

Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Planning for Sustainable Development: Towards Better Practice

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SUMMARY

Introduction and Chapter 1 - Purpose and principles of the Guide

Sustainable development is one of the major challenges facing society. How and where we live, work and take recreation make demands on the Earth's resources, including land. The planning system has a vital part to play in promoting more sustainable land-use patterns and use of resources.

This Guide draws together advice based on a wide range of experience, including examples of good practice from local planning authorities and elsewhere. It is not, and cannot be, the last word on the subject; nor are there easy answers to many of the issues raised. That is why the Guide is called "*Towards Better Practice*". It marks a step on the journey towards more sustainable patterns of development.

Whilst the Guide will be of interest to many, it is principally for planners who work in local authority planning departments. It aims to help them to make more sustainable plans. Many other organisations and individuals are also concerned with what is built and where, and with how land is used and protected. So it is intended just as much for councillors, the local community, developers and professional advisors.

The Guide can be read from beginning to end, but it has also been designed to be used selectively by those seeking ideas on particular topics. It should stimulate thinking prior to the preparation or review of a development plan. It can help plan makers decide how a particular topic should be tackled. It may also be used as a checklist to confirm adequate coverage of particular issues within a plan.

The Guide concentrates on those planning policy areas where sustainable development raises new issues for planners, or requires a new or revised approach. It also suggests a systematic method to assist local authorities in integrating sustainable development into their development plans. As part of this, the longer term and secondary effects of development need to be recognised. Good planning also depends on effective participation by the local community. The guide offers suggestions in ways in which individuals and communities can be helped to play

their part in the process.

The aim is to help implement the principles of sustainable development as reflected in current planning policy guidance and achieve the objectives of the White Paper on the Future of Transport, "[A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone](#)". It provides advice on how planning can contribute towards meeting transport objectives, such as reducing car dependency and improving public transport viability. The Guide also reflects the Government's targets for reducing emissions and for energy efficiency. In due course it may be necessary to supplement this Guide with further advice, for example to reflect the emerging new Sustainable Development Strategy, and the Government's agenda for [Modernising Local Government](#).



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Chapter 2 - Realising the potential of existing urban areas

Development in existing urban areas will reduce the need to travel, revitalise and regenerate urban centres and help to reduce pressure for development of the countryside. Plans should optimise the amount of development within existing urban areas, consistent with maintaining and enhancing the quality of the urban environment.

Increasing densities

Development which attracts a lot of people should be concentrated in or on the edge of existing town and suburban centres, or be within other areas which are, or can be, well served by public transport. Raising the density of housing should also be encouraged within easy walking distance of these centres.

The objective is to increase the proportion of people who are within walking or cycling distance of the services which they require, and thus to reduce reliance on the car. This forms part of the Government's 'sequential approach' to selecting land for housing (further guidance will be forthcoming in the revised PPG3).

Plans should be developed from a strategic vision of what existing urban areas should be like in about 25 years time, when they are inherited by the next generation. This vision should indicate how development can contribute to re-shaping our towns and cities to make them function more sustainably. The future of urban areas must be seen positively. They are not just receptors for new housing and other forms of development pressure.

We should be looking for our urban areas to offer a higher quality of life. As recognised in *Planning for the Communities of the Future*, making urban areas more attractive for people will help to reverse migration from them. This, in turn, will help to reduce development pressure on the countryside, and reduce the rate at which land changes to urban uses.

Mixed uses

A mix of uses can help to revitalise town centres and to improve personal security, by having people around at all times of the day and evening. It will ensure that people have the choice of a range of facilities which they can use within walking distance of their homes. This in turn will reduce the need to use cars.

That paves the way for lower parking provision, which can release space for amenity uses or for further development. It may also help to improve the pedestrian and cycling environment by reallocating road space within residential and shopping areas to pedestrians.

This combination of moderately high densities with a safe pedestrian environment and a reduced need for a car may be particularly attractive to the increasing number of small households. Examples of car-free housing and residential conversions of existing offices and warehouses in central locations, with low levels of parking, have proved popular in certain cities.

