

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

**PROJECT REVIEW**

**Lessons Learnt**

1. 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.

2. 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

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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.

3. 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.

4. 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.

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5. 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.

6. 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!

7. Communication

Set the ground rules early on.

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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.

**8. 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.

**9. Leadership**

Successful plans need effective leadership at all levels:

- ❖ Political leadership within authority and authorities in cases of joint plans.

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- ❖ 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.

10. 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**

11. 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

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

12. 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.
13. 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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