



Final Report

Spatial Plans in Practice: Supporting the reform of local planning



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Baker Associates, Terence O'Rourke, University of Liverpool,
University of Manchester, University of the West of England

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The findings in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the Department for Communities and Local Government

Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DU
Telephone: 020 7944 4400
Website: www.communities.gov.uk

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West Yorkshire
LS23 7NB
Tel: 08701 226 236
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CHAPTER 1

Executive Summary

The purpose of the project

- 1.1** Major reforms to the planning system were introduced by the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act. The Spatial Plans in Practice project has looked at the way that planning authorities and others have used the new arrangements for preparing development plans at the local level.
- 1.2** The objectives of the research project were to:
 - inform Communities and Local Government how the reforms to the planning system are performing in relation to their original purpose;
 - suggest changes that ought to be made to legislation, policy and guidance to assist in the continued positive evolution of the planning system;
 - provide useful lessons to practitioners.
- 1.3** The reforms were designed to enable local authorities to take a more positive, efficient and effective approach to managing spatial development, and for those affected by spatial planning to participate more fully in the plan-making process.
- 1.4** The Act introduced new tools and procedures, but a critical component of reform was about culture change for those in local planning services and others who engage with the planning process.
- 1.5** The research has sought to answer five critical questions concerning the impact of the reforms. Five research components have been used to address the research questions. These include: literature reviews; strategic surveys of local planning authorities, action learning events with planners and stakeholders, thematic studies and longitudinal case studies. Four lessons reports were produced. The main research outputs can be found on the Spatial Plans in Practice website.
- 1.6** The final report, which is a summary of findings from various components of the investigation, is organised around the research questions. It provides an overview of the findings, and a series of practice points providing advice to practitioners. An executive summary of the study findings in relation to the five research questions is set out in the sections that follow.

Study findings

1. The timely delivery of planning policy: Are the reforms leading to more dynamic development plans and so enabling planning policy to be more effective?

1.7 The majority of local authorities are experiencing delays in implementing the reforms and getting plans in place, and overall, progress has been slow. There are several reasons for this. Inevitably it has taken time to make the transition to the new system, and in particular, to fully understand the implications of the new spatial planning approach. The context has continued to change fairly rapidly, with national and regional policy evolving, creating uncertainty. The resources required have been underestimated in many local authorities, compounded by a lack of local authority corporate and political leadership and support in some cases.

1.8 A crucial key to success lies in making the necessary cultural shift to spatial planning. A fundamental part of this involves getting the context right within the authority, as well as developing good relationships with other agencies. This requires gaining the commitment of senior managers and elected members, good leadership at the level of the local development framework team and the head of service, and the development of new project management skills.

2. Effective participation in plan making: Are the reforms providing for participation that is inclusive and effective, leading to confidence in the way the plan is prepared and the achievement of consensus where possible?

1.9 There is certainly more and earlier engagement with other stakeholders, and an increasing appreciation of the need for engagement because of concern with policy delivery. There is less evidence of community involvement being substantially improved by the reforms. Levels of participation appear to be greater where good community infrastructure is in place, and there is evidence of consensus building around site-specific local development documents, but public involvement in the preparation of core strategies remains disappointing. Statements of community involvement were meant to be clear statements of how local planning authorities proposed to engage with the community and other stakeholders, but are often vague when describing the purposes and approaches to stakeholder involvement at different stages of the plan-making process.

1.10 Achieving effective participation requires designing a community engagement strategy setting out the purpose of participation, the outcomes required, who will be consulted, and what methods of involvement are appropriate for different interests and at different stages of the process. There are advantages in joining up participation activities with other departments and sectors, as this helps to develop organisational relationships, allows for resources and skills to be shared and reduces consultation fatigue. There is scope to develop participation techniques, particularly to engage groups which do not generally engage in planning, and, through more interactive techniques, to build ownership and consensus over local policy decisions.

3. Integrating policy through the spatial planning approach: Are the reforms leading to more effective collaboration between local planning authorities and other sector policy makers and stakeholders in identifying issues and priorities?

1.11 There are promising moves towards more collaborative working in plan making. This is particularly the case in terms of collaboration within local authorities, given added impetus by the important links between the sustainable community strategies and development plans. Joint working across administrative boundaries is also increasingly common, motivated by the need to tackle development or other issues that straddle boundaries, or by the development of sub-regional collaboration. The benefits of collaboration have been recognised particularly in meeting the challenging requirements of developing the evidence base for policy making. There has been considerable encouragement for local authorities to develop more collaborative and integrated working practices, but other organisations have not been given the same encouragement. It is also clear that developing relationships with organisations and sectors beyond the local authority takes time, and that producing truly integrated spatial plans that coordinate the actions of a wide range of stakeholders also takes considerable time and effort.

1.12 More effective collaboration and policy integration takes place where members and senior officers actively support collaboration with other tiers, sectors and neighbouring authorities. Collaboration is also enhanced where shared strategic or development issues are identified as requiring a joint approach. Networks and partnerships already exist in many areas, and the local development framework process can exploit these, as well as developing new relationships through initiatives such as seconding planners to other parts of the local authority or other public sector bodies. As in the case of community participation, it is important that approaches

and techniques of stakeholder involvement are tailored to individual organisations and the constraints that they face, and are appropriate for different stages of the plan-making process.

4. Delivering evidence-based, positive planning: Are the reforms leading to plans where the policies and proposals address the necessary issues and which make use of a sound evidence base to manage change from the present situation towards what is sought?

- 1.13** The collection and use of evidence in local planning authorities has increased considerably, and this represents a significant change from the approach taken to producing local plans. The test of soundness, and the number of submitted plans found unsound or withdrawn because of inadequate use of evidence, has been extremely influential in making planning authorities appreciate the importance of this issue. The requirements in Planning Policy Statements, proposals for the allocation of Housing and Planning Delivery Grant and sustainability appraisal are also influential. There is still a lot of progress to be made, however, in gathering the right type of evidence at the right time in a cost effective way, and particularly in achieving a more compelling relationship between evidence and what is in the plan.
- 1.14** For plans to deliver change it is necessary to know what the circumstances are and the issues that need to be tackled in an area, what is wanted for the future, what is feasible and acceptable, and how desired changes can be brought about. Each of these steps in the development of policy requires evidence of different kinds, collected from different sources. The important point, therefore, is that evidence is the thread that runs through policy making and is gathered progressively as a plan develops from initial views on issues, through to deliverable policies and proposals.

5. Making a difference: Does the new system help to achieve the implementation of national, regional and local objectives and strategies, and a contribution to the overarching goal of sustainable development?

- 1.15** This is an important, but difficult, question, and all the more so at this point in time as the number of local development documents that have been adopted remains small. It is possible, however, to make some tentative responses based on the form and content of plans produced to date, and the perceptions of the new system and its likely impact. Overall there has been limited progress towards making spatial plans which embrace the spatial implications of other sectors' and agencies' activities, and seek to

manage these positively to achieve qualitatively different outcomes. On the other hand, there is a growing appreciation that delivery is important in the new system, and the requirement to develop a delivery strategy, to identify the level of infrastructure needed, and to test the effectiveness of a plan at examination are part of the drive to produce plans that 'make a difference'. Institutional developments in local government such as closer links to the local strategic partnership, and local area agreements (LAAs) and multi-area agreements (MAAs) could provide more integrated mechanisms for service and infrastructure delivery.

- 1.16** There are two key aspects to enhancing the effectiveness of spatial plans. The first is to clarify the components of a spatial plan in terms of its form and content. This requires a shared vision for the area, a locally grounded spatial development strategy, policies which deliver the strategy and recognise the consequences of the actions of other sectors and agencies, evidence that delivery has been thought about and planned by the local authority and other agencies and sectors, and evidence that decision making is based on sound evidence and an open and transparent process. The second is to put the local development framework at the heart of the place shaping agenda. This can only be achieved if local planning authorities actively engage with other partners in a positive way to influence delivery, achieve consensus and enhance the status of spatial planning as a focus for coordination. There is also an important role for Government in reinforcing this message across the public sector that spatial plans are concerned with place shaping and not just a narrow view of land use planning.

Conclusions and recommendations

- 1.17** Some general conclusions can be made which reflect on the overall progress of reform and set out recommendations for how Government can support planning authorities in the preparation of spatial plans.
- 1.18** The new arrangements and requirements to produce spatial plans are essentially sound. The sense from this research is that, after a considerable hiatus, the appreciation of the implications of reform is maturing. There is greater appreciation of the need for plans to manage change, and for a longer-term and strategic approach. There is understanding of the need for plans to be built on evidence, and for more engagement with stakeholders and service providers, if there is to be any prospect of a plan being implemented. On the other hand, only a small proportion of the plans that were envisaged have been adopted, and there is consequently little on which to base any assessment of effectiveness.

1.19 For all the attention in this project and elsewhere to ‘the system’, defined by legislation, regulations and policy, it is clear that achieving the objectives behind the reforms is reliant on a cultural change in the way that professionals conceive what plans are for, and how they are prepared. Many authorities point to insufficient resources in terms of people, but the gap increasingly is about skills. The skills needed to make spatial plans – data and analytical skills, creativity and facilitation, project management, implementation and evaluation – are not those that have been emphasised in the profession for the last two decades. Some of the skills gap could be filled through training and new recruitment to the profession, and through a development of current collaborative activities. Alternatively, it could be addressed by shifting responsibility for the preparation of spatial plans away from an isolated forward planning department to a team with a wider mix of skills in a more central position in the local authority.

1.20 Government and its partner organisations can assist plan making in a number of ways:

- By continuing to impress upon local authorities their leading role in place making. This message needs to be directed to the highest level in local authorities;
- By maintaining the emphasis on spatial planning, as opposed to a narrow focus on certain land uses, such as housing delivery;
- Reinforcing the message that spatial plans should perform a positive role in managing development which is needed to meet the needs of society as well as the local community, and contribute to creating the conditions that enable more sustainable life-styles and patterns of behaviour;
- Helping to develop sufficient people with skills in analysis, facilitation, strategy formulation, development appraisal, and implementation, so that they are equipped to make spatial plans;
- Ensuring that the right types of help and advice are available, and that consistent and complementary messages are given by Communities and Local Government, the Government Offices and the Planning Inspectorate;
- Supporting the Planning Advisory Service in continuing and developing its role in disseminating practical advice, and providing targeted support to particular authorities;
- Bringing together and synthesising in an accessible form the already considerable amount of guidance on preparing local development frameworks;

- Examining the potential for establishing a review panel for each local authority, or on a sub-regional basis, comprising the Planning Inspectorate, the Government Office, representation from the Planning Advisory Service, and another planning authority, to act as a source of advice and a sounding board on matters of plan design and content;
- Assistance in developing the knowledge and skills of other public sector agencies and bodies in order that they can engage more effectively in spatial planning, as well as ensuring that other public sector agencies have the resources to do so;
- Communities and Local Government and other government departments should continue to address the alignment of strategies amongst other stakeholders involved in implementation, including time horizons and funding needed to provide the infrastructure, identified as necessary in integrated strategies.

CHAPTER 2

Overview of project purpose, method and outputs

The purpose of the project

- 2.1** The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (the Act)¹ introduced far-reaching changes to plan making at the local level in the form of local development frameworks (LDFs). The Spatial Plans in Practice (SPiP) project was conceived in order to examine how the reformed system was being put into practice and how the changes are helping to achieve the Government's objectives. A summary of the new system is presented in Appendix 1.
- 2.2** The aims of the project were to:
- assess progress and provide evidence and dissemination of materials to support local planning authorities in their preparation of LDFs;
 - assess how local planning authorities and partners are changing the way they work in response to the requirements of the new system;
 - provide the Government with the opportunity to evaluate the articulation of national planning policies in LDFs and to better understand how this enables real world delivery in the longer term;
 - help to develop an understanding of how plan making influences the delivery of sustainable development outcomes in the longer term.
- 2.3** The project began in April 2005 and this report presents the main findings.

Context

Context at inception

- 2.4** The 2001 Planning Green Paper² marked the formal start of reform of the planning system in England. There was widespread agreement that the planning system was failing to deliver the level of speed, certainty and responsiveness that businesses need to make successful investment decisions in a modern economy³. The Barker Review of Housing Supply (2004)⁴ was later to argue that the planning system had critical and deep-seated effects on the economy through its role in the delivery of housing.

¹ (May 2004) *The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act*

² ODPM (2001) *Planning Green Paper: Delivering a fundamental change*

³ CBI-TUC Working Group (2001)

⁴ Barker (2004) *Review of Housing Supply. Delivering Stability: Securing our Future Housing Needs*

2.5 Whilst there remained a positive view of the role of planning in society and the economy⁵, it was agreed that the system had in many places failed to deliver. The main criticisms of the previous system concerned:

- the complexity and inaccessibility of the system;
- delays, unpredictability and poor attention to the customer and service standards;
- weak community engagement and legalistic procedures;
- a weak resource and skills base for those who had to provide the service.

2.6 Other related critical issues not highlighted in the Green Paper concerned^{6,7}:

- large and complex local plans which did not concentrate effort on where development change was anticipated and needed;
- difficulties in tackling issues lying at the boundaries between authorities and between policy sectors;
- an unwillingness of politicians and communities in some places to accept new development and make difficult decisions;
- lack of understanding and control over the costs and benefits arising from new development;
- lack of co-ordination of the provision of necessary infrastructure where growth takes place;
- little wider ownership of plans – corporately within local authorities and across the public sector;
- the questionable qualities of the eventual outcomes of new development from the planning process in terms of sustainable development.

2.7 The reforms were designed to enable local planning authorities to take a more positive, efficient and effective approach to managing spatial development and delivering change, and for all who may be affected by spatial planning to participate more fully in the plan-making process.

⁵ See for example, the Minister's foreword to the 2001 Green Paper which says 'good planning can have a huge beneficial effect on the way we live our lives'.

⁶ ODPM (February 2006) *Spatial Plans in Practice: Supporting the reform of local planning – Inception Report*

⁷ Communities and Local Government (2006) *Spatial Plans in Practice Literature Review 1: The Role and Scope of Spatial Planning*

- 2.8** However, there was no expectation that all of the deficiencies of the local plan system would be removed solely by the introduction of new tools and procedures. A critical component of the reform agenda for planning was about the culture change for those in local planning services and all who engage with the planning process.

An evolving context

- 2.9** Since the study began, the context for preparing LDFs has continued to evolve. In October 2006, Communities and Local Government published the Local Government White Paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities*⁸ which promotes the role of councils as strategic leaders and place shapers, integrating their role with the work of local strategic partnerships (LSPs). The White Paper set out the role of the sustainable community strategy (SCS) (previously the community strategy), as providing the strategic vision for a place which would then be delivered through the local area agreement (LAA) between central government and local government, working with its partners. The LDF core strategy was identified as the means of providing the spatial expression of the SCS.
- 2.10** In May 2007 the Planning White Paper *Planning for a Sustainable Future*⁹ set out proposals for a package of further reforms to the planning system. Proposals to streamline LDFs included revoking the formal preferred options stage for development plan documents (DPDs), ending the independent examination of statements of community involvement (SCIs) and simplifying the process for preparing supplementary planning documents (SPDs). The White Paper further reinforced the need to place planning at the heart of local government by aligning the SCS with the LDF core strategy and expressed the intention to promote culture change in planning and work with the Local Government Association (LGA) and others to build capacity.
- 2.11** In July 2007 the Government published its *Review of sub-national economic development and regeneration*¹⁰ which proposed the abolition of regional assemblies and the development of a single regional strategy to be produced by regional development agencies with local authorities undertaking a scrutiny role. The review also proposed developing multi-area agreements (MAAs) and allowing local authorities to establish sub-regional bodies to develop economic development policy areas beyond transport.

⁸ Communities and Local Government (2006) *Strong and Prosperous Communities*

⁹ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Planning for a Sustainable Future*

¹⁰ HM Treasury (2007) *Review of sub-national economic development and regeneration*

2.12 At the time of preparing this final report, in enacting the proposals set out in the Planning White Paper (2007), The Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004 and PPS12 (2004) were being revised.

The core research questions

2.13 Reforming the system to streamline the local planning process and promote ‘a proactive, positive approach to managing development’¹¹ presented a large agenda for the project to consider. To assist with the design and execution of the project, the aims of the new system were organised under five themes¹² from which a detailed framework for the analysis and evaluation of practice was developed. These themes, and the core research questions developed from them, are outlined below.

2.14 The first theme is concerned with the **timely delivery of planning policy**. The reforms to the system seek more efficient plan production such that plans are adopted more quickly and kept up to date. This is being done by encouraging local planning authorities to improve project management through the adoption of a local development scheme (LDS), the provision of incentives, the production of annual monitoring reports (AMRs), and monitoring by the Government Offices (GOs). The new system also provides greater flexibility in bringing forward or revising planning policy with scope for specific local development documents (LDDs) to address particular issues or agendas, or to exploit opportunities.

2.15 The core research question for this theme is:

- Are the reforms leading to more dynamic development plans and so enabling planning policy to be more effective?

2.16 The second theme is concerned with **effective participation in plan making**. The reforms are intended to lead to stronger community and stakeholder involvement throughout the plan-making and implementation process, to ensure that agreement on key decisions is reached earlier in the process, and that those affected understand the process and the need for particular decisions. The statement of community involvement should lead to greater openness and transparency about what should be happening at particular points in the process and how a variety of stakeholders can become involved.

¹¹ ODPM (2004), *Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Development Frameworks – paragraph 1.3*

¹² ODPM (February 2006) *Spatial Plans in Practice: Supporting the reform of local planning – Inception Report*

2.17 The local development scheme should inform all parties of the authority's programme of planning policy preparation. Liaison with the LSP and the relationship with the SCS will be important in ensuring that plan processes are inclusive. Confidence should be enhanced by the effective involvement of stakeholders and increased understanding of who benefits from intervention.

2.18 The core research question for this theme is:

- Are the reforms providing for participation that is inclusive and effective, leading to confidence in the way that the plan is prepared and the achievement of consensus where possible?

2.19 The third theme is concerned with **the spatial planning approach**. PPS12¹³ says that 'Local planning authorities should adopt a spatial planning approach to LDFs to ensure the most efficient use of land by balancing competing demands within the context of sustainable development'. The spatial approach requires the integration of land use policies with other policies and programmes horizontally across sectors. There are questions for local planning authorities about what sort of 'integration' they seek and with whom. The reforms also address the 'vertical integration' of national, regional and local policy to ensure that policy at different spatial scales is mutually reinforcing, and that decisions are made at the most appropriate level. The reforms also provide more flexibility for local planning authorities to co-operate on planning policy across administrative boundaries where this is needed.

2.20 The core research question for this theme is:

- Are the reforms leading to more effective collaboration between local planning authorities and other sector policy makers and stakeholders in identifying issues and priorities, and what effect does this have on the content of planning policy at the local level?

2.21 The fourth theme is concerned with **delivering evidence-based positive planning**. The reforms give greater emphasis to an open and explicit evidence-based approach to policy making, and a better understanding of the process of spatial development and its wider implications on society and the economy. This understanding should contribute to the LDF becoming influential over change rather than be the source of information about change that is already committed. The approach is supported by the 'test of soundness' of the plan, and the requirement for sustainability

¹³ ODPM (2004), *Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Development Frameworks* – paragraph 1.8

appraisal. Substantial changes in the use of analytical methods and planning culture will be necessary for this change to be effective.

2.22 The core research question for this theme is:

- Are the reforms leading to plans where the policies and proposals address the necessary issues and which make use of a sound evidence base to manage change from the present situation towards what is sought?

2.23 The fifth theme is concerned with **making a difference**. The reforms aim to ensure that planning policy is more effective and 'makes a difference' in the delivery of government policy, especially sustainable development. The new arrangements also attempt to enable the local planning authority to concentrate on those matters on which it can make a difference, which are appropriate to that level of planning, and which add value overall.

2.24 The core research question for this theme is:

- Does the new system help to achieve the implementation of national, regional and local objectives and strategies, and a contribution to the overarching goal of sustainable development?

The research components

2.25 Five principal research components have been used to address the research questions. The research components are:

2.26 Literature reviews investigating what other studies have learned about particular aspects of the plan-making process.

2.27 A **Strategic Survey** of local planning authorities, conducted four times over the three years of the project including:

- May 2005 Strategic Survey 1 replaced by the Local Government Association (LGA) survey, achieving a 70 per cent response rate
- April 2006 Strategic Survey 2, achieving a response rate of 50 per cent
- January 2007 Strategic Survey 3, achieving a 46 per cent response rate
- October 2007 Strategic Survey 4, achieving a 58 per cent response rate.

- 2.28** The survey gathered information about changing practices, and senior local planners' own assessment about how the new system is being applied and its value.
- 2.29 Action learning events** (workshops) to explore emerging issues, findings and possible solutions with planners and other stakeholders such as elected members, developers, the health authority, Highways Agency, the Police, and the Environment Agency.
- 2.30 Thematic studies** to investigate critical issues in more depth (see paragraph 2.38 for the topics selected).
- 2.31 Longitudinal case studies**, following a sample of LDF situations over the term of the project to provide a detailed account of how the new system is being put into place, and with what effect.
- 2.32** Twenty five longitudinal case studies were identified. Only planning authorities that had declared their intention to embark on the preparation of LDFs at project initiation were included in the study. Given that a lot of local authorities did not elect to prepare an LDF straight away because of recently adopted or soon to be adopted local plans, in this respect the case studies were not representative of the national situation. The case studies were selected to give a geographical spread, and also to include a range of different economic and social contexts including growth areas, rural areas, large urban areas, regeneration areas and economically buoyant areas. The sample also included a National Park Authority and a Minerals and Waste Authority. The 25 case study authorities are:
- Birmingham City Council
 - Blackpool Borough Council
 - Carrick District Council
 - Corby Borough Council
 - Essex County Council
 - Horsham District Council
 - Hambleton District Council
 - Kettering Borough Council
 - Lake District National Park Authority
 - Liverpool City Council
 - London Borough of Islington
 - London Borough of Hounslow
 - Macclesfield Borough Council
 - North Cornwall District Council
 - North Dorset District Council
 - North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit
 - Plymouth City Council
 - Stoke-on-Trent City Council
 - Reading Borough Council
 - Stafford Borough Council
 - St Helens Council
 - South Hams District Council
 - West Berkshire Council
 - Windsor and Maidenhead Borough Council
 - Wokingham District Council

2.33 Four rounds of investigation took place including:

- Round 1 – exploratory meeting (December 2005);
- Round 2 – the use of evidence (October 2006);
- Round 3 – participation and policy integration (March 2007);
- Round 4 – making a difference (November 2007).

2.34 These rounds of investigation have included discussions with the local authority and other stakeholders as follows:

- local authority chief executives;
- elected members;
- local authority senior managers;
- the LDF team;
- policy specialists in other departments or tiers of local government, eg housing, regeneration, economic development, education, transport;
- policy specialists in other public sector bodies, as appropriate, eg Primary Care Trusts (PCTs), the Police;
- consultants engaged for special studies;
- GOs;
- government agencies or regional bodies, eg regional development Agency (RDA), Environment Agency;
- neighbouring authorities;
- the development industry;
- business interests;
- the voluntary and community sector.

2.35 In addition, where available, there has been analysis of relevant case study documents including:

- LDSs
- SCIs
- evidence reports and other relevant strategies (such as the sustainable community strategy, corporate plan, local transport plan etc)
- issues and options and preferred options documents
- DPD representations and reports of consultation

- submission and adopted DPDs
- Inspector's reports/Planning Inspectorate (PINS) exploratory meeting notes.

Research outputs

- 2.36** The aims, scope, methodology and nature and purpose of the outputs were set out in the **Inception Report**¹⁴. During the course of the project, the number of lessons reports was reduced from six to three to allow for more detailed investigation of large cross-cutting issues, rather than standalone topics. One of the thematic case studies was dropped from the research programme.
- 2.37** Updates on the project were prepared in the form of spatial plans in practice bulletins. A total of three bulletins were produced.
- 2.38** The main research outputs are listed below and can be found on the Spatial Plans in Practice website¹⁵.

Literature reviews

- The role and scope of spatial planning¹⁶ (December 2006);
- Culture change and planning¹⁷ (December 2006);
- Achieving successful participation¹⁸ (December 2006).

Thematic studies

- Thematic study 1: starting out with local development schemes¹⁹ (April 2006);
- Thematic study 2: preparing core strategies²⁰ (December 2006);
- Thematic study 3: stakeholder involvement²¹ (April 2008);
- Thematic study 4: cross boundary working²² (April 2008);
- Thematic study 5: delivering infrastructure (forthcoming).

¹⁴ ODPM (February 2006) *Spatial Plans in Practice: Supporting the reform of local planning – Inception Report*

¹⁵ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/planning/regionallocal/spatialplans/>

¹⁶ Communities and Local Government (2006) *Spatial Plans in Practice Literature Review 1: The Role and Scope of Spatial Planning*

¹⁷ Communities and Local Government (2006) *Spatial Plans in Practice Literature Review 2: Culture Change and Planning*

¹⁸ Communities and Local Government (2006) *Spatial Plans in Practice Literature Review 3: Achieving Successful Participation*

¹⁹ Communities and Local Government (2006) *Spatial Plans in Practice Thematic Study 1: Starting out with Local Development Schemes*

²⁰ Communities and Local Government (2006) *Spatial Plans in Practice Thematic Study 2: Preparing Core Strategies*

²¹ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Thematic Study 3: Stakeholder Involvement*

²² Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Thematic Study 4: Cross Boundary Working*

Lessons reports

- Lessons report 1: making timely progress and the integration of policy²³ (December 2006);
- Lessons report 2: using evidence in spatial planning²⁴ (March 2007);
- Lessons report 3: participation and policy integration in spatial planning²⁵ (April 2008).

2.39 A total of four **action learning events** took place over the course of the project to explore emerging issues, findings and possible solutions with stakeholders. They included the following topics:

- understanding place (March 2007)²⁶;
- using alternatives in making plans (linked with the Spring 2007 Planning Advisory Service (PAS) LDF seminars)²⁷;
- developer involvement in plan making (October 2007)²⁸;
- involving elected members in plan making (October 2007)²⁹.

2.40 This report constitutes the **Final Report** which is a summary of the study's findings from all of the components of the investigation. Chapters 3 – 7 present the findings according to the five core research questions, including a series of practice points providing advice to practitioners. Chapter 8 presents the overall conclusions on the effect of the reforms to the planning system so far, with Chapter 9 setting out recommendations to Communities and Local Government and its partners.

