

Meeting the Challenges of the New Local Development Framework System¹

Leonora Rozee

Introduction

1. It is nearly two years since the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (“The Act”) came into effect in England. The Act introduced a whole new development plan system based on Regional Spatial Strategies (“RSS”) and Local Development Frameworks (“LDFs”) containing Local Development Documents (“LDDs”), of which Development Plan Documents (“DPDs”) are subject to independent examination by Planning Inspectors—that is why I am here!

2. The first challenge of the new system is to understand and learn the acronyms. As well as the above we have:

- LDSs (Local Development Schemes)—the three-year programme management document all LPAs must have which sets out which LDDs will be prepared and the relevant milestones in their preparation.
- SPDs (Supplementary Planning Documents)—will provide more detail to flesh out policy contained in DPDs but which are not subject to independent examination.
- SCIs (Statements of Community Involvement)—set out the consultation and participation standards and methods to be used by Local Authorities (LAs) to involve their community in plan-making and decision-taking; they are subject to independent examination.
And finally:
- AMRs (Annual Monitoring Reports)—authorities must prepare, which will show what progress they are making in delivering against the LDS and, crucially, in the implementation of the policies and proposals in their LDF.

3. These are all vital elements of an inclusive and effective plan-led system. Unfortunately, the variety of documents and associated acronyms makes it harder to get the message across that this *will be* a more simple and effective development plan system which will engage the interest and participation of the community as a whole in constructive, positive planning. I firmly believe that the system put in place by the Act can, and will, do that, so long as it is given time to bed in. In this context it is to be hoped that (as she has promised in her interim report) anything Kate Barker proposes will build upon, and not undermine, these recent reforms.

4. However, the new system will deliver on our expectations only if there is real commitment and determination on the part of all those with vested interests in the system—whether private or public, business or personal, community or commercial, environmental or economic—to do things differently, to work in partnership, to be open, to share information, to co-operate and to be prepared to compromise. It is all about getting the best outcome in the public interest both now and for future generations.

¹ This paper deals exclusively with the English system, as the Welsh development plan system, whilst similar in many respects, has material differences. So far as the examination is concerned, however, the principles are the same in that the purpose is to determine whether the Local Development Plan (the single plan required to be produced by Welsh Authorities) is sound.



5. It is also about recognising that the new system is radically different. The principles behind the new system need to be understood to make sense of the process changes. Once these have been grasped the new system shows itself to be more coherent and logical than it might at first appear were it to focus simply on the procedures.

6. The Government set out the principles underlying the new planning system in Planning Policy Statement (“PPS”) 1. These are:

- Plans must contribute towards the achievement of sustainable development;
- “Planning that works for People” underlies the need for community involvement;
- quality and usability require design and access to be key considerations;
- a spatial approach to planning recognises the need for a joined-up approach to planning both geographically and functionally.

7. Delivering on these key principles throws up a number of challenges such as:

- Programme management
- Spatial planning;
- Meaningful community involvement;
- Frontloading;
- Sustainability Appraisal (“SA”);
- Creating policies that work—ie proactive planning.

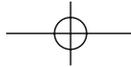
. This paper will explore these challenges in the light of the Inspectorate’s (“PINS”)² and others’³ experience of assessing the soundness of the early DPDs from which we have drawn some lessons. We hope our experience will help build confidence so that all who may be struggling with new concepts, processes and ways of working will develop new enthusiasm for what *they* can do for the planning system to ensure that the future is planned for the benefit of all. The paper will also consider staff and skills issues and how to achieve the cultural and behavioural change needed to deliver the vision of a planning system which is not only efficient and effective but is welcomed by all as the only way to enable genuinely sustainable development and sustainable communities to be achieved.

