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This report is the outcome of action research undertaken by Carnegie UK Trust's Rural Programme and was edited by Kate Braithwaite with assistance from participants at Carnegie's community-led planning seminar held in Banagher, Co. Offaly, Ireland in November 2010. The Rural Team gave invaluable feedback, Geoff Brown copy-edited the text and Kirsty Tait managed production..

Community-Led Planning Seminar, Banagher, Co Offally, Ireland participants

Back row left to right: Martin McCormack Tipperary Institute, Declan Costello Offaly Local Development Company, Bridget Kirwan Tipperary Institute, Tony Kendle Eden Project, Carmel Fox Ballyhoura Development, Lois Muddiman South Oxfordshire and Vale Partnerships; Brendan O'Loughlin Offaly Local Development Company

Front row left to right: Catherine Corcoran Tipperary Institute, Juliet Rose Eden Project, Ciarán Lynch Tipperary Institute, Kate Braithwaite, Carnegie UK Trust and Paul Delahoy Devon Heartlands Community Development Trust.

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Carnegie UK Trust
Andrew Carnegie House
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Dunfermline
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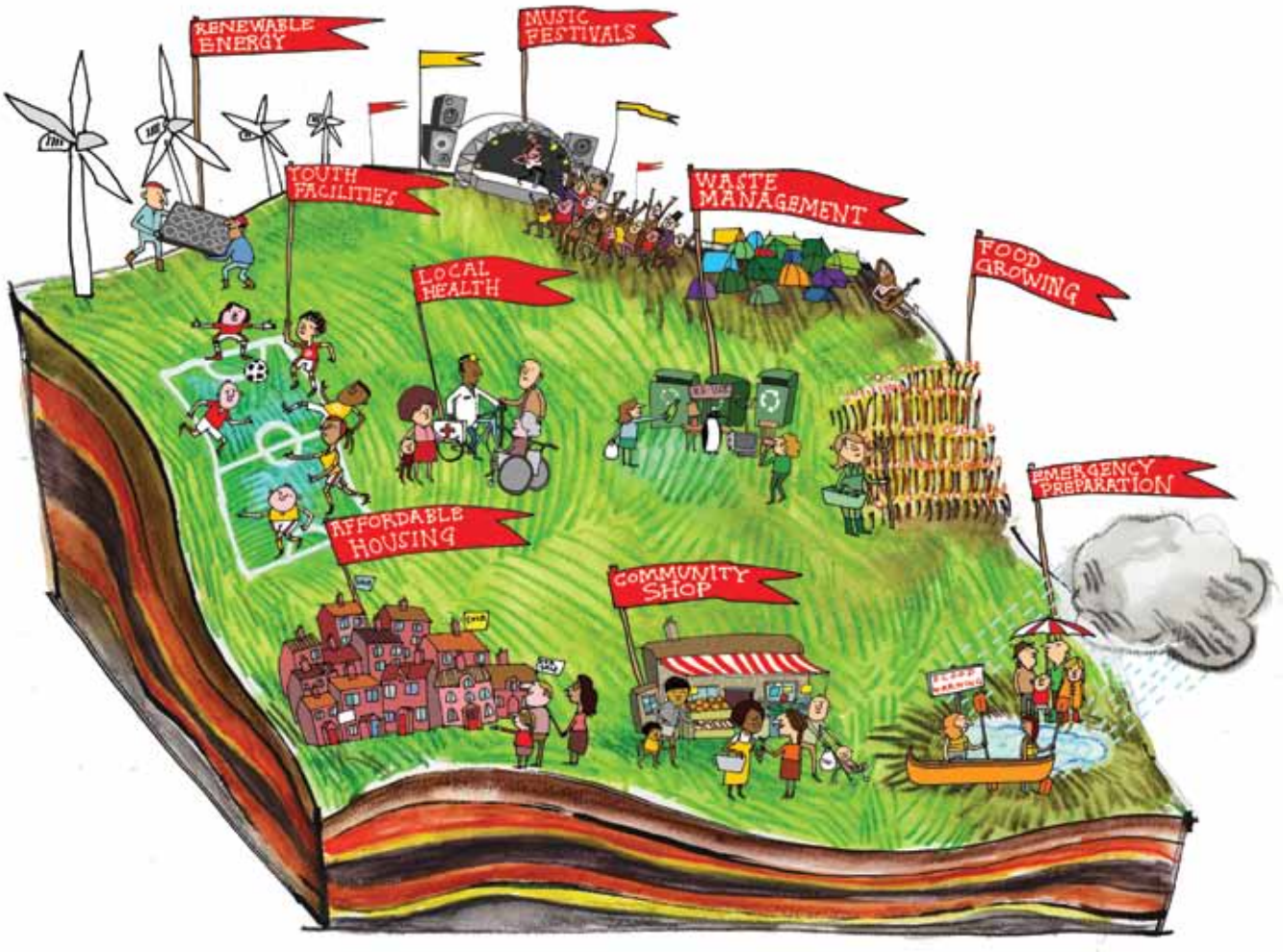

Introduction: Is it time the people reclaimed their plans?

Hardly anyone knows very much about the mysterious world of planning. If you want to build a conservatory you may bump into a Development Control Officer. And the parish council – didn't they do a parish plan once? Whatever happened to that?

In this publication, a group of practitioners, all interacting in some way in the complex world of planning, reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of strategic, spatial and community-led socio-economic planning as it operates now in the Republic of Ireland and across the UK.

The contributors then present a vision for the future that puts the citizen as a valued partner at the centre of planning processes. They champion a simplified and integrated planning system, more suited to an age of budget cuts (with hard decisions to be made about priorities) and greater involvement of communities in service delivery. Above all, encouraging citizen involvement in the planning process is judged to be of critical importance.

It has been recognised for some time in public policy-making and in practice that the active participation of local people in planning the development of the area where they live is a positive thing. When people are empowered to participate in planning the result is not just a better outcome (in the shape of a plan or a document) but also results in improved relationships between the people in the area and the agencies involved in writing and implementing the plan.

Appendix 1 will give you an idea of just how complex planning is. It looks at what was, until this summer, the most confusing of systems – planning in England. Having long championed the cause of community-led planning we are very encouraged by the prospect of formal recognition of neighbourhood plans in the forthcoming Decentralisation and Localism Bill for England. Providing parish and town councils with the right (although not a duty) to commission neighbourhood plans, that, following a positive result in a local referenda, will be 'adopted' by the local authority is a real step forward. We hope this fundamental principle is adopted elsewhere.

Appendix 2 looks at planning in other parts of the UK and in the Republic of Ireland. This is just a snapshot of planning systems, since we do not want to get too bogged down in the complexity for each jurisdiction. However, we have used the information in the Appendices to highlight, where we can, examples of good practice. And the winds of change are blowing through planning systems.

A planning system fit for the 21st Century?

People generally only become aware that there is a planning system when the family decides it would like to extend their house or they read in the local press about protests against a planned wind farm. Some might see planners as defenders of the landscape, protecting us from urban sprawl, traffic congestion, pollution or the building of houses on flood plains.

In fact, the planning system has to balance the interests of major players with the interests of the families who live adjacent to the planned development. It exists to regulate development[1] and use of land 'in the public interest'; to determine what kind of development is appropriate, how much is desirable, where it should best be located and what it looks like. The planning system has to reconcile a number of possibly conflicting demands; the well-being of communities, controlling development, setting the design parameters where development is taking place, protecting high nature value environments and facilitating economic opportunities.

