



LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY **BEST PRACTICE**

A look at the best in Planning Policy and Practice
from across the North West



RTPI North West
Royal Town Planning Institute

rtpi.org.uk/northwest

Contents

Introduction	3
Excellence in the Local Plan Process	4
Resourcing an Emergency: Outcomes for Climate Action from Planning Policy development Lancaster City Council	5
Local Plans in Exceptional Circumstances Rossendale Borough Council	6
‘StoryMaps’: Bringing the Local Plan to life Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council	7
Civic Quarter Area Action Plan Trafford Council	8
Excellence in Practice	9
Building Foundations Preston Council	10
Valid-AI-tion Salford City Council	11
The Economic Recovery of the Borough during and following Covid-19 Sefton Council	12
Design Code Pathfinder Programme Trafford Council	14
RTPI North West LPA Support Moving Forward	15

Introduction



To celebrate the outstanding work that our local planning authorities (LPAs) are carrying out across the North West, the RTPI NW has worked with a number of parties to showcase some examples of this best practice. Hopefully this document will promote and raise awareness of the outstanding work being carried out by our public sector planners. It's also an opportunity to understand how planning departments are having to be innovative to overcome some of the key issues they face such as climate change, the use of technology, mitigating the ongoing impacts of the Covid-19 Pandemic and engaging hard to reach groups. This document seeks to share some of those innovative methods and give us a flavour of what sits at the top of LPA's agenda in the coming years.

This document is part of the LPA Engage Plan pioneered by the RTPI NW which seeks to promote the public sector and provide additional support at a time when the sector is experiencing capacity and resourcing challenges. I'd like to thank each of the LPA Champions who have provided us with each insight and commend them on their achievements.

I hope you find the document insightful and interesting. If there is any way you can work with the RTPI to deliver more support of LPA planners, please do not hesitate to get in touch via regional co-ordinator Beverley Watson beverley.watson@rtpi.org.uk.

We'd be delighted to work with you.

Kieran Blaydes
RTPI North West Chair



Excellence in the Local Plan Process

The projects show excellence in plan production in often challenging circumstances and changing policy environments. It particularly shows how local communities can be effectively brought into the, often slow and opaque, decision making process of creating a new Local Plan or related documents.

Resourcing an Emergency: Outcomes for Climate Action from Planning Policy development

In January 2019, Lancaster City Council declared a Climate Emergency (CE). One of the ways that the Council is helping the district to reach net zero by 2030, to address the CE, is by undertaking a Climate Emergency Local Plan Review (CELPR).

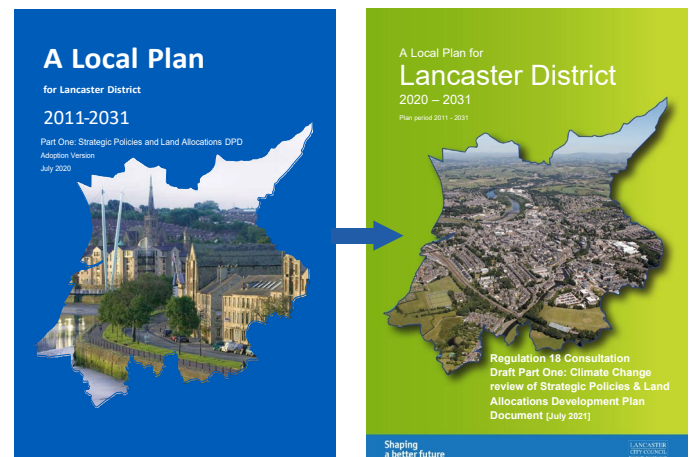
When the CE declaration was made the Local Plan (adopted July 2020) was still in preparation but was too far advanced to incorporate the outcomes of the declaration. Consequently, an immediate review of the Local Plan began, aimed at achieving better development outcomes for climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resilience. Only 20 months later, in March 2022, the Council submitted the CELPR to the Planning Inspectorate.

The CELPR re-visits around 30 key policies with direct links to climate adaptation and mitigation and examines how they can best support the transition to a net zero future. To achieve this, the Council employed two members of staff with Environmental Science and Climate Change backgrounds to work directly within the Planning Policy team. Promptly resourcing the Council's ambition to undertake the CELPR has led to unanticipated positive interactions supporting the development of climate projects and engaging with stakeholders on their actions, whilst always being routed in the development of formal planning policy.

Appointing a Climate Change Policy Officer and a Climate Change Policy Assistant to work on the formulation of the revised CELPR policies allowed for swift progress, reduced the amount of external consultancy required and gave Members the ability to raise issues and questions on this new, and at times technical, area of work.