9. Before I consider the key challenges it is worth just noting the basis on which the Stafford and Lichfield core strategies were found to be unsound. These were:

- lack of clarity about what kind of place the area will be in the future, what kind of changes will be needed to make this happen and how this will be brought about;
- lack of clarity about the generation of options and appraisal process;
- lack of guidance to subsidiary DPDs;
- lack of local distinction;
- insufficient flexibility to cope with a variety of future circumstances (especially given the relationship to the emerging RSS);

² Based on the limited number of DPDs we have had in for examination and the two which have been completed so far, namely, Stafford and Lichfield Core Strategies.

³ Notably the joint Planning Advisory Service (“PAS”) www.pas.gov.uk and Planning Officers’ Society (“POS”) www.planningofficers.org.uk Learning and Dissemination Project



- insufficiently cross sectoral;
- not supported by adequate evidence;
- lack of clear monitoring process.

Key challenges

Programme Management

10. The Act (s.15) requires all local authorities to prepare a Local Development Scheme which is intended to give a clear programme of work over a three-year period to indicate what LDDs will be prepared, when, how (i.e. whether any will be joint documents) and what matters and area they will cover. The LDS must be submitted to the Secretary of State (“SoS”) who can direct changes to be made. Once approved and published by the local authority, all LDDs must be prepared in accordance with the LDS.

11. The LDS is potentially a valuable document from a number of perspectives. It should allow:

- the planning department to bid for resources against a clear programme of work;
- those with an interest in the planning of a local area to know when to get involved in plan preparation; and
- crucially from a PINS’ perspective, it should allow PINS to programme manage the examination process against a clear timetable for each LPA.

12. All LPAs in England had to submit their first LDS within six months of the implementation of the Act—ie by the end of March 2005—and all, to their credit, did so. However, at that stage few authorities appear to have had any real understanding of what was expected of them nor of the need for proper programme management to deal with the range of work required, including contingency planning. Consequently, and perhaps not surprisingly, this has led to repeated amendments being made to many LDSs as LPAs discover that their initial programmes were too ambitious or otherwise not appropriate, notably in the light of the outcome of their first AMR. Even Plymouth, which was awarded the Silver Jubilee Cup by the RTPi for the work they had done on their LDF, found it necessary to re-programme their early DPDs to allow more time to carry out the frontloaded process. They are to be commended for recognising that failure to do so might lead to problems at the examination if they then felt the need to make further changes to their submitted document. I deal with the impact of changes being made at the examination later.

13. The degree of reprogramming of LDSs (an average of 10 LDSs a month have been changing throughout the period from April 2005 onwards) has led to uncertainty and made it more difficult for those who wish to engage constructively to do so. For PINS it has made our ability to plan our resources and manage the considerable examination workload which is predicted for us over the next three years or so impossible, especially at a time when there are other areas of work to which we must give equal priority.

14. As we move into the third year of the implementation of the Act all local authorities should be expected to produce deliverable LDSs which can be relied upon whilst recognising that, in the event of the AMR or a major and unpredictable change, some re-programming might be required. If the LDS is to underpin a more streamlined and properly managed process its deadlines and timescales cannot be a continuously moveable feast. PINS and others should be able to rely on what the LDS says is planned to come forward and when. This will mean LPAs preparing realistic programmes



of work against the resources they have. I consider later issues relating to staff resources and skills availability.

Spatial Planning

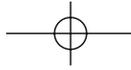
15. Here's a topic that could occupy the rest of the day! In such a place as this I am sure we could debate for many an hour what is meant by spatial planning and still find ourselves with no clear agreement on a precise definition! PPS1 describes spatial planning as going

“beyond traditional land use planning to bring together and integrate policies for the development and use of land with other policies and programmes which influence the nature of places and how they function” (para.30).

