

**ROYAL TOWN PLANNING INSTITUTE**

**A NEW VISION FOR PLANNING**

**DELIVERING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES**

**AN AGENDA FOR ACTION**

## **FOREWORD**

For nearly a century the Royal Town Planning Institute has provided leadership in promoting the better planning of our cities, towns and countryside. The Institute is concerned however that the increasing scale and pace of change in society is putting at risk the future sustainable development of communities and nations.

The need for effective and creative planning is therefore as urgent today as it ever has been. Long term visions for all communities are required to manage the challenges that they face. This needs to be based upon a rigorous evaluation of their needs and opportunities, and on a desire to create delight and life within them, and a sense of place and purpose, and to make them work.

This report is therefore presented as a discussion document about the new vision for planning that is required to ensure that the future planning and management of change in our society are effective, informed, deliverable and accepted. This vision seeks fundamental shifts in the balance of power and responsibility for planning.

## PART A A NEW VISION FOR PLANNING

There is a growing recognition that we are all part of increasingly interdependent communities - residential, work-based, regional, national, global. This is giving rise to more complex relationships which need to be managed if we are to create a society of equity and opportunity, to develop an economy that responds to growing demands and to safeguard an environment that can support us and the generations as yet unborn.

Each of these needs is an imperative in its own right. But they are frequently in some degree of conflict, and that conflict often takes the form of argument over how places should or should not be used: whether they should be developed; and if so how; and for whose benefit; and with what compensating measures. These debates raise issues of private right versus public good; economic growth versus long-term cost; local versus national needs.

Planning provides the means for identifying choices by which competing or conflicting demands can be ***integrated*** and thereby resolved. Planning also provides the means by which all parties can be ***included*** in the choices that need to be made to create and sustain the quality of life in all places - whether village, city, or nation. Town and country planning therefore continues to be one of the key tools, and areas of expert knowledge, in securing the needs of both existing and future generations, and thereby promoting the practice of ***sustainable*** development. The need for effective and creative planning is more urgent today than it has ever been. Some of the key issues from the last century, unfortunately, continue to remain as challenges to way that society is managed. These include housing conditions in the inner cities, the pressure for urban expansion, industrial change and the need for an improved quality of environment, that lay at the heart of the early movement for the creation of new towns and communities. But there are in addition new concerns relating to the threats to rural communities, the need to control the growth in energy consumption, waste and travel, and the growing disparity of health, educational and social conditions between and within communities.

Our capacity to meet these challenges however has not grown to match the scale and pace of change in our society, and a trend towards fragmented and short term decision making. Our capacity to take the necessary action is threatened, in particular, by the growing imbalance between : the power and rights of those who make decisions; the exclusion of those most affected by these decisions, including future generations; and the responsibilities of those who are best placed to safeguard the interests those most threatened by change<sup>1</sup>.

Planning can and should have a positive influence on these challenges - whether or not they are not subject to control through statutory plans. To do this, however, changes in the approach to planning are required since we are facing a future where:-

ÿ Changes to society are increasingly driven by the decisions of global corporate and institutional businesses rather than the wishes of local communities or government. Such agencies affect the environment without it being their primary concern. The traditional reliance upon government alone to prepare effective and relevant plans no longer applies. If planning decisions are to be deliverable there is a need for new forms of **INTEGRATION** with the programmes and policies of all development agencies, public and private;

ÿ There has been considerable loss in the public confidence of political processes. In contrast, however, there are increasing expectations and aspirations by all communities for greater influence over the patterns of change in society. As a result, participation in the debate about the future of society is decreasing whilst conflict is replacing dialogue and consensus. If planning decisions are to be accepted there is a need for new approaches which will ensure the **INCLUSION** of all who are affected by change; and

ÿ Similarly, the range of issues affecting the future of any particular locality is no longer restricted to narrow land use matters but also involves for example, health, energy and urban and landscape design. If

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix A - sets out a synoptic overview of some of the key changes that have occurred in the balance of power and

planning decisions are to be relevant new approaches are required, to encompass this wider agenda, that provide genuinely **SUSTAINABLE** frameworks for the management of change in society.

## PART B INTEGRATION THROUGH PLANNING

Planning seeks to guide and promote the better development of all communities and localities - town and country, neighbourhood and region, valued or degraded. Increasingly, however, the corporate decisions which determine the location of new developments are already taken as matters of principle before the local community, politicians and 'planners' are involved. Their role is therefore often confined to considering the details without an opportunity to influence the predetermined basic principles. On the other hand, those with power - agencies and private sector interests - too often remain 'semi-detached' - "It's not my area; it's not my Plan".