The demands on planners are becoming more complex for a number reasons:

- There are many more competing demands on land and multi-functional land use (where, for example, woodland is used simultaneously for extraction of timber, leisure, control of rainwater run-off in a river catchment and as a location for new forest crofts) is more common
- The rise of the 'localism' agenda, placing a greater emphasis on community engagement in determining a vision for their area
- A need for planners to make decision that will simultaneously produce positive social, economic and environmental outcomes
- The need for some decisions to be made to benefit the nation as a whole, thus overriding local interests (for example, new nuclear plants or new runways)
- The existence of many more short-term regeneration initiatives that are area-based, managed by economic development departments or by independent organisations without the direct involvement of planners.
- This publication considers these challenges for the planning system and for individual planners from the perspective of the communities they serve.

Adversarial style planning; does the culture need to change?

As we have indicated in our introduction, the planning system can seem impenetrable to the layman or woman. Not only is it bureaucratic, it is adversarial in tone. Just consider the words 'development control' or 'making a submission to a planning enquiry'. Indeed there is a whole industry offering to resolve, mediate and arbitrate in planning disputes.

Land use decision-making is adversarial. Like the court of law, its underlying premise is that strongly and well-defended positions will result in the best outcomes for the general public. Land use decision-making is a regulatory, non-negotiated process. The government passes planning laws and regulations, any proposals are compared to those rules and regulations, and a decision is made on whether or not the proposal is allowable.

Inherent in this approach to planning is the assumption that there is a 'one size fits all' set of general rules that can be applied across a country or a county, albeit interpreted within these parameters at a local level by planners. The local communities, who will be directly affected by these decisions, are 'consulted'. Also, there is a principle that planners can dispassionately adjudicate any planning matter, armed with the legal and advisory framework. Planners consider matters by following formal rules. The decisions they make are therefore 'rational'.

[1] Development can be defined as the carrying out of building, engineering, mining or other operations in, or over, or under land or the making of any material change in the use of any buildings or land.

Community and voluntary groups, and the general public see the planning system as complex, intimidating and unresponsive to environmental, economic or social concerns and lacking in transparency. At the stage where plans are being drawn up, there may be consultation (maps being displayed for instance) but it is an expert-led dialogue and although there may be an opportunity to submit 'evidence', the language is formal and technical. Unless they are directly involved as an applicant for planning permission, submitting an objection or acting as a statutory consultee, people will have little opportunity to see the planning system in action.

We contend that a modern, fit-for-purpose planning system needs to place communities at its very heart.

Connecting with local people, accessing the tacit knowledge of the community

The impact of any decision made by planners will have consequences for the aspirations of any community. Over a number of years, Carnegie's Rural Programme has followed the fortunes of the community of High Bickington in Devon; the experience of Chairman, David Brown and his loyal and determined committee perfectly illustrates our point that communities should be intimately involved in the planning system.

High Bickington is a small rural parish situated within the Torridge District of North Devon. The current population totals around 800 people. High Bickington is situated some 9 miles from Barnstaple, 10 miles from South Molton, 8 miles from Great Torrington and 33 miles from Exeter.

A few years ago, the Parish Council and the High Bickington Community Property Trust piloted a new form of Community Led Planning and this led to the 'High Bickington Parish Plan 2003 to 2023'. Implementation of the first phase centred on Little Bickington Farm, which has been declared 'surplus to requirements' by the Devon County Council Farms Estate Committee. The development plans included the provision of affordable local needs housing, workspace, new community buildings and recreational facilities. Also included was the planting of a community woodland, comprising some 3,000 broad-leaf trees. 53 adult volunteers and 63 primary school children planted this in January 2005.

An outline planning application for the development was submitted by the Parish Council in November 2003, was approved by Torridge District Council but was then referred to the Government Office for the South West as a 'Major Departure from the Local Development Plan' and this eventually led to a Local Public Inquiry in January 2006. The Inspector recommended refusal and this was endorsed by the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Ruth Kelly MP, in May 2006.

Despite this initial setback, both the Parish Council and Community Property Trust, working in partnership with Devon County Council and Torridge District Council, remained determined to continue to meet the community's needs and aspirations. The objective was to achieve this through the sustainable development of Little Bickington Farm in a way that would ensure a sustainable and viable social and economic future for High Bickington parishioners both now and in the future. This determination is shared by more than 200 local people who have become members of the High Bickington Community Property Trust, many of whom have freely given extensive amounts of their time, energy and ideas to enable the plans to be developed.

In August 2008 a new Full Planning Application, for a 'Mixed Use Development on Land at Little Bickington Farm, High Bickington', was submitted to Torridge District Council. The Council approved this on 15th January 2009 subject to the completion of a Legal Agreement and submission to the Government Office for the South West as a Major Departure from the Local Development Plan. On 20th February 2009 the Secretary of State decided not to intervene in the application and returned it for determination by the Torridge District Council. This means that Full Planning Permission to build 16 'affordable' homes (9 for Equity Share and 7 for rental); 18 homes for market sale; 5 'Barn Conversion' homes; 6 workshops for local businesses; a new 120 place primary school; community and sporting facilities fit for the 21st Century has been granted.

To achieve this major step towards becoming a sustainable rural community has taken High Bickington Community Property Trust over 9 years, during which time they have faced numerous hurdles that have often been placed in their way by the very governmental departments and agencies that say they 'want local communities to get involved in planning their own futures'! The work being done at High Bickington proves that such aims can be achieved and that local communities do have the capacity to achieve success.

We are delighted to hear that the physical building work at Little Bickington Farm has now started!

What are the lessons from the experiences of the Community Trust in High Bickington?

- The Community Trust or parish council is well placed to understand the particular circumstances of local families; knowing why young people are choosing to move away, how cramped the schoolroom is, that people are having to commute long distances because of the lack of workspace units. This tacit knowledge should be tapped.
- Community based organisations need input from a range of professionals, including planners, to judge whether the scale of any proposed development is appropriate, affordable and achievable.
- The experts get frustrated at the lay people who don't seem to understand what is obvious to them. The lay people get angry with the experts who don't seem to care about their lives.

In reality, the current planning system has a number of fundamental and in-built characteristics:

- Planners are not just 'value free' technicians
- In an adversarial system, the various stakeholders argue from entirely fixed positions – optimal solutions are not sought
- Community 'participation' in planning is limited and is often dominated by special interest advocates and those who have the expertise and resources to put their case forward
- Parties generally adopt win-lose positions and, if necessary, resort to litigation
- Planners are generally defensive and combative about the positions they adopt

In this publication we affirm the suggestion, put forward over a decade ago by Patsy Healy[1] and subsequently by other academics, that a collaborative planning system would better serve our communities, economy and environment. We consider that the approach that governs the British and Irish planning systems based upon the regulation of private land use rights in the 'public interest' and of managing conflicts, fragments consideration of overall qualities of places. The existing planning system seems to be primarily concerned with the planning process. A collaborative planning system would be more concerned with the outcome of planning and the promotion of the particular qualities of places.

[2] Healey, P (1998) 'Collaborative Planning in a Stakeholder Society'. *Town Planning Review*, Volume 69, No 1

This concept is gaining traction across the political spectrum:

'Our conception of local planning is rooted in civic engagement and collaborative democracy as the means of reconciling economic development with quality of life. Planning issues drive members of the public to become engaged in local political campaigning and decision-making. Communities should be given the greatest possible opportunity to have their say and the greatest possible degree of local control. If we get this right, the planning system can play a major role in decentralising power and strengthening society – bringing communities together, as they formulate a shared vision of sustainable development. And, if we enable communities to find their own ways of overcoming the tensions between development and conservation, local people can become proponents rather than opponents of appropriate economic growth.'[3]

Collaborative planning has evolved to provide real opportunities for the public to make decisions affecting their communities. Collaborative planning is a method designed to turn members of the public into decision-makers through direct engagement and dialogue with planners. Active public involvement can help planners achieve better outcomes by making them aware of the public's needs and preferences by using local knowledge to inform projects. Collaboration can result in more creative outcomes to persistent problems, enabling planners to make decisions that reflect community needs and values.[4]

Experience of collaborative planning, for example in the USA, has demonstrated that successful collaborative planning depends on a number of inter-related factors:

- The process must be truly inclusive, with all stakeholders and affected groups invited to the table
- The community must have final decision-making authority
- There must be wholehearted government commitment (financially and intellectually)
- Participants should be given clear objectives by planning staff facilitating the process by providing guidance, expert opinions, and research
- Facilitators should be skilled in working with communities.