²³ Communities and Local Government (2006) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 1: Making Timely Progress and the Integration of Policy*

²⁴ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 2: Using Evidence in Spatial Planning*

²⁵ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and Policy Integration in Spatial Planning*

²⁶ PAS (2007) *Understanding Place* <http://www.pas.gov.uk/pas/aio/37542>

²⁷ PAS (2007) *Using Alternatives in Making Plans* <http://www.as.gov.uk/pas/aio/42167>

²⁸ PAS (2007) *Developer Involvement in Plan Making* <http://www.pas.gov.uk/pas/aio/49756>

²⁹ PAS (2007) *Involving Elected Members in Plan Making* <http://www.pas.gov.uk/pas/aio/49759>

CHAPTER 3

THE TIMELY DELIVERY OF PLANNING POLICY: Are the reforms leading to more dynamic development plans and so enabling planning policy to be more effective?

Introduction

- 3.1** The focus of the first research question relates to the timely delivery of planning policy. One of the main criticisms of the local plan process was that large and complex plans took too long to produce. The reforms seek more efficient plan production so that plans are adopted more quickly and kept up to date. Therefore the first research question is concerned with dynamism which is about getting plans in place earlier than before and being able to review these more quickly to be ahead of and influencing change rather than following and describing change.
- 3.2** This chapter considers whether plans are being put in place earlier, and the factors that account for the ability to make progress. The part of the research question that relates to more dynamic plans enabling *planning policy to be more effective* is dealt with in Chapter 7.
- 3.3** The issues raised as part of this research question include:
- Have the reforms enabled local authorities to improve individual performance in the preparation and updating of planning policy?
 - Is the flexibility in the new arrangements that enables local authorities to produce new forms and combinations of plans being used to improve performance?
 - What are the factors that explain variation in plan progress?
 - Have the poor performing authorities improved and are key bottlenecks in the system being addressed?
- 3.4** The sections that follow address the first three of these matters, firstly providing an overview as to whether the reforms are leading to better performance in the preparation of policy, followed by an examination of the factors associated with plan progress, and picking up the issue of flexibility in paragraph 3.29. It is not possible to address the last issue because the study has not specifically looked at the progress being made by 'poor performing' authorities.

Overview of findings

- 3.5** Three and a half years after the reforms were introduced, only 6 per cent of local authorities in England have achieved a sound core strategy. However, not every local authority embarked on the new system when it was introduced. In fact, in April 2006, Strategic Survey 2 found that 14 per cent of survey respondents had not started on their core strategy.
- 3.6** In total, 146 DPDs have been submitted, of which, 45 comprise core strategies. Of the 146 DPDs submitted, 36 per cent have been found sound, 13 per cent have been found unsound, 19 per cent have been withdrawn and 32 per cent are awaiting an Inspector's report³⁰.
- 3.7** From the case studies, 20 per cent have adopted a core strategy. Most of the progress amongst the other case studies is relatively slow with 80 per cent of case study authorities experiencing delays to the preparation of their priority DPDs of between 6 months to 2 years³¹.
- 3.8** Whilst all respondents to Strategic Survey 4 are now underway with core strategies, progress is relatively slow with 58 per cent of respondents yet to reach the preferred options stage (October 2007). The Survey found that 85 per cent of respondents are reviewing their LDS because they have experienced delay.
- 3.9** **The achievement of some local authorities demonstrates that it is possible to get LDFs in place more quickly than local plans. However, the number of situations where this is happening is very few. The national picture shows that the vast proportion of local authorities are experiencing delays in implementing the reforms and getting plans in place, and that overall, progress across the country has been slow.**

Analysis

- 3.10** This situation is explained by a set of factors that have led to delay or difficulty. They include:
- (i) Problems making the transition**
- 3.11** Many of the factors leading to delay or difficulty that were identified relate to the problems encountered by local planning authorities and other stakeholders in getting to grips with the new planning system.

³⁰ Planning Inspectorate (PINS) data, February 2008 – see Appendix 2 for more information on the number of submitted and sound DPDs

³¹ Longitudinal Case Study research, Round 4 (November 2007)

- 3.12** Perhaps one of the most fundamental issues is that the **concept of spatial planning was not well understood when the system was introduced but that understanding is gradually improving**. Whilst 40 per cent of the case studies are making good progress, 44 per cent have produced plans that have been found unsound/withdrawn or are re-doing formal stages of the process or going back to collect more evidence³². This is against a national context whereby 31 per cent of Survey respondents report they are revisiting the issues and options or preferred options stages.
- 3.13** Following Inspector's decisions in July 2006 that Stafford and Lichfield's Core Strategies were judged to be unsound, the realisation that plans could fail the soundness test had a profound effect on local authorities. For the case study authorities that had made considerable progress, this had an immediate impact, with authorities reconsidering what they had done in light of recent Inspector's decisions. As outlined in the paragraph above, this led to a large number of case study authorities revisiting some of the formal plan preparation stages and reviewing the type and quality of evidence being collected. To some extent, the lessons from some of the early core strategies may well have saved other local authorities from experiencing similar pitfalls. However, the anxiety associated with the potential for failure that persists in some of the case study authorities is considered to be one of the factors causing delay in some cases³³.
- 3.14** The other source of difficulty involved the early decisions about what planning documents were to be prepared and the priorities amongst them. The initial LDSs were frequently over-ambitious, hence many DPDs were subsequently abandoned, and aspirations were scaled down. Only a small minority of the case studies had a clear view of what was needed early on. Uncertainty over what is to go into the core strategy in particular is a continuing theme, including what other documents will be needed to supplement the core strategy. Changing advice from the GO on the priority DPDs of the LDF appears to have compounded this uncertainty³⁴.

(ii) Uncertainty and change generated by the external policy environment, regional and national policy and emerging guidance

- 3.15** In a lot of case study authorities, delays are attributed to external policy factors including:
- Waiting for the regional spatial strategy (RSS) which sets the all-important development targets;

³² Longitudinal Case Study research, Round 4 (November 2007)

³³ Longitudinal Case Study research, Round 4 (November 2007)

³⁴ Longitudinal Case Study research, Round 4 (November 2007)

- Higher development targets emerging from panel reports on RSS;
- New evidence requirements associated with evolving national policy, for example on flood risk assessment, housing market assessment and changing technical approaches to land availability for housing³⁵.

3.16 Strategic Survey 4³⁶ quantifies this problem with 67 per cent of local authority respondents attributing delays to changes in national and regional policy guidance, and 53 per cent reporting delays due to the uncertainty of the timing and contents of the RSS. Though emerging LDFs ought to build in flexibility whilst the finalisation of the RSS is awaited, some of the recommendations from recent panel reports following the Examination-in-Public (EiP) of draft RSSs have included housing targets way beyond what the local planning authorities could have envisaged.

(iii) Resources, capacity and skills available.

- 3.17** This issue includes both the scale of resources (financial and in terms of staff), and also, professional understanding/appreciation of the requirements of the new system.
- 3.18** Many of Strategic Survey 4 respondents point to insufficient resources to deliver the LDF to schedule (66 per cent), or to staff turnover as creating resourcing issues (33 per cent). To put this in perspective, the results of Strategy Survey 4 shows the average LDF team consists of just 5 planning professionals consisting of:
- 1 section manager
 - 2 principal /senior planning officers
 - 2 planning officers/assistants.
- 3.19** Being an average, some will have more, but a large number of local authorities will have less than this resource. Another consideration is that many teams report long periods of unfilled vacancies³⁷. This coupled with the proportion of time undertaking non-LDF work, suggests that the actual time available for the LDF is much lower than 5 full time equivalents.
- 3.20** Many of the complaints about lack of resources relate specifically to the resources needed to fulfil the requirements for gathering evidence to generate alternatives and to justify policy choices in the new system. In general the requirements to gather new and additional evidence and

³⁵ Longitudinal Case Study research, Round 4 (November 2007)

³⁶ Strategic Survey 4 (October 2007)

³⁷ Communities and Local Government (2006) *Lessons Report 1: Making timely progress and the integration of policy* – paragraph 4.49

to comply with sustainability appraisal and appropriate assessment requirements appears to have been under-estimated, and these activities account for much of the delay experienced in relation to LDS programmes³⁸.

(iv) A lack of corporate and political leadership and support for the planning function

- 3.21** Most authorities (66 per cent of Strategic Survey 4 respondents) feel the LDF is a corporate priority and 65 per cent believe members are supportive of the LDF. However, low commitment is a significant issue nationally.
- 3.22** Even when there is said to be commitment amongst the case studies, there is considerable variation in what this means for the resources for the LDF, for corporate and cross departmental working and the political commitment to the programme and the outputs. Strategic Survey 4 shows that the number of situations where respondents feel that members are enthusiastic about the LDF is much lower (28 per cent), while on the other hand, only a very small proportion of respondents (10 per cent) actually find it difficult to engage with elected members on the LDF.
- 3.23** The lack of corporate commitment for the LDF in some situations may stem from a lack of confidence amongst senior officers that the LDF can deliver policies that respond to local problems in a reasonable timescale. For example, in one of the case studies that is a core city, it is stated that priority is given to planning projects and site-specific DPDs where the delivery is more immediate, though it is important to note that this is in a context where the unitary development plan (UDP) is relatively recent, and where the authority's strategic planning priority is to contribute to the development of the RSS and the role of the city as regional capital within this. In three other case study situations, statutory planning seems to be rather disconnected from the key agendas of regeneration, which have their own arenas, spheres of expertise and timescales³⁹.
- 3.24** A striking factor common among the four case study authorities that have prepared sound DPDs more or less to programme, is the impact of an effective and informed senior manager (ie head of planning and/or director) in addressing some of the barriers to progress. This includes the senior manager contributing to the major decisions on the LDF, but also raising the profile of the LDF at a corporate level, championing the case for more resources and assisting with entry to the LSP. The majority of case study authorities have experienced delay, and in these cases, there is little

³⁸ Longitudinal Case Study research, Round 4 (November 2007)

³⁹ Longitudinal Case Study research, Rounds 1 – 4 (December 2005 – November 2007)

evidence to suggest that senior management is actively working to remove the barriers to success, with the consequence that the forward planning service continues to operate in relative isolation⁴⁰.

3.25 In some cases it is members who are said to be cynical about the value of forward planning. This relates to the perceived complexity of the new system in some areas, and objections to national policy in others. In general corporate working is seen as improving, although there is a long way to go for the LDF to become a document that is at the centre of the authority⁴¹.

(v) Case-specific factors

3.26 In addition, there were a variety of case-specific factors relating to substantive issues amongst the case studies which it is claimed have led to delay, or have affected the process adversely. Some examples include:

- an extraordinarily large number of representations to a site allocations DPD
- extended negotiation with infrastructure providers
- political opposition to the housing requirement
- the need to consider alternative approaches to retail provision, following consultation responses to the core strategy preferred options⁴².

3.27 However, these sorts of issues are not as widespread amongst the case studies as might have been thought at the outset. This is probably because there had been a relatively low number of site-specific DPDs prepared, and also because some of the earlier core strategies have not sought to resolve some of the big decisions such as delivering infrastructure and being specific enough about what sort of change is envisaged and where (see the sub-section on 'analysis' in Chapter 7).

How do the reforms address the delivery of more dynamic plans?

3.28 The changes introduced by the reforms in this respect include:

- greater flexibility in bringing forward or revising planning policy with scope for specific LDDs to address particular issues or agendas, or to exploit opportunities;

⁴⁰ Longitudinal Case Study research, Round 4 (November 2007)

⁴¹ Longitudinal Case Study research, Round 4 (November 2007)

⁴² Longitudinal Case Study research, Round 4 (November 2007)

- the provision of incentives in the form of a Planning Delivery Grant (PDG) (now the Housing and Planning Delivery Grant) (HPDG);
- encouraging local planning authorities to improve project management through the adoption of local development schemes;
- the production of annual monitoring reports, and monitoring by the GOs.

(i) The LDF – a portfolio of documents

- 3.29** LDFs were conceived as a portfolio of LDDs to provide more flexibility to local authorities in responding to local issues. The findings from the research confirm that the flexibility of the new system is enabling planning authorities to prioritise and phase the delivery of LDF documents, reacting to the individual situation and local issues in the area⁴³. This is evident from the range of documents being produced by authorities. For instance, whilst the vast majority (80 per cent) of the local planning authorities in the case study group elected to produce the core strategy in the first batch of documents, the remainder got on with area action plans (AAPs) and various other DPDs and SPDs before the core strategy.
- 3.30** To some extent, in the first couple of years following the introduction of the reforms, this flexibility has led to delays as authorities have shifted back and forth between preparing the core strategy, other DPDs and AAPs, unsure which is the real priority. However, in the final round of longitudinal case study investigations, the case study authorities reported a clearer view of what is required now in terms of their priority DPDs⁴⁴.
- 3.31** One of the limitations of this flexibility is the amount of time it is taking authorities to get the full set of DPDs in place.

(ii) Supplementing resources

- 3.32** The PDG is having an impact on plan making in two ways:
- (a) providing authorities with more resources⁴⁵;
 - (b) driving progress⁴⁶.

⁴³ Communities and Local Government (2006) *Lessons Report 1: Making timely progress and the integration of policy* – paragraph 4.9

⁴⁴ Longitudinal Case Study research, Round 4 (November 2007)

⁴⁵ Communities and Local Government (2006) *Lessons Report 1: Making timely progress and the integration of policy* – paragraph 4.49

⁴⁶ Communities and Local Government (2006) *Thematic Study 1: Starting out with local development schemes* – paragraphs 5.20, 5.54, 6.23

- 3.33** PDG has had a significant effect on increasing the overall resource available for the LDF, creating new posts and buying in the support of consultants. Eleven authorities in the case study group are known to have increased the size of their team as a direct response to this incentive. Eight of these used their PDG to fund extra posts, whilst the other three have secured an increase in the size of their budget to enlarge their team⁴⁷.
- 3.34** PDG is being reviewed. In the same vein as with previous forms of the grant, there is to be a reduction in the grant payable where delays in plan making occur. The main difference is that the latest revision is more specific about what constitutes delay, with grants tailing off for a core strategy or DPD allocating more than 2000 dwellings that are:
- >35 and <190 days late at submission/adoption stages
 - >189 and <365 days late at submission/adoption stages⁴⁸
- 3.35** Strategic Survey 3 findings report that securing PDG is the second biggest driver of progress behind resolving important local issues. Therefore, incentives to produce strategic documents and/or housing delivery documents according to schedule and with grants tailing off considerably for documents over six months late has the potential to raise performance. With 80 per cent of the case studies experiencing delays of more than six months, this has the potential to raise performance in a large number of cases. Alternatively, authorities that find themselves significantly behind schedule may give up on any prospect of the grant altogether, rather than try and catch up.
- 3.36** Despite the benefits of PDG, the average size of LDF teams continues to be relatively small and a significant number of local authorities still report insufficient resources to deliver the LDF to schedule⁴⁹.

(iii) Encouraging better project management

- 3.37** The new system has formalised the discipline of project management in the form of the LDS. This is the key performance management tool introduced by the planning reforms which, combined with PDG, has the aim of improving progress and helping to address barriers. All local authorities interviewed in connection with Thematic Study 1 could see the advantages of having a LDS as a means of improving the efficient management of the

⁴⁷ Communities and Local Government (2006) *Lessons Report 1: Making timely progress and the integration of policy* – paragraph 4.40

⁴⁸ Communities and Local Government (October 2007), *Housing and Planning Delivery Grant (HPDG): Consultation on allocation mechanisms*

⁴⁹ Strategic Survey 4 (October 2007)

process⁵⁰. However, some also considered that preparing and reviewing the LDS added to the complexity and potential for delay by adding to the work to be done⁵¹. The most commonly cited benefits were those of managing resources and driving progress.

3.38 For some authorities, achieving what is in their LDS is an inherent commitment; others feel it is an obligation⁵². However, a general overall enthusiasm about the benefits of preparing a programme in the LDS on its own does not eliminate barriers associated with the achievement of milestones. These barriers to progress include:

- external influences posing risks to progress;
- lack of project management skills;
- inaccuracy of programming, given the limitations on the early understanding of the new system⁵³.

3.39 Despite these limitations, it is interesting to note, from Strategic Survey 3, that during 2006 a number of local authorities were taking different approaches to the management of the LDF:

- 60 per cent of respondents had prepared detailed programmes to supplement the schedule of key milestone in the LDS;
- After reviewing the LDS, 25 per cent of respondents prepared a strategy for mitigating future delays;
- 42 per cent of respondents have trained staff in project management skills.

3.40 These findings are encouraging and suggest that the LDS, combined with the new project management skills and the increasing application of project management techniques have the potential to improve the management of LDFs. However, there continue to be authorities which are not as committed or do not know how to get the most out of the LDS in controlling the process. Also, the scale of improvement of the worst performing authorities could be constrained by the current approach in many authorities which is to match schedules for document preparation with the resources that are available in the LDF team, rather than increasing resources for the LDF in response to the spatial issues that need tackling⁵⁴.

⁵⁰ Communities and Local Government (2006) *Thematic Study 1: Starting out with local development schemes* – paragraph 5.39

⁵¹ Longitudinal Case Study research, Round 4 (November 2007)

⁵² Communities and Local Government (2006) *Thematic Study 1: Starting out with local development schemes* – paragraph 5.45

⁵³ Communities and Local Government (2006) *Thematic Study 1: Starting out with local development schemes* – paragraph 5.46

⁵⁴ Communities and Local Government (2006) *Thematic Study 1: Starting out with local development schemes* – paragraph 5.54

3.41 Whilst there will always be limits on the extent to which the LDS can drive progress, the role of project management is to manage risks and issues in order to minimise the impact on the timetable. Preparing a project plan and a timetable will not eliminate all risks, but it will highlight when corrective action needs to be taken, should risks materialise.

(iv) Production of annual monitoring reports

3.42 Positive views of the AMR in relation to identifying the impact of policies and assessing whether policy changes would be required is recognised by 76 per cent of respondents to Strategic Survey 3. In terms of practice, when the impact of AMRs was looked at as part of the investigations on evidence in October 2006, it was too early to tell whether they were going to play a critical role in the review process⁵⁵. The impact of AMRs has not been re-investigated by the research.

Is practice moving in the right direction?

3.43 The performance in terms of the number of DPDs that have been adopted is much lower than planned in the original LDSs but there are reasons that account for this. One of the main reasons is that the concept of spatial planning is not well understood. Looking to the Strategic Survey, it is found that fewer people were reviewing their LDS in October 2007 (72 per cent of respondents) compared with January 2007 (94 per cent). Also, the number of authorities reviewing the issues and options/preferred options stages is reducing (31 per cent of respondents in October 2007 compared with 49 per cent of respondents in January 2007). Whilst there is a sense that a better understanding may be emerging, the total number of authorities that are re-doing work or reviewing formal stages is still significant, showing that issues remain.

3.44 There are encouraging signs that tools such as the LDS are making a positive contribution to better performance, combined with the potential of further changes to the PDG. It remains to be seen whether the proposals in the Planning White Paper⁵⁶ to include fewer formal stages and encouragement for a smaller set of documents will have a positive impact on the ability to put plans in place sooner.

⁵⁵ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Lessons Report 2: Using evidence in spatial planning* – paragraph 7.5

⁵⁶ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Planning for a Sustainable Future*

- 3.45** LDF teams are seeking out opportunities for integration and buy-in at a corporate level, but there is still a lack of corporate commitment to the LDF in a lot of authorities. A combination of measures will be required to raise the status of the LDF at corporate level if it is to achieve the commitment and resources that are needed to achieve more dynamic plans.
- 3.46** Following the introduction of the reforms, the resource situation in a lot of authorities has improved and in the short term at least, PDG continues in the form of the HPDG. Nevertheless, local authorities will need to be creative in leveraging in more resources, whether from within the council or from external delivery partners.
- 3.47** The case study authorities have found guidance from PAS and from PINS to be helpful. However, making the transition continues to be difficult and given the large and growing number of publications containing advice, a consolidated set of guidance is needed, particularly on the form and content of core strategies as well as the process of policy making.
- 3.48** This all highlights that there continues to be an important role for the training events and other initiatives run by PAS, as well as consistent and timely advice from GOs.

Practice points

- 3.49** The task of producing an LDF is a very demanding process and there are certain conditions that are essential to achieving project success. From the research, a number of practice points on the management of the process have emerged. These are set out below.

Establishing the right skills base

- 3.50** The research has found that the application of techniques such as detailed project planning, risk assessment and contingency planning are not being used by a significant number of authorities. Addressing skills in these areas and using these techniques is likely to assist in improving performance in managing work to an agreed schedule.

Securing corporate buy-in

- 3.51 Getting the commitment of elected members and senior management is absolutely critical to making progress. A lack of support for the LDF within the council can create adverse conditions including:
- lack of political leadership;
 - inadequate or short-term resources;

- progress impeded by internal political processes;
- problems in getting input from other departments;
- failure to engage and convince partners of the merits of the LDF.

3.52 In the better performing authorities, the research found commitment at senior officer level, and members very much engaged and understanding the role of the LDF. This requires effective leadership, starting with the head of service acting to remove some of the barriers, such as lack of corporate support, inadequate resources, lack of entry to the LSP, or inadequate direction of the LDF team.

3.53 The PAS publication, *Selling the local development framework: a toolkit*⁵⁷, contains a lot of useful advice on how to make a case for the LDF as well as explaining its role to others.

Managing member involvement

3.54 In relation to progress, some case study authorities experienced problems in using Cabinet to steer and sign off LDF consultation documents. This relates to the long lead in times to Cabinet meetings, with some case studies reporting delays emanating from missing a deadline and having to wait several months for the next meeting opportunity. Use of Cabinet in a 'steering' capacity has also proved problematic due to very busy meeting agendas with insufficient time available for discussing the LDF. Other issues associated with political procedures include LDF documents being called in by the council's Scrutiny Committee as part of their powers to review decisions made by the Executive or the Planning Committee.

3.55 This highlights the need to design decision-making processes so that they provide flexibility, whilst ensuring the quality of debate from proper member involvement.

3.56 It is for the council's constitution to set out the decision-making arrangements for the LDF. Some authorities have set up very flexible procedures whereby consultation documents do not have to go to Cabinet and are signed off by a member working group (eg North Cornwall) or the Portfolio Holder for planning (eg Essex).

3.57 This provides a situation that is less susceptible to slippage and means that a delay of a few days is not likely to extend to a month because of having to wait for the next Cabinet meeting. Lead in times for finalising material for discussion with informal groups is also shorter. Both North Cornwall and

⁵⁷ PAS (August 2006), *Selling the local development framework: a toolkit*

Essex have cross-party member working arrangements and so the political debate takes place in a regular and informal way. In both these situations, full Council (North Cornwall) or Cabinet and full Council (Essex) are still responsible for signing off documents for submission and adoption.

- 3.58** In addition, local authorities should be aware of scrutiny procedures in designing the decision-making arrangements for the LDF. Councils should think about how Scrutiny Committees could be involved during the preparation of the LDF and there are different ways of doing this. This could involve inviting a member of the relevant Scrutiny Committee onto the LDF member working group. The assumption is that closer involvement of the relevant Scrutiny Committee in discussions about the LDF is less likely to lead to delays requesting a review of a Cabinet's decision.

Making the most of the LDS

- 3.59** Local planning authorities should maximise the flexibility provided by the new system and use the LDS to:
- determine what set of LDDs is required to meet the spatial planning needs of the area;
 - prioritise and programme the LDDs according to need and match the work with resources; and,
 - react to local issues and individual situations.
- 3.60** The co-ordination and production of simultaneous LDF documents can be useful in achieving the greatest strategy and policy integration, as well as making both the process and documents more accessible to users of the plan. Parallel DPD production is also useful for the way in which the detail set out in the subordinate plans is able to demonstrate the delivery of the core strategy. However, this level of activity will demand greater resources as well as good management arrangements.
- 3.61** The LDS should contain a programme with key milestones. This will need to be complemented by the use of detailed project planning.
- 3.62** Any review of the LDS should be seen as an important opportunity to get LDF work on track, and should include an intelligent review that challenges assumptions about the work planned and how it is to be done, dealing with such questions as:
- what set of LDDs is needed to do the job that is required in the area, having regard to such factors as the sustainable community strategy and the RSS;

- how the material to be produced should be distributed between the different LDDs, designed as a set;
- what the implications will be of different LDDs being prepared, examined and adopted at different times, for example, between the core strategy and site-specific documents;
- whether the order and timing of LDDs is the most appropriate to achieve the implementation of the RSS; and
- whether the work required for the LDDs can be done in different ways, through, for instance, greater use of existing and borrowed material, and by importing the particular skills and resources needed.

3.63 In reviewing and re-programming their LDS, planning authorities should have a clear understanding of the reasons for delay and include a strategy for mitigating future delays.

Resources

3.64 One of the main concerns raised by authorities is the retention of staff. There is clearly a resource issue experienced across the profession. However, developing and retaining the right team is a key task for the LDF manager. Good management skills are vital here and PAS has produced guidance on recruiting and retaining planning staff⁵⁸.

3.65 Local authorities should also explore opportunities for supplementing gaps or adding to the LDF team's resource by:

- working with external stakeholders (eg the Environment Agency or the transport authority) to contribute towards research;
- exploring opportunities across the council for joint working; investigating opportunities in other council departments for flexible staffing arrangements such as bringing in additional staff on a temporary basis;
- securing the support of senior management and bidding for additional resources for the LDF team to meet council objectives.

Managing risks and dealing with delay

3.66 Risk assessment involves:

- identifying potential risks;
- devising a strategy to prevent risks from becoming a reality (i.e. mitigation measures);
- monitoring new risks as the project proceeds.

⁵⁸ PAS (no date): *Finders keepers: retaining and recruiting planning people*

3.67 Setting out this sort of robust approach to risk management, means that it should be possible to ensure that delays are caused only by issues outside of the authority's control and responsibility.

3.68 Some internal risks identified in LDS documents examined included:

- political party changes;
- political decision making in agreeing the content of consultation documents and the submission DPD;
- LDF team diverted to assist with development control casework;
- unforeseen financial constraints;
- parallel DPD preparation, ie managing the production of the two documents at the same time, with the potential for delays associated with one DPD to knock onto the other);
- the accuracy with which time and resources are estimated for compilation of the evidence base;
- joint working with other local authorities, (eg individual councils unable to agree the policy content of a joint LDD, which requires more time for drafting and more meetings than anticipated).

3.69 Some of the mitigation measures presented in the LDSs examined include:

(i) Managing political risks

- shared learning with other authorities and providing training courses for members;
- close involvement of members in the preparation of the LDF, such as via regular member working group meetings or frequent contact with the Portfolio Holder/Planning Committee Chairperson;
- cross departmental LDF working groups of officers and members established to facilitate sectoral integration;
- delegating political decisions where possible to the Portfolio Holder and Head of Service;
- promoting the LDF as a corporate priority.