This arises in part from the evolving pattern of governance whereby decisions are being taken on a more centralised but more fragmented basis, in terms of health, housing and transport policy. These problems are partly overcome by 'community plans' but need a wider rigorously tested planning context. There are also issues associated with commercial investments decisions concerning the scale and form of development, for example, where corporate strategies and 'formulaic' approaches are being applied internationally without regard to local needs and sense of place. The need for action is being recognised at an international level through the Rio, Kyoto and other declarations. Within the European Union the preparation of a European Spatial Development Perspective is a clear support for the need for integrated approach, requiring more than a culture of compliance through regulations and sectoral policy instruments.

In practice international commitments and initiatives will only be effective when they are applied within individual communities. Conflicts can only be reconciled in terms of specific places - characterised as 'acting locally but thinking globally'. This places local planning at the heart of the sustainable agenda to improve the quality of life, in terms of jobs, social conditions, the environment or transport systems. Local communities alone however cannot safeguard their own well being - communities have to work together to achieve what they cannot achieve alone. This requires wider regional and national planning frameworks to provide confidence that local action is not undermined by decisions taken elsewhere and to demonstrate the integration and consistency of policies and action programmes.

To tackle these relationships requires new integrated approaches to *spatial planning*:-

ÿ Planning decisions should no longer be restricted to just 'land use zonings'. This requires more holistic planning, even if this requires legislative change. Planning must cover a *wider range of activities*, including such matters as health and the environment, supported by community plans which set out short term corporate programmes of joint action;

ÿ Planning decisions should no longer be constrained by artificial local administrative areas which are often arbitrary and potentially constraining to ensuring the most effective dialogue. Planning must be better related to *coherent areas* at the local, regional and national levels, in terms of socio-economic geography and natural regions. For example, the areas within which people search for jobs and homes or natural watersheds and river catchments. . This requires a more flexible approach to 'planning areas' dependent upon the issues being addressed - different regions for different issues;

ÿ Planning decisions should no longer be seen as just a local authority activity. Planning should be *linked to the expenditure programmes* of key government and corporate agencies. This requires that the expenditure programmes of sectoral agencies need to be 'validated'; their conformity with the approved plan should be a condition of entry to funding mechanisms; and

ÿ Planning skills should no longer be seen as a public sector prerogative; spatial planning is critical to achieving excellence in business management. Planning should be developed as a key *corporate management tool* of private and public organisations and companies, comparable with in-house environmental or financial advisors, to advise on the wider impacts of their decisions.

## PART C INCLUSION OF ALL THROUGH PLANNING

Society is becoming increasingly interactive and flexible in terms of travel, relationships and means of communication. Effective integration can only be achieved by **including** all the interests that planning seeks to serve, promote, restrain or otherwise affect. All members of society must be able to take part in the activity of planning.

Partnership and commitment can only be achieved however if it is recognised that change and development inevitably have impacts - no plan is without its trade-offs. The process of planning at its heart is concerned with balancing the costs and benefits of alternative decisions. Planning must therefore take account of the following trade-offs which will otherwise continue to act as impediments to effective participation:

- ÿ In terms of community impacts, some members or groups in society will feel greater benefit than others from planning decisions. There is therefore need for partnership rather than consultation in planning in order that all may understand and accept, however reluctantly, the decisions that need to be taken;
- ÿ In terms of environmental impacts, even where there is a net environmental gain, there is often some trade off in terms of impacts on environmental resources. There is therefore a need for effective processes which facilitate compromise rather than sectoral zeal, if we are to avoid planning being driven by **NIMBY** (Not-in-my-backyard) and **CONU** (Control-others-not-us) attitudes, with the associated growth in the culture of litigation;
- ÿ In terms of economic interests, the private sector interests that need to be engaged in planning are themselves in competition with each other. There is therefore a need for mechanisms to create a climate of collaboration rather than negotiation if the private sector is to be effectively engaged; and
- ÿ In terms of political interests, the time horizon of elections does not sit easily with the longer term agenda required to deliver sustainable development. Longer term goals rather than just short term expediency have to be given greater weight in guiding decisions.

