



RTPI
Practice
Advice

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DELIVERING LARGE SCALE HOUSING

Learning from research in the South West of
England

Introduction

There is now broad agreement that we need more homes, and large scale developments are a key part of delivering the housing the UK needs. However, simply increasing the supply of homes is not enough. We need to deliver sustainable, vibrant communities in the right places that people want to live in and can afford.

This practice advice note provides an introduction to some of the main issues involved in delivering large scale housing developments, looking at the tools involved, best practice, and case study examples. It sets out the practical challenges and considerations for planners in bringing forward such developments. Each of the issues this advice considers could merit its own detailed advice and, accordingly, links are provided to further information.

The note draws primarily on the results of research commissioned by the RTPI and RTPI South West, conducted by Heriot Watt University and Three Dragons Consultancy on ['The Deliverability and Affordability of Housing in the South West of England'](#). This research looked at housing developments of between 650 and 8,000 dwellings.

The advice is supplemented by good practice case studies from elsewhere in England the rest of the UK. We also conducted additional interviews with experts in large scale housing development to test the main themes of the advice and generate additional insight. Some of these are quoted in the text. It begins by setting out the key national policy context for housing development in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland respectively.

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1. Policy context

Governments across the UK cite a need to increase the supply of housing in areas of high demand and large scale schemes are a significant part of achieving that whether it be through urban extensions or new settlements. This section highlights relevant areas of policy documents and legislation in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.¹

The UK as a whole is committed to delivering the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Delivering large scale developments should aim at advancing the public interest by contributing to the achievement of SDG11 to "make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable"². SDG11's target 11.1 aims, "by 2030, [to] ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums"³. As a significant source of housing, large scale developments have an important role to play in the achievement of this commitment.

England

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. Local authorities are responsible for outlining "the objectively assessed development and infrastructure needs of the area, including the unmet needs of neighbouring areas"⁴ through the Local Plan.

The NPPF recognises the importance of large scale developments by stating that, "the supply of large numbers of new homes can often be best achieved through planning for larger scale development, such as new settlements or significant extensions to existing villages and towns, provided they are well located and designed, and supported by the necessary infrastructure and facilities. Working with the support of their communities, and with other authorities if appropriate, strategic policy-making authorities should identify suitable locations for such development where this can help to meet identified needs in a sustainable way"⁵. Furthermore the NPPF highlights the need for planners to 'set clear expectations for the quality of the development', along with specific maintenance expectations; both of which can be achieved using 'Garden City' principles⁵. This is supported by Planning practice guidance⁶ with sections relevant to large scale housing.

The Letwin Review's recent report into build out rates in England looks at the significant gap between the number of housing completions and the amount of land allocated or permitted on large

¹ For more detailed information on legislative and policy contexts see: Comparison of the planning systems in the four UK countries, National Assembly for Wales, (2016): <https://bit.ly/2ziZG83>

² UK Government (2018), UN Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals: <https://bit.ly/2km4txV>

³ UN (2015) Sustainable Development Goals, Target 11.1: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>

⁴ MHCLG (2019) Revised National Planning Policy Framework: <https://bit.ly/2LKauQI>

⁵ MHCLG (2019) NPPF, paragraph 72: <https://bit.ly/2LKauQI>

⁶ UK Government (2016) Planning practice guidance: <https://bit.ly/2l4F6Uc>

sites in areas of high housing demand.⁷ The review concludes that “the homogeneity of the types and tenures of the homes on offer on [large sites], and the limits on the rates at which the market will absorb such homogenous products, are the fundamental drivers of the slow rate of build out”⁸. The review recommends that local authorities are given clear statutory powers to control the development of such designated large sites. The Government is due to respond to the Letwin Review in early 2019.

Scotland

In Scotland, the Third National Planning Framework (NPF3)⁹ sets out a long-term vision for development and investment across Scotland over the next 20 to 30 years.

The Housing and Planning Delivery Framework (HPDF)¹⁰ aims to make it easier for the housing and planning systems to work together in Scotland to increase the speed and efficiency of the planning process on a variety of housing outcomes. It covers Housing Need and Demand Assessment, Local Housing Strategy and Scottish Planning Policy which are all important to large scale developments.

Scottish Planning Policy highlights that new housing developments should be integrated with public and active travel networks, such as footpaths and cycle routes, rather than encouraging dependence on the car. There should be connectivity between new and existing streets with walking and cycling networks, and allow for links into future areas of development¹¹.

Wales

Planning Policy Wales Edition 10 (PPW), is the principal source of national planning policy and sets out the context of planning in Wales, under which local planning authorities prepare their statutory development plans¹². It has been reworked from the previous edition in light of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015¹³.

As set out in PPW, “development plans must include a settlement strategy which establishes a pattern of development balancing social, economic, cultural and environmental needs”. “They should be consistent with National Sustainable Placemaking Outcomes, including minimising the need to travel and increasing accessibility by modes other than the private car”¹⁴. Regarding

⁷ Sir Oliver Letwin (2018) Independent review of build out: final report, p.8: <https://bit.ly/2Dbp4QS>

⁸ The review also highlights that ‘the absorption rate of homes sold on the site appears, in turn, to be largely determined at present by the type of home being constructed (when ‘type’ includes size, design, context and tenure) and the pricing of the new homes built’ (p.11): <https://bit.ly/2Dbp4QS>

⁹ Scottish Government (2014) National Planning Framework 3: <https://bit.ly/2GawUMI>

¹⁰ Scottish Government (2014) More Homes: <https://bit.ly/2SDtZxo>

¹¹ Scottish Government (2010) Scottish Planning Policy, p.16: <https://bit.ly/2Qvh4RF>

¹² Welsh Government (2018) Planning Policy Wales: Edition 10: <https://bit.ly/2H4Uar6>

¹³ Welsh Government (2015) Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 <https://bit.ly/2JqSoCh>

¹⁴ Welsh Government (2018) Planning Policy Wales: Edition 10, p.32: <https://bit.ly/2H4Uar6>

housing requirement, ‘planning authorities need to understand their local housing market and the factors influencing housing requirements in their area over the plan period’¹⁵. New settlements or urban extensions of over 1,000 dwellings should only be considered as part of a joint Local Development Plan, Strategic Development Plan or the National Development Framework.

