



**RTPI**

mediation of space · making of place

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Dear Paul

## **LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS: SHAPING THEIR FUTURE**

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) is a membership organisation representing over 19,000 town planners, over 7,200 of whom work for local planning authorities in England. The Institute exists to advance the science and art of town planning for the benefit of the public.

### **General Comments**

The RTPI welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation, supports the government's continued commitment to creating genuinely sustainable communities and is encouraged to see a re examination of the role, governance and capacity of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and Community Strategies (CS) both in terms of short term changes and more radical long term adjustments. The RTPI welcomes genuine attempts to strengthen links between spatial planning, neighbourhood renewal and community planning and service delivery, set in the context of the UK Sustainable Development Strategy<sup>1</sup> and the Government's commitment to devolution<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Securing the future: The UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy (DEFRA 2005) <http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/publications/uk-strategy/index.htm>

<sup>2</sup> See for example Empowerment and respect: Building Change from the bottom up <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1164236>

This submission focuses on the relationship between LSPs and the planning function at different levels of government and has been aided by contributions from the Institute's general membership, its Community Planning Forum and Planning Aid staff (Planning Aid provides free, independent and professional advice and support to disadvantaged community groups and individuals).

This submission reflects work in progress on good practice guidance the RTPi is currently writing for the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit with in ODPM on developing effective relationships between LSPs, Sustainable Community Strategies and the implementation of the new spatial planning process through Local Development Frameworks (LDF). The first Sounding Board took place on 3 March and the guidance will be made available following consideration of the imminent Local Government White Paper.

It should also be noted that the Government has recently established the Barker Review<sup>3</sup>, an independent review of land use planning, the progress of the new system and opportunities to enable improved and integrated delivery of economic, environmental and social goals. The review could have implications on the approach taken to community involvement and subsequent availability resources.

## **Response to Questions**

### **THE ROLE OF LSPS AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGIES**

1. The following information follows the questions as set out in the consultation document

#### ***Setting out a vision***

2. The key role of LSPs should be to develop a coherent vision for the future of a local area through the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS). The vision should attempt to genuinely reflect the needs of all local stakeholders and be firmly centred on effective and fully integrated delivery.

#### ***Coordinating priorities in partnership***

3. There clearly needs to be a relationship between regional organisations and partnerships plans and strategies and the LSPs Sustainable Community Strategy. Within the planning system there is a statutory relationship between policies at the national, regional and local level. The local development framework must reflect the Regional Spatial Strategy and both the LDF and RSS must be in accordance with national policy. Whilst this approach ensures a strategic approach can be taken it also raises issues of prematurity which can delay plan preparation and can generate frustration and claims that national and regional concerns take precedence over local interest.
4. If LSPs are to set the vision and priorities for the locality, to what extent should they be expected to reflect the needs of the wide range of regional organisations and partnerships contributing to them? Some such organisations are multi-sectoral and are charged with balancing and integrating their programmes in the interests of net community benefit. Others are more sectoral in nature and lack a clear method of accountability to the community for their actions. It will not be sufficient to require that SCSs must be in accordance with the programmes and priorities of all partner bodies, as trade-offs between bodies and responses to community values will drive change to some pre-existing programmes and priorities. The simple and sensible approach would be for all parties to contribute to each others' work and when tensions occur they are discussed and resolved in an open forum – this concept is not difficult to realise but will

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<sup>3</sup> Barker Review of Land Use Planning [http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent\\_reviews/barker\\_review\\_land\\_use\\_planning/barkerreview\\_land\\_use\\_planning\\_index.cfm](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/barker_review_land_use_planning/barkerreview_land_use_planning_index.cfm)

have resource and capacity implications.

5. If LSPs are to be credible and effective, theme or service and area based local plans should 'have regard' to the sustainable community strategy. This would help raise the status of the SCS and hopefully encourage more involvement in its production.

### **Process**

6. The table on page eight of the consultation paper is a mixture of recommended stages for the production of a SCS, suggestions for content and recommendations on how to streamline the process. The first suggestion in the table is that the SCS should "outline a long term vision for the area, using the definition and components of sustainable communities". Whilst supporting and encouraging sustainable communities is to be applauded, care needs to be taken to ensure the right balance is struck between centrally prescribed and locally defined content.
7. Streamlining elements of the SCS with the LAA will create a more integrated and coherent system and help embed the importance and again raise the status of the SCS. If the current Community Strategy Action Plan and the LAA delivery plan become one and the same it is also worth considering that LAA targets **must** as opposed to **should** reflect the content of the SCS. This would help ensure the LAA is influenced by the SCS as opposed to the SCS fitting around the LAA.
8. More detailed consideration needs to be given to the different stages of SCS production. For the SCS to be credible it will require accurate baseline information and an evidence based content. Additional stages not referred to in the consultation include the opportunities for stakeholder involvement and consultation and procedures for monitoring and evaluation. There are clearly many parallels between SCS and LDF preparation and many lessons to be shared. The relationship between SCS and LDFs is looked at in more detail below.

