

INQUIRY INTO THE ABOLITION OF REGIONAL STRATEGIES

SUMMARY:

Ringwood Town Council's summary & expanded comments address the three particular questions & the three subsequent matters for further consideration:

- We believe there will be a marked loss of impetus in the development of housing, particularly amongst the 'developer community' as it comes to terms with the new regime;
- We believe that plans to incentivise local communities will be singularly ineffective as it misunderstands human nature & that alleged community gain will not outweigh perceived personal loss;
- We reserve our position as to the relevance & effectiveness of plans for incentives but are extremely sceptical as to the hoped for impact on overcoming private 'regret or loss' by the offering of wider community benefits;

- We believe that there is need for a higher-level view of strategic issues but what ever body is considered it must meet certain criteria of a 'sense of place';
- We believe that there needs to be both rewards & sanctions for whatever successor planning authority otherwise a 'duty to co-operate' is worthy but worthless;
- We believe that, firstly, such information should be passed to Counties & Unitaries, &, secondly, that larger, task specific or even Ad Hoc structures be considered, subject to the nature of the specific task. Is there a possible role for the Local Government Association?

MAIN COMMENTS:

The implications of the abolition of regional house building targets for levels of housing development:

Ringwood Town Council believes there will be a marked loss of impetus in new build housing whilst new criteria are developed & implemented. The effect will be most marked on the 'developer community' as they had come to terms with rules & vagaries of the previous hierarchical planning regime. Until the certainty is established & understood by all parties there will be a reduced rate of new house building.

The likely effectiveness of the Government's plan to incentivise local communities to accept new housing development, & the nature & level of incentives which will need to be put in place to ensure an adequate long-term supply of housing:

Ringwood Town Council believes that the concept is, for most communities, fundamentally flawed. It misreads human nature of which there is extensive theoretical & empirical evidence that demonstrates clearly the vast difference a perceived personal loss (a building or buildings next to me equals loss of amenity (define & value), & the possible loss of value in my property & the diffuse gain (quantify) that might benefit a local community. The bulk of the community will see no personal gain, therefore, no motivation to champion an 'external good'. It might just work at the very smallest Parish level but even there will be immense inertia to overcome a change to the status quo. There is also the very real issue in forming a robust case for new housing – who is to do this, what will be the quality & robustness of the housing case & who will pay – sponsors or the community?

As an example and to put such initiatives in context Ringwood is a small market town, bisected by the A31, on the edge of the New Forest with a population of approximately 14,000. We have currently a waiting list of some 15 years for affordable housing & an approved new build rate under the current core strategy of 20 units per annum to 2026. We feel that the current long-term supply is neither adequate nor that the above proposals will make any material difference.

The Committee understands that the Government intends to announce further details of its plans for incentives 'shortly' & would welcome comments on the adequacy & appropriateness of those incentives when the details are available:

Ringwood Town Council maintains a watching brief but strongly believes that the devising of incentives that achieve acceptance of a public good by the community against the strongly held & articulated opinions of a few

affected persons who only perceive loss or regret will be very hard to achieve. Blanket solutions will not be appropriate, as the local circumstance should dictate whatever incentive package is devised. That said any solution must be sustainable & not add to the existing burden on the Council Tax payers at large. Lastly, to be an effective local solution, recognition must be taken in any overall calculus that tailored solutions will be administratively costly to implement. Unless it can be shown that there are overall savings then this route should not be pursued.

The arrangements which should be put in place to ensure that cooperation between local planning authorities on matters formerly covered by regional spatial strategies (e.g. waste, minerals, flooding, the natural environment, renewable etc.):

Ringwood Town Council believes that a critical, higher level is required as the view & incentive for wider co-ordination had been subsumed in the now abolished regional strategies. There is an excellent case to review the level at which such overarching viewpoints are formulated & implemented, previously the concept of most regional bodies strained all the criteria of economic geography, a sense of place & history & political comprehensibility. The strongest consideration should be given to more compact structures that address the above issues. What coherence was there ever in an entity called SE region that spanned from the Isle of Thanet ((E), Milton Keynes (N), having skirted around almost three quarters of London, to the conurbation of Southampton/Eastleigh/Portsmouth (SW) with part of the region, New Forest western edge, strongly linked with the other conurbation (Christchurch/Bournemouth/Poole) in SW Region.

The adequacy of proposals put forward by the government, including a duty to co-operate & the suggestion that Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) may fulfil a planning function:

Ringwood Town Council believes that a duty to co-operate unless backed up by a system of rewards & sanctions will be worthy but worthless, which in turn requires some overarching authority. At this stage no comment of substance can be made on the suitability of a LEP fulfilling a planning

function – detail is scant, but see previous comments in that such a body must have a sense of place if its decisions are to materially effect either a community or an area.

How the data & research collated by the now abolished Regional Local Authority Leader's Board should be made available to local authorities, & what arrangements should be put in place to ensure effective updating of that research & collection of further research crossing on matters crossing local authority boundaries:

Ringwood Town Council believes an essential first step is to ensure that such information is passed to Counties & Unitaries, & secondly there needs to be created a 'research & analysis' capability that reflects what ever intermediate structure is created to deal with these larger issues. Once again careful thought needs to be given to the scope of such an organisation be it a LEP or something else such that there is a sense of place in its coverage. Communities must feel some natural affinity with decisions affecting their larger, longer-term interests, without some form of overarching but sufficiently local identity there will be myopia & short-term thinking.

Maybe we need to consider more Ad Hoc structures of the willing to address issues that dictate the scale of investigation & coordination – flooding may have one focus, economic growth another, with rural deprivation being part of a wider community but once again reflecting the concept of a sense of place.

Lastly, is there a possible role for the Local Government Association to complement its existing support, coordination & representation functions which undertakes on behalf of all tiers of Local Government?