There are already really positive moves by planners in different parts of the UK and Ireland to instigate a more inclusive approach to planning. We are grateful to Suzanne Fysh, from West Lindsey District Council, Regeneration Services, (a participant at Carnegie's 2010 Annual Rural Convention) for providing the following example of excellent planning in action:

Community and Stakeholder Engagement for a Large New Neighbourhood in Gainsborough, West Lindsey, Lincolnshire

In July 2008, Gainsborough was awarded Growth Status. This led to proposals for a new mixed use neighbourhood comprising up to 2,500 dwellings on land to the south of the town. With such a large-scale proposal and in the absence of any planning policy for the site, the Council and Applicant decided to manage the scheme through a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA).

[3] Conservative Party (Feb 2010) 'Open Source Planning', Policy Green Paper No. 14,

[4] Innes, J and Booher, D (2000) *Public Participation in Planning: New Strategies for the 21st Century* University of California

The PPA established an agreed vision and development objectives for the site, which helped to shape the masterplan for the neighbourhood. The PPA also provided a project management framework, which included details of the stakeholder and community engagement process for the application. The process involved early consultation with statutory agencies, service providers and local community groups, brought together through themed 'working groups'. These groups met on a frequent basis throughout the planning process and covered topics such as, transport, environment, social infrastructure and housing. A wider workshop session covering all of the topic areas was also facilitated prior to the submission of the application in July 2010. Overseeing this process was a project steering group comprised of representatives from the District and County Councils together with the Applicant and their consultancy team, and ATLAS[5].

Following a 10-month pre-application phase, the planning application was submitted in October 2009. Working Group meetings continued in order to resolve the outstanding issues as part of the formal planning process. Smaller task groups were also held in order to refine the details of the scheme and to reach agreement on the provisions within the Section 106 Agreement. An example of this was a 'Multi-Use Centre' (MUC) task group, which involved discussions with the PCT, Police, Park Springs Residents Group and the Library to determine the most appropriate components of the proposed MUC within the new neighbourhood.

The statutory consultation process also enabled local residents to comment directly on the proposals and various alterations were carried out as a result of these representations, including a 'green wedge' along one of the road frontages.

The PPA approach involved a comprehensive engagement process from the outset. The aim was to seek consensus to particular matters through negotiation. The process evolved over time, including the project programme, which set out the overall timetable to deliver the PPA and resolve certain issues.

The Local Planning Committee finally approved the application on 4th August 2010 and ATLAS is now highlighting the process as an example of best practice.

We are aware that in Ireland too, there are moves to encourage the community to be more directly involved in planning their future. In 2000, the Heritage Council of Ireland introduced the National Village Design Statement Programme to promote the management and enhancement of village distinctiveness and character with a particular emphasis on heritage elements. An evaluation of the programme in 2008 noted that greater community involvement was required, as was a need to embed the process within the statutory planning framework. The Heritage Council, working with a number of stakeholders including the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and Tipperary Institute decided to maintain commitment to the Programme with a renewed emphasis on collaboration and participation by implementing a pilot community-led Village Design Statement (VDS) process in the settlement of Julianstown, Co. Meath.

[5] ATLAS was set up in 2004 by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (now Department of Communities & Local Government) to provide an independent advisory service for Local Authorities to support them in dealing with complex large-scale projects. ATLAS has the following vision: 'To secure the timely delivery of high quality sustainable development through effective planning processes, collaborative working and the promotion of good practice.' **http://www.atlasplanning.com/page/index.cfm**

Julianstown has become a popular location for commuters to Dublin. This has resulted in a large influx of new housing developments to the north and south fringes of the village. Julianstown's selection as the first pilot village was the culmination of three years work by members of Julianstown and District Residents' Association. In October 2008, they made a presentation to the national village design conference held in Slane Castle on the topic: 'Why Julianstown Wants and Needs a VDS'. The residents produced an innovative presentation and drama to demonstrate how enthusiastic they were. The Heritage Council funded a DVD production of the villager's presentation, which was shown to Minister for the Environment who personally endorsed Julianstown's VDS plans. The project also has full backing and support of the local authority, Meath County Council.

In Ireland, Village Design Statements are a mechanism for **protecting, celebrating and enhancing local distinctiveness**. They have the potential to represent the de facto constitution of a village, community or parish. The way that they are developed is of critical importance with the quality of the outcomes a direct reflection on the participative nature of the process itself.

One of the more significant and remarkable achievements of the VDS process was its capacity to generate enthusiasm and support for the ongoing development of the village. Surveys also revealed that most respondents had not participated in community/voluntary activities within the previous six months.

Overall, the evaluators concluded that there is significant scope for the VDS Programme to be expanded upon and to be disseminated throughout Ireland but that this would require

- A multi-agency approach including Government Departments, professionals (e.g. the Irish Planning Institute) and voluntary organisations
- Promotion of a fundamental change in the way in which design, planning, community involvement and heritage (and their inter-connectedness) are perceived nationally, at a county level and then locally
- Provision of guidance about how a VDS might link in to the evolving planning system (especially Local Area Plans) but also to the many programmes of wider social and economic development in rural areas, including for example, the well-established LEADER programme or other forms of Integrated Rural Development
- A programme of training for professionals, communities and elected representatives, about design and distinctiveness, community engagement and the preparation and use of the VDS.[6]

It is the case that there is a growing commitment across the UK and Ireland by planning authorities and others to get the community involved in decision-making. This publication now suggests ways in which that aspiration might be achieved by placing socio-economic community-led planning at the very heart of the hierarchy of plans.

[6] Owen et al. (2008): *Enhancing Local Distinctiveness, Evaluation of Village Design Statements (VDS) in Ireland*, CCRI, Gloucestershire

Community level action plans seek to provide a vision for the future of a settlement and to define how this vision might be achieved.

Community action plans are based on thorough engagement with all parts of the community. The community action plan brings the community together around a vision for the place where they live and includes an action plan to take that vision forward. Importantly, a community action plan enables partners, including planners, to support that vision, by linking to it their strategic plans.

The Carnegie Commission for Rural Community Development identified community-led planning as an essential enabling factor in achieving a thriving community:

'Communities that are strong are ones where residents and service users not only have an effective voice around the planning table, but also generate their own community action plans'.[7]

Carnegie UK Trust also worked with a range of partners from across the UK and Ireland over a three-year period to better understand the requirements of successful community-led planning, reporting our findings in the 'Manifesto for Rural Communities'.[8] Since then we have worked intensively with two organisations, the Eden Trust in Cornwall and Tipperary Institute in the Republic of Ireland, to further our understanding of the mechanics of community-led planning in real places. This publication draws heavily on this work.

The next section of this report examines the potential of excellent community led planning.

[7] Carnegie UK Trust (2007) *Charter for Rural Communities*

[8] Carnegie UK Trust (2009) *A Manifesto for Rural Communities*

Community-led planning: The foundation stone of an excellent planning system

Who provides the vision?

Communities all around the UK and the Republic of Ireland already plan for their future by involving residents in a process to identify priority actions for their area. We call this community-led planning. There are a myriad of different methods that can be used. In this section of our report we highlight three particular approaches. The first, called Integrated Area Planning illustrates most of the elements of sound community led-planning.