16. What matters is not the precise definition of the term but whether the plans produced by a LPA (and in particular the core strategy) focus on outcomes and reflect the fact that land uses and activities interrelate to, and interact with, one another. For example:

- transport is critical to the ability to move around to attend school, work, shop, enjoy leisure activities etc—so there is a need to ensure that the core strategy is properly related to the Local Transport Plan and any transport related requirements are clarified and addressed through the implementation arrangements in the core strategy;
- health facilities are important to the health and well being of communities and if they are not available when and where required the community will suffer. So there is a need to properly engage the relevant health providers to ensure that their spatial needs are reflected in the plans and their delivery programmes are linked to the implementation arrangements in the core strategy These delivery programmes include not just the physical provision of new facilities but also the delivery of new services and public health improvement programmes which can complement and support local authority regeneration initiatives;
- schools are needed as close as possible to the children who will use them, otherwise their educational needs will not be met properly. So the education authority needs to be properly engaged to ensure that their spatial needs are related to the overarching development strategy and their delivery programmes are aligned to the delivery of the core strategy. As with health, it is not just the provision of new educational facilities which is relevant here;
- the right level of retail and leisure facilities are needed to match the needs of both the existing and new population so that extra unnecessary travel is not generated as a result of inadequate provision of accessible facilities. The needs of deprived communities also need to be met. So the retail and leisure industries need to be involved early in the preparation of the plans (notably the core strategy) to help identify requirements so that the plan can give them the certainty they need to plan ahead to deliver facilities when and where needed;
- existing communities should not feel resentment that new development is imposing a burden on them. So all major infrastructure requirements to meet the development strategy need to have been thought about and planned in partnership with the relevant providers.

17. Spatial planning requires a change of mindset. To achieve this planners will benefit from talking about the needs of the area and possible solutions with partners and colleagues who will offer different perspectives and ways of seeing the issues of the area. Place-shaping requires the ability to decide not only where, but when, things will happen. Consideration of whether the interplay of



different activities in one place gives rise to positive or negative outcomes leads to questions such as “to what extent is our planning for housing leading to better public health?”; “to what extent is our planning for employment delivering better revenue streams for bus services?” etc. So a good (sound) plan is one where the place it shapes is greater than the sum of its individual parts, i.e. the sectoral programmes which have been integrated to make the plan work. Furthermore, a sound plan prepared in this way will provide both the vision of place and the means to deliver it which are both critical to an effective Community Strategy. This also reinforces the need for spatial planning to be part of a corporate process so that it is properly joined up with related local authority activities. I shall return to theme this later.

18. Early experience shows the difficulties in aligning plans and programmes which operate to different timescales and which are underpinned by a range of funding mechanisms. The concept of spatial planning also requires a better appreciation of the fact that planning issues do not recognise administrative boundaries but operate in a functional context. There are, for example, housing market areas, retail catchment areas, travel to work areas etc all of which may differ but which need to be planned in an integrated way. In this context the RSS is a fundamental part of the spatial planning process in establishing broadly what is to be delivered at the local level, looking across local administrative boundaries. In addition the Act provides the mechanisms for joint working. Under s.29 a joint committee can be established where a county council is involved. For example, in Northamptonshire where five LPAs are working jointly. Section 28 is proving useful in preparing a joint Black County core strategy.

19. Spatial planning is difficult because it requires real engagement with a range of players who have not traditionally felt the need to involve themselves directly in the planning system. Anecdotally, concerns have been expressed by some planning officers that colleagues in different parts of the authority or in different agencies fail to see the need to engage in the planning system. I look later at the cultural and behavioural issues this raises and how we might seek to address them. It would however, be a great shame if the opportunity presented by spatial planning to deliver positive, proactive planning failed to be grasped because of the challenges it brings.

Meaningful Community Involvement

20. The challenge here is in the word “meaningful”. Regrettably “NIMBYISM” has all too frequently outweighed positive community engagement. So how do we move from the NIMBY to the PIMBY (put it in my backyard)? I’ll talk some more about this later under assessing attitudes and behaviour and delivering cultural change. I do believe we need not be as cynical as we sometimes are about communities’ willingness and capacity to accept change.