A Council-wide Climate Change Hub was also established to bring together staff and projects on all areas relating to climate change, such as the decarbonisation of the Council-owned Leisure Centre, energy matters in the housing stock and the roll out of Electric Vehicles (EVs) and EV charging Points leading to greater cross-departmental working on the matter.

Lancaster City Council's investment in knowledgeable and subject-dedicated Climate Change personnel, embedded in the planning policy team, has not only allowed the Council to develop a significant planning policy specialism but has enabled more real-world outcomes than could have been anticipated.



Local Plans in Exceptional Circumstances

When considering the potential risks associated with a submission of a Local Plan for examination back in early 2019, a world-wide virus pandemic did not feature in the list. However, the first lockdown rules following the spread of the Covid-19 virus affected England in March 2020 at a time when the examination of the Rossendale Borough Council Local Plan was at full steam.

The first public hearings were held for a period of three weeks in September and October 2019 and by then no exceptional circumstances applied (except maybe for Green Belt changes proposals). However, in March 2020 non-key workers were asked to stay at home. In a very short time Rossendale planners adjusted to the new situation, the Council working in partnership with the Programme Officer and Planning Inspectorate pressed on with the examination of its Local Plan. The further public hearing session that was due to be held on 2nd April, less than two weeks after national lockdown, was rescheduled and transformed into a teleconference hearing on 17th June 2020 with 11 participants (in addition to the Council's and Planning Inspectorate's Team) and eight listeners – all taking part from their own homes.

Further online consultations took place in November 2020 and February – March 2021 (each generating more than 130 responses) on additional information requested by the Inspectors following the hearings. In June 2021 the Council received the much anticipated Post Hearing Letter informing us that the Main Modifications consultation was within its reach! In July 2021, the Council were one of the first authorities to identify and consult on Green Belt compensation measures before the final consultation on the major modifications to the Plan in September 2021 (which generated 98 responses). The Local Plan was then adopted on 15 December 2021.

The adaptability and tenacious approach of Rossendale's planners, like so many others across the UK's Local Authorities meant there was only the most minor delay to the adoption of the Local Plan, and active participation continued with stakeholders, during a time of the most exceptional circumstances.



‘StoryMaps’: Bringing the Local Plan to life

Through DLUHC’s PropTech engagement fund, the Council successfully bid for £90,000 to develop ‘StoryMaps’- a mapping tool to bring the Local Plan to life for formal public consultation, allowing people to explore and comment on specific aspects of the Plan more easily. By using a more interactive, visual approach the Council hope to encourage and increase engagement with the Local Plan.

Over the last 6 months the Council have developed a first iteration of Story Maps and have tested it with several different groups in the community, utilising relationships with local colleges, user groups, and digital exclusion groups. The concept has been so successful that Stockport Council will now be using StoryMaps as our consultation platform when they go out to consult on their Draft Local Plan in the Autumn of 2022.

During testing, the approach was welcomed and there was a lot of positive feedback as well as several lessons learnt which will be used to guide it as the Council develop future iterations. Firstly, development of ‘StoryMaps’ received early cross-party member support, which will be vital for its roll out as part of the planned public consultation later in the year.

The Council will continue to work with all members to ensure they have the information and resources to be able to fully promote the consultation with their local communities.

The project team tasked with developing the tool also wanted to use existing skills and capabilities internally, with the funding used to bring in contracted expertise when necessary. This meant that internal capacity and skill has been built and is proving helpful as they move to their next iteration of StoryMaps.

Test volunteers also reported that they welcomed a digital, interactive approach but that this needed to be complemented by more traditional consultation methods.

In response to this feedback the Council are taking an innovative approach to the next formal consultation on a draft plan and will be planning accessible events to promote and encourage all to submit their views on the Draft Local Plan. Online audio and video content will help explain the plan to our communities, alongside the Story Maps consultation platform.



STOCKPORT
METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Welcome to the Stockport Local Plan

Welcome to the Local Plan

A Local Plan sets out the vision for future development in the borough. Local Plans are used to help decide on planning applications and other planning-related decisions. It's a guide to what can be built where, known as a land use plan.