PPW is accompanied by the Development Management Manual 17¹⁶ and Technical Advice Notes¹⁷ setting out guidance on specific areas relevant to large scale housing.

Northern Ireland

The Regional Development Strategy 2035 (RDS) acknowledges that ‘housing is a key driver of physical, economic and social change and emphasises the importance of the relationship between the location of housing, jobs, facilities, services and infrastructure’¹⁸.

The Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS)¹⁸ provides the overarching planning principles from which councils should develop their own planning policies within their new Local Development Plans (LDPs). It acknowledges that there are significant opportunities for new housing on underutilised or vacant land. It states that ‘ensuring the provision of local neighbourhood facilities as an integral element of new large scale residential development can greatly assist in reducing car dependency as well as enhancing the vitality and viability of the development. The LDP should provide the means to promote, influence and deliver a shift to more sustainable travel modes within a council area’¹⁸.

2. Site identification and assembly

Site identification

Identifying sites for large scale development requires consideration of a complex range of factors from infrastructure needs to collaboration with local stakeholders. Sites can pose a complex and costly series of issues, particularly on brownfield land. Land ownership and consolidation issues can also arise when assembling sites.

Regulatory and policy contexts as well as housing markets vary depending on the region and nation, but in each area, planning should play a key role in identifying and assembling land for development. Local authorities need to plan the location of housing and infrastructure strategically

¹⁵ Welsh Government (2018) Planning Policy Wales: Edition 10, p.42: <https://bit.ly/2H4Uar6>

¹⁶ Welsh Government (2017) Development Management Manual: <https://bit.ly/2B9GQjG>

¹⁷ Welsh Government (2017) Technical Advice Notes: <https://bit.ly/2RZD3gp>

¹⁸ NI Government (2015) Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS), paragraph 3.5: <https://bit.ly/2BbvZ93>

and to identify **areas of greatest housing need**.

A strong evidence base is needed to identify growth areas and infrastructure needs. This evidence base should be compiled using a range of assessments and studies and using tools such as sustainability appraisals, strategic environmental assessments and housing need assessment early on in the process¹⁹.

While large scale housing developments are about delivering numbers in high demand areas, they are also about delivering sustainable development and identifying sites in the right locations. Large scale developments can reduce residents' car usage by providing extensive and accessible walking and cycling infrastructure, and high frequency sustainably public transport to link with other settlements. Housing that encourages this modal shift away from the personal car also confers the benefit of increased physical activity.²⁰ Dense large scale developments with mixed land use are also more able to promote self-containment by providing a concentration of services, which can drive local economic activity.

Local authorities engaging in land assembly can bring together the landowners of a strategic site to pool land and discuss how to develop it. By pooling funding streams from developers with available government funds, local authorities can decrease the financial risk taken by developers and thereby unlock necessary streams of infrastructure investment.

Though their use should normally be a last resort, local authorities can use Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) to unblock sites. English guidance suggests that used properly, 'they can contribute towards effective and efficient urban and rural regeneration, essential infrastructure, the revitalisation of communities, and the promotion of business'.²¹ Scottish²² and English²¹ guidance both note that early initiation of the CPO process can save time and make the authorities intentions clear from the outset.

¹⁹ TCPA (2017) Locating and consenting new garden Cities: <https://bit.ly/2C890gL> For more information on SA/SEA see RTPI Advice note: <https://bit.ly/2GndYKC>

²⁰ RTPI (2018) Settlement patterns, urban form and sustainability: <https://bit.ly/2E8f785>

²¹ UK Government (2018) Guidance on Compulsory purchase process and The Criche Down Rules, p.6: <https://bit.ly/1S1xCGI>

²² Scottish Government (2018), Compulsory purchase orders and acquiring authorities: guidance on what to do before developing a CPO: <http://bit.ly/2HEI9iq>

Case Study 1: Sighthill regeneration, Glasgow

Sighthill regeneration scheme is one of eight Transformational Regeneration Areas (TRA) in Glasgow and is a key strategic area in close proximity to the city centre. It overcame complex site issues to successfully transform a derelict, contaminated landscape to an attractive new urban neighbourhood, for which it won the Saltire Regeneration award²³.

In 2014 Glasgow City Council made a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) to allow the project to be taken forward. Despite complex land ownership, absent and unknown land owners, and a number of objections, the Council's careful and structured approach enabled the order to be confirmed in 2016, enabling the comprehensive regeneration of the area to begin. Useful learning points of the process include:

- **Use of a CPO to save time and make intentions clear:** After careful consideration, a CPO was considered necessary as the voluntary acquisition/simultaneous agreement of all the different title interests would have taken too long to achieve by any other means. There were also a number of plots where ownership could not be traced or where the holders of the interest were unwilling to enter into negotiations.
- **Invest time at the start of the process:** The council submitted a draft of the CPO to the Scottish Ministers for a technical check early on. Taking a significant amount of time at the outset preparing a comprehensive Statement of Reasons proved extremely useful when it came to responding to objections and to preparing the Statement of Case in advance of the Public Local Inquiry (PLI). Setting a date for the PLI helped to expedite the negotiations with many objectors as many were reluctant to go to a PLI. Had the date been set earlier, the CPO could have been confirmed earlier.
- **Make use of delays:** There were delays in the process for example it took several months to appoint a Reporter and for the PLI to be arranged. However, the council used this time to negotiate with objectors, so ultimately the PLI was not needed.