21. But where are we now? By mid August PINS had issued 218 reports on SCIs and a further 95 SCIs had been submitted for examination. When the Bill went through Parliament the SCI examination was justified on the basis of the need to raise the bar for those authorities which might not otherwise really try to engage the community. Nevertheless we at PINS are not convinced that the examination process is really proving a guarantee of this. There must be better ways of validating the SCI process at a more local level. This does not alter the fact that the SCI itself is a very valuable document. However, it would be much more valuable if it were part of a corporate document owned by the local authority and used to underpin *all* consultation/participation carried out in the authority’s area. It ought to be prepared alongside the Community Strategy so that community involvement becomes an integrated process across an authority’s area, thus avoiding consultation fatigue.



22. Returning to the issue of meaningful community involvement. This has to be more than simply listening to the loudest and/or most articulate voices. It requires an understanding that rights come with responsibilities. In this case, this means that the needs of the community should be met by the community. How that community is defined will vary but it will include those who aspire to live/work/spend leisure time/etc in an area as well as those who currently live there, and having regard to the framework provided by the RSS.

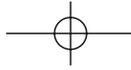
23. All of this requires SCIs to be sophisticated in providing a range of methods of achieving meaningful community involvement and ensuring that there is clarity about what the process is for, how the outcomes will be used and what role the community is playing. Planners should act as facilitators and enablers to help the community to achieve its vision, but planners must also act as leaders and ensure that expectations are not raised that cannot be delivered. When communities' views are sought they must be made aware of the context, including what can and can't be done. Joined up consultation with the Community Strategy and other relevant local authority plans and programmes will help this and reduce consultation fatigue. Otherwise it will be no surprise if the community becomes cynical and alienated. Consensus building is an important objective and potentially deliverable in agreeing overarching principles. Frankly, however, it is unrealistic to expect to overcome all opposition to plan proposals.

Frontloading

24. The phrase "early engagement" as used in Wales is perhaps more easily understood. PPS12 says LPAs should facilitate early involvement and secure inputs from the community and stakeholders, consider all alternative options and take key decisions at the earliest possible stage to allow full community involvement and sustainability appraisal (para.4.2). So, rather than consulting on a finished plan, as under the old system, the new system is about engaging with communities and stakeholders on the key choices before firm decisions have been made. Essentially early engagement requires:

- bringing out into the open of all the issues and options and the generation of alternative potential outcomes;
- sharing of information. For example, the house-building industry has knowledge about sites and their potential for development which should be shared early with the LPA to ensure that the strategy for delivering the necessary housing in an area is based on a real understanding of the market and the availability, suitability and viability of potential housing land;
- gathering of evidence to inform the development of the strategy, policies and proposals rather than to justify pre-conceived decisions;
- carrying out a thorough assessment of all reasonable options against a set of genuinely objective measures (see SA/SEA below); and
- preparedness to take difficult decisions and stick with them. LPAs are expected to submit what they consider to be "sound" DPDs (para.4.15, PPS12) and should not be submitting changes to those documents during the examination process.

25. It is also important to be clear about the different functions of the issues and options and the preferred options stages. The former is about bringing out the options so they can be evaluated. The latter is about explaining the main alternatives which were identified and considered and why the preferred options have been selected. Experience to date has been mixed, with some LPAs successfully identifying and articulating options in a way that genuinely allows debate and



consideration prior to the finalisation of their strategy. Others have found it much less easy to avoid anodyne or meaningless alternatives. Indeed one of the concerns of the Inspector who concluded that the Stafford Core Strategy was unsound was the lack of the identification of any meaningful options leading up to the preferred options stage.

