

# *POS Enterprises*

## **AREA ACTION PLAN and AREA BASED PLANNING PROJECT**

### **PROJECT REVIEW**

#### **Background**

1. POS Enterprises launched its Area Action Plan (AAP) and Area-based Planning Project in February 2008, in order to support authorities with their work on AAPs and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD), at a time when there was very little practical guidance available under the new development plan regime specifically geared towards area based planning.
2. 14 authorities joined the project:- Bath & NE Somerset, Bradford, Chelmsford, Dacorum, Forest of Dean, LB Merton, Mid Suffolk, Oxford, Reigate & Banstead, Richmondshire, St Albans, Teignbridge, Thames Gateway Development Corporation and Wolverhampton, which represented an excellent cross section of size and type of authority with a wide range of local planning issues.
3. The Project Group met on 4 occasions in June and October 2008 and January and April 2009 facilitated by Keith Nicholson and James Russell on behalf of POSE. A number of key organisations were also invited to attend the project meetings to facilitate a two-way exchange of information and ideas. These were ATLAS, CABE, CLG, PAS and PINS.
4. The original brief anticipated that the project would seek to address matters such as:
  - ❖ The criteria that might be included on Core Strategies for the identification of future AAPs or major SPDs.
  - ❖ Assistance in deciding whether an AAP would be the most appropriate planning tool to address the particular issues of an area, or whether an SPD might be more appropriate.

- ❖ Assistance on effective project management systems for the area-based planning process to facilitate the '5Ps' – Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance.
  - ❖ Consideration of the relationship between RSS, Core Strategies and AAPs/SPDs in terms of contents and timing.
  - ❖ The relationship between AAPs and SPD such as masterplans, area development briefs, design briefs, design coding etc.
  - ❖ The integration of AAPs with effective development management systems to facilitate timely and efficient implementation.
  - ❖ The application of the tests of soundness to AAPs particularly in relation to the robustness and credibility of the evidence base, the appropriateness of the proposal against the reasonable alternatives, the deliverability of the proposals, their flexibility in responding to changing circumstances and the mechanisms for monitoring and review of the plan and it's proposals.
  - ❖ The issue of proportionality in relation to the extent of new evidence gathering required, the depth of information required for sustainability appraisal and the extent of the plan proposals in relation to the scale and seriousness of the issues being tackled.
  - ❖ Approaches to community participation, including how to avoid consultation overload following participation on the RSS, Core Strategy, and Sustainable Community Strategy etc.
  - ❖ The skills and resources required to undertake the necessary processes in a timely, efficient and effective manner.
5. The project was, however, established in such a way that the group itself would set its' own agenda and focus on those issues which the authorities considered to be most pressing or important.

### **Organisation**

6. A structured brainstorming session at the first meeting identified the topic headings under which the group wanted to focus their efforts as follows:
- ❖ AAPs/SPDs/Masterplans
  - ❖ Consultation
  - ❖ Evidence

- ❖ Resources for plan making
- ❖ Political relationships
- ❖ Partnership working
- ❖ Deliverability
- ❖ Sustainability Appraisal
- ❖ Certainty v. Flexibility

7. The vital role of urban design became increasingly clear as the project progressed and was considered as a topic in its own right. It was the subject of specific discussion at the final meeting in addition to being a theme throughout the sessions.
8. At the outset the participants were also encouraged to set out their expectations of the project, both as a benchmark against which it could be evaluated and to guide the agenda setting for each session.
9. A Google Group was established to facilitate the exchange of information and opinions, although participants also used traditional e-mail.
10. Project meetings were generally structured around:
  - ❖ Reviewing progress by each authority on their Core Strategies, AAPs and SPDs.
  - ❖ Presentations and case studies on the topics of the day.
  - ❖ Discussion groups and feedback.
11. Notes of the meetings were subsequently circulated, together with the presentations, to the participants and members of the other POSE Learning and Dissemination groups. They were also put on the Google site.

## 12. Presentations and Case Studies were given on the following:

CABE	Sarah Burgess	CABE's work with Government Offices re Core Strategies & key issues for Development Plan documents
	Carolyn Pepper	Design quality in spatial planning focussing on the dynamics of change and place shaping
PAS	James Russell <i>obo</i> Adam Dodgshon	Introduction to regulations and Government policy relevant to AAPs & SPDs
	Jackie Leask	Development Plan Manual. Self Assessment Tool Kit, infrastructure planning
PINS	Susannah Guest	Soundness of AAPs
	Keith Holland	Soundness of AAPs, need for effective monitoring, strategic sites and importance of urban design
ATLAS	Ian Collinson	Guidance on site allocations in Core Strategies
POSE	Graham Jones	Infrastructure Planning & Community Infrastructure Levy
LOCAL AUTHORITIES	Paul McGarry	Merton Town Centre. Choice between AAP & SPD
	Derek Stebbing	Chelmsford AAP. Key lessons re evidence, infrastructure planning and development opportunities
	Rachel Williams	Oxford West End AAP. Secrets of success, partnership approach, importance of realism
	Mike Vout	Telford Central Area AAP. Urban Design philosophy & approach to solutions and proposals

### **Lessons Learnt**

#### 13. What Type of Plan and When?

There is increasing pressure from Government to include strategic site allocations in Core Strategies rather than in Allocations DPDs or AAPs, in order to speed up major site delivery and give the greatest certainty at the earliest opportunity. This is particularly applicable in the case of major urban extensions or if sites are in a single or a limited number of ownerships.

AAPs are best suited to complex areas with a multiplicity of ownerships and multi-layered spatial issues such as Town Centres or Regeneration Areas and where land assembly is likely to be an important element in delivery.