The approach needs to be adopted in a selective way. It must not work against the important aim of protecting and creating areas of open and green space within urban areas. Moreover, it relies on the increased use of public transport and could not be undertaken where such an increase was not achievable. The proposed mix of uses and density will clearly depend on the location.

Town centres and suburban centres obviously offer the greatest potential, where an established focus already exists. But mixed use development can work in areas near or well-connected to these centres, perhaps through the re-use of vacant sites and buildings.

Urban restructuring

Urban areas should be planned to achieve a more efficient use of land, by maximising the reuse of previously-developed land and existing buildings, raising residential densities and reducing the amount of land used for roads and parking.

Planners must consider how existing neighbourhoods could function in the future. Some have recognisable centres, which could become the focus for modest restructuring of the locality. A plan could aim to increase the population and the mix of uses within walking distance of the centre, as and when sites become available to do this.

There are also areas which lack an obvious centre or focus. In these circumstances, the vision could include identifying the location where an entirely new neighbourhood centre should be established over time, by introducing a congregation of services and by increasing housing densities in the vicinity.

Consultation will, of course, be a vital early step in this process of urban restructuring. This will be necessary to confirm that the opportunities exist, and that proposals are, as far as possible, in accordance with people's wishes.

For planners the aim is to restructure or 'retrofit' towns and cities, building back

features which promote, for instance, a higher level of local services and support less car-dependent lifestyles. At the same time they must improve the quality of the physical environment so that people will want to live there.

Where change occurs, the aim will be to maximise accessibility, so as to reduce the number and length of journeys, and provide for improved public transport, pedestrian and cyclist movement.



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Chapter 3 - Growing new urban areas

New urban areas, such as urban extensions or new settlements, can contribute to creating more sustainable patterns of development. To do this, they should be located in the right place, have a well-planned transport infrastructure, be developed at appropriate densities and provide a range of local facilities.

Such development may emerge from a 'sequential approach' to identifying areas for development. Planners need to have a positive vision of what these new urban developments, and their surrounding areas, will be like when they are developed.

As in existing urban areas, planners should be seeking to raise densities, and to promote mixed uses, public transport use and good design. New urban areas may be extensions to existing villages, towns or cities, or they may be new settlements on a substantial scale. They need to be well related to the communities and towns around them, and perform a clear function in the network of urban centres.

New urban areas must also have their own centre with specific functions, a strong identity and must sit well in the landscape. Their identity should reflect local characteristics and be based on coherent and distinctive urban design.

Urban extensions should have a variety of housing types, tenure and densities, as well as neighbourhood centres with mixed uses and a range of facilities. The landscape structure should incorporate and build on existing assets, and create a distinct edge to the urban area to avoid sprawl. There should be pedestrian, cycle and public transport networks, fully integrated with adjacent urban areas. Existing infrastructure should be exploited.

New settlements should relate positively to their immediate rural setting, supplementing provision for local needs in terms of services and housing type and tenure. They should be designed to include neighbourhoods with a variety of housing and employment.

Neighbourhood centres, containing a range of facilities within walking distance of housing, should ideally incorporate mixed development. This will comprise convenience shopping (and comparison if the development is large enough), and uses such as a secondary school, health care, and cultural facilities.

Every neighbourhood must have public transport links to existing major employment centres, as it is not feasible to expect all residents of new settlements to work in the immediate locality. New settlements will enjoy a high quality of urban and landscape design. As well as integrated open space, there should be habitat areas, and environmental gains such as energy efficiency measures introduced in layouts and individual buildings.



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Chapter 4 - Revitalising and enhancing the countryside

The English countryside and its coastline is valued for its distinctive environment, the attractiveness and diversity of its landscape, and its small, close-knit rural communities. As elsewhere, however, the pace of change has quickened in recent years. Some of these valued features are threatened by increased mobility, pressures for leisure and the standardised appearance of much new development.

Sustainable development in the countryside should meet the economic and social needs of people who live and work in rural areas. It should enhance the viability of existing villages and market towns, and conserve the character of the countryside.

Like town and cities, a living countryside have a defined purpose. Strategies developed for the countryside must be complementary to those for urban areas. They will need to assess the suitability of settlements in the rural area for growth, with the aim of achieving balanced communities with a high quality of life.