26. There has been genuine concern expressed by, for example, the Environment Agency (“EA”) and other statutory consultees (such as English Heritage (“EH”) and (the former) English Nature (“EN”)) that the sheer number of DPDs being produced simultaneously makes it difficult for them to ensure they provide the right level of input at the appropriate stage. However, bodies such as the EA, EH and EN have developed generic guidance to assist LPAs and others to identify what issues should be addressed and how to address them⁴. This wider availability of published advice and guidance is helpful to the planning system generally as it allows a better understanding of the role of these bodies in spatial plan-making and of the key areas of importance to them.

27. There is some way to go to get the wider development community, in particular, to help LPAs to identify what the options might be for an area. This may be because of mutual suspicion or a lack of resources or simply because the development community does not feel that it is their “job”. However, if plans are to provide certainty and to stimulate as well as steer development, the development community’s knowledge and know-how about delivery is critical to the plan-making process.

Sustainability Appraisal

28. A great deal of fuss is made of the requirements of the EU Directive 2001/42/EC which requires formal strategic environmental assessment of certain plans and programmes and there is something of an industry being created around the whole of the wider SA process. In essence (and having regard to the statutory duty imposed by section 39 of the Act that LDDs are produced with a view to contributing to the achievement of sustainable development) it does not seem to me to be anything more than about good and proper planning. It is a process which brings objectivity, rigour and openness to the plan-making process. Done appropriately it should not be an add-on, parallel process but integral to the proper process of “survey, analysis, plan” with which I grew up as a young planner some 30 plus years ago! SA should be designed into the work programme to produce outputs in a timely way to fully contribute to decision-making.

29. That said, experience to date shows that the SA process is not well understood nor, in some cases, applied in a proportionate and relevant manner. Huge reports are produced which do not actually address their primary function, which is to inform the key decisions. Furthermore, they often fail to present clear conclusions. Their sheer size makes them unusable both in plan-making and consultation. The Directive refers to “strategic” assessment, not comprehensive impact assessment so the appraisal process should be focussed on those matters which are significant to the strategy and/or key choices. There is no need to evaluate all of the options under every issue. What is needed is to be clear in the SA report what the focus is and why. On allocations DPDs, the focus should be on reasonable alternatives, not patent non-runners (bearing in mind the fact that the allocations DPD should conform to the core strategy).

Creating policies that work —proactive planning.

⁴ Environmental Quality in Spatial Planning—guidance to help in the preparation of Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Frameworks produced jointly by Environment Agency, English Heritage, English Nature and Countryside Agency.



30. The bit that matters—Is the DPD “fit for purpose”? It is perhaps rather too early to tell but many authorities do seem to be trying hard to move away from the traditional development control handbook containing tens, indeed sometimes hundreds, of policies on practically everything that moves. That reflected the rather narrow, regulatory approach of the planning system which has been in place for the last 20–30 years. The hierarchical framework provided by the Act means that there is no need to repeat national and regional policies at the local level.

31. The real challenge of the new system is for LPAs to produce policies that reflect local distinctiveness. This was a particular problem with the Stafford Core Strategy. The Inspector found that the plan failed to develop national and regional guidance “into a detailed Borough-specific strategy” and it contained “bland policies, many of which could be applied almost anywhere nationally or policies setting out little more than a repetition of regional requirements”. The Lichfield Inspector also found a “lack of a local dimension in the Generic Development Control policies”. The questions that need to be asked of the policies in a DPD are:

- will the policies deliver the LAs and community’s vision and strategy?
- do the policies add anything to the national and regional policy framework?
- are the policies based on a “joined-up” approach?
- are all the policies necessary?
- are the policies more than simply regulatory?
- are the policies properly targeted, issue specific and locally distinctive?

