Planning Framework) and receive no public subsidy

Regional Planning: Main Changes



- Current system of Regional Spatial Strategies to be rapidly abolished, including current work to review and update them
- Their functions for deciding housing, planning and transport policy to be handed to district, borough, and unitary councils
- Current regional planning structures are being dismantled
- Local enterprise partnerships will replace Regional Development Agencies, if there is support for this locally
- Government Office for London is being abolished; & will consider case for abolishing the remaining Regional Government Offices

Local Planning: Main Changes 1

- Local planning system is to be made more efficient and with greater local community involvement
- Neighbourhoods are to be given more ability to decide the shape of the places in which their inhabitants live
- Local plans will be prepared more from the 'bottom-up' starting with the aspirations of neighbourhoods (but working within the basic national framework of planning policies)
- New financial incentives for local authorities to deliver sustainable development, including for new homes and businesses

Local Planning: Main Changes 2

- A new presumption in favour of ‘sustainable development’ so individuals & businesses will have a right to build new homes and other buildings if they:
 - ✓ Conform to national environmental, architectural, economic and social standards
 - ✓ Conform to the local plan
 - ✓ Pay a tariff that compensates the community for the loss of amenity and costs of additional infrastructure
- New Local Housing Trusts – will allow communities to develop local homes in small-scale developments that local people want
- Promote conversion of existing farm buildings into affordable housing

Local Planning: Main Changes 3

- Local Renewable Energy schemes to be encouraged where there is community support; and ability to keep the extra business rates they generate
- Firm protection of green belts, SSSI's, and other environmental designations
- Will create new designations for locally important green areas, and promote provision of locally important green infrastructure
- New measures to stop garden grabbing, bring empty homes into use, improve energy efficiency in buildings, and promote a 'zero waste' society'

Key Issues For ECC





Key Issues For ECC:

- The huge 'gap' between national and local policy – still need 'strategic spatial planning' over larger geographic areas for ECC services, transport corridors, minerals and waste planning etc.
- How to engage effectively with a new planning system that is going to be much more locally focussed
- Infrastructure delivery has been has a consistent challenge, but how do you provide for this in an era of public spending cuts
- How to balance tackling a national housing shortage with a localism agenda
- Need for smooth transitional arrangements from the 'old' to the 'new' system

A New Integrated County Strategy 1

- A new spatial strategy is being created to align economic, spatial development, transport and regeneration priorities
- Being prepared in a collaborative partnership between all the Essex local authorities (county council, boroughs & districts, and two unitary councils)
- Will incorporate the views and aspirations of all the Essex local authorities – a strategy accepted by all of Essex’s councils
- Defines Essex’s key selling points and competitive advantages; and identifies where opportunities for growth & investment are

A New Integrated County Strategy 2

- Builds off work by ECC, ECEA, sub-regional partnerships, EEDA, HCA and others – not ‘a blank sheet approach’
- Defines Essex’s key selling points and competitive advantages; identifies where the opportunities for growth & investment are
- Will set out key priorities for action, funding & delivery by partners; will help direct the future application of ECC’s resources
- Will speak to three audiences – local government partners, Central Government, and the development industry
- Ready by October 2010 as a prospectus for discussions with the Government

Finally: The New System and You



- You will have to keep ‘up to speed’ with rapid changes to the planning system as they may well be very radical
- The nature of your working relationships with local planning authorities may have to be rethought
- You will need to work together with local communities much more in consulting them about major development proposals
- Community benefits, imagination and creativity will have to be promoted at a local level
- Finally, as key customers of the planning system – GOOD LUCK