3. Viability

Considering whether a development is financially viable involves looking at the value generated by the development and the cost of developing it - a viable project results in a reasonable return for developers. Viability negotiations can be a cause of delays and can challenge local authorities' ability to achieve desired outcomes from the project, especially where developers argue the planning obligations are too onerous. Reductions should only be considered in cases where the site poses exceptional and abnormal costs. Viability is also affected by factors outside the control of local authorities and developers and it is not always clear what measures can address these

²³ ICE (2018) Saltire Infrastructure Awards: <https://bit.ly/2uFZFtX>

issues. One challenge is changing external factors such as the reduction in affordable housing rents as part of the 2015 budget²⁴. Another is the scale and timing of infrastructure requirements.

Effective solutions such as flexibility and availability of external funding reduce risk and increase the likelihood of development. Where viability concerns challenge the ability to meet objectives, these should be addressed as early on in the process as possible. If they are not adequately addressed there are risks that they will be raised further on in the process. If viability issues are stalling development, one solution is to introduce review mechanisms that future-proof the project and make the process more flexible. These provide a way of moving forward in the short term and commencing delivery in the face of changes in the market. Review mechanisms should be set out at plan level so that all parties are clear when and how viability should be reassessed and will help to provide more certainty through economic cycles²⁵. However, committing to future review mechanisms can be controversial as it can lead to a reduction in developer contributions.

One way to protect against lowering contributions or the ‘viability loophole’ is to agree a robust financial appraisal of the scheme between the local authority, developers and landowners. Typically, a general discussion around contributions has taken place as part of the outline planning permission process based on broad market and economic assumptions, which sets out the affordable housing and infrastructure provision. As the scheme progresses these can be specified and estimated more accurately, reaching a robust evaluation when the plan-making stage is complete²⁶.

Guidelines suggest that viability testing should involve adding a premium above existing uses and deducting the costs of unusual constraints from the values that might be expected from an unconstrained site.²⁷ However, case studies in the South West of England show that in some situations, even costs that could have been anticipated were used as a lever to (re-)negotiate planning obligations. When deciding what position to take, local authorities will benefit from a transparent and consistently applied approach to land valuation. This can also help protect against developer contributions being reduced on the basis of viability.

In England, the latest NPPG on viability²⁸ has attempted to push viability towards the local plan-making stage, and make viability assessments publicly available, however it remains to be seen how this will operate in practice. The New London Plan, to be adopted in 2019, has attempted to improve viability by exempting schemes which meet certain plan requirements from the need to submit detailed viability information, and putting onerous requirements on schemes that don’t meet

²⁴ For more information on rent reductions see: UK Government (2015) Rent Standard guidance: <https://bit.ly/24tM84W> and NHF (2017) Rent Reductions: Supporting implementation: <https://bit.ly/2ErGbyq>

²⁵ UK Government (2018) Draft Planning Practice Guidance: <https://bit.ly/2QrrMIF>

²⁶ TCPA (2017) Finance and Delivery Guide: <https://bit.ly/2QsYJo7>. For more information on viability appraisals and review mechanisms in England: Planning policy guidance: Viability: <https://bit.ly/2v5v7mc>

²⁷ Planning policy guidance (PPG), Local Housing Delivery Group Chaired by Sir John Harman (2012) and [RICS Financial Viability Appraisal in Planning Decisions \(2015\): https://bit.ly/2QNSc6W](https://bit.ly/2QNSc6W)

²⁸ MHCLG (2018), Viability, National Planning Practice Guidance, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/viability>

plan requirements. This aims not just to increase transparency and move away from protracted viability debates, but also to offer a clear incentive for developers to increase affordable housing delivered.²⁹

Affordable housing

Affordable housing provision is one of the most significant areas in viability negotiations. Local authorities should evaluate whether a given scheme is able to meet planning policy requirements as part of the outline planning permission. If the developer challenges the required level of affordable housing then robust and transparent viability evidence should be provided. The local authority will have to be confident that it can back up its position in terms of the planning obligations (including affordable housing) it is requesting.

In common with all aspects of large scale development, key elements of achieving successful viability negotiation outcomes will be collaborative working, a holistic approach, reasoned justification, and an understanding of scheme viability. The process must avoid unsubstantiated demands and offers and work towards an accountable evidence based approach^{30,31}

Case study: Clon Elagh development by APEX housing association, Northern Ireland³²

Clon Elagh is a leading example of social housing provision by a housing association, in an area with acute housing need. It is the largest social housing scheme in Northern Ireland in over a decade³³ providing 757 new homes. It is part funded from grants from the Department of Social Development and partly through Apex private finance³³.

Apex Housing Association's housing department works with existing Apex communities to ascertain the true needs of the tenants living in the community. All 197 families (first phase of development) were invited to participate in existing and new community initiatives. The delivery of this project is underpinned by technical expertise and established community initiatives in the area. Finally design competitions were held between design teams which challenged the architects to review each stage of the masterplan to keep the design quality at a high level

²⁹ Mayor of London (2017) New Draft London Plan: <https://bit.ly/2LbvNvd> and Mayor of London Openness and Transparency: <https://bit.ly/2PyelBG> and Affordable Housing and Viability Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG): <https://bit.ly/2EiDUVc>

³⁰ For more detailed information visit: ATLAS Guide on Affordable Housing: <https://bit.ly/2BbxdkJ> and ATLAS Planning obligations: <https://bit.ly/2L0YA5u> . ATLAS (created by the Advisory Team for Large Applications) was archived in 2017, however many of the principles of good practice still apply.