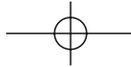
32. The new system focuses on strategic, proactive planning which needs a joined-up approach to allow the LPA to include policies and proposals that go beyond simply land-use planning. Quite soon after the implementation of the Act the Planning Officers’ Society (“POS”) produced some guidance on how to do this—*Policies for Spatial Plans: A guide to writing the policy content of Local Development Documents*. Part 1 of the guidance is an admirable attempt to help LPAs understand how to go about the process of developing spatial policies to deliver proactive planning. However, Pt 2 is not as helpful as it might be if written now. The policy examples it provides are not always sufficiently clearly linked to the delivery of a spatial vision and objectives. Nor are they sufficiently integrated in the way I referred to earlier. I would caution against viewing these as model policies, which indeed was not POS’s intention. Authorities need to prepare spatial policies which are targeted, issue specific and reflect local distinctiveness.

Staff and skills

33. Planning has come to the top of the political agenda with the 2004 Act, the Barker 1 and Barker 2 studies, the Eddington Transport Study for the Treasury and the DTI’s Energy Review and, rather more tangentially, the Lyons review of local government. It follows, however, a long period when planning was in something of a political wilderness which led to falling student numbers, closing planning schools and a retrenchment of the profession as others were seen to be leading the environmental debate. Whilst it is only right that planning has been rediscovered by those who govern, the long period of neglect has left a legacy of insufficient planners with a more limited range of skills than is needed to cope with the demands of the new LDF system.

34. The LDF system undoubtedly places demands on staff resources, especially in LPAs. There are also doubts about the availability of the necessary skills for spatial planning. The Egan study,⁵ which

⁵ The Egan Review: Skills for Sustainable Communities, April 2004



considered these issues in 2004, led to the setting up by the former ODPM of the Academy for Sustainable Communities, launched in May of this year⁶. Furthermore, to help planners develop knowledge and skills in spatial planning, Baroness Andrews launched the University of West of England spatial planning distance learning course in November 2005.

35. In February this year the Audit Commission produced a report entitled “The Planning System - Matching expectations and capacity” which looked at LPAs capacity and skills to deliver the new planning system at a time of considerable demand on them as planning applications reached nearly 700,000pa. One of the three key findings of this research is that “there is a shortage of experienced planners affecting councils’ ability to provide planning services but the private sector can provide comprehensive services under the direction of the planning authority” (para.1c, Key findings).

36. This shows the increasing need for a partnership approach between the public and private sector to deliver a proactive planning system in an increasingly demanding and complex environment. When I trained as a planner in the late 1960s/early 1970s almost all of us went into the public sector to work. Nowadays, youngsters starting on a career in planning are just as likely to move straight into the private sector and stay there. The most rounded of planners have experience in both the public and private sectors. Public sector experience develops communication and negotiating skills with a wide range of sections of society and an appreciation of the role of planning in the democratic process. Private sector experience develops economic reality and an understanding of the development process. Regular movement between the two sectors will help to break down some of the barriers which lead to a lack of trust between the public and the private sector and improve the skills of the planning profession more widely.

37. Within local authorities the separation of policy-making and decision-taking (and enforcement) within many planning departments means that planners do not share skills in a way that ensures that those who draft policy and those who implement it develop a common understanding of what is required. How often are the development control (“DC”) planners asked to contribute to developing the vision and strategy for the area? How many policy planners spend time at the sharp end to see what policy framework is needed for day-to-day DC decision-making to ensure that the vision and strategy they are seeking to develop will be delivered? DC planners in particular will need to gain a better understanding of how to operate in the new world of spatial plans with a more limited suite of policies than they have traditionally been used to.

38. Furthermore, the embedding of the planning service within the corporate body is critical to the LDF forming the delivery vehicle for those parts of the Community Strategy which have a spatial dimension and land use consequences. A better understanding of the value of the planning service and the role of the LDF in the delivery of the Community Strategy will help planning officers to make bids for the resources necessary to develop realistic and deliverable LDS programmes. Planning is the main conduit for engagement with private sector investment. Thus, re-positioning planning within local authorities offers the opportunity to capitalise on the potential for common working between the processes and to use planners’ strategic expertise to help make Community Strategies more strategic and output-orientated.