(ii) Resource management

- detailed proposals for the management of staff time;
- appointment of a project manager;
- undertaking project management training to ensure the LDF team is equipped to manage the process effectively;

- existing members of the LDF team given responsibility to project manage each LDD;
- raising awareness of the LDF with other council departments and encouraging them to build it into their service plans;
- focusing on the top priorities for document production;
- identifying projects that compete for resources and secure council agreement of LDF as core work programme;
- monthly progress meetings with a steering group of members and/or officers;
- close monitoring of progress and assessment of work priorities;
- high levels of supervision and staff retention packages to retain staff;
- filling vacancies as soon as possible;
- enabling unqualified junior or administrative staff to attend planning courses to increase the skilled resource available to the team;
- training and mentoring new staff to ensure their effective contribution to the LDF as quickly as possible;
- using temporary staff or consultants to increase resources at key points;
- pooling resources with neighbouring authorities;
- using a three year rolling budget to minimise the impact of unforeseen expenditure;
- building a reserve into the budget for unforeseen costs.

CHAPTER 4

EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION IN PLAN MAKING: Are the reforms providing for participation that is inclusive and effective, leading to confidence in the way that the plan is prepared and the achievement of consensus where possible?

Introduction

- 4.1** The second research question is about inclusive and effective participation. This focuses on community participation, while Chapter 5 deals with the involvement of organised partners (ie public sector partners and other organised interests). The old local plan system was considered to be complex, remote, hard to understand, difficult to engage with, slow and unpredictable and generally not customer friendly. The reforms seek to achieve a process which involves better engagement with the community, thereby achieving plans that respond more directly to people's needs and which have local ownership and legitimacy.
- 4.2** This chapter addresses whether participation has become more inclusive and effective and analyses the factors that account for the ability to make progress. There have been three main areas for investigation:
- Do the reforms provide communities and private interests with greater confidence and better access to plan making (ie greater inclusiveness)?
 - Has the new system helped to achieve agreement and mediate interests within the community (ie consensus building)?
 - Are community interests are being translated into plans (ie having a direct impact on outputs)?
- 4.3** The research has looked at various matters which have an impact upon the delivery of inclusive and effective participation. This includes gathering the views and perceptions of local planning authorities on the ability of the reforms to assist them to achieve better participation, examination of progress on the production of SCIs, the views of stakeholders on the ability of the new system to meet their needs and demands, and analysis of participation techniques used by the case study group. The main findings are presented below.

Overview of Findings

- 4.4** With regard to achieving greater inclusiveness, the research shows that there is an increasing number of participation events being held and that engagement is taking place earlier, and gradually, more interactive methods are being used. Many authorities remain disappointed about the levels of interest and attendance in participation events for core strategies⁵⁹. The complexity of language used, perceived lack of realistic options available and, ironically, the amount of consultation demands, have been cited as possible reasons for this by participants⁶⁰. Levels of participation tend to be better in areas with well-developed community infrastructure and for site-specific LDDs rather than core strategies⁶¹.
- 4.5** The research shows that the use of deliberative methods of engagement focused on site-specific LDDs can build local consensus⁶². However, in relation to core strategies, it is not clear whether the lack of objection at later stages reflects a local consensus, or simply reflects a lack of interest and effective engagement⁶³.
- 4.6** There is little evidence to draw on concerning the extent to which the results of engagement have directly influenced outputs, mainly due to the fact that too few plans have been produced to date. Where changes to core strategies have arisen as a result of community participation, this tends to involve very minor changes⁶⁴. The ways in which local planning authorities assess, balance or resolve the breadth and depth of community views and use them to formulate policy are rarely made explicit⁶⁵.
- 4.7** **The research shows that the necessary culture change to put participation at the heart of the new system has been slow to develop. There is scepticism that new attitudes to involving the community are emerging despite the commitment in SCIs to adopt new techniques. Instances of local authorities reaching out to hard-to-reach groups are also limited. However there are some local planning authorities that are genuinely rethinking the needs of stakeholders and the ways in which their involvement can be facilitated.**

⁵⁹ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Lessons report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraph 5.32

⁶⁰ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Thematic Study 3: Stakeholder Involvement* – paragraphs 5.14, 5.16, 5.18

⁶¹ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraphs 5.33-5.34

⁶² Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraph 5.38

⁶³ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraph 5.35

⁶⁴ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraph 5.37

⁶⁵ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Thematic Study 3: Stakeholder Involvement* – paragraph 5.17

Analysis

4.8 This situation is explained by a number of factors which are set out below.

(i) Poorly developed participation strategies

4.9 SCIs were intended to be clear public statements setting out how local planning authorities proposed to engage with the community during the preparation of LDDs. By late 2007 most local planning authorities had adopted their SCI. However, from reviewing 23 SCIs, it becomes evident that many are broad and generic, use complicated terminology and are often too long. SCIs are particularly vague when describing approaches to stakeholder involvement, while numerous SCIs simply major on traditional methods. In some cases, hard-to-reach groups are not mentioned and when groups are listed there is no indication of how and when they will be engaged⁶⁶.

(ii) Limited use of modern methods and approaches

4.10 The research suggests that participation is more effective when more deliberative techniques are used⁶⁷. Deliberative methods include workshops and focus groups to explore ideas rather than simply convey information or gather initial views through 'traditional' methods⁶⁸.

4.11 Traditional 'consultative' techniques⁶⁹ continue to be the favoured method in core strategies, although there is growing interest in using innovative techniques such as workshops and forums to improve involvement⁷⁰. Local planning authorities have been more adventurous in the use of more 'deliberative' methods, such as 'Enquiry by Design', 'Planning for Real' and focus groups for site-specific plans⁷¹.

4.12 Despite widespread use of the internet as an information and feedback mechanism, just one of the case studies used it in a more interactive way, with limited success⁷².

⁶⁶ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Thematic study 3: Stakeholder involvement* – paragraphs 4.2-4.3

⁶⁷ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Lessons report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraphs 1.8, 5.29, 5.34, 5.38

⁶⁸ Communities and Local Government (2006) *Literature Review 3: Achieving successful participation* – paragraphs 4.7-4.8

⁶⁹ Traditional consultative techniques include raising awareness about the LDF such as distributing leaflets/newsletters, advertising in the local press, giving briefings to amenity groups, staffed exhibitions, inviting written comments to consultation documents and conducting questionnaire surveys.

⁷⁰ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraphs 5.23 and 5.36

⁷¹ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraph 5.38

⁷² Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraph 5.43

(iii) Insufficient resources set aside for participation

- 4.13** A principal concern of local planning authorities and stakeholders has been that participation activities have not been pursued sufficiently rigorously because of a paucity of resources allocated to them. There is certainly little evidence that additional resources have been applied to engagement activities. However, some local planning authorities have introduced a scheme in which they pool their resources with other council departments in an attempt to extend their LDF budget, and/or appoint a Partnerships Officer to coordinate consultations across sectors⁷³. It appears that Planning Aid is a commonly used service among local planning authorities which increases communities' ability to engage with the planning process⁷⁴.
- 4.14** There is little evidence of re-skilling or training of either planners or stakeholders to improve participation rates and the concept of capacity building among relevant communities is poorly developed⁷⁵.

How are the reforms helping to address the achievement of more effective participation?

4.15 The changes introduced by the reforms in this respect include:

- (i) producing an SCI;
- (ii) 'frontloading' of community engagement, including the examination of alternative options;
- (iii) improving inclusiveness;
- (iv) a focus on hard-to-reach groups;
- (v) building consensus.

(i) production of an SCI

4.16 The production of an SCI was envisaged as a key tool for local planning authorities in planning for effective participation⁷⁶. On the positive side, coverage of SCIs is now widespread and the best examples demonstrate the local authority's commitment to engagement and are written for the

⁷³ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraphs 5.48, and 6.5 and *Thematic study 3: Stakeholder Involvement* – paragraph 4.19

⁷⁴ Communities and Local Government (2006) *Spatial Plans in Practice Thematic Study 3: Stakeholder Involvement* – paragraph 4.21

⁷⁵ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Thematic Study 3: Stakeholder Involvement* – paragraph 5.14

⁷⁶ ODPM (2004), *Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Development Frameworks* – paragraphs 3.5 and 3.6

community⁷⁷. However, few SCIs have grasped the opportunity to set out a clear overall strategy for how participation will be carried out at the various stages of plan making, for different types of documents and for different groups of stakeholders⁷⁸.

(ii) 'frontloading' community engagement

- 4.17** It is too early to conclude whether the 'frontloading' of community engagement has assisted in making participation more effective or inclusive. On the one hand, the reforms require more community involvement in the identification of local issues and needs, and the exploration of options. On the other hand, some stakeholders have expressed views that initial engagement leads to only limited options⁷⁹. For small developers, the fact that representations and supporting evidence are required earlier in the planning process has brought about cash-flow difficulties due to the need for greater spending up-front. The extent to which this is off-set later through a more streamlined examination process has yet to be established⁸⁰.

(iii) Ensuring inclusiveness

- 4.18** While the new system is designed to be as inclusive as possible, it is still the case that certain groups are at a disadvantage in achieving engagement⁸¹. Targeted techniques used in some of the case studies, including going out to talk to people in more informal social settings, have helped to elicit a response from those not normally motivated to get involved. However, it is clear that this needs to be resourced properly⁸².
- 4.19** The complexity and technical language of the new planning system is a considerable barrier to the engagement of the community and wider stakeholders. This is particularly true in relation to SCIs which are often unnecessarily long and frequently use language which is inappropriate for their target audience⁸³.

⁷⁷ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Thematic Study 3: Stakeholder Involvement* – paragraph 4.4

⁷⁸ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Thematic Study 3: Stakeholder Involvement* – paragraphs 4.26 and 5.6

⁷⁹ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraph 4.36. Also, see analysis on presenting options in *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 2 – Using evidence in spatial planning* – paragraphs 5.7-5.9

⁸⁰ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Thematic Study 3: Stakeholder Involvement* – paragraphs 4.42, 5.15, 5.16, 5.26

⁸¹ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Thematic Study 3: Stakeholder Involvement* – paragraph 5.13

⁸² Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraphs 5.21 and 5.45

⁸³ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Thematic Study 3: Stakeholder Involvement* – paragraphs 4.2 and 5.5

- 4.20** Some community groups, as well as stakeholders such as small house builders and the business sector who are crucial to the implementation of plans, find it particularly difficult to engage on the local planning authority's terms. They find the sheer quantity of engagement opportunities difficult to respond to, and often feel isolated at participation events⁸⁴.
- 4.21** Despite the increase in the number of participation events being offered, and the increasing use of more informal, interactive and targeted methods of engagement, many authorities remain disappointed about levels of interest and attendance. This applies particularly to consultation on the core strategy. There is uncertainty as to whether this reflects silent support, lack of awareness of opportunities to participate, or lack of understanding of the potential implications of strategic policy options. Many authorities suspect the latter, and this would be consistent with the experience with other forms of strategic plans⁸⁵.
- 4.22** To some extent this could also be linked to concerns about over-consulting the community. The growth of community strategies, parish plans and other local authority strategies at the same time as the increasing emphasis on participation in the new planning system has led to concerns about potential consultation fatigue from both local planning authorities and stakeholders⁸⁶. This highlights the need to build upon and not repeat previous consultation exercises and combine participation events across the authority and between agencies in order to address these concerns.
- 4.23** Levels of engagement and satisfaction with the results, tend to be higher in areas with a better-developed community and voluntary sector infrastructure. In urban areas, community and voluntary sector umbrella bodies play a valuable role as channels of communication and facilitators of community-based events. In rural areas, parish and town councils may play a similar role. A number of the most extensive programmes of community consultation have benefited from the expertise and experience of community development staff in community strategy teams or corporate units⁸⁷.

⁸⁴ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Thematic Study 3: Stakeholder Involvement* – paragraphs 5.24 and 5.25

⁸⁵ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraph 5.32

⁸⁶ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Thematic Study 3: Stakeholder Involvement* – paragraphs 4.17, 4.35, 5.18

⁸⁷ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraph 5.33

- 4.24** The involvement of communities tends also to be better for LDDs such as AAPs, where it appears easier to engage over specific policies and proposals for change and development in a local area. This is also where local planning authorities have invested the most effort in engaging communities in more ‘deliberative’ processes. However, the resource implications of these forms of engagement are significant and in a number of cases they have been paid for through nationally supported regeneration initiatives, or have been supported by the developer of major schemes⁸⁸.
- 4.25** In general, there is little evidence of engagement exercises being systematically evaluated to determine what the local planning authority achieved and whether it was cost effective⁸⁹.

(iv) Targeting hard-to-reach groups

- 4.26** The reforms require local planning authorities to address the needs of hard-to-reach groups. Most SCIs express the intention of local planning authorities to identify these groups and then adapt methods to accommodate them, but few SCIs attempt to define what they consider to be a hard-to-reach group or how they might be reached. Generally these sections of SCIs are considered to be weak by PINS⁹⁰. However, six of the case studies have made genuine attempts to go into the community to seek out these views⁹¹.

(v) Consensus building

- 4.27** Many early community strategies failed to go beyond general and aspirational statements to identify specific priorities and clear objectives which could then be delivered through spatial planning⁹². This may be one reason why early core strategies, in seeking to translate these aspirational statements into specific spatial proposals, fail to deliver spatial plans which achieve genuine consensus⁹³.

⁸⁸ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraph 5.34

⁸⁹ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraph 5.47

⁹⁰ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Thematic Study 3: Stakeholder Involvement* – paragraph 5.21

⁹¹ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraph 5.21

⁹² Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 1: Making timely progress and the integration of policy* – paragraph 5.18

⁹³ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Thematic Study 3: Stakeholder Involvement* – paragraph 5.11

4.28 There is much greater evidence amongst the case studies of consensus being built in site-specific DPDs – including in some cases those prepared for areas delivering high levels of growth. Perhaps because of the scale of growth proposed, ‘deliberative’ techniques are essential and resources have been made available to take full advantage of them. High levels of consensus have been achieved by techniques such as ‘Enquiry by Design’ and ‘Planning for Real’ methods. Community stakeholders interviewed as part of this research have verified this⁹⁴.

Impact of participation on outputs

4.29 There is little evidence to draw on concerning the extent to which the results of engagement have directly influenced the plans themselves. This is mainly due to the fact that too few documents have been produced under the new planning system to date.

4.30 Amongst the case studies, where changes to core strategies have arisen as a result of community participation, this tends to involve very minor changes. This could be because authorities have reflected community views effectively in the design of the strategy. Alternatively, it could be because the authority has proceeded with its own preferred strategy⁹⁵.

4.31 While concerns about decisions being predetermined have been rare, there is a view that the options presented by local authorities provide limited choices. Indeed, some local planning authorities take the view that alternatives to the chosen strategy are rarely possible because of the parameters set by regional and national policy. Consequently, alternatives can be contrived, producing unreal or limited choices for stakeholders⁹⁶.

4.32 The ways in which local planning authorities assess, balance or resolve the breadth and depth of community views and use them to formulate policy are rarely explicit, either in the process or in the finalised documents⁹⁷.

⁹⁴ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraph 5.38

⁹⁵ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraph 5.37

⁹⁶ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Thematic Study 3: Stakeholder Involvement* – paragraph 5.16

⁹⁷ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Thematic Study 3: Stakeholder Involvement* – paragraph 5.17

Is practice moving in the right direction?

- 4.33** A culture of continuous engagement with stakeholders and the public through the plan-making process has been slow to emerge since the implementation of the reforms⁹⁸. By its nature, however, culture change takes time. Signs are positive from some of the case studies and as more local planning authorities gain confidence in the use of the tools available, there is no reason to believe effective and inclusive participation will not become more prevalent. However, resources are not unlimited and so the sharing of skills and resources within councils and between agencies will become increasingly necessary.
- 4.34** There continues to be a role for Communities and Local Government, PAS and the Planning Officers' Society (POS) to disseminate examples of good practice and a need to revisit these research questions once a greater number of LDDs have passed through the system.
- 4.35** There is no evidence to date that SCIs themselves have helped to deliver better participation, although the usefulness of a document setting out the local planning authority's approach to community involvement is recognised. There has been criticism that the requirements to engage on the content of the SCI itself and independent examination have not been a good use of resources and that a simpler, locally adopted document would suffice⁹⁹. The announcement in the Planning White Paper¹⁰⁰ removing the need for an independent examination of SCIs can help to address these concerns.
- 4.36** The principle of joining up engagement strategies across the local authority and with other bodies such as the LSP is a good one. Proposals in the Planning White Paper to streamline the statutory process for engagement in LDFs, promoting participation as a continuous exercise is likely to provide more flexibility for joint community engagement with other parts of the council. To build upon these new proposals, it will be important to promote plan making as a corporate activity and to encourage councils to co-ordinate their engagement activities as part of an integrated approach to place shaping.

⁹⁸ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Thematic Study 3: Stakeholder Involvement* – paragraph 5.11

⁹⁹ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Thematic Study 3: Stakeholder Involvement* – paragraph 5.4

¹⁰⁰ Communities and Local Government (2007), *Planning for a Sustainable Future: White Paper*

- 4.37** The concept of continuous community engagement throughout the process of preparing a DPD is set out clearly in PPS12¹⁰¹. Creating a single broad consultation requirement should give local authorities the opportunity to plan for continuous engagement rather than designing one-off events to meet the specific regulatory requirements for each stage in the plan-making process.
- 4.38** The project has found some good examples of modern techniques used to engage the public and stakeholders¹⁰² but most local planning authorities are continuing to use traditional methods of engagement and are often still disappointed with the results. Whilst greater integration between the local government sector and other agencies is likely to help share best practice, better guidance is needed on how to engage with hard-to-reach groups, the business community and how different methods of engagement might be appropriate at different stages of the DPD preparation process. The role of the internet is worthy of further research and guidance.
- 4.39** The presentation of alternative options can help to make explicit the types of choices available at the local level to the local community and can help to make the decisions of the local planning authority transparent to local people. The Planning White Paper's proposal to remove the statutory requirement to consult on preferred options for all DPDs will need to be monitored carefully by Communities and Local Government and PINS to ensure that, in streamlining the regulatory process, the discipline of examining alternatives and explaining choices that is important to plan making is not lost.

Practice points

- 4.40** Achieving effective participation lies at the heart of the new spatial planning system. Early community involvement can play an important role in establishing the key issues for an area, identifying the choices available and helping the plan to respond positively to meet local needs. Community engagement can build ownership and legitimacy for the policies and may minimise the need for a lengthy examination process, as follows.

¹⁰¹ ODPM (2004), *Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Development Frameworks* – paragraph 4.13

¹⁰² Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraphs 5.7-5.24

Achieving an effective process

(i) Culture change

- 4.41** The research suggests that achieving a profound culture change in all relevant agencies is critical to the success in preparing an effective and legitimate spatial plan. A genuinely positive attitude towards engagement and a commitment to building participation into the process from the outset can greatly assist in a culture change.

(ii) Joining up engagement activities

- 4.42** Spatial planning is about integrating public policy to deliver co-ordinated action focused on place. Within this context, there are clear benefits to be achieved by joining up local participation activities, with, for example, a comprehensive community engagement strategy for all activities and services. In particular, joint activities can help to more closely align the LDF with SCSs and other local strategies and plans and thereby make explicit the linkages between wider community issues and needs and the potential spatial implications.
- 4.43** Monitoring the extent to which effective participation is being achieved is essential. Identifying who is and who is not getting involved and how the strategy could be amended to address shortcomings could be an important function for the council's Annual Monitoring Report (AMR).

(iii) Resources

- 4.44** Effective engagement requires adequate resources in terms of time, effort, staffing and money. Local authorities should plan for these resources at the outset, identifying requirements in their corporate community engagement strategies.
- 4.45** Although consultation has long been a part of the land use planning process, planners are not necessarily expert at applying the most appropriate and modern participation techniques. Planners should not be afraid to utilise the skills of community planners or other colleagues, or to employ specialist facilitators to undertake participation activities. Partner organisations may have good local links with the community which can also be utilised.
- 4.46** Building capacity within the community is important to develop sustainable participation over the long term. Local authorities should consider spending time and effort to train and educate community representatives, so that they may subsequently make more time available to engage in the LDF process.

4.47 Other agencies need to understand how spatial plans can deliver their own objectives, and they should have the resources to engage effectively on spatial plans. Local authorities can help inform other agencies about LDFs, and this can help design participation events to minimise the resource demand on other sectors.

Achieving greater inclusion

4.48 The key to achieving greater inclusion in participation is to fully understand at the start of a plan process what is likely to be the impact of a plan and who is likely to be affected by it. Reflecting the particular geographical context, local authorities should then engage with the sections of the community and stakeholders that will have an explicit interest or are active in the area, utilising the most appropriate methods of engagement to achieve the desired outcomes.

(i) Community involvement methods

4.49 Local authorities should be explicit about their objectives in their participation strategies. Whose participation is being sought and what is the purpose of their participation? This will help to determine the most appropriate methods of community involvement. The new system requires both breadth and depth of community engagement.

4.50 Whilst 'traditional' techniques such as leaflets/brochures, exhibitions and questionnaires continue to play an important role in terms of information exchange and broad engagement, more 'deliberative' techniques, such as focus groups and workshops provide the opportunity for extended involvement and more active participation with smaller groups. Alongside these engagement techniques, the internet and e-planning provide opportunities to widen participation for those who have access to the internet and who may be too busy to want to engage via face-to-face methods.

4.51 Local authorities should consider using different community participation techniques at different stages of the plan-making process, reflecting their relative strengths. Some suggestions include:

- At the issues gathering stages of core strategies, for example, local authorities should talk to as many people as possible. Achieving a breadth of participation will require local authorities to go out to people's social environments (eg shopping centres, pubs, fêtes, etc) to raise awareness and to gather initial views.

- As the process develops, more in depth participation with smaller groups of people and stakeholders, using more deliberative methods such as focus groups and structured workshops to establish priorities and preferred options.
- Once a preferred way forward has been identified, a further stage of wider community consultation should take place to establish broad legitimacy for this approach, possibly using surveys or citizen's panels.

(ii) Hard-to-reach groups

- 4.52** Targeted participation techniques need to be used to engage with those groups which do not generally engage in planning. These should utilise existing community networks and involve partners who have a high level of acceptance within the community. Meetings or events should take place 'on their patch' and during their time to maximise attendance. Avoidance of planning jargon is essential, as is using methods that are sensitive to the needs and aspirations of different cultural and age groups.
- 4.53** Encouraging groups and individuals to get involved requires planners to make tangible the benefits of getting involved. Essentially the benefits are knowledge about what is being considered and the opportunity to influence outcomes. To this end there should be regular feedback on progress, showing how views have been taken on board, and with action points. Finding ways to reduce the costs of participation (for example, paying for childcare) could help too. Fundamentally, participation events should be rewarding.
- 4.54** It has emerged from the research that the business and developer community can also be particularly difficult to engage with. It is necessary to make special arrangements to involve them early in the process. Chapter 5 considers this in more detail.

Achieving consensus

- 4.55** Early engagement with the community over issues, needs and policy options provides an opportunity to build a sense of ownership over local policy decisions. As part of this process it is important that expectations of participants are managed from the start, to identify what is possible and what restrictions there are on policy decisions.
- 4.56** Developing the evidence base provides early opportunities for agreeing the issues and scope of options for future policy. An example would be local authorities working with developers and landowners on the design and implementation of Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessments (SHLAAs). Agreeing methodologies from the outset and discussing

deliverability issues during the process can help to build trust and cooperation. It can also bring a shared understanding of choices into the policy generation process from the beginning.

- 4.57** Integrating sustainability appraisal work with policy development, rather than seeing it as a separate technical exercise, is another way in which trust and cooperation can be built up through the initial stages of the plan process. Making explicit the types and nature of policy impacts to the local community can build a common understanding about choices and make the final decision more easy to understand and accept.
- 4.58** It is unrealistic, however, to expect all conflicting views and opinions to be capable of being resolved through frontloading engagement. Local authorities need to give consideration to how emerging conflicts are going to be managed, in particular, whether there are mediation techniques and processes that may be needed to achieve a consensual approach.
- 4.59** The research suggests that the most effective examples of consensus building take place as a result of 'deliberative' methods of participation where the emphasis is upon structured discussion, shared understanding and providing opportunities for agreement. However, there is a tension between deliberation, which works best for small groups, and the need for inclusion. Consequently, before formal decisions are reached, there has to be an inclusive strand to participation, where real effort is made to inform the wider community and everybody has the opportunity to comment.

Achieving outcomes

- 4.60** People and organisations are more likely to get involved in participation if they understand how the outputs might affect their lives and businesses. Local authorities should therefore seek to make explicit 'what is at stake' at the outset of a plan process and how a plan when finalised will directly affect local people. Local authorities should also identify the links between participation and policy generation/policy choice and build into the participation process opportunities for feedback to the community.
- 4.61** Local authorities should provide evidence of how the results of consultation have shaped progress in the document preparation process. There is a formal requirement to report on the consultation process and to show how it has been taken account of at the submission stage, but more could be done to report back to the community how the results of consultation have affected the form and content of the document as it progresses, from capturing initial issues and identifying specific needs, through developing the preferred approach (especially for core strategies) to final policy wording.

- 4.62** Local authorities should also build upon existing participation and consultation work and the issues and priorities already identified in the SCS, parish plans and other strategies. Making these links explicit to the community gives confidence that the LDF work is part of a wider joined-up programme to get community views into the decision-making process. It also minimises the accusation of consultation overload and minimises consultation fatigue.
- 4.63** There is an opportunity to improve the use of the evidence base to make clear the implications of strategy options during participation events in order to gain more informed and meaningful engagement about desirable outcomes. For example, explaining how housing need arises in a community and connecting this with situations that people will recognise from their own circumstances, may lead to a different discussion over the identification of land for housing.
- 4.64** It is essential that stakeholders are given the opportunity to consider genuine alternatives. In some areas there may appear in the first instance to be few choices about overall strategy, because of the parameters placed by regional or national policy, but there is always a local context and local choices to be made which will lead to alternatives. Alternatives can be generated by responding to different issues, exploring the differences between the consequences of local evidence and emerging regional policy, prioritising different objectives and by following the consequences of the views expressed by different stakeholders.
- 4.65** The links between participation and tangible outcomes are most advanced where deliberative methods are used. However, such methods are time consuming and not inclusive and so are best used as part of a holistic participation strategy, which ensures breadth as well as depth of discussion.

CHAPTER 5

INTEGRATING POLICY THROUGH THE SPATIAL PLANNING APPROACH: Are the reforms leading to more effective collaboration between local planning authorities and other sector policy makers and stakeholders in identifying issues and priorities?

