Monitoring in the New Era
- 2010 Annual Seminar -

Thursday 4 November 2010

**Council Chamber, Nottinghamshire County Council,
West Bridgford, Nottingham**

Notes from Question and Answers

Session 1

Andrew Pritchard, East Midlands Councils – suggested that monitoring would become more important in the future. Local Authorities would need accurate information in order to access funding.

Carol-Anne Taylor, Amber Valley Borough Council - stressed the importance to local authorities of the 10 year Census of Population.

Andrew Pritchard - said that it shouldn't be assumed that existing ways of working and sources of data will remain available in the future and this applied to the Census of Population.

Carol-Anne Taylor – stressed the need for the continuation of statistics like the Census of Population.

Amy Steer, Central Lincolnshire Joint Planning Unit – wondered what the balance would be between the role of local authorities and the new Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) in planning and monitoring.

Andrew Pritchard – understood that LEPs would not get formal planning powers but some may work with local authorities on planning issues on a non-statutory basis but thought it unlikely they would undertake a significant role in plan monitoring.

Richard Cooper, Nottinghamshire County Council – suggested that some LEPs would wish to prioritise economic issues over planning.

Steve Birkinshaw, Government Office for the East Midlands – was unable to provide an official Government view as to how plan monitoring would develop. However, he pointed delegates to the Conservative's Green Paper 'Open Source Planning' which stressed the need to provide information at the neighbourhood level to enable local communities to shape their own future. This may be a challenging task given the constraints on public resources.

Andrew Pritchard – was similarly uncertain how the process would work but suggested that Local Development Documents might in future bring together Community Plans. LEPs might work jointly with local authorities in co-ordinating neighbourhood activity.

Richard Cooper – suggested that local authorities should ensure their views on how the process would work are fed through to Government.

Mike Cooper, cdpSoft – thought the impact of joint working between local authorities and the sharing of resources e.g. a joint Chief Executive, would be significant. For example, if monitoring is seen as a priority then progress might be made as authorities draw on each other's expertise. However, if monitoring is not seen as an important function then progress made in recent years in the region might be lost.

Andrew Pritchard – acknowledged the role of resource sharing but suggested the position might be complicated by local authorities working with a range of new partners who don't necessarily fit with existing or planned (e.g. proposed LEP) political boundaries.

Ian Lings, Lincolnshire County Council – wondered to what extent parish plans would influence the new planning process, and wondered how those that resisted new development would fit with the enhanced role for communities who wished to engage with the localism agenda.

Andrew Pritchard – pointed out that the region was only partly covered by parish plans.

Session 2

Andrew Pritchard – stressed the need for local authorities to agree clear definitions to ensure their develop figures are accurate e.g. for housing completions and demolitions.

David Hemmett, West Northants Joint Planning Unit – suggested that Officer's Reports should be made available as they should contain the relevant information.

Jon Whitaker, Derbyshire County Council – highlighted a need for officers in different departments within a local authority to make sure they work together in sharing data and intelligence.

Richard Cooper –said that monitoring officers still performed a vital function and should be retained.

David Hemmett - said that the data provided by 1APP could not always be relied upon.

David George, Lincolnshire County Council – stressed the need for local authorities to maintain good data on housing completions and noted the different ways that local authorities gather this information, with some authorities rely on Building Control records, while others preferred site visits. In one example a comparison between Building Control figures and a subsequent site visit revealed an additional 400 + new houses.

Carol-Anne Taylor – stressed the fact that monitoring systems and capturing data from 1APP was not a substitute for going out and making a site visit.

Amy Steer – said it made a lot of sense to align monitoring systems but agreed it was also important to get a better understanding of what is happening on the ground. A possible role for East Midlands Council's in the future could be to advise local authorities on monitoring good practice. The regional monitoring system cdpVision could play an important role in achieving this. It is preferable to develop a 'monitoring manual' to share best practice across groups of local authorities than to try and find out what works best on an individual basis.

Richard Cooper – Agreed with the need to share best practice. A meeting would be held following the seminar to look at the future of East Midlands Councils' monitoring role as well as cdpVision.

Session 3

Richard Cooper – stressed the role of cdpSmart in providing readily accessible data without the need to revisit historic planning records.

There was concern that the note on monitoring by the Communities and Local Government Secretary appeared to suggest that a future list of core indicators would be subject to an annual review thereby not enabling a historic data series to be built up.

One conclusion from the seminar was the desire expressed by a number of officers to meet more regularly as a wider monitoring group to look at issues around cdpSmart and core output indicators.

David George, Derby City Council – asked a question about the ability of cdpSmart to export GIS files at ward level.

Karen Parkin, Nottingham City Council – confirmed this would be possible since the data was georeferenced.

Richard Cooper – asked about the synergies between cdpSmart and the Regional Housing System Hi4em.

Karen Parkin – said that a new set of core reports would soon be available to all cdpSmart users.

Richard Cooper – asked Andrew Pritchard if a Regional Annual Monitoring Report might need to be produced for 2009/10.