³¹ See also Welsh guidance on delivering affordable housing using Section 106 agreements, <http://bit.ly/2TmN3Rm>

³² CIH (2018) Best Practice in Housing: <https://bit.ly/2rpkITg>

³³ APEX (2015) Apex announce Northern Ireland's largest social housing project: <https://bit.ly/2zV3NY4>

Infrastructure

Aside from the need to plan for the viability of the provision of public services, it is essential to ensure the appropriate and sufficient levels of infrastructure are provided. This includes sustainable public and active transport, utilities, internet access, green infrastructure and more.³⁴

Delivering or improving infrastructure normally requires developers to contribute towards the cost. Securing developer contributions can be time consuming and complex and require strong project and process management to save time, improve transparency and certainty³⁵. In addition to site specific contributions such as those discussed above, English local authorities can also use an area-based charge to fund infrastructure through the Community Infrastructure Levy. This must be calculated through considering a sample of local developments and a realistic understanding of costs. Differential rates may be set for certain types of development, including large sites.³⁶

The timing of infrastructure is an important factor in viability considerations. Development that is expected to provide expensive infrastructure early on can pose significant risks to the developer as well as cash flow implications. Examples in the South West of England showed public sector investment being used to support projects that required early infrastructure provision. In one such case study, infrastructure requirements had resulted in a viability gap that was preventing development. £30m of public investment from a combination of government agency, local authority and other public sources, along with developer contributions secured this infrastructure and affordable housing provision in the early stages of development, which 'crystallised' the site value, allowing the development to process.

³⁴ RTPI (2018) Settlement Patterns, Urban Form and Sustainability: <https://bit.ly/2E8f785>

³⁵ ATLAS (2015) ATLAS Guide: Planning obligations: <https://bit.ly/2L0YA5u>

³⁶ MHCLG (2018), Guidance: Community Infrastructure Levy, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/community-infrastructure-levy>

Case study: infrastructure-led development in Cranbrook, Devon

Cranbrook is an 8,000-home new community in East Devon located 7 miles east of Exeter City Centre, led by Devon County Council. Cranbrook is an NHS Health New Town³⁷. Cranbrook is the only case study to successfully deliver a new railway station and one of the only free-standing new settlements in the UK to achieve this. Learning points from Cranbrook are³⁸:

- **Driven by a strong vision:** ‘To create a healthy, vibrant, attractive and sustainable town’. It aims to create a self-sufficient, low carbon new community in close proximity to skilled employment opportunities, encouraging people to use sustainable modes of transport and reduce the need for them to travel between home and work by car.
- **Built partnerships and develop evidence to overcome opposition:** The Local Plan attracted 15,000 comments, many of which were opposed to the new settlement. Planners navigated this opposition and secured Council buy-in by involving external partners such as The Environment and Highways agencies, and Natural England who contributed evidence to mitigate public concerns.
- **Produced a comprehensive Masterplan and simple design guide:** Cranbrook’s Development Plan and Masterplan including the design of the town centre, active travel, incorporation of green infrastructure and street design). A simple design guide was also developed for commercial house builders to follow to create a healthy built environment in large housing developments (10 easy steps for developers).
- **Front-funded infrastructure using public loan:** the delivery of sustainable transport infrastructure in Cranbrook was partly achieved through its approach to finance, front funding by using public money made available on a repayable basis, enabled the risk associated with large scale infrastructure provision to be absorbed and shared.
- **Worked collaboratively with all stakeholders throughout:** through regular meetings, open to all those working to create Cranbrook or deliver services. Representatives would usually include the head teachers from local schools, health visitor service, youth services, the highway authority and environmental health, to understand arising issues as well as celebrating successes. Collaborated beyond those directly involved in Cranbrook, including neighbouring councils and a wide range of public and private sector partners.

³⁷ NHS (2018) NHS Healthy New Towns: Cranbrook: <https://bit.ly/2LfDd0y>

³⁸ RTPI (2015) RTPI Awards: <https://bit.ly/2GfWfVu>

4. Funding

Funding of large scale schemes can be one of the biggest barriers to development. As local authorities are increasingly engaged in the direct provision of housing, they are having to use a wide range of sources of finance. For example, English local authorities are using the Public Works Loans Board (PWLB), their own general fund, the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), Right to Buy receipts, bonds, and city deals, and are borrowing from other local authorities³⁹. Many other funding sources exist around the UK, for example loans from the Development Bank for Wales⁴⁰.

Securing funding

Local authorities and their partners need to have good intelligence of potential sources of funding and senior figures should be proactive in communicating how the scheme meets the objectives of funders. The RTPI research in the South West identified five factors that appear to be important in securing public sector funding:

- A clear development strategy shared across all relevant authorities, establishing clear goals, strong leadership and collaborating with stakeholders;
- High level political agreement on what is required and priorities for funding through clear communication across relevant local authority departments;
- 'Ready-to-go' schemes that can pick up short term funding opportunities, while not rushing through the process compromising design quality;
- A clear 'single voice' to funders so that it is apparent what is required;
- Lobbying to ensure the value of the scheme is understood by funding decision takers and local and national politicians.

The same research also found that funders such as Homes England responded well and were able to fund schemes where the local authority/project board was able to clearly demonstrate the need for and the benefits of funding. Also that the scheme was ready to go with other agencies (for example county highway departments, housebuilders and registered providers) lined up and planning consent in place. Other authorities, with similar schemes but less preparation and less strongly argued cases were unsuccessful in bidding for funds.