Introduction

- 5.1** The focus of the research question relates to the achievement of integrated policy through effective collaboration. Criticisms of the local plan process included that there were inconsistencies between development plan tiers, difficulties in tackling issues lying at the boundaries between authorities and between policy sectors, and little wider ownership of plans – corporately within local authorities and across the public sector. This research question is therefore concerned with whether effective joint working is being achieved, and is leading to more integrated policy through the creation of spatial plans.
- 5.2** This chapter will address the primary research question of whether more effective collaboration is occurring, looking specifically at whether horizontal integration (ie across sectors) and geographical integration (ie across administrative boundaries) are being achieved. It will also address the secondary research questions which include:
- Are the reforms enabling improved integration of sectoral policy?
 - What are the planning authorities' aspirations and priorities for integration?
 - What is the relationship between the LSP, the SCS and the LDF and how are the SCS and the LSP influencing the LDF?
 - How are the reforms helping to ensure coherent and consistent planning policy?
 - Is the flexibility for cross boundary working in the reformed system being used to address issues that fall between local authorities?
- 5.3** The research has not been able to reach conclusions on the extent to which LDFs are being used to shape decisions of stakeholders. The timing of the research and the number of DPDs that have emerged through the case studies have meant that it has not been possible to assess accurately

whether national policy priorities are being implemented through the action of stakeholders in implementing LDFs. The integration of policy as a key aspect of spatial planning is a rapidly evolving area of practice. There have been considerable changes during the course of this research that have influenced and will continue to influence the extent to which integration is achieved. The increased emphasis on integrated policy can be seen in the Local Government White Paper, in the changes proposed to SCSs, in the Sub National Review and in the considerable work that is currently being undertaken such as the PAS collaboration projects¹⁰³ and the soon to be published report, 'Models for sub-regional planning'¹⁰⁴.

Overview of findings

- 5.4** From the Strategic Survey it appears that the majority of local planning authorities are working with others to prepare the evidence base. This has risen from 44 per cent of local authority respondents in 2006 to 60 per cent in 2007, with a further 26 per cent considering joint working. In the original LGA survey 50 per cent of local authority respondents said they undertook informal networking with other authorities. This had risen to 78 per cent in 2006. The latest survey shows that 60 per cent of local authority respondents believe they have effective collaboration with internal departments, and 49 per cent think they have effective collaboration with external organisations. These results show that local planning authorities appear to be developing a clearer understanding about the benefits of joint working and increasing the effort going into it.
- 5.5** From the case study sample a number of effective collaborative processes have been achieved across different sectors, and there is evidence that plans and strategies are better aligned¹⁰⁵. There are some particularly good examples of working with the LSP, undertaking joint consultation and leading to joint strategies which reflect each others priorities (eg Hambleton)¹⁰⁶. It is clear that collaborative working is more common for AAPs and SPDs than for core strategies. There has been some effective joint working with the health sector in Islington and Plymouth in the preparation of their Core Strategies. However, despite some good examples detailed in *Thematic Study 5: Infrastructure Delivery*, in general there has been little effective joint working with transport and other infrastructure providers

¹⁰³ PAS (March 2007) *Working together for better planning: Surrey planning collaboration project Outcomes Report*

¹⁰⁴ Communities and Local Government ERN POS (forthcoming) *Models of Sub Regional Spatial Planning*

¹⁰⁵ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraph 4.19

¹⁰⁶ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraph 4.20

across the case study authorities. For instance, some water companies contacted as part of the study felt that it is not necessary for them to be involved in core strategies because their input relates to detailed matters regarding housing allocations¹⁰⁷.

- 5.6** *Thematic Study 4: Cross Boundary Working* explored the issue of cross boundary working in detail. This form of collaboration is most effective where there are overlapping strategic interests, and when it is needed to deal with the positive management of the urban fringe and with strategic peripheral development. It is also clear that where there is a history of joint working between local authorities, then this provides an important basis for joint working on the LDF¹⁰⁸. The evidence set out in *Thematic Study 4* shows that cross boundary working is increasing and that some of the issues that fall between local authorities are being tackled through this approach.
- 5.7** In spite of evidence that there is more collaboration taking place, there is not yet convincing evidence that this is producing more effective spatial plans that demonstrate the integration of policy across different sectors. The evaluation of 20 DPDs from the case study sample shows that clear evidence of policy integration was achieved in only three documents¹⁰⁹. However, there are some signs that the increased importance given to integration is being recognised and is beginning to be implemented through the increased use of joint working as a means to achieve truly spatial policy.
- 5.8** **The study concludes that a very small number of local authorities demonstrate that it is possible to integrate policy through effective collaboration with other stakeholders, and this promotes better corporate and cross-sectoral ownership of a plan. There are also promising moves towards greater integration as local planning authorities recognise the benefits of collaborative working. This is particularly the case in terms of collaboration in producing evidence and also joint working across administrative boundaries. However, the achievement of truly integrated spatial plans will take considerable time and effort on behalf of all those involved.**

¹⁰⁷ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraph 4.26

¹⁰⁸ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Thematic Study 4: Cross Boundary working* – paragraphs 4.6-4.10

¹⁰⁹ Longitudinal Case Study research, Round 4 (November 2007)

Analysis

5.9 This overview is explained by the findings set out below.

(i) Effective collaboration across sectors

Evidence gathering

- 5.10** The most successful form of collaboration has been achieved by local planning authorities working with other departments, agencies and tiers of government to produce evidence jointly to inform their LDFs. This joint working with a range of partners to deliver consistent and comprehensive information on a range of topics can be seen in various forms across the country. The strategic survey results and longitudinal case study research¹¹⁰ show that this type of effective collaboration is becoming common practice, and is being used to achieve consistent and integrated information on which to base local policy.
- 5.11** It is possible to conclude that to some extent local planning authorities are setting out clear priorities for joint working in relation to the development of evidence. This evidence gathering activity across sectors, boundaries and tiers is becoming increasingly more prevalent and can play an important role in developing integrated policy as partners come to see problems and issues in the same way through jointly shaping the evidence base.

Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS)

- 5.12** Another key area where effective collaboration has been achieved is in the links that have been forged through the LSP and the closer relationship between the LDF and the SCS. Amongst the case studies, the sustainable community strategy is cited frequently as a primary source of objectives and policy priorities for the core strategy¹¹¹. In the longitudinal case study research all but one case study authority cited the SCS as the source of policy priorities. Some case studies raised concerns about the general and aspirational nature of many SCSs which meant that other than identifying what the priorities are, the SCS was having a very limited influence on how these issues might be tackled. However, it is the view of the research team that this is the role of the spatial plan.

¹¹⁰ Communities and Local Government (March 2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Using evidence in Spatial Planning* – paragraphs 4.28 – 4.42

¹¹¹ Communities and Local Government (Dec 2006) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 1: Making timely progress and the integration of policy* – paragraph 5.4

- 5.13** Many authorities are reviewing their SCSs to make them more effective. In many cases the case study authorities believe the present documents provide an insufficient basis to guide better spatial planning¹¹². They are starting to be more specific about what the real priorities are, including what they mean for the area (eg if the priority is regeneration – does that mean more employment, physical regeneration etc). In some of the longitudinal case studies, the LDF team is involved in the SCS review with the LSP, and are aiming to reach agreement on shared priorities.
- 5.14** The LGA survey in 2005 showed that 86 per cent of local authority respondents were confident they could link the SCS with the LDF. This figure has remained much the same throughout all the surveys to October 2007. Exploring the relationship between the SCS and the LDF further, it appears that integration is more effective when there is a dominant aspiration for the area¹¹³. In the case studies examined, this occurs particularly with:
- the delivery of affordable housing – a priority in 14 of the case studies including rural authorities, affluent and socially divided areas; and
 - economic development and regeneration – a priority in 12 of the local authority areas, particularly some of the larger urban areas.
- 5.15** This is clearly a developing area, with further rounds of SCS preparation and advancing work on LDFs likely to create better synergy. There are signs from the case studies that preparation of SCSs and the LDF is becoming better integrated as they seek common goals. This can be seen in the increasing awareness and execution of joint consultation being undertaken on the SCS and the core strategy for the LDF (for example in Stoke on Trent and Hambleton).

Wider stakeholders

- 5.16** There are more limited examples of wider integration of policy and the research shows that other sectors and stakeholders often fail to engage fully with planning policy processes¹¹⁴. This may be due to the resource pressures that they face, or because they fail to see the need for engagement in relation to wider strategic issues. What is clear however, is that there has not been the same amount of pressure on stakeholders, as on local authorities, to undertake collaborative activity with a view to achieving policy integration.

¹¹² Communities and Local Government (Dec 2006) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 1: Making timely progress and the integration of policy* – paragraph 5.14

¹¹³ Communities and Local Government (Dec 2006) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 1: Making timely progress and the integration of policy* – paragraph 5.9

¹¹⁴ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraphs 4.28, 4.31 and 4.49

- 5.17** Local authorities have reported real concerns about getting any meaningful involvement from the local business sector in particular. This has been reported in the longitudinal case study research and consistently in the Strategic Surveys. In 2005, 32 per cent of local authority respondents found it difficult to engage local businesses rising to 41 per cent in October 2007. Many firms are not represented by organisations or associations that have the planning process as part of their concern (other than perhaps the quality of the development control process and service). However, there are some positive signs that some larger urban local authorities are looking at participation techniques targeted specifically at the business sector, as well as the representation from this sector on the LSP¹¹⁵.
- 5.18** In many areas there are established relationships with bodies such as Natural England, English Heritage and the Environment Agency, built up through consultation on planning policy in the past and utilised now for LDF preparation¹¹⁶. This applies also to agencies that are responsible for delivering key aspects of infrastructure, such as the transport authority and Highways Agency, and the utility companies. The nature of relationships with these bodies is said to have changed in some places, but not in others. In the majority of the case study areas it is claimed that there is earlier engagement in the planning process, but that the forms of engagement are 'consultation as usual', with documents sent for comment and responses duly made and considered. In at least some contexts, for example where change is minimal, this may be appropriate.
- 5.19** The research has shown that there can be considerable difficulty in working with some transport operators and other utility providers¹¹⁷. It is clear that there are problems in terms of synchronising the timescales and priorities of different agencies in the planning and delivery of infrastructure and that the uncertainty of general funding is a real obstacle to effective collaborative working and ultimate delivery¹¹⁸.
- 5.20** In some cases there is evidence that statutory agencies are being engaged in formal arrangements through the use of partnership networks¹¹⁹. There are also other examples of successfully using informal and interactive

¹¹⁵ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraphs 4.31 and 4.33

¹¹⁶ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraph 4.23

¹¹⁷ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraph 4.49 and *Communities and Local Government (2008) Thematic Study 5: Infrastructure Delivery* – paragraph 6.8

¹¹⁸ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Thematic Study 5: Infrastructure Delivery* – paragraph 6.30

¹¹⁹ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraph 4.38

collaboration. The techniques of engagement being used include workshops for government agencies and statutory consultees at the issues and options stage, and one-to-one, face-to-face meetings where issues of integration are particularly pressing¹²⁰.

- 5.21** Many agencies, however, continue to see their role as essentially responsive rather than pro-active. They seem content with the opportunity to respond formally in writing to core strategy documents and rarely attend consultation events. The research shows that specific arrangements need to be made to engage with these interests. Statutory consultees report resource constraints dealing with the large number of documents, and the number of different stages associated with a DPD across a region or sub-region¹²¹.
- 5.22** Engagement with other key sectors, such as health (PCTs) and education (local education authorities and universities), is also common, but interactions are most likely to be about these other sectors as landowners and developers, rather than partners in policy making. Collaboration with the health sector is being targeted as part of new cross-sector working arrangements, with over half of the case studies authorities identifying an increase in the links with the PCTs¹²². These links are coming about by direct contact from the planning authority over matters that it believes the health sector needs to be involved in. Joined up working with the health sector is receiving increased support and recognition as shown by the Health and Urban Planning Toolkit¹²³ which won an RTPI award in 2008.
- 5.23** The engagement of and collaboration with developers and landowners is an area that seems to vary significantly. In some localities engagement is limited and confined to rather traditional methods of consultation on documents, often with disappointing results from the perspective of LDF teams¹²⁴. This is particularly the case for core strategies, where the rationale for involvement may not be obvious to developers and landowners, in situations where specific sites or development opportunities are not presented for consideration. At the other end of the spectrum, there are examples of engaging developers and landowners in informal and interactive ways, via focus groups, forums and partnerships.

¹²⁰ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3 Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraph 4.24

¹²¹ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraph 4.50

¹²² Communities and Local Government (Dec 2006) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 1: Making timely progress and the integration of policy* – paragraph 5.61

¹²³ NHS London Healthy Urban Development Unit (February 2007) *Health and Urban Planning Toolkit*

¹²⁴ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3 Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraph 4.33

5.24 The most developed forms of collaboration with development interests tend to be in the context of managing new development/ regeneration through AAPs. The project has identified the need to make special arrangements to engage with the business/developer community, particularly over development opportunities and the deliverability of proposals. Alongside the views of other stakeholders, developers can be involved early in the process in general ways, such as in reviewing the nature and strength of the market and in assisting with the identification of appropriate criteria for the selection of development locations. *Lessons Report 3* concluded that different levels of consensus and policy integration amongst stakeholders may be more achievable and appropriate for different DPDs. 'Informing', 'harmonising' and 'co-ordinating' may be the most that can be achieved in core strategies, whilst 'collaborating' and 'joint policy' may be most relevant and achievable when producing AAPs and site-specific DPDs¹²⁵.

(ii) Effective collaboration across boundaries

5.25 Much of the cross boundary activity to date has been in relation to issues that self-evidently require joint working, for example waste DPDs and core strategies in areas of growth, as well as specific AAPs for new development that affects more than one local authority. Overall, results from the Strategic Survey 2 show that 35 per cent of local authority respondents were working on a joint DPD in April 2006, but only 11 per cent were engaged in a joint core strategy. Many of these examples have been the subject of some form of joint activity for some time. There has also been, in some cases, a significant top-down encouragement for joint working, not just in terms of the new planning legislation, but also through pro-active involvement and advice by some GOs and regional assemblies. It is likely that this will continue with the establishment of LAAs and MAAs.

5.26 The research shows that cross boundary working is being used to address the issues that fall between local authorities, including addressing urban-rural relations. This is particularly the case with large scale development issues on the boundaries of authorities (eg Longbridge AAP). It can also be seen in the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire which includes a large number of authorities working co-operatively, including contributing to the sub-regional component of the South East Plan¹²⁶. In some cases there has been explicit encouragement from GOs and regional assemblies about the need to collaborate across boundaries. In some instances, this has led to authorities working together to collect evidence to inform the sub-

¹²⁵ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning*

¹²⁶ <http://www.pas.gov.uk/pas/core/page.do?pageId=28251>

regional component of the RSS¹²⁷. *Thematic Study 4* contains examples of joint working across boundaries to address common goals¹²⁸.

- 5.27** However, in some places there is evidence that, for political reasons, there continues to be resistance to joint working between neighbouring urban and rural authorities in dealing with development pressures that spill-over from urban to more rural areas¹²⁹.
- 5.28** *Thematic Study 4* has identified four key factors that lead to joint working between planning authorities:
- (i) the recognition of an overriding need to tackle a shared development issue;
 - (ii) a previous history of beneficial cooperation across boundaries;
 - (iii) leadership from politicians and from senior officers;
 - (iv) the benefit of a stronger 'voice' in regional planning matters.
- 5.29** It is clear that the form of joint working varies, and only in a few cases leads to a joint development plan document, jointly agreed by more than one authority. The majority of collaboration is through informal approaches that seek to synchronise plan production timetables, and sees considerable flows of information and ideas across borders. This type of informal collaboration between planning authorities generally seeks to avoid inconsistencies across boundaries. However, it sometimes results in aligned documents that have compatible and complementary policy content managed through joint officer and joint member steering groups¹³⁰.
- 5.30** The benefits of joint working are increasingly being recognised by local authorities. *Thematic Study 4* has identified the specific benefits that local authorities have experienced in their joint working arrangements. These include greater efficiency through sharing resources and ability to produce better quality evidence; improved relationships; a greater collective voice; increased consistency in decision making, coordination and speed of implementation; and improved knowledge through sharing information¹³¹. It is clear from an analysis of DPDs that the authorities who are making the most progress in terms of joint working have entered into collaborative working and have derived considerable benefits from it¹³².

¹²⁷ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Thematic Study 4: Cross Boundary Working* – paragraph 4.13

¹²⁸ Communities and Local Government (Dec 2006) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 1: Making timely progress and the integration of policy* – paragraph 5.59 and *Thematic Study 4: Cross Boundary Working* – paragraphs 4.7-4.10

¹²⁹ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraph 4.11

¹³⁰ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Thematic Study 4: Cross Boundary Working* – paragraph 5.11

¹³¹ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice 'Thematic Study 4: Cross Boundary Working* – Annex 2

¹³² Longitudinal Case Studies Round 4 (November 2007)

5.31 Barriers to cross boundary working include the sometimes complex and difficult relationships that have been a longstanding feature between some neighbouring authorities. The research has shown that they also include the potential difficulties of the logistics of organising joint working, given staffing and other resource constraints. Additionally there are timing issues relating to committee cycles and consultation requirements that act as a disincentive to collaborative working¹³³. The most successful joint working arrangements show that over time the barriers to joint working are reduced as there is growing realisation of the potential benefits.

(iii) Achieving policy integration

5.32 Integration is achieved when the matters of concern to one organisation are taken into account in the work of another. In terms of the LDF, this means a DPD which has the relevant objectives of other strategies embedded within it.

5.33 The research considered some of the DPDs produced by the case studies and sought to evaluate the extent to which these demonstrated:

- evidence of integration of other plans and strategies produced by different sectors and at different scales;
- evidence of collaborative activity with other sectors through partnerships and networks;
- recognition of interaction and relationships between trends and consequences (education, accessibility, employment and housing) and use of cross cutting themes.

5.34 Out of 20 documents examined, only three (one core strategy and two AAPs) demonstrated a considerable level of policy integration¹³⁴. In these documents collaboration with other sectors is clearly established through reference to the activities and proposals of partner agencies, including those outside the scope of land use planning. In these cases, the result is a suite of policies which bear the imprint of partner agencies. However this type of approach was, to varying degrees, absent from most of the other DPDs examined.

5.35 It is clear that there has been considerable encouragement for local authorities towards working arrangements that seek to achieve policy integration. The research shows through the strategic surveys and the longitudinal case studies that this has become both more common and

¹³³ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Thematic Study 4: Cross Boundary Working* – paragraph 5.16

¹³⁴ Longitudinal Case Studies Round 4 (November 2007)

more effective. The emergence of corporate structures such as internal working groups that have been developed through local government reorganisation, are playing an important part in encouraging and sustaining the use of spatial planning¹³⁵. However, it is clear that other external stakeholders have not been given the same encouragement to achieve collaboration. Consequently the achievement of 'integrated policy' will require the focus of culture change to be placed more equally on all internal and external partners.

How are the reforms addressing the need for effective collaboration?

5.36 The changes introduced by the reforms in this respect include:

- encouragement for better cross sector integration;
- a duty to have regard to the SCS;
- arrangements to encourage and facilitate co-operation and formal joint working across boundaries.

(i) Cross-sector integration

5.37 There are a number of elements of the LDF reforms which appear to have had a direct impact on the amount of collaboration that is occurring across the country. The requirement for a robust evidence base at the heart of the DPD process has encouraged people to work together to share information, as well as share costs in the production of joint studies. One example of this is the new emphasis on housing market areas which has assisted in this process of encouraging neighbouring authorities to work together. There are now a considerable number of joint SHLAAs taking place as a direct consequence. However, it is not just in the area of housing policy that there are benefits to be gained in collaborative working.

5.38 The requirement to involve stakeholders and all interested parties earlier in the process appears to have made authorities more aware of the need to engage with different sectors. However, this is a resource-intensive process which requires considerable time, energy, staffing and management. Whilst there appear to be more multi-sector partnerships being created and more deliberative methods which seek to involve specific interests at a time and place convenient to them¹³⁶, the methods of collaboration are not yet being used effectively to prepare 'integrated policy'.

¹³⁵ Communities and Local Government (Dec 2006) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 1: Making timely progress and the integration of policy* – paragraph 5.41

¹³⁶ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration* – paragraph 4.37

- 5.39** *Thematic study 5* identified the importance of working with infrastructure providers at an early stage in the LDF process, and in ways that are relevant to them. It remains to be seen whether the increasing emphasis on implementation in the proposed revisions to streamline LDFs will provide an additional incentive to collaborative working. It is currently unclear whether the reduced number of formal consultation stages proposed in the Planning White Paper¹³⁷ will improve the ability of authorities to collaborate more effectively. While this may give authorities more flexibility in engagement and address concerns of stakeholders about being over-consulted, there is still a need for alternatives to be robustly assessed within the process.
- 5.40** Overall, while some authorities are optimistic about the role the reforms have played in changing the way they work with stakeholders, many did not think that any significant changes had occurred. However, there is a belief among some authorities, stakeholders and GOs that plans and strategies are better aligned now than they have previously been and that there is a considerable amount of work being undertaken to integrate policy. Given that the system is still at an early stage and that relationships with other sectors have been relatively underdeveloped, it is perhaps not surprising that there are more collaborative processes without collaborative outcomes at this point in time.
- 5.41** The research has also revealed that the requirements of the new system are not significantly changing the ways that representatives of other sectors are involving themselves in developing the content of the LDF¹³⁸. There is little evidence to suggest that the system is proving simpler to comprehend, although some planning authorities did suggest that the reduction in the number of DPDs and the number of stages that stakeholders would be asked to engage with would be an advantage. However, it remains to be seen the extent to which this is in fact a presentational rather than actual saving in terms of the time and process, because the robust assessment of alternatives is still required.

(ii) Making the connections with the SCS

- 5.42** The requirement to have regard to the SCS has led to more direct working with the LSP in many authorities, and a realisation by the majority that it is essential to link the core strategy with the SCS. In some authorities the organisation of staff into thematic groups has facilitated joint working and led to a more coordinated authority wide approach. It is clear that the most effective sound plans are the ones that have integrated the

¹³⁷ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Planning for a Sustainable Future*

¹³⁸ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraphs 4.29 and 4.32

wider objectives of the LSP and other interested parties through effective collaboration¹³⁹.

(iii) Cross boundary working

- 5.43** The flexible approach available to joint working across boundaries has provided a range of opportunities for enhanced collaboration. Joint working takes many different forms, largely influenced by the individual context and development issues to be addressed and for many areas, relates to the need to manage growth. The research has shown that for those authorities that are working across boundaries, most are engaged in some form of collaboration which involves reciprocal dialogue and data sharing¹⁴⁰.
- 5.44** The ability to establish a formal joint committee has led to a new way of making plans in the North Northamptonshire Growth Area. The authorities in this area have elected to work together, and in general have now embraced the need for collaboration amongst themselves and with other stakeholders. There are a lot of other instances of informal and formal cross boundary working, albeit without the creation of a joint committee¹⁴¹. Therefore, the research shows that there is considerable movement towards greater joint working which should lead to greater integration. It is evident from the thematic study that many authorities believe that cross boundary collaboration has become easier since 2004, but while the opportunities exist to work together, many authorities believe that there are a number of complex issues that need to be addressed to ensure collaboration is effective. The amount of activity is a sign of evolving inter-organisational relationships and reflects the complexities of spatial planning.

Is practice moving in the right direction?

- 5.45** This project has identified many examples of good practice in achieving effective collaboration (*Lessons Report 3*). There are also clear indications that joint working is increasing across the country, and being used to tackle a variety of issues. Whether this moves from joint working which informs and influences, to something which coordinates strategies and becomes truly 'collaborative' remains to be seen.

¹³⁹ Longitudinal Case Studies Round 4 (November 2007)

¹⁴⁰ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice 'Thematic Study 4: Cross Boundary Working'* – paragraphs 5.9 – 5.10

¹⁴¹ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice 'Thematic Study 4: Cross Boundary Working'* – Annex 2

5.46 The signs are positive however, with the increased emphasis being placed on the importance of the links between the SCS and the core strategy and the requirement to involve the LSP in the LDF process. This, together with the increased emphasis on implementation and delivery as a key part of the LDF, should ensure that collaboration remains a high priority for local authorities, as they prepare their LDFs. The RSS has also had a positive influence on the development of strategies for city regions which are being jointly prepared and the increasing emphasis on sub-regional functional areas is likely to further encourage collaboration.

5.47 There is, however, a need to ensure that collaboration is effective and moves towards the aim of integrating policy and achieving spatial plans. There is much work still to be done and it will be necessary to:

- continue the culture change in local authorities which emphasises the need for joint working and the benefits of doing so;
- encourage stakeholders to see the value of getting involved in the LDF process and of thinking strategically at an early stage, as well as ensuring they are aware of the benefits of integration;
- synchronise timescales and priorities of the different interested parties and their plans and strategies;
- recognise some of the external factors that hinder effective collaboration such as the frequent restructuring of health services and changes to policing arrangements where staff changes increase the difficulty of establishing partnership arrangements at the working level;
- ensure resources are available to pursue more innovative collaborative arrangements;
- elevate the status of planning and planners as a focus for integration and coordination within local government and beyond.

5.48 The role of PAS in continuing to support and examine collaboration projects with the aim of identifying good practice will be an important part of ensuring collaboration becomes more effective. The PAS publication, *Real Collaboration*¹⁴², is a comprehensive guide which provides detailed information on the key elements of large collaborative projects with particular emphasis on governance and responsibilities with practice examples. It sets out the benefits of collaboration through a business model approach and also establishes the importance of 'starting with the end in mind'.

¹⁴² PAS (October 2007) *Real Collaboration a guide to establishing effective collaborative relationships in planning services*

- 5.49** There is also the opportunity for the development of future collaboration through local area agreements and multi-area agreements. These offer additional opportunities for planners to be involved with setting indicators, targets and outcomes, and ensuring that the LDF reflects the new priorities, and pooled funding which will be essential to the delivery of services. There are particular opportunities for developing relationships on health and housing issues as these priorities are set locally. It is essential that planning authorities influence these, and work with the LSP in setting targets and delivering change.
- 5.50** There is an important supporting role for Communities and Local Government, regional assemblies, GOs and PAS in encouraging joint working, providing advice, facilitating initial meetings, disseminating good practice, considering the resource implications of alternative organisational structures and having a potential arbitration role in disagreements.
- 5.51** The GOs could be more proactive in encouraging joint working, and recognise the implications this may have on the need to review LDSs, as local authorities seek to coordinate their timetables. There is also the opportunity for Communities and Local Government to consider simplifying the joint committee procedures to encourage more formal joint working arrangements.
- 5.52** The RSS could also assist by being more explicit about the joint working that is required at sub-regional levels. The Single Regional Strategy aims to create more effective integration of land-use, housing, transport, economic development and other strategies¹⁴³. The relationship between sub-regional spatial planning and the other partnerships and initiatives based on functional areas has recently been investigated in the report *'Models of sub regional spatial planning'* (Communities and Local Government, ERN, POS), which is to be published shortly. This concludes that there are considerable opportunities to undertake joint working at the sub-regional level which can provide positive benefits for local authorities and their spatial plans as well as for regional planning itself.