Rural areas are not all the same. Near to major cities the key sustainable development objectives will relate to avoiding urban sprawl, retaining and improving distinctive landscapes, and managing recreation pressures. By contrast, in the more remote areas investment may be harder to attract, and the level of available resources (including human resources) may be lower.

Local authorities should focus new development (including for employment) on the most accessible rural centres. Lesser amounts of development should be concentrated on those smaller villages which have basic services, to support their continued viability. Development in all other settlements and the open countryside should be strictly controlled.

The diversity and character of different landscape areas must be protected. The distinctive local context should be enhanced by good quality design of buildings and effective landscaping.

Diversification of the local economy and low impact informal recreation facilities, linked to rural centres will help improve local quality of life.

Planners should ensure larger scale attractions are developed only where the impacts are acceptable, where the location is accessible and where they meet the 'sequential test'. They should promote schemes to encourage visitors out of their cars and onto other modes of transport.

To succeed in creating sustainable rural areas local planning authorities will need to develop their understanding of local needs. This will require analysis of the employment, age, health and mobility characteristics of residents, and the state of the rural economy.

Authorities will also need to consider whether their circumstances justify undertaking a local landscape assessment or preparing a design guide for the locality. They should examine the importance of nature conservation interests in the area, and the scope for realising biodiversity objectives. Authorities may also find that the preparation of a Rural Strategy will be a useful complementary tool, helping to inform thinking and integrate the main policy areas.



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Chapter 5 - Incorporating other sustainability issues

There are some cross-cutting topics that need to be considered in urban and rural areas alike, if sustainable solutions are to be devised. In all circumstances planners will be aiming to:

- avoid dangerous interference with the **climate** system;
- protect and improve the **quality of air, soil and water**;
- minimise the **use of resources** (eg land, building materials, water);
- protect and enhancing the **built heritage**; and
- conserve the **diversity of species and habitats**;

The guide highlights parking, nature conservation and energy (efficiency and alternative sources) as key issues.

Parking

Car parking policies are a vital link in the process of moving towards sustainable development through integrating land use and transport policies. Planning policy guidance (PPG13 and PPG6) advises that local authorities should have a comprehensive strategy which covers all aspects of parking.

The supply or pricing of car parking is a potential tool for influencing travel choices. By limiting parking provision, people may be encouraged to use other means of travel. By providing the right supply of parking for shopping and other town centre trips, the vitality and viability of town centres can be supported.

Parking restraint policies must however be complemented by measures to encourage viable alternatives to the car, for example, through enhanced public transport provision. Otherwise the consequences may be to exacerbate congestion and other forms of inconvenience.

Local authorities' approach to parking provision for new development should be set out in development plans, and reflected in development briefs. These policies should also be reflected in local transport plans. Treatment of parking issues should be consistent with any strategy for transport management affecting the area, and with Local Air Quality Management Area action plans.

The opportunities for action will vary between urban and rural areas. Urban authorities are more likely to be able to take advantage of established public transport systems. More rural authorities may be dealing with a small number of main settlements, each serving a large and in some cases remote hinterland.

Park and ride schemes should be developed where they can be an integral part of the overall parking strategy for an urban area or conurbation. Authorities need to be clear on the objectives of such schemes, such as reducing town centre congestion and pollution, and which users are being targeted. Authorities must ensure that schemes do not increase car usage (by providing an attractive facility) or have an adverse (local) environmental impact.

So, whilst in certain circumstances park and ride schemes will contribute to sustainability, not all locations will be suitable or advantageous. For schemes to be successful, it is essential that complementary measures, such as bus priority or reductions in town centre parking stock, are in place.

Green Transport Plans (or commuter plans) can help to achieve sustainable transport objectives and address traffic problems. They aim to reduce car use and encourage other modes of travel such as public transport and cycling. Some local authorities have required a green transport plan to be produced as a pre-requisite for obtaining planning permission. These plans are usually the subject of Section 106 agreements. Examples relate to business developments and to major establishments such as schools and hospitals.