SPD can be a quicker and more flexible tool but provides less certainty to landowners and developers in terms of their investments, and cannot be used to allocate development land. To be effective SPD needs something 'statutory' to give it validity e.g. Strategic Site Allocations in Core Strategies, Planning Permission or Allocations DPD.

AAPs in advance of Core Strategies can be risky in relation to soundness. They will often rely on the Core Strategy evidence base and the strategic options may not have been fully considered at such an early stage. The trick can, however, be pulled off if all the key issues of soundness, flexibility and deliverability can be effectively resolved at the local level but only where there is no significant impact on the bigger picture.

#### 14. Evidence, Evidence, Evidence

Evidence was just as important at the AAP level as it was higher up the plan hierarchy, but evidence needs to be focussed on those aspects which the AAP is intended to address. This includes evidence on the various options available unless these have been fully resolved at the Core Strategy stage. Detailed character appraisals are likely to figure prominently in any AAP/SPD.

Relying on developers' studies or submissions as part of the evidence base was problematical from the perspectives of fairness and transparency and should only be used if they have been the subject of rigorous testing and evaluation by the Local Authority to establish their credibility.

#### 15. Urban Design

The underlying importance of urban design to the AAP and local planning process emerged strongly as the project progressed, not just from CABE, as would be expected, but also from PINs and the Local Authorities who had already produced sound AAPs. Urban design needs to underpin the whole process starting with a clear analysis and understanding of the

area's character and local distinctiveness and the inter-relationship of the various spatial elements.

This was essential in order to be able to set out, and justify, a framework for effective place shaping.

16. Vision

Avoid double vision by setting out a clear and coherent set of aspirations and intentions at the outset.

The plan needs to articulate and convey what the area will look and feel like in the future, and in doing so, set out clear parameters for spatial proposals and the range of policies and interventions which are required to deliver the vision in a timely manner.

17. Think Spatial

At the more local scale of area planning, there could be a temptation to slip back into a more physically orientated land use mode of thinking. This needs to be firmly resisted and plans need to demonstrate a clear spatial approach to sustainability which considers the inter-relationship of issues, functions and objectives that underpin the vision for the specific area within the wider context of the Core Strategy. Key linkages are likely to include:

- ❖ Need and opportunity
- ❖ Development options and infrastructure needs (both physical and social)
- ❖ Urban design and quality of life
- ❖ Funding and the capacity for development to provide capital and revenue resources.

It is important to try to anticipate the un-anticipated and consider the potential spatial consequences or implications.

18. Presentation

Consider how to articulate and present issues and proposals at different spatial scales.

Maximise the use of diagrams, illustrations and photographs to get the messages across. A picture speaks a thousand words.

Use different formats to get messages across to different groups e.g. use mediums such as YouTube to engage with younger people.

KISS – Keep it Simple Stupid!

19. Communication

Set the ground rules early on.

Engage with stakeholders right from the start to get them involved in setting the vision and considering the potential outcomes to ensure buy-in to the whole process.

To avoid participation fatigue combine consultation with other events and consultations wherever possible, provided this will still provide a clear view of the issues the plan is tackling.

Ensure that consultation is targeted at the issues the Plan is addressing.

Utilise stakeholder groups and umbrella organisations particularly the Local Strategic Partnership.

20. Delivery and Implementation

The mantra was delivery, delivery and delivery! At AAP Examinations, Inspectors can be expected to set more stringent tests of delivery and implementation than for Core Strategies. Plans would not be found to be sound unless they could demonstrate how, when, where and by whom the key elements would, not could, be delivered. Effective Infrastructure Planning was an essential component of successful delivery. Flexibility and fall back propositions were also vital, particularly in the current economic climate where public funding was likely to be tight for some years to come and the commercial, housing and regeneration sectors' business models may well need significant overhaul to respond to the prevailing market conditions.

## 21. Leadership

Successful plans need effective leadership at all levels:

- ❖ Political leadership within authority and authorities in cases of joint plans.
- ❖ Political leadership within the community which needs to reflect both the authority wide and ward representative roles of Members.
- ❖ Visions need to be politically driven.
- ❖ Different styles of leadership are required in different circumstances from diplomatic to autocratic.
- ❖ The establishment of Implementation Partnerships with senior representatives from the Local Authority, service providers, landowners developers and lobby groups can an effective way of providing collective leadership.
- ❖ Officers have a leading role in making things happen.
- ❖ Political and officer leadership must seek to build effective partnerships based on trust and a clear understanding on what partners bring to the table and what outcomes each are expecting.

## 22. Monitoring

This is very much linked to the evidence base. The key issues are whether the chosen indicators are fit for purpose and can clearly show progress, or lack of it, against the vision, objectives, policies and expected outcomes from the plan. If progress is not being made, will the indicators help determine what is needed to get the plan back on track or how it needs modifying to take account of changing circumstances?

## **Conclusion and review**

23. The project concluded with a review of how far it had met its original objectives both in terms of outcomes and expectations. These had been established early on as:

- ❖ Action learning
- ❖ Reflection

- ❖ Hearing from others
- ❖ Sharing experiences
- ❖ Validation
- ❖ Interpretation of Government intentions
- ❖ Direct feedback from Government

24. The conclusion was that it had met all of the expectations to some extent or another. The area which had been the least satisfactory was the anticipated direct two way conversation with CLG. Unfortunately, due to staffing difficulties they were unable to attend all but one of the meetings, although CABE, ATLAS, PAS and PINS were all invaluable in being able to assist the discussions by articulating and commenting on different aspects of government thinking.
25. The Group have indicated that they would be interested in a post project review early in 2010, which POSE will facilitate, to update progress on their plans and share solutions, successes and frustrations.

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