Practice Points

- 5.53** In order to continue moving in the right direction and to achieve effective collaboration which makes planning a focus for integration and coordination, a number of practice points have been identified. These aim to highlight the ways in which local authorities can positively embrace collaboration to achieve the significant benefits that exist in working together.

¹⁴³ Communities and Local Government ERN POS (forthcoming) *Models of Sub Regional Spatial Planning*

5.54 Effective collaboration should lead to more effective policy outcomes. The research suggests effective collaboration draws on the following.

Corporate leadership

5.55 The commitment of members and officers at the highest level in the council and in other organisations is a pre-requisite of achieving effective collaboration. The key elements of success include:

- a culture of joint working and a confidence about its potential at the highest level in the different organisations with chief executives, members, and senior officers;
- recognition of the importance of leadership as a crucial factor and establishment of effective collaborative mechanisms at this level;
- coordinated corporate objectives and consultation processes.

5.56 Plymouth and South Hams have achieved joint working by ensuring that there is corporate commitment to the collaboration by establishing regular meetings between the Leaders of the Councils. Hampshire has given priority to collaborative projects by ensuring that the agenda is set by the Chief Executive.

Focused objectives for collaborative activity

5.57 A clear and common objective for all joint working is the need to focus activity and set priorities. To achieve this it is necessary to:

- identify whether there are strategic or shared development issues that would benefit from a joint approach;
- identify what functional areas and relationships exist and how these can be most effectively addressed/built upon;
- engage with the relevant neighbouring authorities to explore joint working potential.

5.58 There are many examples of collaboration based around a large variety of issues and reasons. However, where they are successful they are clear about what they are seeking to achieve. Examples include working together as a response to a specific development issue, such as in Longbridge and Sherford. The new system allows this to be done through AAPs. These have been used effectively to allow specific development issues to be addressed through joint working. Hambleton and South Hams developed relationships with the LSP because of the clear corporate priority given to addressing rural affordability issues. Cross boundary collaboration has been used to influence regional issues and the sub-regional component of RSS, such as the Black Country Partnership.

Involving all interested parties

- 5.59** The people who need to work together will vary, depending on what outcome is being sought by the joint working and the integration to be achieved. It is important that all the relevant people are invited and included. An approach to follow would be to:
- identify all stakeholders with a particular interest in the area;
 - establish what outcome is required from the collaboration and target the participation of all relevant stakeholders;
 - identify whose involvement is critical, and where this is, as it may be necessary to counter perceptions of some stakeholders that their role is essentially reactive ie by using more 'deliberative' methods to involve them;
 - target those that do not normally get involved such as the relevant communities, businesses, infrastructure providers and other sectors, using appropriate methods of involvement.
- 5.60** There have been some examples of working with a broader range of interested parties to achieve more integrated spatial plans. The *Health and Urban Planning Toolkit*¹⁴⁴, developed by the NHS London Healthy Urban Development Unit, provides a useful tool to explore the interactions between PCT and local planning authorities, and what is required to seek more integrated planning outcomes in terms of an improved response to health implications of development.

Using existing networks

- 5.61** To achieve collaboration which is grounded in the locality, makes best use of resources and influences the plans, strategies and actions of relevant stakeholders, it is necessary to build on the existing networks and partnership structures that are already in place. It is therefore necessary to:
- examine existing joint working arrangements that may already be in place, considering their effectiveness and whether there is a need for revision to increase effectiveness, and whether there is scope to increase the range of joint working activity;
 - exploit and develop existing networks and relationships, identifying all corporate channels of communication and exploring how the LDF process can use these.

¹⁴⁴ NHS London Healthy Urban Development Unit (February 2007) *Health and Urban Planning Toolkit*

Developing relationships

- 5.62** Collaborative relationships take time to develop and therefore it is essential to spend time establishing internal and external relationships and developing trust with all partners. Consequently it is necessary to:
- establish internal relationships – identify key officers in all council departments and make time to understand their concerns, opportunities and priorities and identify the spatial implications of these;
 - instigate measures to establish/strengthen professional and political relationships between the authorities, organisations involved and to help cement a culture of joint working;
 - establish good member relations and set up effective decision-making processes;
 - engage with other sectors on the basis not of why those sectors should help prepare the planning authority's plan, but how their own aspirations can be delivered through the spatial plan;
 - recognise that relationships may be vulnerable and could be broken by changes such as alterations in personnel;
 - consider whether town planners should be seconded or specifically employed to work in a key partner organisation.
- 5.63** It is important to establish positive and open relationships with members regarding cross boundary working and how this can impact on the speed and ability to take decisions. Many authorities have made explicit reference to the importance of developing and maintaining personal relationships, as being fundamental to the progress of joint working. There is also acknowledgement that considerable time is required to build up a secure relationship based on trust, which will develop the degree of integration required to synchronise policy. One solution to this has been found by employing planners in projects and teams, to develop relationships and integration from the inside.
- 5.64** Examples of seconding or employing planners for a temporary period in order to secure better integration include Plymouth who seconded a member of the forward planning team to the LSP team, in order to develop the relationships with the LSP and explore their spatial implications. The planning officer worked in the LSP team for two to three days a week for a period of time, which was repeated at regular intervals as necessary, and when the programme dictated this closer interaction. A further example which is highlighted as best practice in the *Health and Urban Planning Toolkit* is the Greenwich Health Engagement Project where a town planner

was contracted to work with the PCT to help realise the potential to engage in the planning system, which improved its capacity to respond to development proposals and identify and secure planning obligations.

Using appropriate techniques

5.65 There needs to be a planned application of appropriate techniques to successfully involve different partners. Different techniques are required for different stages of the process. These need to be used at the right time and tailored to individual organisations. In order to ensure that the most appropriate methods are employed it is important to:

- understand that collaboration is a process and works through a spectrum from 'informing', 'harmonising', and 'coordinating', to 'collaborating'. The relationship is developed as knowledge and trust is progressively built up;
- start at the beginning of the process using non-threatening forms of information sharing;
- establish regular meetings of a group of officers widely constituted from across the authority to ensure that there is knowledge of what is happening and give the opportunity for other disciplines to demonstrate the contribution they can make;
- understand the constraints and needs of other sectors, recognising the importance of personal relationships and inviting stakeholders to specific events.

A well managed and resourced process

5.66 Collaboration is a complex and time-consuming activity which needs to be actively managed if it is to succeed. It is important that:

- there is early analysis of potential benefits of joint working in the local context, to help to highlight and explain the benefits identified, and communicate them to decision makers;
- clear agreement is developed about what the purpose of the collaboration is and what is to be addressed with what outcome;
- some consideration is given to perceived barriers to joint working with partners, followed quickly by more proactive discussion of the opportunities;
- achievable outcomes are sought and those where there is a chance of early success with the aim of building confidence before embarking on anything difficult;

- careful consideration is given to how joint working across boundaries will operate best, taking local circumstances into account, and whether there need to be formal arrangements for a joint DPD or separate aligned DPDs;
- quick and efficient decision-making structures and procedures are established, and timescales are aligned as much as possible (this may require a review of the LDS);
- a dedicated project/network manager is in place who can develop relationships and trust, maintain momentum, minimise transaction costs of liaison between members;
- attendees are empowered, helping officers to take decisions;
- priority, resources and time are given to communicating the project to all interested parties and clear lines of communication set out.

5.67 There are resource implications of pursuing any partnerships. These can be significant when the aim of the joint working is to produce specific joint outcomes, such as joint DPD or AAPs or even a joint evidence base. The resource implications should be acknowledged at the start of the process and included in any consideration of the costs and benefits of joint working. In considering resources it is important that:

- the skills of all partners are maximised and coordinated;
- the demands of project managing the collaborative project at whatever scale are acknowledged and costed.

5.68 Examples of using project management techniques include work in Surrey which was assisted by external funding for the project manager which gave an element of independence to the partnership.

Translating collaboration into integration

5.69 To ensure that joint working achieves the intended aim of integrated policy it is necessary for it to be translated into the LDF. Policy integration is achieved when the outcome of the collaborative activity can be seen in the plans, strategies and actions of the various partners. Ideally these will be coordinated and explicitly influence decisions. The outcomes of the collaborative activity should be included in the DPDs as policies and proposals. Methods of doing this include:

- developing joint visions (corporately and with other stakeholders);
- including specific policies and proposals (such as supporting public health initiatives and links with open space);

- identifying the spatial implications of the outcomes (such as the catchment areas of GP surgeries and proposals for new facilities);
- use of the collaborative work as a fundamental part of the evidence base (such as joint studies informing the spatial strategy);
- getting partners to assist in generating options (such as suggesting alternatives that may not have been considered) ;
- testing the options through the collaborative work (such as gathering delivery and viability information and joint work on sustainability appraisal).

CHAPTER 6

DELIVERING EVIDENCE-BASED POSITIVE PLANNING: Are the reforms leading to plans where the policies and proposals address the necessary issues and which make use of a sound evidence-base to manage change from the present situation towards what is sought?

Introduction

- 6.1** The fourth question is about evidence and its use in achieving positive planning that enables a change to be brought about from the present situation to what is wanted in the future. Local plans tended to present the planning authority's views on what should happen, or what should not, with evidence only featuring when justification had to be developed in response to objections and in preparation for the public inquiry. The reforms seek a form of plan that sets out to achieve specified outcomes¹⁴⁵, and evidence is essential in making this kind of plan. Evidence explains the current situation, indicates possible futures to aim for, links actions and outcomes, and provides the means of knowing what change is occurring that can be attributed to the influence of the plan.
- 6.2** The main thrust of this research question is whether evidence is being used in the way intended to prepare the types of plans that are needed. Specific matters raised as part of asking this question include:
- whether the skills to use evidence are available in planning departments, and what techniques and analytical methods are being used;
 - whether the relationships are in place to work with others in evidence-based spatial planning;
 - whether the use of evidence is reducing uncertainty, broadening the understanding of spatial development in the area, giving consistency to decision making, and reducing conflict;
 - whether there is a contribution to a more dynamic review process with effective monitoring of the impact of planning policy; and
 - how the use of evidence and the role of sustainability appraisal are related in practice.

¹⁴⁵ Communities and Local Government (2006) *Spatial Plans in Practice Literature Review 1: The Role and Scope of Spatial Planning* – paragraphs 2.2, 2.8 and 2.9

6.3 This chapter draws on the research to provide some answers to these questions and the effect of evidence on the types of plans being prepared. It considers what evidence is, where it comes from, and its link to the content of the plan. The relationship between evidence and collaborative working, sustainability appraisal and the evaluation of alternatives and monitoring are also discussed.

Overview of findings

6.4 Activity in relation to the collection of evidence has increased considerably. All of the case studies now report an increasing appreciation of the importance of using evidence in preparing LDDs and are using evidence more than before¹⁴⁶. Increasingly, collaborative working of all types is helping in the collation of evidence.

6.5 The use of evidence is clearly a significant change from the approach taken to producing local plans, and making this change has been one of the things that has proved most difficult for planning authorities. The requirement for plans to be rooted in evidence is a factor planning authorities suggest is contributing significantly to the time being taken to prepare LDDs¹⁴⁷.

6.6 The introduction of the test of soundness has been extremely influential in making planning authorities gather evidence, though there has been less success to date in ensuring that the content of the plan flows from the use of evidence¹⁴⁸. The link between evidence and the plan is something that has to continue to develop. The Planning Inspectorate is seen by planning authorities as 'authoritative' on the achievement of soundness, and the direct and indirect influence of PINS continues to be a major factor in the development of evidence-based planning.

6.7 The use of evidence has increased enormously and particularly so lately. The number of submitted DPDs found unsound or withdrawn, because of the inadequate use of evidence has had a dramatic effect on the appreciation by planning authorities of the need to have evidence. Evidence is now being collected in great quantities, though frequently as an initial stage virtually separated from plan making. A great deal of time is being taken

¹⁴⁶ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 2: Using Evidence in Spatial Planning* – paragraph 8.2

¹⁴⁷ Longitudinal Case Study research, Round 4 (November 2007)

¹⁴⁸ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 2: Using Evidence in Spatial Planning* – paragraphs 5.4, 5.7, 5.11 and 5.19-5.21

over evidence collection. The requirements in PPSs are having an effect here, as is the way that HPDG is proposed to be allocated in relation to SHLAAs. There is still quite a lot of progress to be made however, in gathering the right type of evidence at the right time in a cost-effective way, and particularly in the achievement of a more compelling relationship between evidence and what is in the plan.

Analysis

6.8 These findings are elaborated below.

(i) Making the transition

6.9 The use of evidence has been a relatively difficult change for planning authorities to embrace¹⁴⁹. It is a very significant shift from the way local plans have been made, it requires resources to be directed in a different way and it can highlight the lack of a sound rationale for choices that may otherwise appeal to communities and politicians.

6.10 The questions raised by planning authorities as they have begun to engage with an evidence-based approach to plan making include:

- what type of evidence is required, and what are the sources of evidence?
- how can the amount of evidence that appears to be required be gathered within a short space of time in order for it to be 'up to date', bearing in mind the need to make rapid progress and given the availability of resources?
- how is the amount of evidence obtained judged to be 'enough'?

6.11 These questions continue to exercise planning authorities. In *Strategic Survey 4* (October 2007), of those that were returning to earlier stages of DPD preparation, the need to collect additional evidence was a major factor.

6.12 The findings from the study and the practice points developed from the findings address these questions, and address too issues of the quality of evidence and how its use relates to the plans to be produced.

¹⁴⁹ see for example, Communities and Local Government (2007) Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 2: Using Evidence in Spatial Planning – paragraph 3.14

(ii) The type of evidence being collected

- 6.13** The most common type of evidence encountered are studies on a particular topic, such as the familiar topics of housing, employment retail and open space.¹⁵⁰ Determining what evidence is required by beginning with the requirements listed in PPSs is a frequent approach, which may reinforce a topic-based approach to evidence collection. Urban housing potential studies and now SHLAAs promoted by PPS3¹⁵¹ and by the published guidance on SHLAAs¹⁵², as well as the expectation of HPDG¹⁵³, are becoming very common. Employment land assessments of the type described in the December 2005 guidance are widespread¹⁵⁴. Studies of open space, as sought by PPG17¹⁵⁵ are common, with a wider approach to green infrastructure and links to the use of landscape character emerging in some cases. More recently, studies of infrastructure capacity are being carried out as a response to the emphasis on integrated implementation.
- 6.14** Topic studies, when designed to help plan making, can identify issues in an area, consider what might be possible and provide detailed information needed to implement the strategy on a topic basis. Studies of likely retail demand are the most familiar of a type of evidence that explores possible futures as a way of understanding what might be possible, as well as what might be desirable. Studies of economic potential have become more familiar because of the requirements on strategic planning authorities to provide evidence as part of the preparation of regional and sub-regional strategies.
- 6.15** Studies of specific topics can provide geographical information too, and so contribute to creating plans that are spatial in this sense. Material on issues such as the distribution of employment locations can be related to accessibility issues in seeking a sustainable mix of activities. Accessibility is most frequently addressed in work undertaken on open space and community infrastructure. Understanding geographical differences across the district can assist in developing alternatives related to the needs, character and roles of different areas, and in preparing strategies that are spatially specific in the distribution of development and the management of change. This understanding may subsequently be used in policies and guidance to implement the strategy. An example would be in

¹⁵⁰ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Strategic Survey 4*, and also Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 2: Using Evidence in Spatial Planning* – paragraphs 4.12-4.14

¹⁵¹ Communities and Local Government (2006) *Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing*

¹⁵² Communities and Local Government (2007) *Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessments Practice Guidance*

¹⁵³ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Housing & Planning Delivery Grant: Consultation allocation mechanism*

¹⁵⁴ ODPM (2005) *Employment Land Reviews: Guidance Note*

¹⁵⁵ ODPM (2002) *Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 Planning for Sport and Recreation*

the use of planning obligations, with different priorities for contributions to the creation of community infrastructure in different areas¹⁵⁶.

- 6.16** Some planning authorities dealing with substantial urban areas divide them into different parts. This division may arise from studies, differentiating areas on the basis of land use and character. The areas defined can become the building blocks of the strategy that responds to the distinct nature, needs and potential of different parts of the urban area. Further analysis of these distinct areas may be undertaken to inform the development of the strategy. In some cases technical studies of community facilities, accessibility and development potential may be allied to community engagement on perceptions and needs¹⁵⁷.
- 6.17** Without undertaking a topic study as such, there is valuable material being drawn from existing statistics by planning authorities to provide a basic understanding of how their area is working. Understanding basics such as the population structure, the relationship between homes and jobs, and travel patterns related to work and other activities for different settlements or parts of a settlement, will point to matters that may need to be addressed by the strategy. Having this knowledge will assist in examining the implications of different strategy alternatives¹⁵⁸.
- 6.18** Responses from community consultation exercises are sometimes referred to as 'evidence' by planning authorities and are used as such in developing and evaluating alternatives and as part of the justification of choices that are made. The report from an engagement exercise can add real knowledge about the place and the community, but must be capable of being tested. Corroboration between different sources of evidence is a way of doing this.
- 6.19** The value of information obtained from community engagement for use in plan-making may increase as a dialogue with the community increases in line with the spirit of the reforms. Carried out well, engagement in the early stages of plan-making mean that communities can make a connection between what is being considered as a way forward and the issues that need to be addressed, now and in the future. What the issues are and how they can be dealt with should be informed by community involvement, reinforcing the iterative nature of the process¹⁵⁹.

¹⁵⁶ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 2: Using Evidence in Spatial Planning* – paragraph 4.16

¹⁵⁷ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 2: Using Evidence in Spatial Planning* – paragraphs 4.17-4.18

¹⁵⁸ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 2: Using Evidence in Spatial Planning* – paragraphs 4.8-4.11

¹⁵⁹ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 2: Using Evidence in Spatial Planning* – paragraphs 4.5-4.7

- 6.20** Evidence related to the common land uses (the familiar headings of local plan chapters) is much more frequent than evidence on other spatial issues such as health and education, and on the variation of the quality of life amongst different parts of the community.
- 6.21** Whilst approaches to the collection of evidence continue to develop, undertaking an audit of what is there remains overwhelmingly the approach to evidence rather than 'new system' ideas about the relationship between different types of issues, and between cause and effect. Making spatial plans requires both these types of evidence.
- 6.22** Being able to answer 'what if' questions is essential to an inquisitive form of plan making concerned to make the best choices, and to demonstrate that this is being done. The need to examine alternatives and the formal requirement to carry out a sustainability appraisal (incorporating the requirement to report on realistic alternatives because of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)), are causing some planning authorities to question first assumptions about the type of evidence they gather. Climate change is one possible issue that is likely to make planning authorities think more in terms of what the consequences would be of possible directions of change. As a consequence local authorities will need to look at what type of evidence is needed for this purpose, as well as looking at longer timescales.
- 6.23** Beginning with the idea that evidence provides a means of generating alternatives and will be needed to test alternatives remains the exception in the way that the assembly of evidence is thought out. Thinking in this way about evidence seems more likely to happen where there is more early and wide engagement on what issues need to be tackled in a place and for the community. There is more sign of planning authorities beginning to work like this, with the emphasis on implementation as a stimulus to more contact with stakeholders and service providers. Hearing about the present and future of a place from different perspectives is leading those who work in this way to embed evidence more deeply into plan making. Local authorities whose starting point for making the plan is 'where can we put the amount of housing required by the RSS?', are unlikely to take this approach to obtaining evidence.

(iii) Obtaining evidence

- 6.24** Planning authorities report that the emphasis on evidence is making plan preparation very resource intensive and very large amounts are being spent by authorities that have made most progress. Seventy-six per cent of respondents to *Strategic Survey 4* allocated more resources to developing

the evidence base in 2007 than in the previous year.¹⁶⁰ Collecting large amounts of evidence, and the reliance on other organisations for evidence, or to cooperate in undertaking studies is widely reported as a reason for the extended timescales for LDF preparation¹⁶¹.

- 6.25** A lot of work on evidence gathering is being undertaken by local planning authorities in-house. The demands of the new planning system have also led to a large growth in the use of consultants to support plan preparation. Extending the resource in this way is seen as a means of compressing timescales for the collection of evidence, in order to keep to programme and to relate all of the evidence to a common date. It is also driven by the need for information on a wide range of matters¹⁶².
- 6.26** Local planning authorities report that the extent and range of collaboration is growing in the context of the information and evidence requirements of the new planning system and the need for spatial planning to engage with and integrate related plans and strategies. Collaboration with other departments and services in local government has become a prominent feature of plan making in virtually all of the case study authorities investigated. From the *Strategic Survey*, 75 per cent of respondents report that other departments are contributing to the LDF. Collaboration with other departments and services is sometimes limited to specific relationships however, most often housing¹⁶³.
- 6.27** Better co-ordination and sharing of information and evidence across local authority departments is sometimes seen as a potential role for community planning teams and LSPs. However, in the case studies, LSPs are not currently performing this role to any large extent. There are, however, indirect contributions from the LSP in providing a stakeholder network and input from community consultation exercises.
- 6.28** There is evidence of a growing level of collaboration in obtaining evidence with neighbouring local authorities¹⁶⁴. Fifty per cent of respondents to the *Strategic Survey* reported working jointly with neighbouring authorities to develop the evidence base and 80 per cent of respondents were working with adjoining authorities to share information¹⁶⁵. Working together

¹⁶⁰ *Strategic Survey 4 (October 2007) and Communities and Local Government (2007) Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 2: Using Evidence in Spatial Planning* – paragraphs 4.46-4.51

¹⁶¹ Longitudinal Case Study research, Round 4 (November 2007)

¹⁶² *Strategic Survey 4 (October 2007)*

¹⁶³ *Strategic Survey 4 (October 2007) and Communities and Local Government (2007) Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 2: Using Evidence in Spatial Planning* – paragraphs 4.28-4.31

¹⁶⁴ *Communities and Local Government (2007) Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 2: Using Evidence in Spatial Planning* – paragraphs 4.33-4.34

¹⁶⁵ *Strategic Survey*

on strategic housing market assessments for housing market areas is common, and some of these arrangements are being carried on into the preparation of SHLAAs. Obtaining evidence jointly is far more common than collaboration on the content of plans.

- 6.29** The area of collaboration that is growing most strongly is with stakeholders and service providers. This is driven by the need to demonstrate that plans are capable of implementation, and particularly that there is a realistic prospect that the required infrastructure will be integrated with development and funding will be available¹⁶⁶.
- 6.30** Greater involvement of developers in plan making is certainly necessary if plans are to be realistic and deliverable. The most developed examples of partnership working have been with major development areas, such as urban extensions. In these situations the planning authority and stakeholders are talking with developers who have clear objectives and everybody has a clear understanding of the scale and location of development to be delivered. Developers are familiar with this situation because they are used to promoting individual sites and can contribute to the project. There is a recognition amongst some planning authorities working on core strategies of the potential value of engaging developers in plan making more generally, including on the generation and evaluation stages, contributing views on market conditions and deliverability. However, there is little evidence of this type of engagement happening very effectively.
- 6.31** The Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) is a source of evidence that planning authorities are drawing upon. Although most planning authorities have previously undertaken some form of monitoring of the main characteristics of their areas and of the impacts of their policies, the requirement to develop a rigorous monitoring framework and to prepare an AMR is a new challenge for many. The AMR process is, therefore, still evolving and developing in several case study areas. Resources could be used efficiently by designing a process of continuous evidence gathering for plan preparation that informs the AMR, and for the AMR to deal with all of the matters that need to be monitored in order to implement the plan and make the review process more dynamic¹⁶⁷.

¹⁶⁶ Communities and Local Government (forthcoming) *Spatial Plans in Practice Thematic Study 5: Infrastructure Delivery*

¹⁶⁷ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 2: Using Evidence in Spatial Planning – Chapter 7*

(iii) Using evidence

- 6.32** Though evidence is being gathered, there appears to be a lack of in-house skills to be able to manipulate and interpret evidence. Only 22 per cent of respondents to the Strategic Survey stated that they have trained staff in analytical/appraisal skills in 2007, which has declined from 37 per cent in 2006¹⁶⁸. The turnover in planning professionals is a possible, if partial, explanation for this. Those with experience from the time of more strategic planning are leaving employment through retirement and through the scaling down of county planning departments. Planners whose education has given more emphasis to rational approaches are coming into the profession and will gain influence in time. Many of the intervening generation of planners have worked in local planning authorities where the approach to local plans has been neither strategic, rational nor positive.
- 6.33** The development of the strategy, proposals and policies, and the evaluation of alternatives, including carrying out the sustainability appraisal cannot take place properly without the use of evidence. From the Strategic Survey, 92 per cent of respondents are considering the evidence requirements more in October 2007 than in 2006. Seventy-eight per cent of respondents say they are using the evidence base more to set strategies, define options and develop policy and 58 per cent of respondents are using the evidence base more to assess the effectiveness of options¹⁶⁹.
- 6.34** Plan making begins with the identification of issues. Evidence identifies issues and the issues determine the need for more evidence. This is recognised by planning authorities. Demonstrating the way the issues examined by the plan relate to evidence is useful to people following the planning process, though reporting of the way the relationship works is not always very clear in planning documents to date¹⁷⁰.
- 6.35** The strategies and proposals prepared by the case studies have used evidence to differing degrees¹⁷¹. There are examples of evidence being used in developing spatial strategies through an appreciation of what the nature and role different settlements or parts of settlements have now and could have in the future, subject to different amounts and types of development.

¹⁶⁸ Strategic Survey 4 (October 2007)

¹⁶⁹ Strategic Survey 4 (October 2007)

¹⁷⁰ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 2: Using Evidence in Spatial Planning* – paragraphs 5.4-5.6

¹⁷¹ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 2: Using Evidence in Spatial Planning* – paragraphs 5.7-5.15

- 6.36** Planning authorities that have generated alternative options and subjected them to a challenging form of evaluation have appreciated the central role of evidence in this rational process. However, planning authorities in the case study group were frequently unsure how to explain and demonstrate the way that evidence-based progression from alternatives to preferences has occurred¹⁷².
- 6.37** In terms of implementation policies, beyond housing, employment and retail policies, very few of the case studies have made the connections with locally-generated evidence in preparing policies for issues such as accessibility, the environment, culture, health, crime and design. These policies tended to be more generic. Just two of the case study authorities had devised evidence requirements in a way that enabled them to specifically to develop and test implementation policies that were more than simple assertions of aspirations for spatial issues such as culture, green space and transport¹⁷³.
- 6.38** Using sustainability appraisal alongside plan making raises many issues, and is referred to at various points in this report. There is a specific connection between sustainability appraisal and evidence, however, because the task for the appraisal is to identify the likely change from a baseline situation along a desired direction of change if certain actions are taken. This is a rational process requiring evidence. The SEA Directive requires the description of a baseline position, and this is an explicit requirement for evidence to be set out and for it to be used.
- 6.39** Planning authorities undertaking sustainability appraisals have sometimes found the use evidence gathered for making the plan to be insufficient for the purposes of the sustainability appraisal if this is to be as challenging and incisive as it ought to be. In such cases more information has to be obtained for the appraisal to be sufficiently informed and inquisitive, and this should lead to both the evidence and the plan being improved. Those authorities using sustainability appraisal properly in testing and developing proposals find it a useful process and value it, while those only seeing it as an external verification process question its value¹⁷⁴.