Nature Conservation

Nature conservation policies can contribute to sustainable development by increasing wildlife habitats, and thus safeguarding biodiversity (ie variety of life for its own sake) including species and habitats at risk. At the same time they can provide opportunities for recreation and enhance the quality of life generally in an area.

For development to be sustainable, it must maintain and if possible enhance biodiversity. The planning system has a key role in safeguarding designated sites. More indirectly, land use policies can have some influence on adverse effects such as atmospheric pollution.

Planners should therefore integrate a site-based approach with a more broadly-based concern with biodiversity. This more holistic view requires cooperation between local planning authorities, because natural systems do not recognise administrative boundaries. Authorities need a strategic approach which can take account of cumulative impacts even when those of individual developments are relatively small.

Policies should protect and enhance habitats and wildlife corridors in the wider countryside - and in urban areas too. Plans should also seek complementary measures, such as reducing the need for energy, for travel, for minerals or for water resources.

Local authorities should identify positive opportunities for improvements to the nature conservation of an area or site. Such opportunities can be linked to site-specific land allocated for development in a Local Plan or Part II Unitary Development Plan. Planning authorities may wish to include policies for creating sites of nature conservation value.

Urban areas provide particular opportunities for habitat creation. Much work has been done in Europe in restructuring towns by developing interconnected nature areas. There is scope to capitalise on the UK's long history of specific sites being improved ecologically by local groups, including Groundwork Trusts, working alongside public agencies.

Energy

Climate change is one of the greatest environmental threats facing the world today with potentially far reaching disruptive effects on human society, the global economy, human health and the natural environment. Possible long term effects on the UK include rising sea levels, changes in weather patterns and temperature rises exacerbating pollution problems in urban areas.

Renewable energy policies can contribute to combatting the causes of climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and securing diverse and sustainable energy. Energy efficiency policies can contribute to sustainable development by reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Buildings account for almost half of the UK's delivered energy consumption and associated emissions of CO₂, the main greenhouse gas causing climate change. Action by planning authorities to increase energy efficiency can complement building regulations and the wide range of DETR and Department of Trade and Industry initiatives.

The areas in which planners can be particularly influential are combined heat and power schemes (CHP), site layout and, to a limited degree, building design. With CHP, by using waste heat to heat buildings, fuel efficiency can be increased to 70-90% compared to 30-50% with conventional generation. It therefore has the potential to deliver significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and in energy costs where suitable heat loads exist.

Changes in site layout (orientation, location on slope, landscaping) can reduce the energy requirements of a typical dwelling by 20%, through the 'free' ambient sources created by passive solar gain, and microclimate improvements.

Planners will need to recognise that maximising energy efficiency will require particular strategies to reflect individual circumstances. So, for example, while a higher density will make CHP more practical, it may militate against passive solar design by increasing overshadowing.



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Chapter 6 - Methodology for integrating sustainable development into plans

There are three themes to the methodology. These are the need for strategic awareness, both spatially and temporally; planning for people and places; and developing a vision of how an area might be structured or restructured.

The proposed methodology may entail merely a shift in emphasis for some authorities, while for others it would involve a more radical change of approach. Either way, planners should streamline their efforts to focus on key decision areas, working in conjunction with the range of stakeholders.

There is no correct time to undertake this change in approach. Planners should look for the earliest opportunity, whether this is a root and branch review of the development plan, or simply when making alterations such as adding policies in areas that have been previously omitted (eg on energy).

Guidance on how to integrate sustainable development principles will inevitably repeat to some extent existing guidance on development plan preparation, such as that in *Development Plans: A Good Practice Guide* (DOE 1992). The methodology aims to put sustainable development at the heart of plan preparation, and integrates it into each stage of the method, resulting in greater emphasis on identifying objectives and indicators as a basis for subsequent monitoring.

It carries forward several of the techniques recommended in the *Environmental Appraisal of Development Plans: A Good Practice Guide* (DOE 1993), but extends these so as to test plans and policies against a full range of economic and social objectives, as well as environmental objectives.