Integrated Area Planning (IAP) is a practical and participatory process to collect, compile and analyse information about the priorities of people who live in an area. The plan is put together by local people themselves, assisted by an independent facilitator in partnership with state agencies. At the same time the skills and structures needed to prepare and implement the plan are developed. This plan can then be used by state agencies in preparing development plans for the area, confident that these plans reflect local people's wishes.

IAP was piloted in Co. Offaly in three towns: Banagher, Ferbane and Cloghan. Here we look at the impact of this community-led planning process in Cloghan.

Cloghan is a well-established village located 18 miles from the County town of Tullamore. There were 503 people resident in the village at the time of the 2006 census; however there was rapid house construction in the 2000s, with Offaly County Council reporting that there were approximately 100 new housing units built or under construction. The original settlement pattern of Cloghan probably developed as a small cluster at a crossroads junction. Subsequent development has taken the form of linear development along the constituent roads, leading to a lack of coherency in village form. Cloghan has a good base of social and community services including 2 shops/filling stations, car salesroom/garage, a church, 3 pubs, a National School, a health centre, community hall and Garda station as well as active sports and social clubs. Cloghan was chosen for IAP because of its high levels of unemployment.

West Offaly Partnership facilitated the preparation of the plan in the community and the process began by establishing a steering group comprising of volunteers within the community.

The initial work of the group involved conducting a household survey to inform the preparation of the plan. The survey took the form of a self-completed household questionnaire, to establish citizens' views on a broad range of local issues. Each volunteer took responsibility for distribution and collection of questionnaires in his/her local street / road / estate until the entire area was covered. Over 60% of households in the area participated in the survey, yielding a wealth of information on many aspects of life in the area, and identifying the area's priorities.

It was now necessary to devise actions that would address these priorities. **Task groups** were established to examine needs and propose appropriate responses. These task groups, comprising of local volunteers, were useful in that people could dedicate time to issues that interested them personally, for a time limited period.

The steering group agreed the recommendations proposed by the task groups. These provided the content of the action plan. During the process the steering group met with a number of agencies to seek advice and support.

The Cloghan community has been actively working on the implementation of the IAP, achieving tangible results:

- Traffic calming is in operation
- The 'Cloghan K' was developed as a 1kilometre walk around the town, based at the GAA[9] pitch. It is in regular use and is described as a major boost to the place. The local GAA is expanding its membership and are building a new clubhouse through community subscription
- The steering group organised the active retired and youth groups to paint boards on a very prominent derelict site. This led to a good physical outcome and the revitalisation of the two groups. The active retired group now meets regularly again and the youth club meets twice weekly also.
- The scouts have started up and business people are starting up an enterprise group.
- Business people have started up an enterprise group
- Defibulators have been installed since the plan was finalised and a group of 80 local people have been trained to use them.

We conclude that the development of personal relationships between the various stakeholders in the IAP process was a crucial element in its success. These relationships lead to better development outcomes, tapping into latent local resources.

Development agencies and local authorities need to work differently, seeing themselves as catalysts for local development, responding to local needs, tapping into local initiatives and matching capacity in one area with needs in another. The role of local democracy is laid bare here: if politicians are properly engaged in community planning, they become more responsive to local needs and in tune with the needs of the majority rather than the vocal few.

Experienced community-led planning facilitator, Carmel Fox, Chief Executive of Ballyhoura Development Ltd (a local development company which manages National and EU programmes including the Local and Community Development Programme and LEADER and which covers the areas of South and East Limerick and North East Cork), has utilised a wide range of community led planning techniques from Future Search[10] to Planning for Real[11] and has learned much from her international exchanges with Plan International in Uganda. Ballyhoura Development has developed the second socio-economic community led planning methodology we wish to highlight. Called ADOPT[12] an acronym for the words Audit, District, Organisations, Planning and Training, this method is designed to provide the capacity, structures, knowledge, objectives and the legitimacy to enable community activists to properly represent their communities in decision-making environments. The approach is based upon the principle that the service centre (such as a market town) and its hinterland is the most effective geographic unit for the representation of the needs and perspectives of the community, while the local community is the most effective unit for drawing up socio-economic development plans. The following is a brief outline of the elements of the model.

[9] The GAA is a community-based volunteer organisation promoting Gaelic Games, culture and lifelong participation

[10] An interactive planning process used across the world in diverse cultures to achieve shared goals and fast action. Future Search leads to cooperative planning that lasts for years

[11] Planning for Real® is a community planning model which helps people shape the places where they live through the use of interactive, hands on tools and techniques

[12] Dr. Pat Gibbons, The Department of Agribusiness Extension and Rural Development, University College Dublin in association with Ballyhoura Development (2004) 'ADOPT; Should the ADOPT model be adopted?'

Audit – an audit of the area, coinciding with the administrative area of local government is carried out. This provides essential information about the area such as demographic trends, employment figures and availability of a range of services

District – Following the audit of the area, districts that contain a significant service centre and with service delivery function are identified. These districts are used as the basis for further work and communities within the District network with each other.

Organisations – establishment/adaptation of an existing umbrella or 'pan-community' organisation at community level as a structure for planning and monitoring actions on community development.

Planning – a process with a number of phases in prioritising local needs and agreeing a plan of action. At a community level and, where possible, working with relevant public bodies and service organisations, plans are developed that promote social, economic and environmental development of the areas.

Training – it is recognised that in order to participate in the planning process, community activists require training so that they can set their personal and individual knowledge in a broader context. The training equips people with the skills, knowledge and attributes needed to represent their constituencies to good effect and pursue an inclusive agenda for development at both community and local level.

This process allows the community to draw up an action plan, setting clear targets, timescales and identifying those who should lead/be involved in the delivery. However, the process varies from community to community depending on their specific needs and issues. The process begins with the animation of organisations and groups within the community to achieve buy-in and participation to the process.

This method demonstrates ways in which the time involved in community led planning can be managed, so that the demands on volunteers are not unrealistic. Analysis of the community takes place in advance so that when the community comes together, there are facts and figures to hand.

At the first meeting, an overview of the process is presented together with the community socio-economic data. This is followed by a preliminary discussion on the issues at the heart of the community. Together with agreeing the area covered by the community, the group undertakes a Community Audit to identify 'What have we got?' To ensure good participation, there are checks on 'who is missing' and members of the community undertake to invite those people to the next meeting; this process examines the 'missing' from the perspective of groups, sectors and geographies. At the second meeting, a SWOT[13] analysis is undertaken together with facilitated workshops to identify issues by sector and possible solutions. This meeting also identifies other people in the community who may have a particular interest in or knowledge of specific issues and members agree to invite the identified people to the next meeting.

At the third meeting, a review of the issues, which emerged at the previous meeting, takes place and these are grouped into sectors. The group identifies which organisation or agency could support implementation of the solutions to the issues. They then identify groups (3 to 5 people/group) who will take responsibility for each area of work identified. Each working group appoints a convenor and members exchange contacts. Prior to the agency meeting night, the small working groups work on their specific issues to ensure they are well prepared to meet the agencies and to discuss the issues.

[13] An analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

The fourth meeting is the 'agency meeting' (usually 6 weeks to 2months after the 3rd meeting) where the Community Working Groups meet with the relevant agencies and discuss potential support. The groups generally use a template to feedback from these meetings, which record Actions, Lead, Other Partners, Resources and Timeframe. This detail facilitates the compilation of a draft Community Socio-Economic action plan. The outcomes from this process are communicated to the agencies that attended the agency night, via a summary document, to check for any amendments. The amended document is then circulated widely in the community.

At the fifth meeting, the draft plan is presented for approval by the community. A Steering Committee or a specific organisation is identified to oversee implementation of plan.

A key outcome from the process is that the ownership of the plan and its implementation is with the community and its constituent groups.