All members of society must therefore be able to take part in the activity of planning - there must be no exclusions :-

ÿ in terms of **equality**, although there should be consideration of the needs of all parties, planning processes, policies and outcomes must aim to redress existing inequalities and not create new ones. Where there is a choice there should be a presumption in favour of those in most need;

ÿ with **respect for differences**, there must be an understanding that groups or sectors within the community have different values and aspirations; it is important that policies and outcomes reflect the needs of different groups of people. It is therefore important that alternative policies or proposals are presented for arbitration;

ÿ with a **common commitment** to acting upon the agreed outcomes of discussion; the outcome of arbitration of disputes should be binding; and

ÿ negotiated in a process that is subject to **independent scrutiny** and review; there is therefore a need for the separation of plan-making processes from those who arbitrate upon the plans put forward for adoption.

This must be supported by clear professional and political leadership to develop the ideas, information and processes. This includes a recognition that a growing range of skills need to be engaged in planning, involving a wide range of professional or expert disciplines, and cross disciplinary activity.

## PART D ENABLING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH PLANNING

The integration of economic, social and environmental issues is at the heart of a sustainable approach to development, both in the long and short term. This must be reflected in the following goals, which should underpin the policies and programmes of all communities :-

• levels of economic growth and employment which meet demand and are economically and environmentally sustainable;

• social justice, equality and progress which recognises the needs of everyone for a better quality of life in terms of health, wealth, shelter, education and security, including a sense of belonging arising from local identity;

• effective protection of the environment and the prudent use of natural resources;

• integrated and quality transport systems to enable ease of movement to work, home and leisure, and to deliver environmental benefits

These four objectives are always in degrees of tension. Our society tends to be driven more powerfully by private sector led economic forces than by the political will of national or local communities. There is often conflict in particular between short term economic and fiscal benefits and longer term economic and social costs arising from development. There is no natural equilibrium between them.

Planning must therefore embody a more rigorous way link to the key concepts of sustainability reflecting the need to differentiate between long term and short term action, as follows:-

A **Longer Term Requirements** : Implementing the ***Precautionary Principle*** to the evaluation of development proposals rather than an open-ended presumption in favour of development. This would relate the need or demand for development to a clear context of planning horizons and market areas. Linked to this is the need to identify the ***carrying capacity*** of those ***Resources*** which form the critical natural 'capital' and key economic and social infrastructure of an area, and which are not renewable within the time horizon of the planning system (i.e. a generation).

B **Medium Term Requirements** : Applying a ***Prudential Approach*** to ensure the 'Wise Use of Resources' for meeting identified requirement for development whilst minimising the rate of loss and maximising the benefit in enhancing the environment or the social and economic infrastructure. This is embodied in the 'Sequential Approach' to the evaluation of the appropriate location. Currently, the sequential approach is seen as relating to a narrow range of activities. It has however application to all development, and will allow a more rigorous approach to the concept of specific locational need which is often misused in justifying planning proposals.

C **Shorter Term Requirements** : Applying the ***Principle of Developer Obligations***. This involves the harnessing of the development gains and wealth that are created by the plan and offsetting community impacts (through developer contributions), even where the best location has been identified. In this latter context the concept of 'polluter' applies to any impact that is deleterious - e.g. transport emissions and environmental compensation.

## PART E. A NEW VISION FOR PLANNING - AN AGENDA FOR ACTION

### THE INSTITUTE'S MANIFESTO

The need for visionary and effective planning of communities has never been greater. The means for achieving this have never been more challenged. Planning however is not however about defining a simplistic future 'end-state', because there are no end-states; there is always change. Planning however provides the means for agreeing a framework which:-

• sets out the strategy for *real places*, the means to achieve it and the criteria by which its success will be evaluated;

• safeguards the *rights* of individuals and communities, identifies their *responsibilities* and *provides for* their concerns and aspirations to be negotiated and their conflicts to be mediated; and

• identifies the *criteria and means* to be used in the implementation of the plan.

The Plan thus provides a robust and validated frame of reference for a continuous process of implementation, review, and amendment, whereby physical and geographical changes within society are managed and not circumstantial.

In particular, there is therefore a need for clear planning frameworks which that integrate action and engage people in terms of the following *three key perspectives* :

• *Sectoral* - the Key Objectives of Sustainable Development

• *Locational* - the Key Areas of Change within Society

• *Scale* - the Key Scales of Action Requiring distinctive Planning Frameworks

These are clearly inter-linked and overlapping , but they provide the building blocks for setting out the priorities where action is required in order to put into effect the new Vision for Planning.