¹⁷² Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 2: Using Evidence in Spatial Planning* – paragraph 5.7

¹⁷³ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 2: Using Evidence in Spatial Planning* – paragraphs 5.16-5.22

¹⁷⁴ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 2: Using Evidence in Spatial Planning* – paragraphs 6.8-6.12

6.40 Monitoring and review complete the cyclical nature of plan making and here again evidence is the key. *Strategic Survey 4* found that virtually all respondents agreed that producing an AMR will promote the use of an evidence base in plan and policy-making, facilitate the development of a useful monitoring framework, enable the assessment of the impact of policies and allow planning processes to be more responsive¹⁷⁵.

(iv) Timing

- 6.41** The case studies point to a continuous process of developing the evidence. Sometimes planning authorities have realised that the evidence gathered in the early stages has simply been insufficient – or have lacked confidence in its adequacy – and have delayed the process to obtain more evidence. Sometimes matters raised by stakeholders have contributed new evidence or led to the realisation that more is needed.
- 6.42** There is a positive point about the progressive development of evidence. The types of evidence that are needed change and develop as the LDF takes shape. Planning authorities have found the need for more and different evidence to evaluate alternatives and proposals arising from stakeholder and community inputs for instance. What is emerging in plans in these circumstances is different from what it would have been because of evidence – evidence presented by stakeholders and evidence developed by the planning authority and used to test what is put forward by stakeholders and promoters of development.
- 6.43** Planning authorities are finding that different types of evidence are needed for different types of local development document and that different levels of detail may be required at different stages of the preparation of a local development document. From the experiences of the case study authorities, evidence gathering is something that continues through the greater part of the plan preparation process. Local planning authorities are finding that some types of evidence are pointing to what the plan needs to do and using this appreciation (together with stakeholder responses for instance) to identify what further evidence is required in order to develop the local development document to the next stage. In this way, evidence continually informs the progression of policy development.

¹⁷⁵ Strategic Survey 4 (October 2007)

How do the reforms lead to the greater use of evidence and more positive planning?

6.44 The changes introduced by the reforms that relate to the use of evidence include:

(i) The test of soundness

6.45 The reforms have placed evidence at the heart of plan making and more evidence is being collected to inform plan making.

6.46 This is being driven by the introduction and application of the test of soundness which has made it impossible to prepare a plan that can be adopted without the conspicuous use of evidence. Several plans have been found unsound or have been withdrawn from examination because of an inadequate connection between evidence and the content of the plan. These cases have had a significant impact on other planning authorities.

6.47 The evaluation of case study DPDs shows that the transition to more evidence-based plans is starting to take place, with DPDs prepared more recently appearing to be far more cognisant of the requirement to ground policy in evidence, compared with some of the early DPDs.

(ii) An emphasis on collaborative working and continuous engagement with stakeholders

6.48 Spatial planning requires collaborative working with stakeholders who have knowledge about what needs to be done and how it can be done. Perhaps one of the most positive findings of the SPiP project is the extent to which local authorities are gathering evidence in collaboration with colleagues within the council, external stakeholders, and neighbouring authorities.

(iii) The requirement to consider alternatives

6.49 The soundness test also obliges planning authorities to show how alternatives have been considered. The reforms made sustainability appraisal a statutory requirement and through the incorporation of the requirements of the SEA Directive, this process requires the implications of alternatives to be reported. The generation of realistic alternatives needs evidence on what is possible and the evaluation of alternatives needs evidence to anticipate their likely implications. Having evidence and appreciating what it is saying about places and their needs is leading planning authorities to generate alternatives and assisting them in doing so, though the documents that are produced do not always make it clear how evidence is being used.

6.50 There is evidence that local planning authorities recognise the role of the sustainability appraisal in testing and selecting development options. In the Strategic Survey for example, 64 per cent of respondents agree that sustainability appraisals are used to test options to see how far they contribute to or detract from the sustainability objectives.

6.51 While sustainability appraisals should evaluate alternative strategies, in some of the case studies this has been severely hampered by the lack of detail about options within some DPDs. It is also noticeable that few of the emerging DPDs from the case studies make explicit reference to the sustainability appraisal process.

(iv) Making sustainability appraisal a statutory requirement, involving a formal stage of setting out baseline information

6.52 Sustainability appraisal includes a formal stage of setting out baseline information, which provides much of the contextual evidence for plan making. Whilst the case studies have reported mixed experience of the sustainability appraisal process, when its role is understood and appraisal is used properly it is a valuable part of the process.

(v) Production of an Annual Monitoring Report

6.53 Monitoring has previously been seen as the Cinderella of plan preparation, but the requirement for the AMR means monitoring is now unavoidable. Whilst the monitoring process is still evolving, Strategic Survey 4 found that respondents are positive about the potential of the AMR and that half of all local planning authorities are already finding that AMRs are improving the scope and quality of evidence available.

Is practice moving in the right direction?

6.54 The message that LDFs are to be prepared with evidence has certainly now been received in all but a few planning authorities. The specific requirements of the new arrangements have had this effect and the realisation that explicit failure is now possible together with the witnessing of failure by peers has had a big influence. What is encouraging now is that the widespread initial view of evidence gathering as an imposed chore is giving way to the appreciation that evidence is an essential part of preparing plans for managing change from the present to the desired future situation.

- 6.55** The resource demand that this type of planning places on planning authorities is very considerable. Better targeting of evidence more clearly driven by the preparation and content of the plan will improve the cost effectiveness of the process. Collaboration between different local authorities and more evidence coming forward from stakeholders should lead to further savings.
- 6.56** So far there are very few adopted plans that demonstrate the relationship between evidence and the content of the plan in the way they should, but awareness of the basic point is spreading and there is a lot more work underway of the right type.

Practice points

An evidence-based approach to plan making

- 6.57** The appreciation that making plans is a positive activity is the quintessential point of the culture change required for successful development planning. Plans have to be seen by local authorities and planners as a way of addressing issues that are evident now and will need to be dealt with in the future. They are a way of delivering the change that is wanted in a place and for its community. Plans are a positive tool for doing something that is necessary and preferably for which there is some community consensus. The idea of managing change through the plan is vital. This approach has to be embraced and plans have to be used by local authorities and by communities as a means of achieving what is wanted.
- 6.58** For plans to deliver change it is necessary to know what is wanted for the future and why, but also how this change can be brought about.
- 6.59** Evidence is the thread that runs through making and using a DPD. Evidence, and its analysis enables judgements to be made that are required for the plan. Evidence:
- identifies what needs to be tackled and informs views of what is to be done, contributing to the vision and objectives
 - informs effective engagement in the plan making process
 - suggests how to achieve the changes that are sought, and so contributes to the development of the spatial strategy and proposals
 - assists with testing possible ways forward, through the generation and evaluation of objectives

- enables the means of achieving change to be worked out for inclusion in the plan and through the alignment of the actions of different parties;
- is the basis for seeing what has happened, assessing the effectiveness of the plan in managing the right kind of change and reviewing the plan to improve its performance.

Planning the use of evidence

6.60 There is a vital iterative relationship between the assembly of evidence and the preparation of the plan. This can be explained with an example, dealing with affordable housing, where the interacting steps might be:

- appreciation of affordable housing as an issue, from the sustainable community strategy, national statistics and stakeholder and community engagement – **evidence**;
- housing needs assessment to identify the scale of the need for affordable housing, and the spatial distribution of that need – **evidence**;
- development of alternatives for the spatial strategy that distribute development in sufficient scale to contribute as far as possible to affordable housing requirements, taking account of the variation in need across the area – **plan making**;
- examination of the potential supply of housing to establish how much affordable housing would come forward under alternative strategies – **evidence**;
- iterative approach through the testing of alternatives according to the effectiveness of different approaches in meeting this objective (as well as others) – **plan making**;
- consideration of development viability to inform the development of policy mechanisms such as thresholds and proportionate contribution of affordable housing – **evidence**;
- development of the implementation policies to deliver the strategy – **plan making**.

6.61 Evidence is gathered progressively as the plan develops from initial views on issues through to a deliverable strategy, when the need for evidence and the form of evidence required become apparent.

6.62 This approach is one of ‘nesting’, whereby sufficient information is gathered in order to make strategic decisions and further information may be gathered in order to develop the chosen approach to the next, more detailed stage. If the use of evidence is well planned, successive stages of detail will positively support rather than undermine the choices made at the strategic stage.

6.63 Assembling an evidence base is not a discrete stage which precedes commencement of the preparation of the plan. Evidence gathering has to be integrated with the preparation of the plan. The progressive relationship between evidence and plan making should be designed from the commencement of the LDF as part of the project plan.

Types of evidence

- 6.64** There is no standard set of evidence that will be needed for an LDF in any particular set of circumstances. The issues to be addressed in an area and the aspirations for the area will determine what types of evidence will be needed. Information will be needed on the main land uses, on infrastructure, and on the social, economic and environmental matters that make places work for communities. A valuable starting point is to explore with stakeholders different perspectives on the present and future requirements of a place. This will assist in determining what evidence will be required, what is already available and how evidence might be obtained. It is also part of a spatial planning approach of developing a plan that reflects many views and which will be delivered through the actions of many parties.
- 6.65** The way in which evidence is gathered should not be driven solely by topics or themes. It should be determined by the roles evidence has in plan making.
- 6.66** Evidence is needed to understand a place and its community and for the appreciation of future needs to be addressed through the plan's vision, objectives and strategy. The way that settlements perform in terms of the balance of homes and jobs and the travel demands that arise as a consequence of this relationship is evidence of this type, as are views of members the community on what gives a place identity and character.
- 6.67** Evidence is needed on what potential there is to bring about the changes sought, including through private sector development and through public sector investment. Examples are:
- the economic potential of an area in the future and what this will mean in terms of housing demand, the requirement for employment land and accommodation, with locations and characteristics appropriate to the types of economic activity and where this can be directed;
 - how much investment of what type might be attracted to a place and can be used to achieve objectives the community may have for town centres.

- 6.68** Evidence is needed to devise the mechanisms by which change can be made to happen, as part of the design of the implementation policies. An example would be the size of sites from which the supply of housing can be expected to come forward to ensure that the intended level of affordable housing is delivered.
- 6.69** Evidence needs to be able to help understand what the implications would be of following different approaches. For instance, evidence on travel patterns associated with different settlements will enable the implications of alternative spatial strategies for accessibility, energy use and emissions to be appraised.
- 6.70** The evidence gathered is determined by the questions that making the plan has to answer, and the means devised in the plan to answer those questions.

Evidence and sustainability appraisal

- 6.71** Choices will be continually presented and evaluated as a plan develops into a form which the council wishes to submit. Various types of evaluation will take place including deliverability, viability and equity assessments, with sustainability appraisal a statutory requirement.
- 6.72** Incorporating the requirements of the SEA Directive into the method used for the sustainability appraisal brings the explicit requirement for the baseline position to be set out and for the environmental implications of alternatives to be reported. If the environmental and wider sustainability information required for the sustainability appraisal is included in the scoping report, on which the statutory bodies are consulted, this can assist in identifying the issues to be addressed in the plan and the types of evidence that are likely to be needed.
- 6.73** The consideration of alternatives through the sustainability appraisal process will draw on evidence in reaching an informed view on the likely implications of alternative strategies and proposals.

Evidence and monitoring

- 6.74** The preparation and use of plans is a cyclical process and evidence is part of the cycle. Evidence is used in making the plan, in monitoring change which in turn will lead to a review of the plan to make it more effective in bringing about the types of change that are needed. There is a considerable cross-over between the preparation of the AMR and the use of evidence in plan making. Preparing the AMR should make use of information that has already been collected, and by developing the monitoring framework for the plan there may be the means to extend what goes into the AMR.

Sources of evidence

- 6.75** The evidence that is needed should be obtained as quickly as possible and with as little direct cost as possible. This can be achieved by asking:
- are there standard sources of this information – from websites of national statistics for instance?
 - is this information already being obtained by someone else – from the economic development department within the local authority, or from one of the statutory environmental bodies for instance?
 - could the information be obtained by someone else – from parish councils for instance, if there needs to be an audit of services and facilities in smaller settlements?
 - how can community engagement be designed to ensure that people are informed about issues and possible approaches, as well as enable what comes forward from community sources to be valuable evidence?
 - if the evidence has to be obtained, can the cost of obtaining the information for this plan be reduced by collaborating with others – such as other planning authorities, developers, community groups, or service providers?
- 6.76** Some types of information are likely to be needed in almost every case, but planning authorities should be wary of standardised approaches to evidence needs and collection. If evidence gathering studies are to be commissioned, great care should be taken to understand precisely what questions the study is to answer and how the information obtained will be used in the preparation of the plan. Too many studies undertaken result in a better understanding of what was really wanted instead of providing what is needed.
- 6.77** Collaboration is essential to spatial planning and is a valuable means of obtaining evidence. Spatial planning is about inclusive visions and objectives and aligned strategies and implementation. The view of a place and the needs of its community that other agencies have is evidence, as is the analysis on which this view is based. The means that other agencies have at their disposal for bringing about change is evidence too.

How much evidence?

- 6.78** How much evidence is enough is often asked. The answer is that there must be a compelling link between what the evidence says and what the plan says. A small amount of evidence is sufficient if it demonstrates why the proposed approach is right and how it will work. Evidence can only be judged by its quality and pertinence, not its quantity.

- 6.79** The way that evidence is used in making the plan should be evident from documents that are available as the process progresses.

Keeping evidence up to date

- 6.80** Evidence relied upon in making and justifying the plan has to be up to date. This places a further demand on planning authorities where the preparation of evidence is determined by annual budgets as well as by the evolving needs of the plan. Some material dates more than others. For example, landscape character work will remain useful for many years whereas evidence on housing needs and housing supply has to be continuously refreshed. Good baseline work and a dynamic evidence base designed in common with the monitoring system has proven to be both efficient and effective in achieving this aim.

CHAPTER 7

MAKING A DIFFERENCE: Does the new system help to achieve the implementation of national, regional and local objectives and strategies, and a contribution to the overarching goal of sustainable development?

Introduction

- 7.1** The focus of the final research question is of an over-arching nature. It attempts to evaluate evidence and findings from various components of the research to make an assessment of whether the reforms to the plan making process are actually making a difference compared with the situation under the former local planning process. In other words, it attempts to address whether there is evidence that the new system is 'adding value'. To assess this, there have been four interrelated areas for investigation:
- are LDFs better in terms of their form and content?
 - is spatial planning achieving the broad objectives of government, the local authority and the community?
 - is spatial planning delivering national policy?
 - will the reforms lead to more sustainable development?
- 7.2** Ultimately, the final research question seeks to consider the degree to which positive change in terms of the improvement of places and the circumstances and involvement of communities can be attributed to emerging plans.
- 7.3** This is an important, but difficult, question. It is all the more difficult to answer effectively at this point in time as the number of LDF documents that have actually been adopted remains limited and, indeed, in some English regions there is still not one adopted plan in place. However, it is possible to make some tentative responses based on experiences and lessons to date and the question is about whether the new planning documents, in terms of their form and content, are better able to contribute to place-making and the goal of sustainable development.
- 7.4** This chapter will therefore focus on the extent to which spatial plans are being produced, including their delivery and implementation and perceptions of the new system and its likely effectiveness in the future.

Overview of Findings

- 7.5** There has been slow progress towards achieving spatial plans which go beyond old style land use planning documents. In terms of progress, as of February 2008, 126 DPDs had been submitted to PINS for examination but only 44 declared sound and adopted¹⁷⁶. In the initial period after the introduction of the new system, many local authorities planned to prepare a plethora of DPDs simultaneously to replicate the contents of the old style local plan. There appears to have been some refocusing recently with local authorities concentrating on putting a sound core strategy in place. However, there are only a few examples of sound core strategies in place that are locally distinctive with visions that are operationalised through a set of specific strategic objectives, a decisive spatial strategy and effective spatial development policies, supported by robust evidence.
- 7.6** Whether spatial planning is achieving broad objectives of government, the local authority and the community, depends to a large extent, on whether plan makers are going beyond traditional land use planning matters to embrace the spatial implications of other sectors and agencies. The positive role of the LDF in managing spatial change appears to have been most successfully realised where a local authority has recognised the benefits of the LDF at a corporate level and has put in place the resources to deliver it. The best DPDs also show evidence of policy integration with the strategies and policies of other agencies and demonstrate cross boundary working.
- 7.7** With regard to delivering national policies, producing plans in conformity with national policy is a key test of soundness. However, authorities and many stakeholders are failing to get to grips with the concept of implementation. This is particularly the case in relation to the delivery of infrastructure. There is a growing awareness of the importance of implementation, however, some progress is being made to put strategies in place to address delivery in a more robust and positive way than under the old local plans system. Government requirements to develop a delivery strategy, to identify the level of infrastructure required and to test the effectiveness of the plan are intended to produce plans that will make a difference. The reforms have also given central government more tools to influence the activities of local planning authorities in the arena of performance and policy management in the form of the LDS and the AMR. To date these have been used to influence the types of LDDs and their speed of production. However, national targets linked to financial reward and assessed via annual monitoring are beginning to be used to ensure the delivery of national housing targets.

¹⁷⁶ The Planning Inspectorate data February 2008

- 7.8** Few plans produced under the new system are explicit about how the sustainability appraisal process has had an impact upon the strategies and policies generated. The Strategic Survey shows, however, that local planning authorities are increasingly optimistic that the new planning system will bring about more sustainable policies (60 per cent of local authority respondents in 2006 rising to 71 per cent in 2007) and better quality and more sustainable development (47 per cent of local authority respondents in 2006 rising to 59 per cent in 2007). The reality of this has been almost impossible to assess in terms of outcomes because of the timing of this project and the limited amount of change that can be attributed to sound plans so far. This should be the subject of future research. In addition, many of the current challenges facing authorities (eg economic regeneration, social equity, climate change) are so great that judging success against a static view of the world would be misleading.
- 7.9** **Many of the DPDs reviewed as part of this research remain largely land-use planning documents. This would suggest that authorities have not made a full transition to the practice of spatial planning. It is also clear that even plans found sound at examination are falling short of aspirations for what a good spatial plan looks like.**

Analysis

(i) The nature and relationships between DPDs making up the LDF

- 7.10** In terms of role and content, there is guidance from The Planning Inspectorate that the core strategy is where the tough strategic decisions need to be made and objectives developed, and that such decisions should not be devolved to subsequent DPDs¹⁷⁷. However, it is clear from consultations with local planning authorities, undertaken as part of the research, that they are sometimes having difficulty in establishing a clear core strategy before moving on to think about the details of the policies needed to put the strategy into effect¹⁷⁸.
- 7.11** The Planning Green Paper¹⁷⁹ proposed a significant change from local plans to a combination of strategic plans and targeted action plans. PPS12 (2004) interpreted this as the LDF consisting of a 'portfolio' approach with a number of related DPD components based on the core strategy. However, in the early years of implementing the reforms (and partly because of the recent adoption of local plans), there was considerable

¹⁷⁷ The Planning Inspectorate (June 2007) *Local development Framework: Lessons learnt examining development plan documents*

¹⁷⁸ Longitudinal Case Studies – Round 4 (November 2007)

¹⁷⁹ DTLR (2001) *Planning: delivering a fundamental change*

flexibility in terms of which DPDs were to be prepared first. The idea was to allow flexibility to adapt to local circumstances¹⁸⁰. In terms of prioritisation, a significant number of local planning authorities put the core strategy aside in favour of developing other DPDs. However, the inter-relationships between issues, the function of the core strategy as a strategic framework and need for conformity with the core strategy and the RSS, this has led to a re-evaluation of the importance of the core strategy¹⁸¹. Experience has shown that failure to think about the core strategy as the first priority can result in DPDs that do not adequately reflect the concept of spatial planning, fail to address local issues and local distinctiveness and ultimately fail to deliver a coherent strategy for the area. Some of these problems were clearly evident in the recent documentary evaluation of DPDs of the SPiP case study authorities¹⁸².

- 7.12** There are also concerns that DPDs are being developed in the face of uncertainty about policy issues in draft RSS, and this uncertainty is sometimes reflected in the content of DPDs. Alternatively, local planning authorities have delayed the production of their DPDs because of the lack of a clear regional steer on such matters¹⁸³. This is particularly the case with housing figures and distribution and transport investment priorities. The conflict between core strategy/DPD production and RSS adoption is a particular concern of the Planning Inspectorate, in that they see it as being an area where delays in the system might become acute. This tension has been recognised in the Planning Advisory Service *LDF Learning and Dissemination Project*¹⁸⁴.
- 7.13** Further, the need for integration of the LDF with the SCS has only been fully articulated more recently¹⁸⁵. Early community strategies were often vague and aspirational and did not appear to offer the connections with the reformed spatial planning process that is now envisaged – that is that the core strategy implements the community vision with a deliverable package of spatial planning policy, backed up as necessary by subsidiary LDDs.
- 7.14** When they first considered their intentions for the new LDF process, a significant number of local planning authorities embarked on an ambitious programme of DPD production. Even where they started by focusing on a core strategy, the intentions set out in the first round of LDS documents often included quite long lists of potential DPDs in the form of AAPs and

¹⁸⁰ ODPM (2004), *Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Development Frameworks* – paragraph 2.9

¹⁸¹ see, for example, Communities and Local Government (November 2007) *Streamlining Local Development Frameworks Consultation* – section C3

¹⁸² Longitudinal Case Studies – Round 4 (November 2007)

¹⁸³ Strategic Survey 4 (October 2007)

¹⁸⁴ <http://www.pas.gov.uk/pas/core/page.do?pagelid=11534>

¹⁸⁵ Communities and Local Government (2006) *Strong and prosperous communities – The Local Government White Paper*

other DPDs, alongside long lists of proposed SPDs¹⁸⁶. Not only did these authorities underestimate the work (and hence timescales) involved in preparing a DPD under the new regulations, leading to revised timetables and a 'scaling-back' of planned DPD production in revised versions of their LDS, there were also concerns that local planning authorities were trying to use the plethora of DPDs to reproduce the detailed land use planning coverage inherent in the 'old-style' local plan/UDP system, contrary to the spirit of the new spatial planning approach¹⁸⁷. The final round of longitudinal case study investigations indicate a greater understanding of the priority documents to be prepared.

(ii) Content of DPDs and the adoption of a spatial planning approach

- 7.15** A central component of the research has been to assess the outputs from the case study authorities to see whether the form and content of plans were significantly different from those of the 'old' system. During summer 2007 a sample of twenty DPDs (mainly core strategies and AAPs) were reviewed drawn from the twenty-five case studies, which were at various stages in the plan production cycle¹⁸⁸. From this it is possible to identify some positive experiences, and good practice examples, with respect to the role and content of emerging DPDs.
- 7.16** The best core strategies are built on a contextually distinctive local vision that explains where the local planning authority realistically hopes the area to be by the end of the plan period. The subsequent strategy and implementation policies make the connections with the vision, identifying where the significant development will be and how it will be delivered. These core strategies achieve an effective balance between statements of aspiration and place-based detail. Both Plymouth and St Helen's provide a clear vision which is tailored to its specific context and augmented by subsequent objectives and policies. The most successful sound core strategies examined in this research (Hambleton and Plymouth) are locally distinctive with visions that are operationalised through a set of specific strategic objectives, a decisive spatial strategy and effective spatial development policies, supported by robust evidence.
- 7.17** Overall though, for the most part, the core strategies examined did not find an appropriate balance between the general and the specific and many lacked a spatial focus, with little explanation of existing spatial relationships. Many visions from withdrawn or unsound core strategies

¹⁸⁶ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 1: Making timely progress and the integration of policy*

¹⁸⁷ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 1: Making timely progress and the integration of policy* – paragraph 4.5

¹⁸⁸ Longitudinal case studies – Round 4 (November 2007)

examined were high on general aspiration, but low on content dealing specifically with that place. This tended to follow through into the remainder of these documents which lacked a spatial focus and led to allocations which then lack detail and evidence of how they would be delivered.

- 7.18** The most complete examples of spatial strategies progress seamlessly from the identification of existing spatial trends and relationships, to the identification of critical spatial development issues, long term goals, the future role of places leading to a focus on key areas of change and the means of delivery.
- 7.19** In the Plymouth Core Strategy, the numerous spatial trends and relationships are well explained including the distributional consequences of wider non-land use planning sectors such as energy, health and education. These trends are articulated not only within the administrative jurisdiction of Plymouth City Council but also with regard to the spatial relationships with the adjoining district of South Hams. Whilst the role of places and their development is set out in an accessible narrative form, this is augmented by numerous maps and diagrams which serve to clarify the text.
- 7.20** In the case of Plymouth, the spatial strategy that links the strategic vision to detailed policies is articulated through the structure of every chapter, thereby seamlessly knitting the contents together. The policies are both detailed and specific and clearly speak to the overarching vision. This leaves the overall impression that policies are viable and likely to be effective. This is reinforced by setting out specific details of what is to be delivered, at what time, how and by whom. A particular strength of the Plymouth Core Strategy is that there is clear evidence that the strategy is concerned with coordinating the proposals of multiple partner agencies in a coherent fashion.
- 7.21** One aspect common to sound DPDs was a clear connection between the ultimate document and earlier stages in the plan making process, perhaps most significantly the identification of, and arbitration between, issues and options. Documents such as those produced by Plymouth City Council and Hambleton District Council provide a useful summary of the issues and options stage of plan preparation. This is useful both in establishing a logical and transparent approach to decision making as well as situating the plan in its temporal context, narrating the process by which issues and options were identified and considered en route to the specification of a preferred option which ultimately informs the final core strategy.

7.22 By contrast some core strategies do not include any reference to the issues and options facing the area and the community. This de-contextualises the core strategy from those stages which are intended to act as its precursor, and gives the impression that there is not a close connection between the early stages of plan production and the document ultimately arising from it.

(iii) Achieving broad objectives

7.23 The DPDs which were clearly grounded in evidence are most likely to address local objectives. The two documents produced by Plymouth City Council (Core Strategy and North Plymstock AAP) were based on a range of evidence types, ranging from commissioned studies highly specific to the plan making process, to data and information collated from other sources, including the strategies and aspirations of partner agencies. The North Plymstock AAP makes reference to over 70 documents which comprise the evidence base for the document.

7.24 What differentiates the Plymouth DPDs from many others is the manner in which evidence is explicitly and conspicuously used, for example, by listing the 'key sources' at the start of each chapter. This clearly establishes the evidence-based nature of the document as well as giving the general impression that it has been drafted in partnership with other agencies. This supports an overarching view that the Core Strategy represents a coherent and co-ordinated approach to guiding development in Plymouth, which has also largely been endorsed by the key stakeholders.