⁶ www.ascskills.org.uk



Attitudes and behaviour—achieving culture change

39. Until planning is seen as a core area for many Chief Executives the LDF will not be recognised as sufficiently important for the wider community and stakeholders to change their behaviour and engage early and constructively in order to share the process of developing key LDDs such as the core strategy. In this context Paul Hudson, who took over as Chief Planner at DCLG this summer, stated at the RTPI Convention in June that he wishes to see Chief Planning Officers forming one of the key posts in the local government corporate management structure.

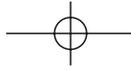
40. Our experience at PINS to date is that there remains a significant lack of understanding that the LDF process is very different from the old development plan system. As we examine documents submitted by LPAs we are finding that they still expect to be able to propose quite significant changes after the representations have been received on the submission document. If they do this it suggests that there has been insufficient rigour in identifying and testing options during the preparation process and that the LPA has not submitted what they consider to be a sound DPD because, if they have, why change it?

41. The problem for the Inspector is that unless he or she can be sure the plan as changed would not be vulnerable to challenge on the grounds that the proper procedures had not been followed (in particular in relation to the SA process and proper community involvement) it is difficult to recommend the change in a binding report. This was a particular issue with the Lichfield core strategy where late changes were proposed which the Inspector was unable to recommend in a binding report. Interestingly, Horsham officers decided not to report to their members on the submission representations on the basis that, in their view, they had considered all relevant matters at the preferred options stage and their submission document was as they wished to adopt it. This is the proper approach to the new system where the local planning authority has considered all the relevant matters at the preferred options stage in line with front loading and the representations raise no new matters. As the Horsham examination is ongoing I am not, of course, commenting here on the content of the document nor its soundness.

42. It is not only LPAs who have yet to really grasp the principles of the new system and especially the examination process. We are finding a great reluctance (or difficulty) on the part of those making representations on DPDs to focus those representations on the tests of soundness; to explain why the document is unsound and how the proposed change they wish to make will make it sound. Inspectors are rigorously applying the principle that the document they are examining is sound unless shown to be otherwise by evidence considered during the examination and they are focussing on the issues raised by the tests of soundness.

43. Without a change in the behaviour of all involved in the LDF system it will be difficult to move away from a confrontational, reactive planning system based on predominantly regulatory processes to a more co-operative, visionary, proactive planning system based on strategic policy frameworks focussed on outcomes. There is a lot of good work going on out there. For example, Hampshire County Council has achieved what many might consider to be the near impossible. A Waste DPD to which there is relatively little objection (only 73 representations have been made on the submission document) because of the enormous amount of work Hampshire County Council and the industry put into meaningful community engagement throughout the preparation process. Once again I make no comment on the content or soundness of this DPD but use this as an example of what can be achieved in terms of reducing controversy.

44. One of the ways to deliver the cultural and behavioural change required to achieve the aims of the new planning system is by championing positive messages about the opportunities the system



presents and by disseminating good practice. A number of organisations exist to do this. The DCLG and the National Planning Forum are seeking to identify champions in different sectors and across the country who will celebrate the positive aspects of the LDF system. The Planning Advisory Service and the Planning Officers' Society are each working closely with small groups of authorities to share experience and develop good practice⁷. DCLG is undertaking research entitled Spatial Plans in Practice from which some lessons will be drawn. The Local Government Association, private sector bodies and professional institutes regularly feature the LDF system in conferences and seminars for both the public and private sector, so there is no shortage of opportunity to promote the system. However, the best way to achieve change is by showing how doing things differently makes a real difference.

Conclusions

45. It is too early to conclude that the LDF system is the breakthrough Government and others expect in terms of making the planning system more responsive, more efficient and better supported by the wider community. Meanwhile I am pleased to be a champion for the new planning system and delighted to find planning back at the top of the national agenda, even if it is an uncomfortable ride at times!

⁷ PAS/POS Learning and Dissemination Project