#### KEY OBJECTIVES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

**A. Economic development** : The main driver of change in our society, the economy, has little regard for its social and environmental impacts. Economic Change needs to be channelled to areas which are better related to those in need of work and where it capitalises upon existing infrastructure, and based upon a greater degree of diversity, self-employment and community enterprise. This can only be achieved if a longer term approach is taken to economic strategies if change is to be planned and no longer circumstantial.

**Key Action:** Economic Strategies should be integrated into a Common Spatial Development Strategy

**B. Social Justice and Inclusion** : The social fallout from economic and technological changes must no longer be treated as a residual problem tackled by compensatory action programmes and with a lack of participation.

**Key Action:** Strategic Social Audits should be prepared for all statutory and corporate plans to complement Environmental Assessments

**C. Environmental Integrity** : The need to manage environmental change cannot be achieved through reactive and post hoc evaluative processes. The future of the environment requires positive action and not merely negative controls to realise the economic and social benefit of creating 'new landscapes', restoring lost habitats and removing inherited dereliction.

**Key Action:** Environmental Benefits that can be achieved through planned development require a fresh basis for resourcing and evaluation, if they are to be realised.

**D. Integrated Transport** : Growing transport problems represent a universal challenge threatening the quality of life in all communities. This will not be solved alone by new high tech integrated transport systems and networks. New development needs to be better related to transport consequences .

**Key Action :** Access requirements must be a critical determinant of where new development is encouraged.

## KEY AREAS OF CHANGE WITHIN OUR COMMUNITIES

**A. Urban Areas** : The quality of development needs to be radically improved in all urban areas. Suburban areas in particular are not dealt with in the recent Urban Renaissance agenda yet are often the dominant and growing form of urban development.

**Key Action:** Promote a new Urban Agenda

**B. Town and Country Relationships** : Urban expansion is in the main managed through confrontational negotiations. This fails to deliver longer term more sustainable settlement strategies, for example, new towns or corridors of growth.

**Key Action:** A new strategy for managed urban growth is required which will include a fundamental reappraisal of Green Belt Policy

**C. Rural Communities** : The quality of rural life is being undermined by undue pressures from urban population, loss of services and unsustainable transport. The rural economy is also being determined by competing public subsidies which have evolved with little regard for their aggregate impacts, and for land uses which are not subject to any effective strategic spatial planning (e.g. agriculture and forestry).

**Key Action:** New forms of integrated spatial strategies need to be developed for rural areas.

**D. Natural Resource Areas** : The main threats to natural resources arise from changes which lie outwith the control of current regulations, arising for example from agricultural, forestry and energy policies. This is clearly related to the issue of rural communities but poses additional issues in terms of designation and management of resources themselves. The planning of natural resources should concerned not just with the site specific 'precious' designated resources but also the wider landscape, whole watersheds or catchments.

**Key Action:** The development of integrated management plans for major natural regions.

## KEY SCALES OF PLANNING

**A. International** : The development of a European Spatial Development Perspective has highlighted the importance of planning decisions at an international level. There is however great variation in the approaches and quality of planning arrangements within the EU. Since planning arrangements and requirements affect economic competitiveness there is no means of validating whether European development is operating within a level playing field.

**Key Action:** The development of a consistent approach and benchmarks for planning arrangements, especially at the strategic or sub-national level.

**B. National** : There is a need for an agreed position between the development industry and with Government to provide the infrastructure for development and priorities for investment which has greater locational guidance than the current national guidelines.

**Key Action:** The preparation of Strategic National Planning Frameworks for the UK .

**C. Sub-national** : The current sectoral strategies for regional development do not deliver effective planning frameworks. They are also not formally integrated with other governmental spatial strategies e.g. economic, health and transport.

**Key Action** : Replace RPGs with more integrated regional development strategies.

**D. Local** : Local plans have become less relevant to the promotion of development because of their bureaucratic requirements. Effective local plans are however essential to the delivery of sustainable development.

**Key Action** : A radical overhaul of the local planning system which separates the long term core policies from the dynamic and changing proposals within them.