However, while it is important to have a 'ready to go scheme', it is important not to rush schemes through the planning process to achieve funding. This speed can come at the expense of a well planned development and lack of attention to detail in terms of design or affordable housing provision.

³⁹ Morphet and Clifford (2017): Local Authority Direct Provision of Housing: <https://bit.ly/2QSlxfg>

⁴⁰ Welsh Government (2018) Development Bank for Wales, Property Development Loans, <http://bit.ly/2MD6xyw>

Case study: Housing Infrastructure Fund bid by councils in Somerset

Forward funding strategic and high-impact infrastructure helps housing delivery proceed. Development is more acceptable to local communities when it is accompanied by necessary infrastructure. Local authorities in Somerset have made the first step of an £83 million bid to the Housing Infrastructure Fund to invest in local infrastructure and accelerate the delivery of 17,600 houses⁴¹. Collaboration and joint working between councils to achieve results was a key part of the joint bid.

The funding will be used for new highway access to planned housing areas, schools, drainage infrastructure, cycle and pedestrian routes. It will also provide a bus priority corridor that will link the new development at Monkton Heathfield with Taunton town centre to reduce the car journeys associated with development⁴². Councillor David Fothergill, leader of Somerset County Council highlighted the need for housing in Somerset and that most communities support growth but only if its accompanied by suitable infrastructure, in particular roads and schools⁴³.

5. Leadership and governance

Leadership

Effective leadership and good governance structures lie at the heart of successful large scale development projects and corporate commitment to large scale schemes is critical. However, research by the RTPI found that only 23% of local authorities surveyed in the UK and Ireland had a head of planning service that reported directly to the Chief Executive⁴⁴, highlighting a concerning reduction in the role of planning in corporate decision-making. It is often necessary to engage with those at a senior corporate level to explain how decisions will impact wider areas. In projects where genuine corporate commitment has been achieved, the process and outcomes are demonstrably better⁴⁵.

The importance of leadership was highlighted in the South West research. Strong leadership within the local authority was associated with commitment to the scheme's objectives. Where the scheme was viewed as more than simply a large scale housing development, this was an impetus for senior

⁴¹ Somerset County Council News Room (2018): Cash boost for vital infrastructure moves step closer: <https://bit.ly/2LpZQPE>

⁴² Bridgewater Mercury (2018) Bid for £83m to help speed up development of 17,600 houses in Taunton and Sedgemoor: <https://bit.ly/2EspYbi>

⁴³ Somerset County Council News Room (2018) Cash boost for vital infrastructure moves step closer: <https://bit.ly/2LpZQPE>

⁴⁴ RTPI (2018) RTPI, Chief Planning Officers: The corporate and strategic influence of planning in local authorities: <https://bit.ly/2rxcPpL>

⁴⁵ ATLAS (2016) ATLAS Guide: Collaborative working <https://bit.ly/2GbO0K8>

officer and political support. Strong leadership can also embed the scheme within the wider objectives of the local authority and plans of delivery of housing. Large scale housing developments need to be based on a strong vision and an overarching strategic approach as opposed to piecemeal incremental developments.

Through a shared vision and collaboration within local authorities, strong local leadership establishes the importance of the scheme and communicates the advantages and necessity for housing in the area. Planners can play an important role in this by highlighting the infrastructure or community assets that will come with development. It can also be carried out by emphasising the consequences of failing to build enough houses for current and future generations.

“When development is politically unpalatable, local politicians and leaders need to deliver a strong message highlighting the need for additional homes. Because at the end of the day, the extra homes will have to be built to meet the needs of our communities, especially for younger people.” - Development manager, house builder

The importance of leadership is not exclusive to the local authority sector and the way development consortia organise themselves and operate can have a bearing on the effectiveness of working arrangements with local authorities.

Case study: the importance of vision, Tadpole Garden Village, Swindon⁴⁶

Tadpole Garden Village, located in the north of Swindon, was granted outline permission in 2012 and will provide in the region of 1,695 dwellings. The vision for the development was to create a holistically planned new community based on landscaping, design, open space and sustainable development. It was based on involvement of local people in both vision and long term management, and a good relationship of collaboration with Swindon council. The development is in keeping with Swindon Borough Council’s ‘Vision for Swindon’ and its ambition to provide a “model of well managed housing growth which supports and improves new and existing communities”⁴⁷ in the area.

In a development of this size it is essential that a long-term management strategy is in place, whereby the developer works with the community for its long term benefit and to ensure that the principles established are upheld. A Community Interest Company with a successful long-term management structure has been established by the developer to manage the open space and other community assets. All revenues generated from any assets are returned to its members.

⁴⁶ RTPI (2018) Tadpole Garden Village was highly commended for the 2017 RTPI awards for Planning Excellence: <https://bit.ly/2Bs74ON> . For more information see also LGA, Swindon Borough Council and Crest Nicholson: a new garden village (2018): <https://bit.ly/2Lo9pyN> and Crest Nicholson, Tadpole Garden Village: <https://bit.ly/2dU4bxq>

⁴⁷ Swindon Borough Council (2018) Our Priorities and Pledges: <https://bit.ly/2rJuw5K>

Governance

Local authorities organise themselves in a variety of ways to deal with large scale developments. This can include setting up bespoke and dedicated teams which bring together a range of traditional planning skills alongside development and funding know-how. It can involve partnership working between the public and private sector and at the most senior level. Some interviewees in the South West of England suggested that alternatives such as Community Land Trusts, Garden Village and Joint Venture Models could be explored further. It is increasingly unusual for an authority to deal with this scale of development through its standard development management route.