### **Content**

9. If the Egan Review<sup>4</sup> recommendation is taken on board, and Community Strategies become Sustainable Community Strategies, the exercise must be more than just one of name changing. Research<sup>5</sup>, undertaken for ODPM, DEFRA and the Academy for Sustainable Communities found the topics most commonly engaged in by LSPs were:
  - Community safety (66%)
  - Healthy lifestyles (62%)
  - Social Inclusion (55%)
  - Community engagement (55%)
 And least engaged with by LSPs:
  - Sustainable consumption (10%)
  - Reducing pollution (17%)
  - Fuel poverty (21%)
  - Sustainable economy (21%)
  - Sustainable procurement (21%)
  - Sustainable design and construction (24%)
  - Climate change (28%)
  - Energy efficiency and renewable energy (28%)
10. The Local Government Act 2000, which provides the legal basis for Community Strategies states that the purpose of the Community Strategy is for "promoting and improving the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area and

<sup>4</sup> The Egan Review – Skills for Sustainable Communities, ODPM 2004

<sup>5</sup> Formative Evaluation of Community Strategies, ODPM 2004

contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom". The above evidence suggests this is not happening and that greater emphasis needs to be placed on the principles of sustainable development being central to the work of the LSP and content of the SCS. It would therefore be appropriate to recommend SCS reflect the aims and objectives of the UK Sustainable Development Strategy.

11. The relationship between the LDFs and SCS could be strengthened further by sharing the same principles for sustainable development. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires planners to "exercise their functions with a view to contributing to the achievement of sustainable development"<sup>6</sup> and, as previously mentioned the purpose of a CS is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.
12. If LSPs are to represent the communities they serve then it is important they encourage the effective involvement of neighbourhoods and parishes as it is only through their involvement more sustainable communities will evolve. On a practical level it is important LSPs are aware of the many local community voluntary sector organisations and representative bodies which can help disseminate information and raise awareness and encourage involvement. LSPs should also appreciate the community and voluntary sector may have capacity issues and should consider budgeting to resource this. LSPs also needs to be aware that local communities are increasingly being asked to contribute to local decision making, for example the reforms to the planning system also provide more opportunities for involvement. So as to avoid apathy, fatigue and wasteful duplication, participation exercises need to be fully integrated and well coordinated.

### ***Coordination with spatial planning***

13. Recent and ongoing reforms to the planning system has seen explicit links made between the SCS and LDF; for example PPS 12 states: "the LDF should be a key component in the delivery of the community strategy setting out its spatial aspects where appropriate and providing a long term vision"<sup>7</sup>.
14. Whilst central government policy requires there to be a relationship evidence suggests links are not frequently made in practice. The guidance, currently being written by the RTPI for ODPM, aims to address this issue. Work in progress suggests there are four key drivers stimulating the need for improved understanding:
  - lack of understanding from both LSP and planners on the significance of recent planning reforms
  - The relationship between neighbourhood renewal and regeneration and planning at the local and regional (and national) levels
  - Local government reform and the increased emphasis on spatial issues in relation to governance and citizen involvement in local decision making
  - Influence of the UK Sustainable Development Framework
15. The following externalities-set the context for debate:
  - i) the government's overall aims for sustainable communities, recognising the different contexts and challenges faced across the English regions
  - ii) the developing role of local government (what the Lyons Inquiry refers to as 'place-shaping'<sup>8</sup>) and for greater citizen involvement in governance affairs<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, Part 3 sec 39, HMSO 2004

<sup>7</sup> PPS 12: Local Development Frameworks, ODPM 2004

<sup>8</sup> Lyons Inquiry into Local Government; consultation paper and interim report December 2005