What is clear is that there is no 'one true way' for community-led planning because every community is different, so a skilled facilitator will understand the particular local circumstances and adapt from a variety of methods to suit the community. A facilitator should not arrive in a community with pre-prescribed plans – it is important to listen and learn about the things that are already happening.

'No formula for effective engagement exists. How could it when every locality, with its own histories, environments and politics, is home to a host of unique relationships? Intuitively and methodologically, we need to examine the differences and emotions that keep people in opposition and we need to provide opportunities to build something new and unexpected. We also need to create open spaces where we can have the types of conversations that will bring people (especially those who tend to remain uninvited in traditional processes) close enough to engage together with an issue.

John Forester[14]

However, whatever method is used, we have reached a strongly held view that community-led planning should be fun and that it should be integrated into the existing traditions of a place – not as a 'one off' but as an ongoing commitment of residents to the healthy development of the neighbourhood where they live. We have learned much from Juliet Rose from the Eden Trust and Heidi Morgan from the Sensory Trust and their experiences of working alongside communities in the china clay villages near St Austell.

http://www.clayfutures.org.uk/

The third engagement approach that we highlight was used in 'Which Way for the Clay'[15] community planning process in Cornwall. Elements that worked really well were:

- Creating a convivial space in which people could reflect on and hold conversations about what they want and need for the future of their community and taking basic hospitality seriously as an integral part of the engagement process (usually involving tea and cakes).
- Creating a space that appealed to people of different ages and abilities, especially people who did not usually participate. Making the process enjoyable and fun! Playful techniques were used to encourage creative and imaginative responses.
- Allowing people to get to know more about their area through old and new photos and aerial maps of the area, recognising the role of memory in feeding the imagination
- Encouraging service providers and community development organisations to take part.
- Inspiring people with new ideas and new aspirations.
- Recognising and building upon the existing knowledge and experience held within the community.
- Connecting people who share ideas about a particular theme and letting them work together
- Encouraging people to think positively about their locality and helping to celebrate and highlight what is/was good about the community.

[14] Forester, John, (1999) *The Deliberative Practitioner: Encouraging Participatory Planning Processes*

[15] Clay Futures Project (2009) *Which Way for the Clay – Creative Community Engagement Report*

- Asking open questions to help people think about the broader needs and values
- Listening carefully and taking people's responses seriously
- Giving locally elected representatives the opportunity to participate.
- Providing detailed local information for those who are interested
- Encouraging inter-generational conversations.

http://fieryspirits.com/video/clayfutures-effective

Spotlighting these three methods for community-led planning demonstrates that it is time to go beyond business-as-usual civic engagement. It's not enough to just find out the public's priorities and concerns or seek public buy-in on pre-determined community plans and policies. Citizens represent a tremendously underutilised community asset: a source of wisdom and creativity in finding solutions to the complex issues that face communities everywhere. The challenge is to find ways to bring out the public's tacit knowledge through creative community engagement.

'Adopting a spirit of welcoming and hospitality in community engagement practice allows us to talk about beauty, poetry and dreams alongside arterial roads, public parks and housing. We can also welcome reflection about the language we use and commit ourselves to ongoing creative inquiry in our practice. As we attempt to re-imagine the lines and spaces of practice – studying and using experimental methods to invite others to listen and share in the multiplicity of voices around them – we discover many points of difference. Our dream is to welcome multiplicity and difference in our engagement processes and to illustrate the power of creativity in nurturing inclusion and community transformation'.[16]

During our investigations we have seen a wide variety of techniques used in community led planning. We are not going to provide detailed commentary on other community led planning methods here; you can find much valuable information from the following websites:

http://www.acre.org.uk/communityledplanning.html

http://towns.org.uk/knowledge-hub/policy-into-practice-2/community-led-planning/

http://www.nalc.gov.uk/Latest_News/Community_Led_Planning.aspx

[16] Sarkissian, W and Hurford, D (2010) *Creative Community Planning -Transformative Engagement Methods for Working at the Edge*, Earthscan

Some findings from our action research on community-led planning

So far we have looked at a sample of techniques that can be used to determine the priorities of local people in a settlement. We have stressed how important it is that planners and other public sector officials are involved in the process, to achieve integration between the plans that are community and the resulting statutory plans. From our action research we conclude that:

- When people in rural settlements are invited to participate in participatory planning processes they do so with great enthusiasm. Rural communities contain very skilled and resourceful people and their community action plans generally embrace sustainability, are imaginative and attempt to be socially inclusive.
- Most communities that have participated in community-led planning have developed enhanced capacities and skills. Their action plan prompts new projects to be developed.
- The extent to which the outcomes of a community-led planning process are adopted by decision-makers and the degree of explanation given where the outcomes are not adopted is crucial. The experience of the communities in that regard is mixed.
- In some communities, as a result of participating in community-led planning, residents have seen their priorities addressed and have developed an enhanced relationship with the agencies and bodies.
- In other communities, however, the experience of adoption of their priorities by local authorities and agencies has been less positive. In some cases the goals and actions that seemed to be agreed in the community-led planning process by officers were not reflected in formal plans and policies; in other cases decision-makers were perceived to act in ways that seemed to disregard the views of the community; and in other cases investments fundamental to the future of the communities were not made or were significantly delayed.
- Where community experiences of a collaborative process are not good, the relationships between the community and the agencies and organisations with which they interact can become worse than before. An undelivered expectation gives rise to cynicism and an unwillingness to participate in similar exercises in the future.

Structural changes in the planning system to assist community-led planning

Our investigation of what works well in the world of community-led planning has led us to conclude that there are many structural changes that need to be implemented if local people are really going to be able to influence the development of their area. There are challenges for professionals, elected members and for communities themselves.

Integrating community plans within the statutory planning system

There are potentially two parallel processes: community-led planning (as in the socio-economic plans that Ballyhoura Development have been involved with) and plans obligated or required under legislation. The challenge is to integrate these, with sequencing of plans designed so that the priorities identified by communities can inform the drawing up of statutory plans.

Integrating statutory planning within the wider socio-economic plans of an area

Planning is about land use and promoting high standards of development in cities, towns and rural areas. It establishes the essential infrastructure we need. Creating excellent public services (schools, hospitals, affordable housing, renewable energy) requires investment in infrastructure and buildings, so it is essential that there is synergy between the work of planners and a wide range of other public, private and non-profit officials. Planners need to reflect on social and economic goals. There is a need, across an area like a county, for an integrated plan that considers the service needs of communities in the future to ensure that the necessary infrastructure is in place.

With the greater significance of localities and neighbourhoods in the planning system, it becomes sensible to have multi-disciplinary area-based teams or community resource units within the public sector rather than old fashioned 'departments' with a strict demarcation of duties.

Funding of good facilitation

A common feature in all our case studies of successful community-led planning is the essential role of expert facilitation. The evaluation of the Julianstown Village Design Statement highlight the characteristics of a great facilitator:

> *The facilitator is considered to have exhibited an extraordinary rapport with the community and an innate understanding of the importance of process to a community development type programme. Expertise was used to promote discussion rather than to identify definitive solutions and the programme was based on collaborative discovery of key issues rather than on an inflexible objective-setting approach. The process demanded a totally flexible approach and meetings were mostly held at times which might be considered to be unsociable. This flexibility was also manifested in the facilitator's ability to recognise that any agenda might be subject to 'change without notice'. The overall professionalism of the facilitator ensured that the final document was representative of the entire consultation process and was very well honed. It is considered as essential that any facilitators should have as a core element of their modus operandi the building of community capacity. Given the intense nature of the process, it is considered appropriate that the level of remuneration should adequately reflect the demands of the process.*[17]

[17] Tipperary Institute (2010) *Evaluation of Julianstown VDS for the Heritage Council*

There is a danger that during a time of budget cuts, the relatively modest requirement for facilitation will be overlooked. Communities will then be left to their own devices, with a great risk that the end product will be an action plan that is not robust enough to be accepted by public sector and other partners.