7.25 However, as might be expected, the emergence of evidence-informed spatial planning is not uniform, particularly amongst those plans produced most rapidly following the reforms. This is borne out by the findings of the Strategic Survey which found in October 2007 that 92 per cent of local authority respondents stated that they now give greater consideration to the evidence requirements in the plan making process than in the previous year¹⁸⁹.

7.26 The best DPDs also show evidence of policy integration with the strategies and policies of other agencies and demonstrate cross boundary working. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 5. However, in the few examples which showed very little evidence of policy integration, what generally prevails is a document which does not inspire confidence that development is sufficiently coordinated. Where partner involvement is not clearly established there are typically unanswered questions regarding the clarity of the spatial development framework and, in particular, what impact the

¹⁸⁹ Strategic Survey 4 (October 2007)

proposals of neighbouring authorities, healthcare and education providers, waste disposal facilities, energy and other utilities providers will ultimately have on the plan and vice versa.

7.27 The positive role of spatial planning appears to have been most successfully realised where a local authority has recognised the benefits of the LDF at a corporate level. For example, where the delivery of the LDF is identified in the corporate plan as a priority, or where the LDF is identified as a key delivery mechanism to meet a corporate objective. In these cases, the local planning authority is more likely to be able to bid successfully for adequate resources and to be able to maintain a high profile for the LDF. Hambleton and Redcar and Cleveland are two authorities where early corporate buy-in has resulted in core strategies being adequately resourced and progressed to early adoption. The case studies show that national, regional and local objectives are more likely to be achieved when they are clearly articulated and agreed upon by the council, LSP, and other stakeholders. There are examples of authorities which are delivering on their objectives by responding positively to the need for regeneration, affordable housing and major new development. It is these authorities which have used collaboration to deliver a clear agenda that are furthest ahead in terms of implementation¹⁹⁰.

7.28 A clear relationship between the SCS and the LDF is also an important part of the new spatial planning system. The research finds that in some authorities, for example Horsham and Plymouth, progress on the LDF has involved a close working relationship with the LSP and the SCS.

(iv) Implementation of DPDs and the delivery of Infrastructure

7.29 The purpose of the new LDF process is not simply the production of a DPD that successfully passes the various tests of soundness considered at the examination, but rather whether the policies and proposals in the resulting document are the most appropriate and can subsequently be delivered. At the heart of the current emphasis on plan implementation is the issue of infrastructure delivery. As PPS12 states, *“the provision of infrastructure is important in all major new developments. The capacity of existing infrastructure and the need for additional facilities should be taken into account in the preparation of all local development documents”*¹⁹¹. A good DPD needs to reflect the reality of existing infrastructure constraints and infrastructure plans of agencies in shaping realistic options. It also has

¹⁹⁰ Communities and Local Government (2008) Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning – paragraphs 4.6-4.11 and Longitudinal case studies – Final Visit (November 2007)

¹⁹¹ ODPM (2004) Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Development Frameworks

to demonstrate how the chosen strategies, policies and proposals can be delivered within the timescales of the plan.

- 7.30** The evaluation of the various LDF documents from the case study authorities suggest that some of the early DPDs were deferring making difficult decisions regarding infrastructure delivery. Common weaknesses included a failure to provide sufficient detail on the infrastructure requirements of the plan, a lack of identification of the agencies responsible to deliver specific projects or proposals and insufficient evidence that the key partners were willing or able to take responsibility for delivering relevant infrastructure¹⁹². Some of the implementation plans in the early core strategies were vague on these issues, which is problematic given their strategic nature. However, interviews with a range of local planning authorities found that policy makers are beginning to recognise the need to make difficult decisions early on in the plan making process, particularly in their core strategy, in order to provide the strategic foundation for delivering long-term infrastructure objectives. These include the need to identify and 'tie-in' the agencies responsible for delivery of plan policies or proposals; the need to develop proposals that are jointly owned by partners; and the need to identify, however tentatively, the streams or mechanisms of funding (such as developer contributions in respect of particular sites) which could be harnessed to help deliver infrastructure projects.
- 7.31** The delivery of infrastructure across administrative boundaries has been relatively limited but this reflects the fact that infrastructure delivery has been constrained in any case by problems of slow plan making, funding and resource constraints and co-ordination difficulties between delivery partners. However, there is evidence that policy makers recognise the importance of cross boundary working in the delivery of infrastructure. For example, the Redcar and Cleveland LDF is being developed with the intention of linking sub-regional and local scales in order to help address cross boundary linkages, particularly in relation to the delivery of services and in enhancing connectivity between urban areas and between urban areas and transport hubs such as airports and ports. The development of MAAs provides further potential to change the way local authorities and agencies work together to challenge the artificial limits of administrative boundaries.

¹⁹² Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Thematic Study 5: Infrastructure Delivery* – paragraph 5.39

7.32 There is growing awareness from local planning authorities that the delivery of infrastructure is dependent on the close working of a range of partners and stakeholders which is necessitated by the complexity of planning and delivering infrastructure, as well as the cost and resource implications associated with implementing major infrastructure projects. Perhaps more slowly, infrastructure providers are becoming aware of the changes and the benefits of early involvement and are examining the costs and benefits of different solutions to meet the community's vision for the future. The research has shown that active collaboration between authorities and other agencies over policy development and infrastructure delivery is increasing, particularly in managing new development/ regeneration through AAPs, but is less advanced in the development of core strategies¹⁹³.

How are the reforms helping to achieve the implementation of national, regional and local objectives and contribute to sustainable development?

7.33 The reforms have introduced a number of key structural changes which are designed to ensure that the new plans are better able to meet national, regional and local objectives. These include:

- the requirement to produce a 'spatial plan';
- the need to be consistent with national policy and in general conformity with the regional spatial strategy;
- the role of the LDF as a key delivery mechanism;
- to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.

(i) The requirement to produce a spatial plan

7.34 Whilst the reforms set out the requirement for spatial plans, very few have been produced so far. Spatial plans are very different from local plans and this transition is proving to be a challenge for everyone involved in the planning system. In particular, the full implications of spatial planning are very wide ranging and need to be embedded in forward planning activities of all stakeholders. On-going support and training is required in educating all concerned about the content and form of spatial plans, as well as the process.

¹⁹³ Communities and Local Government (2008) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 3: Participation and policy integration in spatial planning* – paragraphs 4.43-4.44

(ii) The need to be consistent with national policy and in general conformity with the regional spatial strategy;

7.35 At this stage, evidence of the effectiveness of these structural reforms is restricted to analysing the extent to which some of the LDF documents prepared by the case studies address these wider objectives. It is reasonable to assume that the 11 adopted DPDs prepared by 5 of the case study authorities are consistent with and in general conformity with national and regional policy respectively, since this is a test of soundness. It is too early to say, however, whether the development strategies contained within the adopted plans will actually deliver development that meets national, regional or local objectives as they have had little time to have an effect upon development and other spatial processes. This should be the subject of future research and assessments.

7.36 What is evident from an examination of core strategies prepared by the case studies that have been found unsound or withdrawn after submission is that inconsistencies with national and regional policy were part of their weakness¹⁹⁴. In some instances, these plans were aborted because they failed to address the requirements in PPS12 (2004) on the procedural and content requirements for LDFs including:

- the time period of the plan was not consistent with national guidance in PPS12 and PPS3;
- the plan lacked clarity and coherence and failed to provide a strategy specific to the place;
- the core strategy was not a spatial plan, ie – was a land use plan and did not show how others would be involved in delivery;
- there was a failure to identify locations and strategic sites where sustainable housing and employment development might take place;
- the preferred options did not derive their momentum and content from the consultation on issues and options;
- the evidence base was deficient – eg there was no assessment of the need for employment sites, or an up to date urban capacity study to inform the potential for housing to be accommodated on previously developed land, in particular former employment land;
- the section on implementation and monitoring was weak.

¹⁹⁴ Longitudinal Case Study research, Round 4 (November 2007)

7.37 In addition, there are aspects of LDFs that failed because they were not consistent with other aspects of national and regional policy including:

- the heavy reliance on an uncertain supply of unidentified windfall opportunities to satisfy the strategic housing requirements in accordance with PPS3;
- defects in the housing trajectory;
- resistance to a local review of Green Belt boundaries to address housing requirements;
- affordable housing thresholds being unduly onerous;
- failure to define and address how to achieve an increase in annual completion rates in order to meet Structure Plan requirements, having regard to the need for further increases in housing provision likely to arise from the review of the RSS;
- insufficient consideration to changes necessary within the council area to respond to the impacts of climate change and global warming;
- lack of conformity with the housing requirement set out in the regional plan, without any evidence to substantiate under provision.

7.38 The fact that a number of the case study documents failed on aspects of conformity with national and regional policy shows that these wider objectives have been pursued quite rigorously by PINS.

(iii) The role of the LDF as a key delivery mechanism

7.39 The reforms have introduced additional requirements for local planning authorities to submit their activities to scrutiny. The requirement for local planning authorities to submit a draft LDS to the GO and for the submission of an AMR to the GO on an annual basis has given central government more tools to influence the activities of local planning authorities in the arena of performance and policy management. To date these tools have been used to influence the types of LDDs in production and to influence their speed of production, for example, by linking milestones in the LDS to the annual PDG settlement. The more recent requirement for AMRs to show how the 5-10 year housing land supply is being achieved is a specific example of how the structure of the new system is being used to ensure the delivery of national objectives.

7.40 The reforms have been designed to speed up the production of plans, to achieve more positive and strategic decisions, to integrate land use planning with the spatial consequences of other processes and to achieve plans that actually deliver. The research has shown that in practice some

early progress has been made in the form and content of plans, in terms of integration with the work of other agencies and stakeholders and towards spatial planning. In terms of delivery it is too early to say whether the plans will actually deliver outcomes on the ground. Evidence from the best of the case studies does allow us to conclude that spatial plans, prepared through joint working with all relevant agencies, are well positioned to make a difference.

- 7.41** From the Strategic Surveys it is evident that, despite the teething troubles of the new system, there is still a strong perception amongst local planning authorities that the product of the new system will be better, in terms of more sustainable policies, stronger stakeholder engagement, a sounder evidence base to justify policies, more efficient programme delivery, greater flexibility in responding to local circumstances and ultimately better quality and more sustainable development. Only 4 per cent of local authority respondents in October 2007 felt that the new system would be less effective than the old, with 40 per cent thinking it would be better and 24 per cent still uncertain¹⁹⁵. What is interesting is that, over time, these perceptions seem to have changed relatively little despite the challenges that many authorities have been struggling with.

(iv) Contributing to sustainable development

- 7.42** The reforms have introduced the statutory requirement for local planning authorities to undertake sustainability appraisal throughout the plan making process. Policy development also needs to meet the requirements of the SEA Directive. Sustainability appraisal requires local planning authorities to establish the baseline position at the scoping report stage. This provides much of the contextual evidence for plan making and going through this process can assist in identifying the issues to be addressed in the plan and the further evidence which needs to be collected. The process requires alternative policy options to be considered and evaluated for their impacts and this is a central part of the new plan making system. Sustainability appraisal should therefore be seen as an integral part of the plan making process. If undertaken correctly and the results fully taken account of in decision making, sustainability appraisal should provide the local planning authority with a plan which is capable of delivering sustainable development.
- 7.43** Whilst local authorities are required to undertake sustainability appraisals of documents, there is, however, no obligation to accept the recommendations of the appraisal. It is noted that amongst the case studies, over half believed that the SA had been a useful and valuable part

¹⁹⁵ Strategic Survey 4 (October 2007)

of the LDF process¹⁹⁶. However, an examination of documents prepared by the case studies found that they were not explicit about the sustainability appraisal process and the impact this had on the selection of options and the preferred strategy and policies. It is also noted that in some cases the value of sustainability appraisal in examining alternatives has not been realized to their full potential because of the very limited set of options, including limited detail on alternatives that have been set out that can subsequently be appraised¹⁹⁷.

- 7.44** Despite a number of the case study authorities viewing sustainability appraisal as a burdensome requirement, in January 2007, 95 per cent of local authority respondents to *Strategic Survey 3* agreed with the statement that sustainability appraisal is being used to integrate sustainability considerations into the preparation of plans and ensure more sustainable outcomes.
- 7.45** It is too early to say whether the development strategies contained within the adopted DPDs will actually deliver development that contributes to sustainable development as they have had little time to have an effect upon development and other spatial processes. This should be the subject of future research and assessments. A more fundamental question is whether practitioners have a sufficiently detailed and agreed definition of what sustainable development is and clearly defined indicators against which outcomes can be judged.

Is practice moving in the right direction?

- 7.46** There is still a concern that the new system is not speeding up the plan making process nor leading to earlier decision making. When exploring the reasons for these delays and slippages, problems making the transition, changing central and regional government guidance and context (including uncertainty and timing of RSS), ambiguity in advice from the GO, lack of resources, and a lack of corporate commitment are the key reasons given by authorities for a lack of progress¹⁹⁸. Conversely, where there has been strong corporate buy-in from the local authority, resources have been made available and DPDs have been delivered more or less on time.

¹⁹⁶ Communities and Local Government (March 2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 2: Using evidence in spatial planning* – paragraph 6.4

¹⁹⁷ Communities and Local Government (March 2007) *Spatial Plans in Practice Lessons Report 2: Using evidence in spatial planning* – paragraphs 5.7-5.10 and 6.20

¹⁹⁸ Strategic Survey 4 (October 2007) and Longitudinal Case Study research, Round 4 (November 2007)

- 7.47** Evidence from the case studies suggests that local planning authorities are beginning to refocus their efforts on the core strategy and are moving away from producing a plethora of documents akin to the various components of a local plan. This is reinforced by government requirements that every local planning authority should produce a core strategy and that this will be the key DPD.
- 7.48** Making delivery a key part of the LDF is becoming increasingly important in the new system. Requirements to develop a delivery strategy, to identify the level of infrastructure required and to test the soundness of the plan by reference to the principle of 'effectiveness' are all part of a conscious drive to produce plans that will make a difference. Current institutional and cultural developments in local government, including closer links between the local authority and the LSP and new and emerging mechanisms such as LAAs, MAAs and single purpose vehicles (SPVs) could provide more integrated mechanisms for infrastructure delivery in the future.
- 7.49** It is apparent that there is a particular requirement to cultivate skills in development and property finance as viability becomes a key issue for local planning authorities seeking to produce plans that can be delivered. Communities and Local Government and professional bodies should consider how these skills can be developed in the future.

Practice points

Form and content

- 7.50** Given that a spatial plan is essential for the delivery of national, regional and local objectives and ultimately to achieve sustainable development, the essential characteristics of a spatial plan have been considered. Drawing upon the results of the research, and having considered the framework proposed in the RTPi report *Shaping and Delivering Tomorrow's Places – Effective Practice in Spatial Planning (EPiSP)*,¹⁹⁹ it is possible to identify some key components which are required to create a spatial plan which will effectively manage change.

¹⁹⁹ RTPi (April 2007) *Shaping and Delivering Tomorrow's Places – Effective Practice in Spatial Planning (EPiSP)*

7.51 The key components of a spatial plan in terms of its form and content include:

A vision which:

- provides a clear view on the future role of the area and the changes required;
- is positive, realistic and aspirational;
- is distinctive and captures the characteristics of the place;
- generates and is supported by locally distinctive objectives;
- brings together the spatial aspects of other relevant visions (SCS, corporate plan, RSS);
- has been developed in partnership with other sectors;
- is articulated in the strategy and policies;
- is carried forward by those responsible for implementing change.

A spatial development strategy which:

- identifies:
 - critical spatial development issues;
 - key areas of change;
 - what will be done, where, how and by whom;
- explains spatial trends and distributional consequences of wider issues such as energy, climate change, health, education;
- seeks to deliver sustainable development by minimising harm and maximising benefits and by identifying:
 - the future role of places and the scale, form and source of necessary development;
 - the necessary integrated transport, community and other infrastructure;
 - the means of joining up actions by others to deliver the objectives;
- uses spatial concepts in strategy and policy expression;
- uses visual material and maps to illustrate the spatial dimensions of policies.

Spatial policies which:

- deliver the strategy by:
 - addressing the interaction of factors in spatial development;
 - set out what is to be delivered, by when, how and who;

- are specific, able to be monitored, appropriate, realistic and time related;
- are sufficiently detailed to meet the requirements of the relevant DPD;
- are concerned with the improvement of places and the circumstances of communities;
- concentrate on outcomes rather than outputs;
- contribute to broader government outcomes and achieve the goals of other sectors.

Local distinctiveness achieved by:

- explaining key spatial relationships;
- concentrating on the issues of specific importance to the area;
- recognising the quality of places, local needs, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats;
- highlighting areas of change;
- producing location specific strategies;
- bringing together an understanding of how a place and a community interact together and with their neighbours.

Evidence which:

- is relevant to the issues needing to be addressed;
- underpins the progression from issues to objectives to policy;
- examines the spatial impact of policies and trends;
- includes, uses and makes available information from other sectors.

Policy integration demonstrated by:

- evidence of links with other plans and strategies produced by different sectors and at different scales;
- the spatial expression of community and corporate ambitions;
- evidence of collaborative activity with other sectors through partnerships and networks;
- recognition of the interaction and relationship between trends and consequences (eg education, accessibility, employment and housing) and use of cross-cutting themes;
- policies delivered by other agencies.

Effective and inclusive community participation demonstrated by:

- evidence that a breadth and depth of public participation has occurred throughout the plan making process;
- evidence that the results of public participation have influenced the identification of issues, needs and alternative options;
- evidence that the chosen strategies and policies have demonstrable legitimacy in terms of public support.

Meaningful options achieved by:

- realistic alternatives that have been generated as a result of analysis;
- alternatives that have considered the strategic approaches including locations, balance of development across the area, management of supply, balance of uses and delivery issues;
- alternatives that have reflected the priorities of stakeholders and the concerns of the community;
- using SA/SEA and other testing techniques to evaluate options.

Transparent decision making achieved by:

- showing clear links between vision, objectives, strategy and policies which work together as a coherent whole;
- taking account of the results of community and stakeholder engagement;
- showing and explaining the evolution from options to preferred strategy;
- explaining how evidence has been used to develop the spatial strategy;
- showing how SA/SEA has been used to inform decisions;
- justifying any departure from national or regional policy.

Certainty for investors achieved by:

- setting out the principles for decision making;
- making clear decisions about where and when change will be permitted;
- providing for major land use allocations driven by the strategy;
- explaining phasing and investment programmes;
- setting out a clear implementation plan including targets, timescales and delivery partners;
- making clear risk factors and contingencies to deal with unforeseen circumstances and change.

Certainty in delivery achieved by:

- identifying when and how tasks will be achieved and by whom;
- evidence of joint ownership of proposals across sectors, with reference to other delivery agents;
- a co-ordinated programme which uses a range of incentives and mechanisms (not just controlling regulations) and is integrated with positive development management;
- reference to resources anticipated from infrastructure providers;
- clarity on the contributions expected from different stakeholders (including local income streams and development contributions).

Monitoring which:

- seeks to evaluate the impact of the policies, including distinctive indicators and targets, based on evidence.

An accessible document which:

- is easily available to read (both on the internet and paper copy);
- uses clear and succinct plain English;
- clearly cross references to evidence and other policies and strategies and avoid lengthy explanations;
- demonstrates evidence of community and stakeholder engagement;
- is a part of a coherent set of LDF documents, containing policies which link to and complement those in other documents such as the SCS.

7.52 A document that does all this would then be likely to achieve the implementation of objectives and strategies and have a real influence on the place-shaping agenda. This is then more likely to deliver effective spatial change and sustainable development.

Putting the LDF at the heart of the place-shaping agenda

7.53 The LDF is specifically about delivering spatial policies and in that sense sits logically at the heart of the place-shaping agenda. However, in recent decades the land use planning system has not provided an effective mechanism by which public and private agencies have co-ordinated their strategies and plans to deliver spatial change within a local area. If the LDF is to achieve this role, local planning authorities will have to reach beyond their traditional sphere of influence to engage with other partners to influence delivery, achieve consensus and implement national, regional and local objectives.

7.54 The various ingredients required to achieve this have been explored in detail through the research. The following summarises some of the key ingredients:

Culture and political climate

- Obtain corporate recognition of the role of the LDF as a key delivery mechanism for the SCS, other local strategies and the corporate plan;
- Invest in creating partnerships and in explaining what the LDF can do for other service providers.

Community participation

- Utilise existing community networks and the skills of community planners to establish effective and inclusive contacts with the community;
- Plan for participation at the outset of the DPD process;
- Use a range of participation methods to ensure a breadth and depth of public involvement;
- Actively seek out the views of hard-to-reach groups;
- Continually engage rather than carry out one-off consultation events;
- Provide community feedback through the process to show how views have influenced policy generation.

Integration and cross boundary working

- Collaborate effectively with other sectors;
- Develop a suite of policies which are authoritative and consistent with other important partners and delivery agencies working in the area;
- Develop a well-integrated partnership which straddles administrative boundaries;
- Join up engagement strategies and build upon the results of previous engagement;
- Integrate plan preparation work and ongoing delivery across functional areas (such as Housing Market Areas), sub-regions set out in the RSS and LAAs and MAAs.

Relationship with other strategies

- Reflect national policy but take it forward and adapt it to the local circumstances;
- Develop an interactive relationship and two way partnership to ensure the core strategy reflects the RSS and that the RSS reflects the needs of the local area;
- Use RSS as the regional framework within which local context and local choices are made;
- Develop joint working on the sustainable community strategy, the LDF and LAA;
- Ensure LDF documents are a spatial expression of the sustainable community strategy;
- Use SCS ambitions to develop core strategy options;
- Use the LDF to harmonise and coordinate other strategies that have spatial implications.

Delivery

7.55 Ultimately the LDF is a means of delivering objectives. The Planning White Paper (2007) proposes an increased emphasis on delivery. The following checklist of components should be in place to ensure effective delivery:

Content of Plans

- Policies should be supported by clear targets and timescales for delivery;
- Identify and prioritise the infrastructure required, taking care to differentiate between existing deficits and the needs created by development;
- Provide flexibility in the programme and delivery mechanisms, to address potential risk of infrastructure not coming forward and contingencies or other funding streams;
- Produce a monitoring and implementation plan as an integral part of the plan making process.

Working arrangements

- Involve key agencies and partners using appropriate collaborative techniques, in order to understand the organisation, achieve early and continuous engagement and align delivery plans;
- Secure evidence of the commitment of infrastructure providers, using agreements and statements of commitment.

Delivery mechanisms

- Engage at an early stage with infrastructure providers and local planning authority development management officers;
- Create a development management team that facilitates sustainable development rather than just 'controls' it;
- Establish local infrastructure programmes (LIP), local infrastructure funds (LIF) and local infrastructure (management) groups (LIG) to facilitate improved co-ordination and delivery of infrastructure provision (*Thematic Study 5*);
- Manage the funds to which development contributes and from which infrastructure is funded ie between standard tariffs and negotiated contributions;
- Take advantage of the opportunity provided by the community infrastructure levy;
- Use LAA and MAA and SPVs to aid delivery.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusions

Introduction

8.1 Major reforms to the planning system were introduced by the 2004 Act. The Spatial Plans in Practice project has looked at the way that planning authorities and others have used the new arrangements for preparing development plans at the local level.

Conclusions from the research findings

8.2 Inevitably, any consideration of what is happening with LDFs has to deal with the interaction of three matters:

- the increased emphasis on preparing development plans and the greater role seen for those plans;
- the changes to the types of plans prepared and the arrangements for their preparation;
- the culture change needed amongst planning authorities, local authorities, stakeholders and the general community for the preparation and use of the types of plans now sought.

8.3 The research project has focused on the reforms to plan making whilst being aware of the effects of the other matters. The research project has sought to answer five 'critical research questions'. The questions and the conclusions of the research on each question are as follows.

8.4 CRQ1: The timely delivery of planning policy: are the reforms leading to more dynamic development plans and so enabling planning policy to be more effective?

8.5 The division of the plan into component documents, and following the Planning White Paper,²⁰⁰ increased emphasis on the spatial strategy and its means of delivery. The intention is that this will shorten the time to put in place an influential and effective plan. There is perhaps more to do because the plan needs to be rooted in evidence (including the consideration of alternatives) and subject to meaningful participation, but to some extent, this is compensated by a faster process for adopting the plan. There should

²⁰⁰ Communities and Local Government (2007) *Planning for a Sustainable Future White Paper*

be a reduction in the number of representations against the plan, and Inspector's reports are binding. So far these time advantages have not been realised by many authorities, essentially because of the time taken to make the transition to new arrangements, but the reforms do present the opportunity to put large parts of the LDF (in the form of the core strategy) in a shorter timeframe as already demonstrated by some authorities.

- 8.6** However, given that the changes brought about by the new system were more radical than people realised at the time of their introduction in 2004, and that the context has continued to change fairly rapidly following the Local Government White Paper and more recently the Sub-National Review, it is perhaps not surprising that practitioners have needed time to appreciate what is required as well as make the necessary changes to practice. To some extent, an under-estimation of the resources required accounts for a lack of progress, and this continues to be the case in a large number of authorities.
- 8.7** It is clear from the research that the key to success lies in making the necessary cultural shift to spatial planning. A fundamental part of this involves getting the context right within the authority, as well as developing good relationships with other agencies. This requires corporate buy in, leadership at all levels and the development of new and neglected skills.
- 8.8** **CRQ2: Effective participation in plan making:** are the reforms providing for participation that is inclusive and effective, leading to confidence in the way that the plan is prepared and the achievement of consensus where possible?
- 8.9** The new system places a greater emphasis on participation, and on meaningful engagement in making a plan, rather than informing people of decisions that are effectively made. There is certainly more happening with stakeholders because of the requirement for spatial plans, and recognition of the need to do more with regard to implementation because of the increasing concern with delivery. There is less evidence of community involvement being substantially improved by the reforms, although some authorities are beginning to rethink the needs of stakeholders and how their involvement can be better facilitated. Levels of participation appear to be greater where good community infrastructure is in place and there is some evidence of consensus building around site-specific LDDs, but public involvement in the development of core strategies remains disappointing. The requirement to prepare an SCI has had little effect on improving forms of participation or its effectiveness, and hence has taken resources for little benefit.