There are many alternative ways to set up a suitable and effective project management structure. Treating a proposal as a 'project' that will need managing is key. The ATLAS guide suggests the following potential structural components as good practice, although not all may be necessary to secure a positive outcome⁴⁸:

- Identifying specific individuals, who possess a range of necessary skills and attributes, and who can play key roles in the project in terms of directing and managing across the public and private sectors.
- Organising an appropriate management structure, including an action orientated and inclusive steering group, with direct links to member and community forums. The local community should be included wherever possible, and the role of councillors and other key external stakeholders must also be addressed.
- Establishing topic specific working groups as necessary to explore and resolve specific issues.
- Undertaking project planning and risk assessment to clarify a work programme and timetable for decision making. Risks to achieving this timescale must be identified and understood.
- Once a suitable structure has been put in place, each of the participants will need to be allocated clearly defined roles and responsibilities, set within an overarching project plan.

6. Masterplanning and design

Masterplanning and design will form the basis of the visual aspect and feel of a development as well as the land use mix and other outcomes, however it is a complex and demanding task. A successful masterplan will set out how to create and sustain an excellent place to live, work and play, and will determine the overall quality of the place and its sustainability⁴⁹. Not only can these

⁴⁸ ATLAS (2016) Atlas Guide: Project Management and Decision Making Structure: <https://bit.ly/2BdfLMJ>

⁴⁹ CABE (2008): Creating Successful Masterplans: <https://bit.ly/2rxPioC>

aspects have a big impact on whether prospective residents want to live there, but also how existing residents feel about current and future developments.

The combination of broad principles and detailed design work serves to set the character of the development and affect the overall quality. When preparing or reviewing masterplans or design guides it is important to understand and take into account the site and context, functionality, sustainability, vision and inspiration. Furthermore the plans need to be appropriate and appealing enough to win the buy-in of local residents.

The issues that masterplans and design guides deal with vary from scheme to scheme but there are common factors that affect all developments such as standards, broad locations, dwelling types and mixes. Masterplans should consider the site opportunities and constraints and work through different options to arrive at the best balance of development. Generally, masterplans will allow for some flexibility to account for demand for market dwelling mixes, while providing enough detail for the local authority's officers and the planning committee.

Masterplans should not be seen as rigid blueprints for design and development, but rather as a strategic stage of thinking and a document setting out the context and addressing challenges in a proactive and positive way⁴⁹. It is important to reflect on which tool to use in each situation. Where multiple tools are used, for example masterplans, design guides, and design codes, it is necessary to define the respective and distinctive roles of each.

There is a wealth of information and advice on masterplanning and design (see further information section). A masterplan should be:

- Visionary: raising aspirations and providing a vehicle for consensus building and implementation.
- Deliverable: it should take into account likely implementation and delivery routes;
- Fully integrated into the land use planning system: while allowing new uses and market opportunities to exploit the full development potential of a site.
- Flexible: providing the basis for negotiation and dispute resolution.
- The result of a participatory process: providing all the stakeholders with the means of expressing their needs and priorities.
- Take strong consideration of the role, function and form of new neighbourhoods.⁵⁰

The timeline of applications is important. It can sometimes take a long time to process applications for a variety of reasons such as the relationship between developer and local authority, and the time involved in negotiating the masterplan and/or the design guide. Analysis of case studies in the South West of England highlights the time taken between outline planning permission and agreeing

⁵⁰ CABE (2008) Creating Successful Masterplans, p.26: <https://bit.ly/2rxPioC>

the details of development (through reserved matters applications), which can be as long as two years. The planning process can be much smoother where there is a design guide of sufficient detail and where it is supported by the developer and local authority.

In the case studies in the South West of England that were heavily design-led, the development was very much tailored to the masterplan and design guide principles, and this meant that the housebuilders were obliged to amend the types of housing provided. This could have an impact on the pace of development, as moving away from standard house types to deliver a locally distinctive scheme can have a cost penalty. Therefore it must be balanced with other priorities of project delivery.

Case study: designing for zero carbon homes in Hanham Hall, Bristol⁵¹

Hanham Hall is located 7km to the East of the centre of Bristol, and was designed by HTA⁵² for Barratt Homes. The scheme is based on a strong vision and quality design, but also a continuous process of dialogue with many stakeholders involved in the project. The landscaping, scale, layout and architectural style respond to specific characteristics and constraints of the site. The scheme addresses local housing needs by providing a wide range of accommodation, including 30 percent affordable.

It is the first of a number of Carbon Challenge schemes promoted by the Homes and Communities Agency (now Homes England). Constructed from pre-fabricated structural insulated panels with high performance timber windows and insulated doors, all the homes are highly energy efficient. They are designed to allow residents to reduce their carbon footprint by 60 percent without any lifestyle changes. Night-time mechanical ventilation, thermal mass on the ground floor slabs and wall linings and external shutters keeps the buildings cool in the summer. Water supplies include rainwater harvesting to help reduce potable water use. Bike and recycling storage in each unit encourages residents to adopt a greener way of life.

⁵¹ Hanham Hall is a smaller development of 187 new homes, however the good practice principles of design and sustainable development can be applied to large schemes. For more information see: Hanham Hall, HTA Design LLP: <https://bit.ly/2SUyZOI> . Highly commended in the RTPI Awards for Planning Excellence 2015: <https://bit.ly/2GfWfVu>

⁵² HTA (2019) Hanham Hall, HTA Design LLP: <https://bit.ly/2SUyZOI>

Masterplanning for a former industrial site in Coed Darcy, Wales⁵³

This development located at the edge of Llandarcy in Wales includes 4,000 new homes on a ex-oil refinery site covering a total of 270 hectares. A strong masterplan was particularly necessary due to challenges of a site contamination risk and a nearby international wildlife designated marshland. In their review of the site, the Decision Commission for Wales (DCfW) praised the masterplan and town code, and in particular the layout, public spaces, diversity, permeability, and response to the surrounding area.