Communities do not just need assistance in drawing up an action plan but should also be able to access advice during implementation.

There is a precedent for the provision of funding for expert facilitation; the parish plans programme[18] organised by the Commission for Rural Communities and county-based Rural Community Councils provided pump-priming funds for such plans.

Continuity is everything in community-led planning

Carnegie's Rural Action Research Programme (RARP) demonstrated that communities need the financial means, support and facilitation in order that they can:

- Understand how to set about articulating their concepts, visions and objections and
- Engage with the agencies of the state and planners.

The experience of RARP partners has illustrated that time-limited or issue specific government-led community-led planning initiatives are all well and good, but the real prize is the sustained engagement of the local community. To this end, the experience of partners at Devon Heartlands has shown that a well-supported mechanism (in this case a community forum) is an excellent way of maintaining ongoing community engagement in planning and civic matters generally. They have demonstrated that these goals can be achieved in a cost-effective manner, providing it is linked and valued by the authorities as a portal between the community and service providers and decision makers.

Moves towards greater citizen involvement in local decision-making (localism) and improved local democracy require effective arenas in which this can be fostered. The Devon Heartlands Community Forum[19] example is worth mentioning within this context as it has enabled that community to engage beyond the life of yet another 'initiative' (in this case the Market Towns Initiative) and has thus matured to the point that the community has been able to challenge and participate. For example, the Forum has enabled the community to challenge aspects of the District Core Strategy and to contribute substantially to discussions on the provision of services (including plans for a new school, hospital services, policing, youth services, care for the elderly and local development of community assets).

This goes to very core of what we all hope to achieve through greater community involvement and is an outcome consistent with the aims articulated by the Integrated Area Planning model, with its enhanced focus on relationships of local communities with planning and planners; in the past community-led planning in England has had a less structured and ad-hoc approach to the formal planning process.

Future proofing; horizon scanning 5-10 years ahead

There is a temptation for residents involved in community-led planning to concentrate only on current issues – the things that they know about and understand and currently occupy the headlines in the local press. However, during changing times, communities need to plan ahead if they are not to be caught out when an essential service is withdrawn.

Expert facilitators will ensure that future scenarios are considered; what would need to happen if the community wished to install its own wind turbines? Could affordable housing units be built within the village? Would the narrow village lanes cope with increased traffic?

If there are really contentious issues in a settlement, lifting the debate by considering what things might look like in 10 or 15 years can help engage warring parties in constructive debate.

[18] **http://www.parishplanning.co.uk/background.html**

[19] **http://www.devonheartlands.co.uk/**

Succession planning, growing leaders

It is very common for a small band of volunteers to shoulder most to the work involved in community-led planning. It is desirable to plan for succession by recruiting from a wider pool. First you have to attract a bigger audience.

Community-led planning is not a process just for the 'usual suspects' but how on earth can you encourage wider participation? Eden Trust found it essential to hold meetings in comfortable venues rather than formal town halls. These might include football clubs, supermarkets or schools. Getting kids involved is smart, as they bring in their parents. Young people always respond to the chance to film and photograph their community.

We have already promoted a creative and fun approach; this might mean spending time making bunting, getting hold of aerial photographs and creating 3-D models (people love these). Also if people are meeting anyway, an agricultural show or fete for instance, then you have a captive audience.

Drop-in sessions should reflect the availability of different groups in the community – inevitably this means long hours.

Our action researchers have found that, whilst time-poor working people cannot commit to participation in general steering groups, they do find it possible to join sharply focussed 'task and finish' groups.

Facilitators report that more people are willing to get involved – they are just waiting to be asked. Being involved can be very rewarding and new friendships flourish. This helps cement the process of community-led planning in the traditions of a place.

Need for capacity building

There is a skills and knowledge gap among the various stakeholders charged with implementing participative processes and a combination of Continuing Professional Development and informal training programmes will be required to enable the effective implementation of such processes. The focus of such training needs to encompass skills of collaboration, consultation, working with elected members and understanding and problem-solving.

An enhanced role for local councillors

A new focus on community-led planning could have additional benefits in relation to local elected representatives, who have an enhanced role in communicating to their peers and officers about locally identified priorities. Carnegie UK Trust was invited by the County Council in Herefordshire to hear more about exciting developments in Herefordshire; in particular of the 'Hearts of Herefordshire' initiative which is developing the role of ward councillors.

Hearts of Herefordshire began in early 2009, as a politically-led approach that connects local councillors with their communities. Politicians are of their place, recognise the resourcefulness of communities and know their electorate well. If given support they can work with local community leaders to convene public services around what matters most in their communities – and in so doing restore confidence in democracy and strengthen local society.

The scheme aims to take the town hall to the village hall to aid politicians' understanding of what matters most to communities and will help them to involve residents in getting it sorted. Rural councillors should be the eyes and ears of the community, but they need support from council officials. Herefordshire politicians have decided that they have far more influence when they listen rather than trying to control. More details of this initiative can be found at the following link:

http://21st.cc/studies/herefordshire.jsp

In the Integrated Area Planning pilot area, the active involvement of local elected representatives on the steering group in Ferbane was notable. Such deep understanding of local circumstances through engagement of councillors in the community-led planning process allowed subsequent political decisions about the allocation of financial resources to be made. We are encouraged by such experiences and believe that a renaissance of local democracy may well be a welcome by-product of community-led planning.

Participative budgets

The allocation of financial resources is very much tied up with planning decisions and one way in which the community can influence financial priorities is through participatory budgeting.

Participatory budgeting allows the citizens of an area (neighbourhood or local authority area) to participate in the allocation of part of the local Council's or other statutory agencies' (health services, police) available financial resources. Participatory Budgeting aims to increase transparency, accountability, understanding and social inclusion in local government affairs. We discuss this option in greater detail in our sister publication *A Shareholders' Guide to Local Services*.[20]

Building in accountability by determining what the outcomes of planning are expected to be and reporting and measuring progress, with consequences of non-delivery.

Publishing a statutory plan for an area, incorporating the priorities of local communities is not the end of the story. Plans should be outcome based and local people should expect regular progress reports, with explanations in the case of non-delivery. Communities should also be accountable, reporting on their achievements against actions in their own plan.

[20] Carnegie UK Trust (2010) *A Shareholders' Guide to Local Services*

A Summary: Our vision for a collaborative planning system

Our action research suggests that it is possible to use community-led plans as the foundation stone of a reformed collaborative planning system. This would require some further cultural change within the planning profession: change that would actually provide better outcomes for communities and planners:

- In a collaborative planning system planners do not impose their opinions but consult widely and incorporate the robust findings of community action plans. The planner of the future is much more of a facilitator than a prescriber. As a result of this process there will be general agreement and consensus on the desired outcomes of plans. Planners would, however, experience some challenges in implementing a collaborative planning system: a need to accept discussion rather than argument and a willingness to go into a conversation without a fixed view of what the outcome should be. The planner may need to implement the agreed outcomes of the process even where he or she did not fully agree with them.
- It is important that all participants undertake a collaborative planning process in good faith. The involvement of those in a position to deliver on undertakings made during the planning process becomes extremely important. A series of goals and outcomes that cannot be delivered may well be a worse outcome than not engaging in a collaborative process at all.
- Planners have a critically important role in identifying the boundaries (legal, financial, technical) within which communities must work and acknowledge. The planner also needs to provide advice on how the agreed outcomes might best be achieved. A collaborative planning system therefore needs to harness the planner's analytic skill and knowledge in guiding dialogue with communities so that resulting plans are realistic and achievable.
- Many agencies and state organisations are governed by centrally determined goals, objectives and programmes and have little flexibility to respond to the needs of individual communities. What is important, however, is that these limitations are made clear during the collaborative process.
- Existing local partnerships do offer paths to participation that the representative system cannot always offer.
- A change to a more collaborative approach challenges power structures at the levels of the community and local government; it requires experts to adopt a far less prescriptive approach. Formal structures of decision-making have tended to be expert-led and to be based more in the representative than the participatory forms of governance. Such an approach would demand of politicians share some of their decision-taking power with members of the communities they represent. While continuing to be elected representatives for a particular area, their role in the planning process would be to act as champion for the plans drawn up by the community.
- Collaborative planning will require changes in the education of planners and other professionals to equip them to work effectively with communities and to respond to their needs.
- Community participation must be resourced. Merely offering the community the opportunity to participate is not always enough to increase participation rates. Promoting participation among the most marginalised in the community requires extra effort. In order to overcome these problems, it is necessary to go out into the community and actively encourage participation through a range of targeted measures.
- It is recommended that local authorities sub-contract the participatory aspect of local area planning to neutral bodies with credibility and experience of excellent community engagement.
- One of the intentions of the opening up of the planning process is to create improved relationships between the public and local authorities by opening up new communication channels.
- Planners have much to gain from a collaborative planning system: they are able to access deep local knowledge and understanding. The process ensures a reduction in the influence of those acting primarily in their personal interest. There is a possibility of greater acceptance of specific decisions (particularly contentious ones) when linked to the achievement of agreed outcomes.

Charter of Rights and Responsibilities for the community

If local people are to influence the future development of their area, there are some responsibilities that they (through their representative organisations) have to take on. In doing so, the local authorities and other public bodies have an obligation to provide support:

1 On Community-Led Planning

Every neighbourhood or community should develop its own 'rolling' community action plan which should be future focused, identifying assets (tangible and intangible) that need to be developed, conserved or enhanced for the benefit of the community as a whole. This should be action orientated and drawn up with the full engagement of statutory and other partners.

2 On Community Engagement

Planners and other public sector officials should acknowledge the priorities in community action plans and identify ways of responding to these, to use the information and insights of local communities to inform their future statutory plans. They should inform the community of the external imperatives, which must inform their final plan. This should be done in the context of the community owning a tacit knowledge, insight and information to enhance the planning process and add another dimension to the quantitative and factual information provided by experts. In order to achieve such an outcome a number of elements are critical:

a) Sequencing of community and statutory plans needs to be carefully considered to ensure local priorities are available to influence statutory plans

b) Setting out the boundaries imposed by statutory requirements which are not open to change

c) Pro-actively seeking out the issues identified by the community at as early a stage as possible

d) Working closely with local elected representatives as important points of contact in the community

e) Treating the outcomes of community-led planning with respect so that what emerges from them is reflected as far as possible in the final plan and, where not reflected, it is made clear as to why this is so

f) Maintaining communication with communities so that they are aware of the stage the process has reached and the impact of their input

3 On facilitation

Facilitation that is independent plays an important part of a community-led planning process, ensuring that it is purposeful and positive and that the results are robust enough for planners.

4 On training and development

Planning Authorities and other partners are encouraged to facilitate the provision of training in the use of participatory approaches for relevant members of their staff. Similarly, support should be available for community leaders. There are also important implications for university planning departments as they prepare the planners for the future.

5 Focusing on outcomes

In formulating plans, officials should focus on identifying the outcomes that are sought by communities for their areas, designing policies and actions that will achieve these outcomes.

Appendix 1: Planning in England

At a national level, Town and Country Planning is the system that the government uses to balance economic development and environmental quality. The Town and Country Planning Act of 1947 created the framework and this has not changed much since then.

There has also always been a split between planning the developments that can or cannot take place and planning for social and economic development. Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS) were introduced in England in 2004 to establish a vision and strategy specific to the region, identifying areas for development or regeneration, including targets for house building, for a period of about 20 years ahead. Regional Assemblies – indirectly elected bodies drawing representatives from local government and partner organisations, devised these strategies but generally few of the electorate ever knew of their existence. The Regional Spatial Strategies were revoked and funding for the Regional Leaders' Boards (the structure that replaced Regional Assemblies) cut, as one of the first acts of the incoming Coalition Government in 2010. At the same time and in parallel to the development of RSS, unelected Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) developed Regional Economic Strategies (RES) – the new government has abolished both.

'Communities will no longer have to endure the previous government's failed Soviet tractor style top-down planning targets – they were a terrible, expensive, time-consuming way to impose house building and worst of all threatened the destruction of the Green Belt. Today I'm revoking regional plans with immediate effect – hammering another nail in the coffin of unwanted and an unaccountable regional bureaucracy. They were a national disaster that robbed local people of their democratic voice, alienating them and entrenching opposition against new development'.

Rt. Hon. Eric Pickles, M.P., Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

It looks as if things might be getting simpler? Local authorities have a role in planning matters – one that has been reasserted by the Coalition Government. The local authority and key partners meet as a Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and they have responsibility for producing a Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) that sets out the vision for the area. There are 360 LSPs in England! Then there are Local Area Agreements (LAAs), normally for a three-year period, based on the SCS vision, setting out improvement targets for the priorities of a local area. The LAA is made between Central Government, represented by the Government Office (although this regional level of central government has been abolished following an announcement in the Comprehensive Spending Review) and local authorities and their partners on the LSP.

Encouraging news

The Coalition Government has promised a radical reform of the planning system to give neighbourhoods far more ability to determine the shape of the places in which their inhabitants live, returning decision-making powers on matters such as housing targets and planning to local councils. And all those targets in the Local Area Agreements will no longer be reported to central Government.

Further reforms are due; for example on how the Government propose to take forward ideas for a simple and consolidated national planning framework.

Sitting below the (now defunct) Regional Spatial Strategies are Local Development Frameworks – (LDFs) – a complex portfolio of spatial planning policies that operate at the local authority level. They are quite separate from the SCS and have been produced by different people in different departments of the local authority. The Town and Country Planning (Local Development)(England) (Amendment) Regulations 2008 tried to help streamline the process and LSPs were encouraged to look on the LDF as a tool to deliver their priorities.

Interestingly, LDFs include a 'Statement of Community Involvement' to explain to the public how they can be involved. The idea is that better public engagement in the process will ensure that decision-making is transparent and accountable and reflects local needs. It will also encourage community 'ownership' of plans and policies. Why not check out a few council websites and look at their Statements? You will see that they commit to hold meetings in accessible places, to put adverts in the local press, to identify the organisations they will speak to and some may go further to incorporate really engaging events.

The incoming government viewed the LDFs as excessively detailed and not capturing any sort of community vision.

In the place of the 8 (outside London) Regional Development Agencies, England is to be served by Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) – initially 56 of them, to 'take a grip' on local economic challenges.

'In some areas, there might be a focus on skills. In others, local enterprise partnerships may help set priorities for planning and infrastructure decisions. The key is that these partnerships are built from the bottom-up and will have the flexibility to determine their own agenda, rather than have it handed down to them by Whitehall.'

Rt. Hon Vince Cable, M.P., Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills

Confused by the alphabet soup? There are even more plans! Over the years there has been a succession of short-term initiatives, usually requiring their very own plan. New Deal for Communities, Market Town and Coastal Town Initiatives with their Health Checks, Single Regeneration Budget, LEADER II and LEADER+ – all had their own strategies, plans and partnerships.