Andrew Pritchard – confirmed that it would if the High Court challenge into the revocation of the Regional Strategy by Cala Homes was upheld. The Regional Strategy would then once again become part of the development plan. The judgement was expected to be known w/c 8 November 2010.

In this event a cut down Regional AMR would be produced by 28 February 2011 which would focus on core output indicators only.

Workshop Notes

Workshop A: Plan Monitoring and the Localism Agenda

Facilitator: Andrew Pritchard, East Midlands Councils
Support: Ian Lings, Lincolnshire County Council

- Need to take into account the Community Right to Build
- Housing monitoring procedures should be better formalised so that they can give more meaningful information to inform other working arrangements and planning priorities
- The role of planning permissions, in terms of net additions as well as commissions and completions should be better analysed across the region
- Any gaps between trajectories and a vision should be ascertained
- Sec. 106 agreements should be clarified in geographical areas
- Joint Planning Units (such as the one in place in North Northants) should be looked at as they have put in place effective monitoring procedures
- Local Economic Assessments and Local Enterprise Partnerships could be beneficial to localism if coordinated effectively
- Derby HMA is a good example of joint working in practice
- With regards Renewable Energy it should be agreed regionally what should be taken into account and which methods should be used
- Better liaison with groups which assess planning applications (in Lincolnshire, such as the Development Control Officers Forum)

Workshop B: Taking Forward Monitoring – the requirements

Facilitator: Jon Whitaker, Derbyshire County Council
Support: Don Betcher, Nottinghamshire County Council

Session 1

cdpSmart/Tractivity – does your authority use cdpSmart/Tractivity to meet its monitoring requirements?
- 13 attendees – 6 indicated they use cdpSmart, no-one indicated they use Tractivity
- Mixed comments on cdpSmart – financial implications of buying into, use of Uniform is unsatisfactory but would like to have Smart, not convinced that Smart can provide results and consequently an existing parallel system is maintained, reports in Smart need to be developable but acknowledge that Karen Parkin is addressing this issue, no need to duplicate monitoring when an existing system is flexible and adequate, existing system can satisfy AMR requirements but can Smart deliver? Major officer input into cdpSmart but benefits now being realised

cdpSmart/Tractivity – if your authority uses cdpSmart/Tractivity what could be improved to meet your monitoring requirements?
- Reduce duplication where data migrations undertaken of same records but different formats used
- Certainty of support and the question of financial implications should some authorities decide to pull out of cdpSmart

cdpVision future
- Disappointment that authorities still required to use cdpVision
- cdpVision could be useful if authorities are not cdpSmart users
- Few (employment land and subject to thresholds) sites makes cdpVision not very useful
- DCLG HFR request means that Vision data request leads to duplication
- Information available elsewhere

Role of EMC
- Local authorities responsibility to provide information – regional interference confusing
- Question the need to monitor and relevance/usefulness of what we do at the moment e.g. NI 170 (previously developed land that has been vacant or derelict for more than 5 years)
- Wind down of EMC long overdue because authorities get no benefit

Session 2

cdpSmart/Tractivity – does your authority use cdpSmart/Tractivity to meet its monitoring requirements?
- 15 attendees – 5 indicated they use cdpSmart, no-one indicated they use Tractivity
- Mixed comments on cdpSmart - reports (housing) checked out correctly, reports inaccessible so far but require greater familiarisation with the system, general (un)usability means cdpSmart is not useful, major effort required in inputting data (especially large sites), problems with development control section, historical data input of sites a major problem but 'once done cdpSmart is brilliant', use of cdpSmart could lead to greater efficiency of staff resources, no need to change to cdpSmart because existing monitoring system satisfies requirements
- Tractivity – issue of transfer of data and uploads from existing systems into Tractivity means existing system continues to be maintained, past resources put into Tractivity make it now harder to change and run with cdpSmart
- Need to mirror 1APP – information not always recorded

cdpSmart/Tractivity – if your authority uses cdpSmart/Tractivity what could be improved to meet your monitoring requirements?
- Problem of bringing in old data
- Dealing with technical problems (though acknowledged that Mike Cooper can and does provide support)
- Allow the use of UPRN's as reference rather than planning application numbers

cdpVision future
- Useful to continue cdpVision because it brings the collection of information into a central point
- Flexible geographies useful and important
- Provision of housing trajectories useful (especially in relation to HMA's)
- Useful to keep time series data

Role of EMC
- Useful training for planners initiative welcomed for those that do not want RTPI membership
- Good to have a voice for the East Midlands and need to lobby for national funding
- Need to promote future co-operation in the LEP (cite 3 Cities as a good example of co-operation)

Other Actions to improve monitoring process
- Need to develop better links and understanding with other departments within local authorities e.g. development control
- Emphasise the importance and need of informing authorities of data requirements well in advance of monitoring dates so that monitoring systems can be put in place
- The reporting of some data analysis can be demoralising e.g. deceiving 'garden grab' definitions
- Need to raise profile of monitoring through EMC. New Homes Bonus can help. Local authority parochialism and inexperienced/high turnover of staff resources doesn't help