The masterplan aimed to create a sustainable community with a range of land uses and densities, including a full range of services and 3000 jobs. They also used 'The Town Code' (design code) as way of controlling design. The masterplan contained highly technical investigations of these issues, involving the input of a wide set of stakeholders. It also set out the creation of a suite of characterful features that built a strong sense of place. The plan was developed in consultation with a wide set of stakeholders and market tested with developers. The transport connections were a major part of the design proposals with a future rail station and bus routes incorporated. The new development adheres to urban design principles and is in keeping with the surrounding landscape, topography and towns.

7. Collaboration

Collaboration with both internal and external stakeholders should lie at the heart of delivering large scale development. This includes managing relationships between different stakeholders, addressing skills gaps in the context of budgetary cuts or successful communication within and between councils to deliver a consistent message to developers. Large scale development projects are necessarily cross-departmental, involving new investment on infrastructure, development activity and provision of public services.

“Good communication with colleagues is essential. It’s about ensuring that the council’s major development team, or officers working on major developments, maintain a healthy and honest internal dialogue about what they hope to achieve on key sites, communicate internally about the discussions they are having with applicants, defend each other’s position and deliver a consistent message where there appears to be an attempt to realise some competing objective”.

Local authority officer

⁵³ Design Commission for Wales (2006), Design Review: The experience of the Design Commission for Wales Design Review Panel, <http://bit.ly/2Sf1RUO>. See also: Coed Darcy Masterplan: <https://bit.ly/2RX8GqT>;, and CABE (2008) Creating Successful Places: <https://bit.ly/2rxPioC>

The delivery of large schemes is a product of a group of stakeholders and individuals, who will need to be involved throughout the process. The likelihood of a quality outcome will be severely compromised without positive engagement of all the key players. A collaborative approach will ensure that all relevant issues and potential solutions are fully explored. Spatial planning should draw stakeholders together, for example through a ‘development team’ style approach, understanding that issues beyond land use planning must be addressed for large scale schemes⁵⁴.

Often large scale developments are based on long-term relationships between developers and individuals within councils that extend beyond a single project. Developing trust is a key part of that relationship. Once scheme promoters and developers have emerged or been identified, a partnering relationship with these stakeholders should be established as soon as possible – this may be best as a bespoke single-purpose group⁵⁵. This will also help to establish clear communication lines and clear roles in the project.

Leeds City Council and CEG transforming an industrial site into a mixed-use community⁵⁶

The 57 acre Kirkstall Forge scheme in Leeds, led by CEG (Commercial Estates Group), is transforming an industrialised site into a thriving mixed use community in a riverside setting. The success of this scheme comes from a strong public private partnership. CEG worked with Leeds City Council, West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) and its predecessors, the local enterprise partnership, rail industry and the local MP to secure a rail growth funding package from Government.

Leeds City Council approved supplementary planning guidance for the redevelopment of Kirkstall Forge into a mixed-use community, creating a planning framework for the forge to guide the redevelopment. Following extensive community and stakeholder engagement, CEG submitted an outline planning application. CEG’s approach to involving local people in pre-application consultation is highlighted as exemplary by Leeds City Council in its document ‘Protocol for pre-application discussions with local communities and ward councillors’⁵⁷.

8. Community engagement

Community engagement should not be seen as a token or a tick-box exercise. It is an essential part of ensuring successful development of large scale housing projects, both to understand local community views and knowledge and to ensure continued political support. Overcoming existing

⁵⁴ ATLAS (2016) ATLAS Guide: Collaborative working: <https://bit.ly/2Sl8RpV>

⁵⁵ For information on partnership models between local authorities and housing associations: NLGN (2017) Working Together for more homes: <https://bit.ly/2EmyGbh>

⁵⁶ Leeds City Council and CEG (2018) LGA Case study: <https://bit.ly/2EfcXlr>

⁵⁷ Leeds City Council: <https://bit.ly/2Bi0me6>

residents' concerns about development, such as overstressing public services, preserving green spaces or a fear of decreasing house prices amongst others can be a challenging and tense process. It can also be challenging to secure genuine engagement from the whole community, not just those with the loudest voices.

Successful community participation involves engaging with the community early on in the process, and should not stop when development starts. Pre-application engagement and local plan consultations should be comprehensive, straightforward, accessible and represent good value for money⁵⁸. They should also bring the community together with both local authority and developers.

“The process of consultation should not stop at permission stage. It’s not a legal obligation when the lorries start to come in. But I think that planners’ work has only just begun, not ended when planning permission is granted”.

Local authority development manager

Local and national politicians and campaigning groups as well as planners need to make the case for large scale housing schemes by emphasising the consequences for current and future generations of failing to build enough houses, and the opportunities represented by large scale schemes to deliver quality sustainable communities.

Community engagement works best where it is an ongoing cumulative process, building relationships and trust which strengthen over time. Individual engagement events should be planned and designed with this in mind and aim to contribute to the overall aims of the engagement process. Community or voluntary groups may want to participate at a range of levels – from providing advice to co-designing the process and from undertaking some aspects of the engagement to delivering projects to meet some of the outcomes⁵⁹. Though not always the answer, technology, such as social media, may help secure this genuine engagement, and create an accessible, open and transparent process.