The Local Plan will run until 2038 and will:

- make sure that Stockport has the right land, the right homes and the right infrastructure in the right places, for current and future generations
- address the key issues facing the borough such as the climate emergency and some of the impacts of coronavirus (COVID-19)
- identify those places and sites where change and development can best be accommodated, and make sure we get the right development in the right places

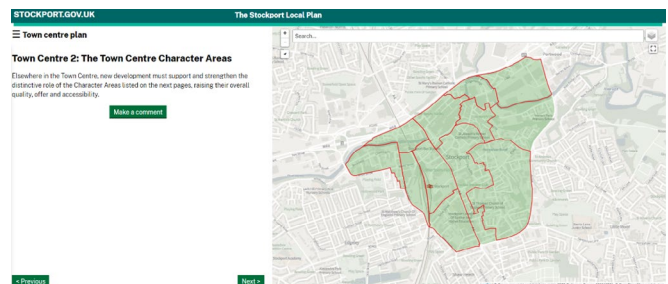
The Local Plan must be allowed by national legislation and wider policy but we can make sure that it reflects what our communities think is most important.

WHAT IS A LOCAL PLAN?



ALSO WE CAN SETS OUT THE VISION FOR OUR DEVELOPMENT

Continue >



Civic Quarter Area Action Plan

The Trafford Civic Quarter Area Action Plan is approaching the final stages of examination – with a modification consultation starting at the beginning of July 2022. With a following wind the Plan will be adopted by the end of the year.

The Plan seeks to manage and guide the regeneration and transformation of a section of Old Trafford – centred on Trafford Town Hall and Lancashire Cricket Ground. For the past decade this area has started to transition from one dominated by large insular office complexes, to a much more diverse range of uses and activities. The Plan seeks to retain and enhance much of the area’s largely forgotten history and heritage, whilst devising clear guidelines for fresh developments and the creation of new communities. The Plan area is split into several character areas, each with their specific policies and guidelines, reflective of their distinct characters.

The Civic Quarter will be transected by two new public realm routes – the ‘Processional Way’, linking the two iconic Old Trafford sports venues and the ‘well being’ route which seeks to replace the present vehicle dominated Talbot Road with a much more ‘liveable’ thoroughfare. Overall, the Plan promotes a significant increase in housing to around 4,000 new homes, employing careful design to enhance densities where appropriate.

The Council originally proposed a Supplementary Planning Document to guide development in this location – but it soon became clear that something with more scope and ‘teeth’ was required. A design-led approach has been integral to the Plan, illustrating how new NPPF guidance can be applied in practice. The plan is already influencing planning decisions in the area, including appeals, providing clarity and certainty for investment.

The AAP illustrates how a statutory plan can be prepared in a timely fashion to help shape and boost an area’s regeneration.



Excellence in Practice

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Having focused previously on the policy process, the following case studies now consider innovation in planning and regeneration practice, looking at how services are actually being delivered in often challenging circumstances and how they could be delivered better in the future.

Building Foundations

Preston City Council aims to maximise employment and skills opportunities from major developments. Its Employment Skills SPD (adopted 2017) requires an Employment Plan to be provided as part of a major planning application when locally set thresholds are exceeded.

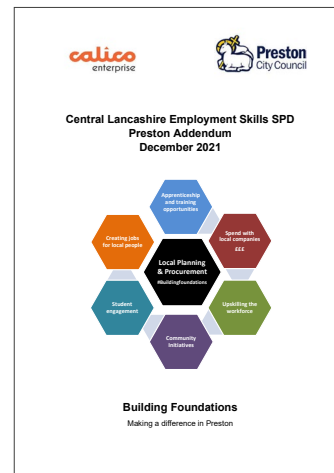
Employment Plans identify the number of employment, training, skills and community engagement opportunities at the consented scheme's construction stage. In Central Lancashire they also identify employment generation within the development supply chain and, where relevant, at occupation stage.

The Council has National Skills Academy for Construction (NSAfC) status, which gives the Central Lancashire authorities permission to use this guidance and benchmarks on suitable construction projects. The Employment Skills SPD advises that Employment Plans should have regard to the NSAfC benchmarks.

Calico Enterprise Ltd was appointed in November 2021 to implement an innovative, end to end service, for the assessment, provision and monitoring of Employment Plans and related Action Plans using NSfC benchmarks. The service is cost neutral to the Council and is paid for by applicants. Calico Enterprise provides additional resources, expertise and experience to implement this new process, understood to be the first of its type in the UK.

Additional guidance for applicants, 'Building Foundations' (December 2021), was produced, and is discussed at pre-application meetings. The additional guidance has improved the effectiveness of the Employment Skills SPD in Preston, following extensive alliance building.