The main characteristics of the methodology are as follows:

- It is iterative. The objectives defined as the starting point are then used to test emerging policy options.
- It involves selectivity. Some decisions are more central than others to determining the key policies of a development plan. Details on subsidiary matters can then be added to flesh out a chosen strategy.
- It involves developing linkages with a wide range of interests. The planning

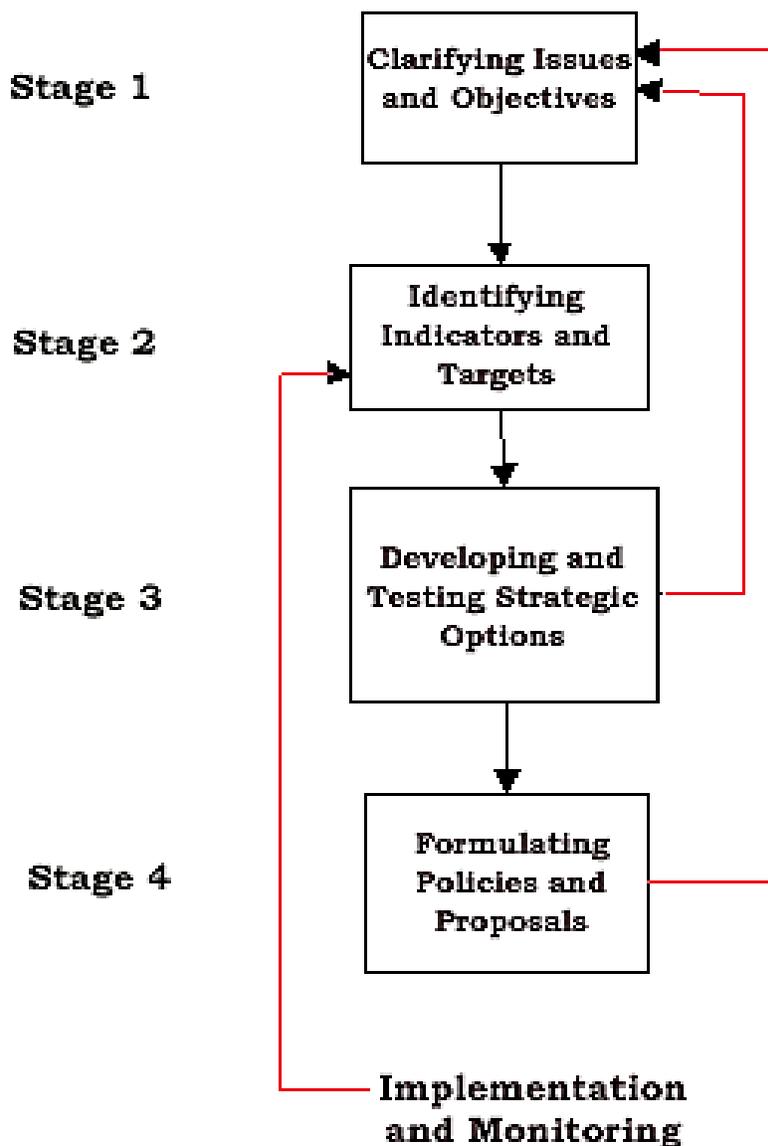
system needs to work in concert with other initiatives in the move towards sustainable development.

The success of the methodology will be judged by how well the plan can be implemented and whether it assists progress towards a more sustainable pattern of activities. Effective involvement of a wide range of parties in the process - through consultation and partnership - is more likely to engender local support, and this is strongly encouraged.

Monitoring progress has always been an essential part of the plan process, but there has not always been sufficient commitment to monitoring the effects of plans as they are implemented. A key objective of participation is to help individuals and communities 'take ownership' of the proposals which plans make, and the objectives which they are pursuing.

Monitoring is important to ensure that the policies are being implemented in a way which is consistent with a plan's objectives, and with the objectives of sustainable development. If undertaken properly, monitoring will ensure that the development plan continues to be valuable as a tool for these implementing planning policies. In particular monitoring exercises will need to measure progress on the chosen indicators, and towards achieving targets as set out in the plan.

SUGGESTED APPROACH TO INTEGRATING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INTO DEVELOPMENT PLAN PREPARATION



Legend

- Main stages of plan preparation and monitoring
- Iterative testing



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