## APPENDIX A - THE NEED FOR CHANGE

Growing economic liberalism and the information revolution have resulted in a globalisation of the economy and short term and highly volatile investment decisions. As a result the scale and pace of change in our society and fragmented and short term decision making are putting at risk the sustainable development of communities. :

ÿ the globalisation of the world economy with its increased separation of production and markets, with increased uncertainty about even the medium term sustainability of any mode of economic development within the economy;

ÿ the increased polarisation in the distribution of wealth and living standards in society with the growing separation of people, jobs and services reinforcing the exclusion of the disadvantaged from opportunities; and

ÿ the acceleration in the rate of consumption of land and unmanaged demands upon natural resources.

These trends are in direct conflict with international accords and government policy for, an Inclusive Economy, a Just Society and Secure Environment. The truth is that if sustainable economic development is the primary goal, then *the King is Naked*. Unless there is change Sustainable Development is likely to remain a Holy Grail and that policies for it in main will remain rhetoric.

The key action required to tackle these challenges must spring from recognising the fundamental shifts that are occurring in the balance of power and responsibility for the implementation of a more sustainable and just society. The roles of government (national and local), the private sector, local communities and the voluntary /tertiary sector are changing rapidly. The position of other key interests must also be changed. These shifts in responsibilities reflected the changing power distributions in society are described below and needs to be reflected in the way society is organised .

### **SHIFT 1 : Central Government**

The role of Central Government is increasing in importance as : decision-making has to be taken at a scale larger; the fragmentation through devolution; the break down of regional self-containment elsewhere; and the scope for local decision making is being eroded. In order to ensure and demonstrate coherence and consistency, a more transparent framework for setting out national priorities is required. This complicated by the tendency for government to assume responsibility without the power to deliver. There is therefore a need to temper the rate at which responsibility continues to be centralised by a more collegial approach to strategy formulation if Government is to avoid the risk of imbalanced national development and inefficient use of infrastructure.

### **SHIFT 2 : A new Accountability for Central Agencies**

The implementation of the growing power of central government is increasingly entrusted to non-elected agencies and private service monopolies. This reinforces the increased separation of communities from the decision making process. If these agencies are to be able to demonstrate the alignment of their programmes of action their needs to be a more explicit linkage with the local planning, based upon long term commitment to specific areas and their priorities. Without this, the multi-benefit that can be achieved through integrated sectoral programmes will not be fully realised.

### **SHIFT 3 : Aligning the Agenda of the Private Sector**

The decisions taken in distant board rooms increasingly determine the scale and form of economic activity and the life local communities. Directors of major investment (commerce, finance, banking etc.) must recognise their role in shaping our national and local futures, and the need for them to contribute collectively to strategies and plans which will guide future development. Such an approach to Planning will also provide greater confidence that the benefit arising from investment will not be undermined by less sustainable development proposals.

### **SHIFT 4 : Safeguarding the NGOs and Voluntary Sector**

Increasing recognition is being given to the role of NGOs and the voluntary sector in guiding policy and planning decisions. This will give rise to issues of accountability. In addition as their role becomes 'institutionalised' the value of their 'independence' may become eroded. This potential imbalance needs to be safeguarded against if the expertise and value of these interest groups is not to be neutered..

### **SHIFT 5 : Re-empowering Local Governance**

Local government has through loss of powers and resources lost the link between plan making and implementation. Administrative boundaries are also impediments to effective planning. Local administrations have however a unique role in terms of their accountability and long term commitment to a locality which lies at the heart of a sustainable approach to development. Their re-empowerment is critical to the local delivery of national and international programmes of action.

### **SHIFT 6 : Re-engaging Local Communities**

The lack of involvement of local communities is a major threat to the effectiveness of the planning process. There is growing disenchantment and alienation from the decisions taken by politicians and business. The planning of 'ones own community' however represents a major opportunity to help to redress the more general malaise in civic involvement and commitment to community activity that threatens democracy.

### **SHIFT 7 : Securing Professionalism of Advice**

The speed and volume of communications is putting greater reliance upon the sound bite, dumbing down the debate and information that should guide decisions. Decisions are increasingly being justified by assertions rather than demonstrated evidence. This is reinforced by the fragmentation of professional advice. A new alignment of the professions is required if planning is to properly guide the development of society based upon knowledge and experience that lie at the heart of the science and art of town planning.

## **IMPLICATIONS - SECURING THE SHIFT**

The required realignments in power and responsibilities will only be acceptable if there is confidence provided that those who make decisions and those who are affected by them are not undermined by countervailing actions. There needs to be developed new frames of references for evaluating, determining and safeguarding actions about the future of society. This requires a **NEW VISION FOR PLANNING**. The potential scope of such a step is considered in the foregoing paper.