Workshop C: Taking Forward Monitoring – the systems

Facilitator: Mike Cooper, cdpSoft
Support: Amy Steer, Central Lincolnshire Joint Planning Unit

- cdpSoft don't get much feedback on cdpSmart from the East Midlands. Mike Cooper would welcome feedback and suggestions for improvements
- Mike Cooper ran through the improvements being made to the system including:
  o Reporting - can run reports between any two dates not just financial year; templates will be available
  o Demolitions check box
  o Many plot permissions - will be able to sort table to aid searches
  o Garden development check box
  o Monitoring guide and module
- cdpSoft is working with Oxfordshire on Section 106 module - could be rolled out to other authorities for a fee (of around £3,000)

Workshop D: Reporting Tools in cdpsmart

Facilitator: Karen Parkin, Nottingham City Council
Support: Peter Williams, East Midlands Councils

Session 1

- Two members of groups have some experience of cdpSmart reporting
- Core list of reports being developed to cover COI's – available soon
- Extra data can be added to existing reports but can be difficult to locate correct field – look in field's list to help find fields
- Building complex reports yourself is not an easy process. Consider using reports provided
- Use SQL. Look at existing SQL for how to do it
- Takes a while to get report design correct
- Previewing reports not available
- Finding fields is biggest challenge when writing a report. Don't know what they mean – use 'available fields' designation
- Hope that key fields required by LAs coincide with agreed key reports
- Reports can still be sent to Excel – best way if going to another report

Session 2

- Six people in group already used cdpSmart reporting
- Easy to edit existing reports
- Easiest way to filter and find fields is use switch between list/treeview
- Will be given standard reports which you can add to
- User guides available from user forum
- User issues – 'field width' when trying to create reports. This can be amended by changing 'width' or if set as pdf, can run it as Excel spreadsheet – solves problem
- Anyone can create a new report
- Use available fields filter to find frequently used fields
- Filter by '(M)' for date range fields
- 'Criteria 2' only works with dates
- May get some sites appear more than once if mix plot level and permission level. Remedy this by selecting different fields for reports
- Learn by mistakes – mistakes not normally made twice

- Tools there to help you design reports
- Report design allows you to customise reports so not just stuck with what you are given but can be a bit complicated
- Question to Group – should reports be pre-written with dates or left blank?
- Concluded leave blank or will have to adjust each year. All agreed
- Inconsistencies in reports, e.g. completions by wards and housing availability and the 'not yet started figure' on both reports was completely different
- Question? Will the new master reports solve some of these problems? Answer – it depends on how field is designed – give examples to Karen
- Templates coming soon – looking at Gypsies & Travellers and demolitions. May make a few reports available at a time
- If edit cdpSmart reports – do you save as another name? Make copy and save yourself a copy

Workshop E: What is a Five Year Land Supply or House Building Target?

Facilitator: Richard Cooper, Nottinghamshire County Council
Support: David Hemmett, West Northants Joint Planning Unit

- There was agreed to be a 'short-term' (i.e. appeals or interim statements) and 'long-term' (LDF reviews) distinction
- On the short-term aspect some authorities are getting lots of questions from developers on the 5 year land supply. However, this is only one element and the basis for an approach, not the be-all-and-end-all
- Decision does depend upon other policies which may have been saved, plus some districts are updating their housing policies through the LDF
- Inspectors seem to be all over the place, with apparently conflicting decisions
  - Cornwall
  - Ipswich
  - South Northants (Deanshanger)
- Districts variously are sticking with the RSS - a quick count of those in first workshop showed about 8 (out of 20+) keeping RSS housing figures, rest either reviewing or undecided. BSHF research showed about 38% for the East Midlands
- Whatever is decided has to be evidence based – cannot just make up a number. This applies even to short-term decision making where decision is to keep RSS figures
- There is a big issue at the moment of capacity to deliver – PPS3 and RSS approaches were based on a time when there was no demand constraint. Housing trajectories now constrained by the market, not supply

Considering the Longer term:

- Localism is a big problem for urban areas which need to develop outside their boundaries; a co-operative approach needs to be negotiated. Deanshanger decision cites this, although in the context of a pre-existing joint LDF
- Option 1 figures are based on out-dated figures which contradicts PPS requirement to be based on latest figures, therefore agreement at workshop that these are untenable in the East Midlands
- Suggestion has been made by the Minister for Housing and Planning Grant Shapps that Local Authorities should do deals and get another Local Authority to build homes for you to help deliver the New Homes Bonus, this may depend upon co-ordinated LDFs
- The West Northants Joint Planning Unit approach presented to the workshop was agreed as a valuable example, it included two important elements; it was evidence-based and jointly prepared, fulfilling PINS, CLG and ministerial guidance. It was noted that it was still to be tested at Examination