The new service supports and encourages applicants and local supply chains to achieve targets in Employment Plans agreed between applicants and the Council with support from the economic development and community engagement teams. This approach strengthens Community Wealth Building and engagement with education and training providers, including with the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan), local colleges and schools. The project helps to develop and monitor inclusive local skills growth in Preston and commitments made to date, within five Employment Plans include eleven new jobs, six work placements and 255 training weeks on site. Actual outputs secured from these commitments will be regularly monitored by Calico Enterprise upon commencement of development and will be reported to the Council upon development completion.



Valid-AI-tion

Salford receives circa 1,800 applications each year and about one-third of them are deemed to be invalid on first review. Therefore, the validation process is undertaken about 2,400 times with each case file including several documents and plans. To explore automating as much of this complex process as possible the City Council initially partnered up with four other LPAs from across the country, Agile Applications a local government software provider, and the artificial intelligence (AI) department at Exeter University to form a project team to develop a validation module using AI. The number of LPA's taking part has now grown to over ten.

The Project Team developed a cloud system that intercepts applications from the Planning Portal before it reaches the planning department back office. It analyses applications and helps to organize the application file and includes quick view thumbnails to make the review process easier. It reads documents and renames them, it looks for certain necessary ingredients in plans (e.g., does the location plan have a red line and scale bar) and it interrogates spatial data to help decide what is needed (e.g., if it is in a conservation area has a heritage assessment been submitted?). In the future the system will also recognise and rename plans.

AI can have a significant impact on high volume transactional activities. It can analyse data, make sense of it, and then carry out defined actions based on its analysis. It does require rules to be set and large amounts of data to improve its accuracy but the investment of time in this is starting to show its benefits for the validation of planning applications and that will only grow in time and open new doors to how the technology can be harnessed.



Agile Applications

			<input type="checkbox"/>		Air quality assessment	Air quality assessment (B96)	Air Quality Assessment REP-1013229-5A-AG-20220523.pdf	yes	-
			<input type="checkbox"/>		Biodiversity survey and report	Biodiversity survey and report (B76)	Buzz Bingo - Ecology Report.pdf	yes	-
			<input type="checkbox"/>		Biodiversity survey and report	Biodiversity survey and report (B8%)	Biodiversity Metric Report (3.1) - Former Buzz Bingo Salford 80-732 #2.2.pdf	yes	-

Citizen Portal Planning

Back Quick search

Applications validated
PP-11271391

Print Refresh Review Send to I0

- Summary >
- Spatial Constraints (0) >
- Editable fields >
- Documents (75) >
- Validation feedback >

The Economic Recovery of the Borough during and following Covid-19.

The Covid-19 pandemic brought unprecedented challenges to the delivery of statutory planning functions across the country and hit some parts of the economy quite hard. Many Councils were not prepared for the challenges of a national lockdown, and some services came to a grinding halt before being able to offer even the most basic of services.

Fortunately, in the months leading up to national lockdown, Sefton Council had mobilised itself for the majority of staff within the Planning service to work in a more agile way, which allowed the service to adapt quickly to having to work full time from home. This change was originally introduced partly to offer staff more work-life balance opportunity, but also to offer stronger business resilience.

The Council therefore had a good platform to respond positively to the Government's Chief Planning Officer letter of March 2020, which encouraged planning services to do all they could to support the economy. Sefton Council saw this as a real opportunity to ensure that planning played a vital role in the economic recovery of the Borough. In response to this, and after taking appropriate advice, and with input from the whole service, the Council introduced the following eight measures:

1 Key stakeholder and investor meetings

Making experienced senior officers across the Council available at short notice to meet investors and assist them in reaching any decision to invest within the Borough.

2 Free pre-application advice

Temporarily suspending the fee schedule for pre-app advice and encouraging more front-loading dialogue, particularly for major schemes.

3 Free applications seeking renewal of consent

Allowing time lapsed schemes to re-submit free of charge, particularly those that would assist in the fight against Covid-19, and would be introduced quickly.

4 Streamlined validation and determination procedure for major applications

Validating major applications, and other schemes in one day, particularly where they would assist with the fight against Covid-19 and support economic recovery.

5 Longer timeframes for consented schemes

Allowing an extra year on consented schemes to commence works.

6 Flexible approach for temporary schemes

Supporting temporary schemes or temporary variations of conditions to help in the fight against Covid-19 and the retention/creation of jobs.

7 Flexible approach to breaches of planning conditions

Allowing breaches of planning control where this helped in the fight against Covid-19, and adapting quickly to Government relaxations in permitted development.