Even local areas have been involved in their own version of planning – community-led planning, embracing social and economic outcomes. **The Rural Programme at Carnegie considers these local plans to be essential for communities who are planning their futures and a building block for the emerging slimmed down planning system.**

Appendix 2: Planning in the other four jurisdictions

Ireland

Land-use planning is one of the most decentralised aspects of government in the Republic of Ireland. Within guidelines set by National Government and Regional Authorities, it is largely left to Local Planning Authorities to decide on the policies that they should adopt for their areas and to make the decisions on specific planning applications. The Planning and Development Act of 2000 governs the Irish planning system and the regulations made under it.

The Republic of Ireland has a national strategic planning framework – the National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020. It aims to achieve a better balance of social, economic and physical development across Ireland, supported by more effective and integrated planning. This is then translated into regional and local planning by regional and local authorities and is taken up in the plans and programmes of Government Departments and agencies.

Plan-making and development management decision making takes place at county or city level - through 29 County Councils, 5 City Councils, 5 Borough Councils and 75 Town Councils. Plan-making is reserved to the elected members, whereas most development management (decisions on planning applications) matters are delegated to county/city managers. An independent board - An Bord Pleanala - exists to hear appeals against the refusal or grant of planning permission and the application of conditions. This provides rights of third party appeal that are not found in the UK - meaning that people other than the applicant for planning permission can appeal a planning decision. In theory the Irish planning system therefore facilitates higher levels of participation than the UK system. However, despite the theoretical openness of the system, public participation has been far greater with regard to planning applications than it has been to the planning policy development system. Most local authorities in Ireland receive a relatively poor response when they invite comments on their draft five-year development plan for the area, or hold public meetings on the subject. However, when an application for a large development project is lodged, the Council can receive hundreds, or sometimes thousands, of observations. It may be suggested, of course, that it is easier to engage with the issues surrounding specific concrete proposals than it is to participate on discussions on complex and multi-faceted policy. However, the policies that are adopted in the Development Plan are often amongst the key determinants of the decision made regarding a specific development proposal. In a very real way, by the time it comes to commenting on a specific proposal it is too late if the policy issues have already been settled in a particular way.

Planning systems in Ireland are just as complex as in the UK; even where local communities are pro-active they are often faced with a large volume of legislation, complex procedures, jargon and a wealth of government guidance and policy. The Irish Planning legislation does provide substantial opportunity for participation by individuals and communities in the planning process both in the policy-making and development management areas. Indeed the potential for participation is significantly greater than that afforded in other jurisdictions. However, the manner in which these opportunities are put into effect can reduce rather than enhance the electorate's sense of involvement. Many communities and civil society organisations feel that participation in the process is fruitless as they rarely impact on what has already been largely decided. This can result in a diminution of active citizenship rather than its enhancement.

From this it is clear that the decisions of the Planning Authority are very policy-related and that the Development Plan is one of the key policy documents that determine these decisions. Citizen participation in the making of these policies, therefore, is a critical element in facilitating input into the making of the decisions regarding individual developments that the development control system regulates.

Scotland

The really important legislation guiding planning in Scotland is the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 which was amended by the Planning Etc. (Scotland) Act 2006. The changes were designed to improve the process and make the planning system more transparent and efficient, with plans that are more concise, action-orientated, clear and visionary.

There is a hierarchy of plans: the National Development Framework sets out developments of national significance and Strategic Development Plans cover the biggest cities (Aberdeen, Dundee, Glasgow and Edinburgh and their hinterlands – so called city regions) in Scotland.

The key issues for Strategic Development Plans will be the supply of land for housing, as well as major business and shopping uses. Protection of environmental assets and the provision of important infrastructure such as transport, waste, water and energy will also be covered, as may the promotion of green belts and networks. Strategic Development Plans form the upper tier of the development-planning framework, with Local Development Plans sitting below.

The relevant council prepares the Local Development Plans. Outside Strategic Development Plan areas there will be a single tier development plan – just a Local Development Plan.

Each planning authority is obliged to prepare a consultation statement, indicating how it intends to consult all sectors of its community, including young people. There are examples under the existing regime of special arrangements for consulting young people, such as the Highland Youth Forum, which was formed in 2001 to assist with the preparation of the Highland Structure Plan. In a model that may be useful in other jurisdictions, people can expect to be engaged early in the process following the publication of a Main Issues Report which will identify the key areas of change that need to be addressed.

Good Practice: In 2007, the Scottish Government published a Planning Advice Note (81) on Community Engagement within the planning system. This contains advice on techniques for consultation with all groups, including young people, and on working with other partners interested in effective consultation.

Good Practice: Planning Aid for Scotland (and the equivalent in Wales) provides a free, impartial and professional advice service to help people understand and engage with the planning system. Volunteers provide this service, all fully qualified and experienced planners based throughout Scotland. These experts give free advice on any planning issue, from home extensions, wind farms, schools, public spaces, new shopping centres and roads, how to support or object to planning applications, how to get planning permission and how to get involved with Developments Plans. They also help with questions about planning appeals, enforcement and anything else.

Wales

Substantial responsibility for town and country planning has been devolved to the Welsh Assembly Government. The Assembly Government's national land use planning policies are set out in Planning Policy Wales. Each authority in Wales is required to prepare a local development plan and a community strategy for its area. There is an attempt at integration of these plans: community strategies should provide the overarching strategic framework for all the other plans and strategies for the local authority and Local Development Plans should express those elements of the community strategy that relate to the development and use of land.

The spatial planning approach in Wales is a key mechanism in joining up a range of activities: nationally, regionally and locally as an essential link between strategy and action.

Good practice: Although not part of the statutory development plan framework, the Wales Spatial Plan is the overarching framework and integration tool for Wales. It provides important underpinning in a whole range of matters, for example:

- Economic development and the long term goal of full employment at a rate of 80%;
- Regeneration programmes in various parts of Wales;
- Improving skill levels in the workforce;
- Improving regional and national strategic planning for transport;
- Reducing annual greenhouse gas emissions;
- Understanding and meeting affordable housing needs;
- Making the right decisions, and getting the most benefit from specific major investment decisions, affecting public services;
- Helping to shape our capital investment though the Strategic Capital Investment Framework.

Just as in other jurisdictions, there is a hierarchy of plans; beneath the National Spatial Strategy are area strategies (such as the one for largely rural Central Wales) and beneath that community strategies. However, for a small country, with only three million people, Wales is blessed with a great many subject specific strategies that have to relate in some way or other to the Wales Spatial Plan.

Northern Ireland

In September 2001, the Department for Regional Development (DRD) published the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025. This provides a long-term view on the future development of Northern Ireland to 2025 and is subject to an ongoing review process. It sets out the number of new homes that will be needed in each council area and contains guidance on the future development of cities, towns and rural areas as well as on the environment, economy and transport.

The Planning Service develops and implements Government planning policies and development plans in Northern Ireland. Development Plans usually cover a 15-year period but can be reviewed and amended as necessary during this time. Their aim is to ensure that there is enough land available for the expected needs for the area in terms of housing, employment and community facilities etc. while at the same time, protecting significant landscape and environmental features. Their contents are an important consideration in dealing with planning applications.

There are various types of Development Plans:

- Area Plans – these cover one or more council areas and are the main type of Development Plan
- Local Plans – these cover a smaller area, such as a town centre
- Subject Plans – these deal with a particular type of development within a particular area

A comprehensive reform of the planning system was announced in November 2007 to address development plans, policy and development management. The NI Executive agreed to the final policy proposals for reform of the planning system in February 2010, including the measures necessary to transfer the majority of planning functions to new District Councils under the RPA. However, at a special meeting of the Northern Ireland Executive on 14th June 2010, Executive Ministers were not able to come to an agreement on the way forward for local government reform, which means the new councils will not be created in May 2011 as had previously been envisaged, nor will functions such as planning be transferred to them at that point.

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Carnegie UK Trust
Andrew Carnegie House
Pittencrieff Street
Dunfermline
KY12 8AW

Tel: 01383 721445
www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk

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