- 8.10 CRQ3: Integrating policy through the spatial planning approach:** are the reforms leading to more collaborative working between local planning authorities and other sector policy makers and stakeholders in identifying issues and priorities, and what effect does this have on the content of planning policy at the local level?
- 8.11** Collaborative working between authorities was slow to get going, but is increasing now. Core strategies provide the opportunity for dealing with matters that cross boundaries and relate to areas defined by role and function. In some cases, collaborative working seems to have been energised by district councils working collaboratively on submissions to emerging regional spatial strategies, and on the preparation of evidence.
- 8.12** Real spatial planning in terms of developing a plan that addresses wide ranging objectives and provides for these to be met through the actions of a wide range of stakeholders is taking even longer to emerge. Most of the plans prepared so far, including some of those that have been found sound, are not spatial plans. To some extent, progress in preparing spatial plans has been inhibited by the poor coordination of the policy change (ie shift to spatial planning) in government and local government, without the same pressures being applied to other sectors to engage in an integrated approach to the LDF. There is a sense that practice is changing and local authorities report there is evidence that more stakeholder engagement is emerging now. However, to achieve spatial plans, local authorities need to continue to build on the new relationships that are emerging with other sectors and this needs to be met with a willingness amongst other stakeholders to engage in plan making.
- 8.13** As further developments in national economic planning occur, following the sub-regional review, there will be increased incentives for considering spatial planning within functional sub-regions. This will require authorities and delivery partners to work together.
- 8.14 CRQ4: Delivering evidence-based positive planning:** are the reforms leading to plans where the policies and proposals address the necessary issues and which make use of a sound evidence base to manage change from the present position towards what is sought?
- 8.15** The number of submitted DPDs found unsound or withdrawn, with the inadequate use of evidence a significant factor in many cases, has had a dramatic effect on the appreciation by planning authorities of the need for evidence. A great deal of evidence is now being collected. The requirements in PPSs are having an affect here, as is the way that HPDG is

proposed to be allocated in relation to undertaking a SHLAA. There is still quite a lot of progress to be made, however, in gathering the right type of evidence at the right time in a cost-effective way, and particularly in the achievement of a more compelling relationship between evidence and what is in the plan.

- 8.16 CRQ5: Making a difference:** are the reforms helping to achieve the implementation of national, regional and local objectives and strategies and a contribution to the overarching goal of sustainable development?
- 8.17** This is the most difficult of the questions to reflect on at this stage. The role of plans in achieving outcomes is fundamental to the reforms, with the intended outcomes being the reason for making a plan. The reforms have provided for plans that are designed to deliver changes for which there is a clear need and, some consensus. The short period since the reforms were introduced, together with the slow adoption of the spirit of the reforms means that there is little to report in terms of 'on the ground' activity brought about by the new style of plans.
- 8.18** It may be possible to discern a progression. Some development plans (albeit a very small number so far) that are dealing positively with development and taking the necessary decisions are beginning to be produced. The reforms above all were designed to encourage planning authorities to think strategically, and the emphasis on the core strategy component of the LDF means that this is now happening. The possibility that the core strategy will be the only part of the LDF ever produced is now quite strong in some areas. The next stage in the progression that more planning authorities are embracing is the development of truly spatial plans integrated with the strategies and policies of other agencies. At a time when some signs of government policy appear to planning authorities to be solely concerned with the delivery of housing numbers, it remains to be seen whether progress in the direction of truly spatial plans will continue to gather momentum. This highlights the mismatch between strategic thinking and detailed target setting in government, and the need for a full understanding (at all levels) of how delivery can best be facilitated.

General conclusions

- 8.19** Some general conclusions can be added to these conclusions on the research questions. These are set out below.

8.20 Though much has been said to the contrary by some users of the system, the evidence from this project is that the intended role of LDFs and the arrangements for their preparation, are basically right. In making this point, it is important to appreciate that making a plan should be driven by what needs to be done rather than the process set out in legislation and policy. Planning authorities that achieved early success with the new arrangements took this attitude, and appreciation of the point is spreading. The further revisions in the Planning White Paper to streamline plan making reflect the evolution that has been underway and reinforce the spirit of the reforms, over the letter of regulation.

8.21 The most significant and desirable aspects of the reforms appear to be:

- the requirement for plans that provide strategies that work across the plan area (and beyond) over a fairly long time, and which integrate development and infrastructure to bring about what is wanted in addressing the needs of the place and of the future community;
- a process that is informed and challenging and where the output (the plan) is tested according to whether it is a good tool for the job identified;
- the emphasis on continuous engagement in the preparation of plans, leading to plans that stakeholders can be part of implementing,
- the aspiration for plans that carry community consensus in their endeavour, to address understood need.

8.22 The value of the new arrangements – even the degree of change that they represent – is only being realised very slowly, and an ‘old school’ resistance to the changes lingers in some quarters. The Government did relatively little to convey the significance of the changes or to assist planning authorities in committing to their positive use. Local government and the development industry have demonstrated considerable inertia and tradition.

8.23 After a considerable hiatus, the sense from this project is that the appreciation of the planning reforms is maturing. There is greater appreciation of the need for plans to manage change, and for a strategic approach. There is a wider understanding of the need for what is in plans to relate to evidence, and for engagement with stakeholders and service providers to be an essential feature of plan making if there is to be any prospect of making a plan that is to be implemented.

- 8.24** The best work from planning authorities and others has shown that the barriers that are regularly encountered need not be insurmountable, and that with intent, imagination and persistent effort, the kind of plans that are needed can be produced. Whilst there should never be model plans to be copied, plan makers are encouraged by success and do learn from the lessons that have been broadcast from what others have done.
- 8.25** Whilst there are positive signs about the nature of plans to be prepared, the current situation is that insufficient progress has been made in the preparation of plans. A tiny proportion of the DPDs that planning authorities envisaged preparing have been adopted. The distribution is uneven with a few planning authorities being quite prolific. It must be noted that a lot of the intended DPDs will not now be wanted, left behind as the system has evolved and become better understood, but the DPDs that are required are still awaited in the great majority of local authority areas. With few plans of the quality the reforms intended in place, there has been little opportunity to attribute outcomes to plans and to assess the effectiveness of plans in meeting national and local objectives.
- 8.26** It is a clear conclusion of this project that the procedural changes to the planning system are necessary but not sufficient to achieve the objectives that lie behind the reforms. Achieving the objectives behind the reforms is reliant on a cultural shift in what plans are for and the way they are prepared.
- 8.27** Any type of reform can take a long time to show results. The propensity for change and the capacity to undertake planning in the form now needed have certainly been found wanting and whatever else, the limited capacity for creative, strategic and positive planning will continue to be an obstacle to progress.
- 8.28** For all the attention to 'the system', defined by legislation, regulations and policy, the reform of the planning system has to work with the far bigger requirement for a change in culture. This is a change from planning as a reactive activity to planning as a positive force in making places and delivering on community needs, with plans saying what is wanted and how the activities of all formative organisations and decision takers will be aligned in its achievement.

- 8.29** The emerging situation seems to be one of a growing realisation of the role and value of spatial planning that is not being matched by the capacity in planning departments to do what is required. There may be insufficient people but the gap increasingly is about skills. The skills needed to make spatial plans are not those that have been emphasised amongst the profession for the last two decades at least. It is evident that the core requirements for preparing spatial plans are creativity and facilitation, backed by ability in areas such as project management and implementation, and these are not the skills that dominate traditional planning departments. Some of the resource gap may be made up from other local authority departments and other stakeholders and service providers lending their efforts to plan making because they see the plan as a means of delivering what they want to achieve. This would certainly be consistent with what spatial planning requires.
- 8.30** A further response however, may well be that as place-making becomes more important and as LDFs come to be seen as a vital tool for delivering community requirements, responsibility shifts from an isolated forward planning department, to a team with a wider mix of skills in a more central position in the local authority. Indeed, it may not be long before a spatial plan is prepared by the facilitated engagement with all who have an interest in a place, assisted by, rather than being led by planners trained in land use planning.

CHAPTER 9

Recommendations

Introduction

- 9.1** The great majority of planning authorities have still to produce spatial plans. Significant issues remain around culture change, commitment and capacity for planning authorities and stakeholders. The willingness of communities to engage in positive planning for the future of places and their people remains elusive.
- 9.2** All of this means that there are many practitioners who will benefit from appropriate support, and there will be a great deal of valuable learning available as more plans reach more advanced stages, particularly in terms of influence and implementation.
- 9.3** This final chapter of the report looks forward by making recommendations on two matters:
- what should be done to assist planning authorities and others in the preparation of good and timely spatial plans;
 - the way research and practice dissemination of the type started by the SPiP project should continue.

Supporting plan making

- 9.4** The ways in which plan making can be supported fall into three types:
- by continuing to create the right context;
 - by assistance to planning authorities;
 - by helping stakeholders and service providers engage with spatial planning.
- 9.5** For each of these categories, recommendations for Communities and Local Government and its partner organisations are set out below.

Creating the right context

- 9.6** There needs to be continued and persistent effort to emphasise the importance of spatial planning and to **impress upon local authorities their leading role in the inclusive task of place making**. This effort should be directed at the highest level in local authorities, and is a role for Government, and LGA. Though reiteration of the message is important, as are incentives for authorities and leading figures therein, reinforcement of the message through success attributable to spatial planning may well have the greatest effect.
- 9.7** In order to help achieve spatial planning, Communities and Local Government **needs to maintain the emphasis on spatial planning** that was at the heart of the reforms, when there is a risk of this message being undermined by the apparent elevation of a single issue such as the delivery of housing above all others.
- 9.8** Local plan making was often associated with the prevention of change²⁰¹. If plans are to be prepared and to perform the positive role seen for spatial planning, a **radical culture change** has still to come about. Plans have to become associated with desired outcomes, with the preparation of plans that do more than before, with development required to meet needs becoming more accepted, or sought even. That planning now means that what is delivered to meet the needs of people in the future will be better is a difficult message for current communities to accept, as is the scale of development required. The task becomes even more significant with the addition of the idea that plans frequently presume, or oblige, a behavioural change away from current popular lifestyles.
- 9.9** There is much to be done in the development of **skills**. Plan making is associated with report writing and policy drafting, and creative communication remains vital, but the skills for making spatial plans are increasingly to do with action-oriented analysis, facilitation, strategy formulation, evaluation, development appraisal, and implementation. Good project management is essential too, as is leadership. If spatial planning is seen to be what it needs to become, it should attract creative capable people even in a competitive market. Developing sufficient people with the right skills to make spatial plans, whether employed in the public or private sectors, will need a combination of learning through innovative teaching and experience. Those entrusted with the accreditation of learning facilities need to be sure that they are playing their part. There may yet be some quite fundamental organisational issues inhibiting the development of the right kinds of skills and influence amongst professionals in the workplace.

²⁰¹ Communities and Local Government (2006) *Spatial Plans in Practice Literature Review 1: The Role and Scope of Spatial Planning* – paragraphs 2.4 and 2.8

Supporting planning authorities

- 9.10** Planning authorities finding their way with the new arrangements have looked for advice and support and they are still doing so. In the early days there was very little practice advice available, because there was little practice. Planning authorities grasped at the first few reports from Inspectors following Independent Examinations, and they looked for authoritative views from the GO and PINS on how policy and guidance were to be interpreted. To a degree the way these sources were used became part of the problem. The realisation that there could be failure in plan making led to a great deal of caution and the right messages were not always learnt from the experiences of the early failures against the soundness test. At the same time the advice of GOs and PINS were treated as 'definitive', when these bodies would say that they too were learning about the new system, and their advice has developed and changed over time.
- 9.11** This experience must guide the way support is provided in future. For some planning authorities, better appreciating how to use the advice given by different organisations or set out in different pieces of guidance and advice is a continuing concern, though the ability to judge and weigh advice should be at the core of planners' skills.
- 9.12** What needs to be done in **ensuring that the right types of help on plan making are available** and delivered in the future should include:
- for **Communities and Local Government and PINS to work together on how their roles relate to each other**, and on what planning authorities should look to each organisation for. Whilst Communities and Local Government and the GOs deal with policy and its interpretation and PINS on how the soundness test is applied, there is common ground on what makes a good plan for a place, and practitioners need to be assured of **consistent messages** on this matter;
 - for **Communities and Local Government to work with the GOs on the way advice is given** and what that advice is, to ensure that **advice is consistent** with the current policy position and best practice;
 - for **PAS** to be supported in developing and continuing its role in **disseminating practice advice**;
 - for the different initiatives by which PAS can provide **support to be carefully targeted and co-ordinated** to the particular circumstances of an authority;

- for **Communities and Local Government, PINS, PAS, RTPI** and **POS** to recognise that there is a considerable amount of guidance on preparing LDFs now, and that what is actually required is a **compact suite of the very best material** that is recommended to local authorities and other stakeholders. In doing so, this same group of organisations should also consider where further advice is needed and put in place a robust process for its quality control.

9.13 A number of organisations assist planning authorities, but these are not co-ordinated other than by the efforts of the planning authorities themselves and there is a question over whether the effort involved could be used more efficiently and effectively. One area that should be looked at is whether a planning authority should establish a **review panel** to assist with the preparation of its LDF. Setting out its position and raising any issues on a regular basis with this panel would impose extra discipline for the planning authority on programme matters and provide a sounding board for matters of plan design and content, and fit with national and regional policy. In this way progress would be maintained and potential departures from appropriate practice picked up at an early stage. The contributions of the participants on the panel would also be provided in a co-ordinated way. This panel could be the first point of advice on what further, more targeted support should be offered. The panel might comprise, at least, PINS, Communities and Local Government/GOs, representation from PAS and other planning authority representatives in a benchmarking capacity. In some places, where there are common issues, there may be potential for this arrangement to work on a sub-regional basis.

Support to stakeholders

- 9.14** Spatial planning has to be about many decision makers and investors using the plan to set out and to deliver common aspirations for the future. The significance of the role of stakeholders and service providers has become evident. This is exposing limitations amongst some prospective participants in their appreciation of the opportunity spatial planning offers, and in the resources available to engage on the level likely to be required. Serious steps do need to be taken to tackle these issues.
- 9.15** Ways have to be found, through Communities and Local Government and PAS with its wider remit, to assist stakeholders and service providers in seeing the role LDFs can have in delivering on their objectives, working no doubt with the various umbrella groups that represent different sectors. With an increased appreciation of the task, and an increased intensity in the preparation of LDFs, capacity amongst some of the vital service providers will become an issue. There will be an increasing need for

assistance in developing the skills required within these organisations, and for **greater resources to be directed to their involvement in spatial planning**.

- 9.16** The most evident difficulty arises from the different time horizons that some of the main service providers work to in planning and budgeting. It is hard to prepare integrated strategies that are an expression of common intent, and to demonstrate how strategies are to be implemented, when the participating bodies are looking to different time horizons. The delivery of government objectives is challenged by this situation. Setting short time horizons is fundamentally inconsistent with seeking sustainable development too.
- 9.17** Communities and Local Government, working with other government departments, should continue to address the issues of the **alignment of strategies amongst different stakeholders relied upon for implementation** and of budget horizons and funds to provide the infrastructure identified as necessary through a jointly prepared strategy.

Continuing research

- 9.18** The substantial areas where practice is developing on vital matters and hence where research should continue to seek lessons and practical advice that can be disseminated include the following.

(i) Strategy alignment and infrastructure provision

- 9.19** It seems that stakeholders and service providers are really beginning to engage and so this critical area of integrating infrastructure with development through strategies should be producing useful experience for dissemination in the near future. In particular, practical advice and good practice examples of how strategies and infrastructure provision are being aligned would be very useful.

(ii) Core strategies and other LDFs

- 9.20** For good reasons, many planning authorities may not produce any DPDs other than core strategies. This is a very significant change from the previous system and from early expectations in the new system and what these contain and how they work is a rich area for examination. Using a strategic document as the context for delivering development in all respects – scale, location and form – is something entirely new and advice will be needed on how to make this successful. There may be interesting transferable material from seeing how the Welsh system works, with the requirement for one Local Development Plan containing all policies and locations, but with a process where the strategy is resolved first.

(iii) Policies

- 9.21** The point that national policy is not to be repeated is being absorbed by local planning authorities. However, there is relatively little good advice on what policies included in the core strategy to deliver the strategy are like, (including good examples), and little familiarity with drafting material of this type amongst planning officers. The POS publication 'policies for spatial plans'²⁰² is a guide to writing the policy content of local development documents. However, the guide is relatively light on good advice on visions, spatial policies for non-land use planning themes, and policies that make clear connections between the strategy and implementation. Whilst not a direct question put to the case study authorities, the guide was not a source that was mentioned as helpful by the case study authorities in the same way as the guidance from POS on core strategies for instance. This is an area well worth following up.
- 9.22** Because there has been a limited amount of change that can be attributed to sound plans so far, the research has not been able to examine the implications of spatial plans on sustainable development. This would benefit from further research, not least in order to inform better strategies and policy development in the future, as well as implementation practices. Further research could look at whether there is a lack of real integration in the treatment of social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainable development, including how trade-offs are being handled. It would also be useful to examine how effective sustainability appraisals are as a mechanism for ensuring that spatial planning policies deliver sustainable development.

(iv) Top down, bottom up policy development

- 9.23** LDFs are to deliver national and regional policy, and there is requirement for general conformity. However LDFs are also a response to the needs of the place and the community, having proper regard to the SCS, being rooted in evidence and containing place-specific visions and strategies for instance. There are both top-down and bottom-up elements in policy development. There are now areas where strategies are being prepared with a full appreciation of the need for evidence, with stakeholder engagement and with an emphasis on implementation, and where doubts are being raised whether infrastructure can be accommodated, funded and delivered that would meet the housing targets coming down from the RSS in the timeframe of the LDF. This is particularly so for some of the figures included in Panel reports. This situation needs to be observed closely in the future.

²⁰² POS (2005) *The POS policies for spatial plans a guide to writing the policy content*

(v) Community involvement

- 9.24** A vital objective of the reforms has been to enable communities to engage more, though as noted in the study report, a shift to more strategic material may create further difficulties for communities in taking part and feeling they have an influence. This ought to be examined, with more done from the point of view of communities and to hear their experience. It is a vital issue for the continuing culture change too.

(vi) Local spending priorities

- 9.25** Expectations for community provision funded by contributions from the improvement of land and the realisation of development continue to rise. With a great deal of development to take place, there is widespread determination that the infrastructure needed to make places and to make places work should be there as development happens. The cost of similar infrastructure is relatively common anywhere and rising, whilst the value of development varies enormously from place to place and over time. What can be funded and what the priorities are for funding will vary therefore. There may be desirable developments where infrastructure needs and the requirement for affordable housing cannot both be met for instance. How priorities are determined, and how provision is made in strategies over the long term, is going to have significant implications. How these matters are dealt with in practice ought to be a topic for further exploration.

(vii) Dynamism

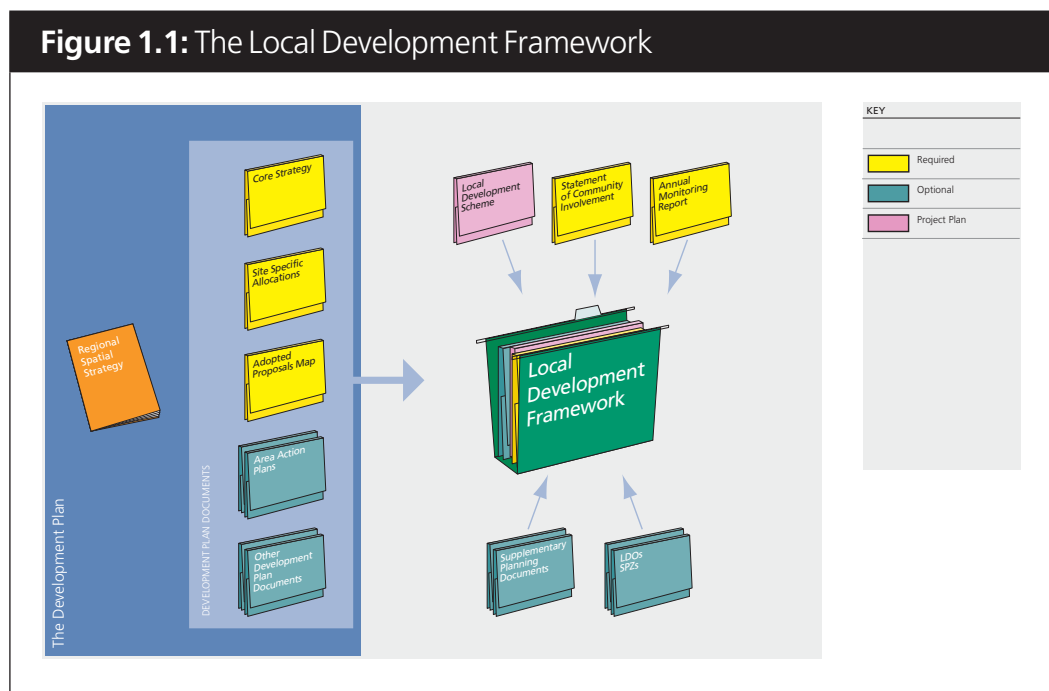
- 9.26** It was a fundamental objective of the reforms that plans should be made faster and reviewed more frequently and more quickly – in short for the system to be more dynamic. Monitoring frameworks are being addressed, but there is not yet any experience of adopted LDFs being reviewed. Plans are supposed to be flexible too, and with growing development requirements, this issue will be tested vigorously. Mechanisms may emerge for instance, whereby core strategies set out the criteria and thresholds for development at given settlements, and then planners and developers draw upon a pool of identified development opportunities to make the provision within this policy context. All matters of dynamism should be part of an ongoing programme of research.

Appendix 1

Summary of the plan making reforms (2004)

PPS12 (2004) describes the composition of LDFs and the DPD process as introduced by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004). Relevant paragraphs are copied below.

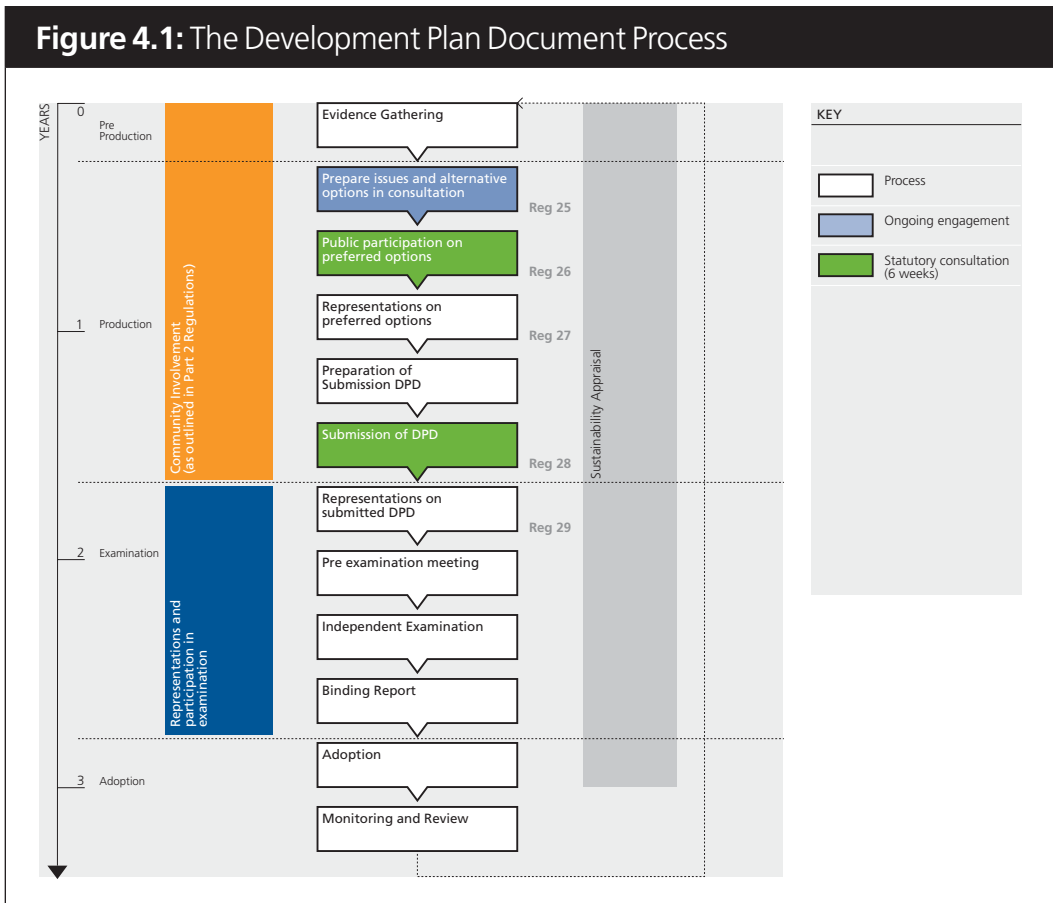
PPS12 (2004) Paragraph 1.2: *The local development framework will be comprised of local development documents, which include development plan documents, that are part of the statutory development plan and supplementary planning documents which expand policies set out in a development plan document or provide additional detail. The local development framework will also include the statement of community involvement, the local development scheme and the annual monitoring report. Furthermore, local planning authorities should also include any local development orders and or simplified planning zones², which have been adopted. The local development framework, together with the regional spatial strategy, provides the essential framework for planning in the local authority's area. The key documents, which form part of the local development framework, are illustrated in Figure 1.1.*



Preparation of a development plan document, PPS12 (2004), para 4.5:

The preparation process for development plan documents can be divided into 4 stages as detailed in Figure 4.1. These are:

- i. **Pre-production** – survey and evidence gathering leading to decision to include a development plan document in the local development scheme;
- ii. **Production** – preparation of preferred options in consultation with the community, formal participation on these, and preparation and submission of the development plan document in light of the representations on the preferred options;
- iii. **Examination** – the independent examination into the soundness of the plan; and
- iv. **Adoption** – the binding report and adoption.



Appendix 2

Planning Inspectorate data on submitted DPDs

	Sound Reports Issued	Unsound Reports Issued	Withdrawn/ Being withdrawn	Submitted and at examination	Total
Core strategy	22	8	12	20	62
Site specific policies/ allocations	1	1	0	7	9
Area Action Plan	11	1	5	16	33
Development control policies	5	1	1	2	9
Minerals/ Waste DPDs	5	0	9	6	20
Other DPDs	5	1	1	6	13
Total	49	12	28	57	146

PINS data, February 2008

Appendix 3

Abbreviations

AAP	area action plan
Act	2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act
EiP	Examination-in-Public
GO	government office
HPDG	Housing and Planning Delivery Grant
LAA	local area agreement
LDD	local development document
LDF	local development framework
LDS	local development scheme
LGA	local government association
LIF	local infrastructure fund
LIG	local infrastructure (management) group
LIP	local infrastructure programme
LSP	local strategic partnership
MAA	multi area agreement
PAS	Planning Advisory Service
PCT	primary care trust
PDG	Planning Delivery Grant
PINS	Planning Inspectorate
POS	Planning Officers' Society
RDA	regional development agency
RSS	regional spatial strategy
SCI	statement of community involvement
SHLAA	strategic housing land availability assessment
SPD	supplementary planning document
SPV	single purpose vehicle
UDP	unitary development plan

Appendix 4

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