8 Use of temporary Development Orders

Using Temporary Development Orders where this allowed greater flexibility for businesses to carry out works such as changes of use to adapt to Covid-19.

During the lockdown period, and for some time after, it is acknowledged that the volume of applications across the country had risen significantly, with an average increase in the Liverpool City Region of around 20 percent. At Sefton, there was an additional 11 percent increase, and from the feedback the Council received from some of its applicants, this was directly attributable to the recovery measures, which sent out a clear message that Sefton was still open for business.

At the heart of this success was Sefton Council's dedicated staff who supported one of the main core values of the service, of being customer focussed, and collectively recognising the vital role they could play in the economic recovery of the Borough, which was to everyone's benefit. The key to this was making sure the Council looked after its staff with a range of measures, including ensuring all staff were fully equipped and enabled to work from home, properly supported by managers, maintaining regular contact at many different levels, conducting regular staff surveys and preparing an action plan to address issues identified in those surveys. All of this helped maintain a positive staff morale during unprecedented challenging times.

All of this has shown that planning as a profession has a vital role to play in creating and maintaining a sustainable future for our communities, and that notwithstanding the framework in which we operate, this does not constrain creativity or innovation. Also, that fundamentally, there is flexibility in a crisis to allow us to adapt the way we deliver our services in order to ensure we play our part in economic recovery.



A staff away day held in Southport, the first time the whole service met for over 700 days. The purpose of the away day was to build team spirit, reward good performance, and to re-focus on providing quality customer care.



A walking tour around Southport, part of the service away day, and a team building exercise.

Design Code Pathfinder Programme

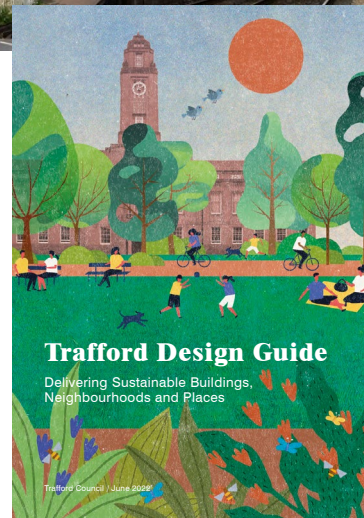
Trafford Council has been selected to participate in the DLUHC Design Code Pathfinder Programme. This funded programme tasks participants to draft and adopt a Design Code by July 2023. To deliver the project the Council has been awarded the maximum amount of funding of £160,000. It is one of only a handful of LPAs on the programme attempting a borough-wide Design Code.

The Design Code will be co-designed with the community and extensive stakeholder, public and member engagement will take place throughout its development to deliver a code which will empower communities to have their say on new development in the borough.

The first stage of the Design Code consultation is 'visioning', and this will take place in July 2022 via a series of drop in events across the Borough. The emerging Trafford Design Guide, which is at consultation draft stage, will be used as the basis for the visioning exercise. The Code will build on the guidance in the Trafford Design Guide to give certainty on design expectations and 'must haves' and therefore the quantum and quality of development that can be achieved on a site.

The Code will assess the character of existing places and the vision for new places within the Borough, building upon the work already undertaken for the draft Trafford Design Guide. It will look at heritage, urban grain, existing views, local building vernacular, architecture, proportion, façade pattern and proportion, architectural detail, and materials. All new development proposals will be expected to respond to their context. Beauty will be embedded into the code, requiring developers to optimise development potential by taking a contextual, landscape first approach.

Both the Trafford Design Guide and the Trafford Design Code will be adopted as Supplementary Planning Documents.



RTPI North West LPA Support Moving Forward

A whole range of cases have been discussed within this document and it is evident that LPAs across the North West are thinking outside of the box to enhance service delivery and achieve the best planning outcome for their residents and businesses. This region is lucky to have so many talented and committed LPA planners to realise the value of planning.

This document is one of a number of things the RTPI North West is looking to do over the next 18 months to support LPA's. The LPA Engage Business Plan sets out a number of priorities for the Institute and how it seeks to provide this support. The four key areas identified in the plan are staff recruitment and retention, training, health and wellbeing, and promoting the public sector and championing the value of planning. This document contributes to the final point, but so much more work needs to be done to make a difference for LPA planners. The RTPI North West is open to business, and are keen to work with any organisation who also want to make a difference for the better.

For more information on the work of the RTPI North West on this or any other area, please contact regional co-ordinator Beverley Watson beverley.watson@rtpi.org.uk



RTPI North West
Royal Town Planning Institute

LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY BEST PRACTICE

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