⁵⁸ RTPI (2013) Delivering Large Scale Housing: <https://bit.ly/2zULIJT>

⁵⁹ Community Places (2014) Community Planning Toolkit, Community Engagement: <https://bit.ly/2AKJPNB>

Pro-active planning to deliver housing in Perrybrook, Gloucestershire⁶⁰

Perrybrook, adjoining the village of Brockworth in Gloucestershire, provides 1,500 homes (40% affordable). The release of green belt land was underpinned by early, extensive consultation by the developer to highlight the community's needs. Building the case for greenbelt release demanded a great deal of technical skill and a long engagement with local residents, local businesses and community groups. Public consultation, carried out over a period of two years, was a way of genuinely learning from the community rather than promoting the development. The planning team at Hunter Page Planning highlight the following good practice and learning points⁶¹:

- **Open and transparent:** use a combination of meetings, interviews, a website and public exhibitions. Be open and honest about the approach being a positive attempt to overcome and resolve local objection before submitting the application, but highlight that residents still have a right to object.
- **Proactive early engagement:** include a broad range of local community groups and businesses early in the process. Engage the community from the beginning through extensive and collaborative consultation.
- **Take time to make use of findings:** in particular to establish what improvements the scheme can bring to the community. The information from the engagement process can also be used to feed into site identification in the local plan or policy review through showing the benefits of the development for the local community and existing residents.

Enquiry by Design⁶²

Enquiry by design is a tool for pre-planning community participation. Planners and Developers together run a series of multi day workshops with local people, businesses and landowners in order to test the initial development ideas against this group's comprehensive understanding of local issues, topography, opportunities and constraints.

Unlike other consultations, drawn plans for the development emerge from the workshop with community input, as opposed to being taken to the community for consultation. Events should be structured with clear aims and outcome laid out.

An Enquiry by Design process in Ascot led by the Prince's Foundation and local planners led to the community opting for a high street development that involved building on green-belt. This is an example of a seemingly unlikely scenario arising from this in-depth process that puts strong trust in the community's opinions and ambitions⁶³.

⁶⁰ RTPI (2017) Awards for Planning Excellence, Bruton Knowles, Perrybrook: <https://bit.ly/2A3TQrF>

⁶¹ Hunter Page Planning (2019): <https://www.ridgeplanning.co.uk/>

⁶² Scott Fletcher (2016) Participedia: <https://participedia.net/en/methods/enquiry-design>

⁶³ Nigel McGurk (2014): https://www3.rbwm.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/605/examiners_report.pdf

9. Skills

The availability of skills, resources and time for large scale projects is a challenge for many local authorities and other partners, in particular where there is little experience of such projects and no established major applications team or set of processes.

The project management process should be used to ensure that the available resources are used effectively and efficiently. Each authority will learn from their own experience of large scale housing. However, officers should share knowledge and experience with other local authorities working on similar schemes to strengthen good practice. They can also look for opportunities to seek support and information from existing formal or informal networks.

Addressing skills shortages in the development and construction sectors is also essential to ensure continued increase in housing supply. Some local authorities are attempting to address the skill shortages through the use of apprenticeship and training provisions in their procurement strategies and specifications.

Planning Improvement Peer Challenge

The Planning Advisory Service (PAS) provide training, and keep planners up to date with policy changes through a subscription based service with Council's. They also partner with council planning authorities to create 'Planning Improvement Peer Challenges'⁶⁴.

A Peer Challenge is a document produced by the PAS and Local Government Association (LGA) in collaboration with a planning authority. Local authorities help identify the skills gaps of their peers, and give specific advice on how to address them.

A panel of (preferably local) industry expert 'peers' are selected for each challenge. They constructively interrogate the degree to which the council in question holds the necessary knowledge and experience to meet its aims – in focus areas chosen by the Council. The subsequent report is deeply contextual, practical and actionable – structured as a discussion by the peer panel.

A Peer Challenge represents a significant investment from PAS, who offer ongoing support in implementing its skills advice, but a proactive and transparent effort is needed from the planning authority to produce an effective result that gives a clear view of the council's position⁶⁵⁶⁶.

⁶⁴ PAS (2019): <https://www.local.gov.uk/pas/pas-support/peer-challenge/planning-improvement-peer-challenge>

⁶⁵ PAS (2016): <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/media/20505029/planning-peer-report-final-070116.pdf>

⁶⁶ PAS (2018): <https://www.arun.gov.uk/download.cfm?doc=docm93jjm4n12618.pdf&ver=12636>

Further information

RTPI policy and research

- Better Planning: Housing Affordability: <https://bit.ly/2zUMdUh>
- Better Planning: Smart City Regions: <https://bit.ly/2QPzHit>
- Settlement Patterns, Urban Form and Sustainability: <https://bit.ly/2E8f785>
- The Deliverability and Affordability of Housing in the South West of England, Bramley et al, commissioned by RTPI South West: <https://bit.ly/2QpKbFU>
- Delivering Large Scale Housing: Unlocking Schemes and Sites to Help Meet the UK's Housing Needs: <https://bit.ly/2zULIJT>
- Chief Planning Officers: The corporate and strategic influence of planning in local authorities: <https://bit.ly/2rxcPpL>
- Transport Infrastructure Investment: Capturing the Wider Benefits of Investment in Transport Infrastructure: <https://bit.ly/2QMMTVb>
- Local Authority Direct Provision of Housing, Morphet and Clifford, commissioned by RTPI: <https://bit.ly/2QSlxfg>

Information and advice

- ATLAS Guide: <https://bit.ly/2RSBoJm>
- TCPA Guidance for Delivering new Garden Cities: <https://bit.ly/2At9jjM>
- Creating Successful Masterplans, CABI: <https://bit.ly/2rxPioC>
- Local Government Association Case Studies: <https://bit.ly/2Bq2u3l>



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