<sup>9</sup> Local Government White Paper expected Summer 2006

- iii) the uneven development of LSPs (differentiating between those operating within Neighbourhood Renewal Areas, and perhaps also those operating within two-tier areas) and the acknowledgement that there is no standard model<sup>10</sup>
  - iv) the complexity of different stages and timescales involved in the move to LDFs, and the different timings of SCS preparation, which will make the preparation of guidance relevant to everyone's varied situations potentially challenging
  - v) the legal status, and statutory function, of LDFs (which does not apply to SCSs) and the requirement that they adhere to Regional Spatial Strategies<sup>11</sup> and national planning policy
  - vi) the requirements on LDF documents for Strategic Environmental Appraisal and Sustainability Appraisal
  - vii) the possible introduction of planning gain supplement in addition to the use of Section 106 (although introduction may post-date the life of this guidance)
  - viii) the potential need for further restructuring of LSPs to improve their alignment to the new requirements of developing SCSs and delivering LAAs
16. There are many potential synergies between SCS and LDF process and content including:
- ♦ aligning community consultation and involvement arrangements, creating improved opportunities for neighbourhoods and parish councils to influence strategic local priorities and contribute to good governance of public service delivery
  - ♦ strengthening the contribution and role of local data and information (including spatially-analysed information) in preparing SCSs and LAA actions (perhaps especially the usefulness of GIS mapping tools); enabling a place-specific approach
  - ♦ aligning Quality of Life indicators across both SCSs and LDFs
  - ♦ assisting planners to understand the spatial dimensions of quality of life, such as health and wellbeing, worklessness etc and championing new alliances with public sector agencies such as police and health
  - ♦ improving the linkages and alignment of SCSs with other regional and sub-regional plans and strategies (currently perceived as weak) such as Regional Housing Strategies, Regional Economic Strategies, etc
  - ♦ identification of priorities for LAA outcomes and, in areas where NRF resources are pooled into LAAs, enabling sufficient focus on the six mandatory neighbourhood renewal outcomes<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See 'National Evaluation of Local Strategic Partnerships Final Report, January 2006

<sup>11</sup> Regional Spatial Strategies are prepared by the Regional Assemblies in all English regions except London where the responsibility is vested in the Mayor

<sup>12</sup> namely achieving crime, education, health, housing, liveability and worklessness 'narrowing the gap' on these deprivation floor targets

- ♦ improved understanding about the contribution of inward investment, regeneration, economic development, housing and transport plans in tackling spatial concentrations of deprivation and worklessness
  - ♦ transparent approaches to planning gain, based on shared objectives and agreed priorities
17. As both documents evolve, as SCS become more place specific and spatially aware and their content becomes evidence based and as the planning system continues to place greater emphasis on integration and community and stakeholder involvement, it could be argued there is a need for the two documents to become one and the same - the SCS (or part of) becoming the core strategy with in the LDF.

### **GOVERNANCE OF LSPS**

18. Whilst thematic partnerships are useful and pragmatic care needs to be taken to ensure cross cutting themes such as sustainable development are not neglected. Clustering such partnerships around the LAA blocks is sensible assuming every one is content with the LAA blocks! Anecdotal evidence suggests there is concern that the LAA blocks will result in sustainable development and environmental protection being a secondary consideration.

### **ACCOUNTABILITY**

19. Clear governance and accountability structures are required not only to validate the work of LSPs but also to reduce duplication of work. If the role of LSPs is to be strengthened it seems appropriate to promote the use of 'partnership agreements' and to encourage key partner agencies at the local level to include partnership working with LSPs as a criterion for assessment.
20. Elected members have an important role to play in the governance of LSPs. Their role is of particular interest to the RTPi given the important position they hold in relation to both plan making and decision making on applications.
21. Executive councillors have a role to play in ensuring LSPs are clearly integrated with other corporate strategies whilst back bench members should play a vital role in championing effective community involvement. This shift from representative to participatory democracy should not be underplayed. Elected members should be offered support and training to help understand their evolving role. The RTPi submission to the ODPM Select Committee Inquiry in to Local Government Consultation<sup>13</sup> (February 2005) included comment on 'the general effectiveness of public consultation and its impact on local authority decision-making, and possible ways to improve it;' and 'whether the new cabinet structures in local government facilitate consultation and the involvement of constituents in decision-making.'

### **CAPACITY ISSUES**

22. As identified in the consultation document, for LSPs to be effective they require participants to have a new way of working which will require new skills, as identified in the Egan Review. Representative bodies such as the RTPi, Government Offices, the local authority, regional bodies as well as key agencies all have a role to play in ensuring all stakeholders have the necessary skills to help deliver sustainable communities. The RTPi, for example, works with a range of partners to deliver regional and national events and training and is currently working with the Consultation Institute on an *Effective community involvement and consultation* training programme for

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<sup>13</sup> RTPi response to ODPM: Housing, Planning and Local Government and the Regions Select Committee of the House of Commons Inquiry in to Local Government Consultation <http://www.rtpi.org.uk/resources/policy-statements/2005/feb/pol20050223.pdf>

planners and elected members. The Institute is also involved with a Community Development Foundation lead proposal to the Academy for Sustainable Communities on cross sectoral community involvement training for sustainable communities professionals.

If you require further information or clarification on any of the issues raised please do not hesitate to get in contact.

Yours sincerely

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