



local development frameworks

delivering the vision





executive summary

This case study draws on emerging good practice to show how councils have responded to the challenge of spatial plan making.

The study shows how these councils have put their Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) centre-stage, allowing them to deliver on corporate objectives such as sustainable communities. The study also highlights the benefits this brings to communities, local authorities and Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP).

The guidance on spatial planning in Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 12 is clear: planning policy needs to make links with other policies and programmes – the most strategic of which is the sustainable community strategy. This integration requires planners to build relationships within and outside their council.

Steve Packham, the Chief Executive for Chelmsford, neatly sums up the sentiment that should be captured by all chief executives and senior managers of planning departments:

‘We have now got to the point where we wonder how anyone could think that a community plan could deliver what it is supposed to without being linked into the LDF.’

This case study draws on interviews with representatives from the following councils:

- Chelmsford Borough Council
- Hambleton District Council
- Horsham District Council
- Sevenoaks District Council
- Sheffield City Council
- Wycombe District Council.

These interviews have shown that there are some common elements in understanding the relationship between the LDF and the corporate planning of the councils namely:

- securing corporate support early
- integrating work
- explaining the planning system
- highlighting how the LDF can help deliver other objectives.

The case study explores the benefits of better integration between process and outcome and the results of having a positive relationship between the LDF and the corporate strategy. These benefits include:

- joined-up working
- ownership by local communities
- gains in efficiency
- integrated planning
- customer focused planning.



The case study has found that while each council's approach is unique and tailored to their needs, there are broad similarities between authorities who have successfully integrated their LDF with their sustainable communities strategies and other relevant strategies. Equally there is a communality of experience as to the various advantages that such closeness brings in terms of efficiency, clarity and customer focus.



how to get an LDF centre-stage

get corporate support early

It is only with the active support of leaders, members and chief executives that the LDF will be regarded and used as a clear statement of corporate will.

Ted Cante, an Associate Director at IDeA and Chair of the Society of Local Authority Chief Executive's (SOLACE) Environment Panel, believes that LDFs and sustainable community strategies are inextricably linked. He notes that councils and their partners need to embrace this combination:

'Sustainability has moved to the top of the political agenda which means that sustainable community strategies will become even more important. Senior officers and chief executives can help to reflect the aspirations of their local communities by making sure that the LDFs are the spatial expression of those aims and that there are clear links, in all respects, between their sustainable community strategy and the LDF – from preparation to implementation.'

The experience of some of the case study authorities bears this out.

Chelmsford recognised that it was located in an area of significant growth and the LDF and the sustainable community strategy would need to reflect and manage this. The Chief Executive, Steve Packham, decided that in producing the LDF, the council needed to work with its partners via the LSP to develop a shared vision, backed by joint spending, to help meet the community's aspirations. While this has taken extra organisation and has required a 'degree of maturity' from the LSP and planning staff, in practice this integration has been very successful, with acceptance from all involved that working together is the way forward to achieve their shared vision. It was crucial that the chief executive was a driving force behind this approach.

'Bringing the community strategy and LDF closer together has cultivated a level of enthusiasm that didn't exist previously'

Steve Packham, Chief Executive, Chelmsford Borough Council

integrate work

If actions are to be jointly developed and owned by councils and their LSP partners, then evidence from the case study authorities indicates that structures and working practices need to reflect this aspiration.

Sevenoaks used an away day for members and senior officers to discuss proposals for producing the LDF and the revised sustainable community strategy together. Participants concluded that there were so many similarities between the two that it made sense to merge some of the processes such as the consultation process. Practically, this meant realigning timescales: the first LDF options paper was delayed slightly, and the sustainable community strategy review was brought forward to ensure joint consultation.

In **Sheffield**, the LDF team is working increasingly closely with the city's LSP. The LDF Project Leader, Peter Rainford, believes that the first requirement of integration is 'to keep in touch'. This has included a monthly meeting between the LSP director and the coordinating group for the LDF, contributing to a 'good working relationship' between the director of the community strategy and the planners.

Hambleton's head of planning policy and economic development is also in charge of community and transport planning. When the council began work on its sustainable community strategy it naturally sat within this area. This integration has enabled the council to run joint consultation events for the sustainable community strategy and the LDF, staffed by both planning policy and community planning officers. These events ensured that the authority and LSP partners had a common understanding of local issues and priorities, resulting in the closer alignment between the sustainable communities plan and the LDF.

Wycombe held interactive meetings between planning staff and the LSP to discuss emerging key issues, including how best to consult the public. Wycombe's planning team and the LSP are also publishing a joint newsletter to help underline the links between the LDF and the sustainable community strategy.

'Working jointly is a confidence boost for ensuring that all the significant issues have been taken into account – both the LDF and the community plan are stronger because of the dialogue'

Jerry Unsworth, Head of Planning and Sustainability, Wycombe District Council

explain the planning system

The new planning system is different from that which preceded it. At the same time as planners are getting used to the changes, they also need to explain it to their partners and local communities to enable them to participate in it.

Horsham has put considerable effort into helping stakeholders, including the Horsham LSP, understand the new planning system. For example, the council held a workshop for developers, agents and planning consultants operating in the local area, developed a booklet and ran drop-in sessions on how to make effective representations at the submission stage of the new system. Officers have also visited parish councils and met with local action group representatives. Whilst undertaking these activities officers were mindful of the need to emphasise how the planning process can help achieve outcomes, rather than just be a process for the sake of it.

In **Sevenoaks**, like many other places, most members of the LSP were not particularly familiar with planning. To help them understand spatial planning, officers presented a real-life planning application to a meeting of the LSP, a proposal to convert an old industrial site to housing. The planners used this as a chance to get the LSP members to think about the implications of this new development for their service areas – what new services would be



required as a consequence of the development? What would be the impacts on their service areas? This was a real learning experience for the LSP partners and has led to better forward service planning because they are more able to anticipate the impacts of new development.

‘LSP members are now much more planning literate and can make more effective contributions to the LDF’

Lesley Bowles, Community Development Manager, Sevenoaks District Council

highlight how the LDF can help meet other objectives

In order to get chief executives and LSPs to take planning seriously as an essential delivery tool, planners must highlight how the LDF can help others achieve their objectives. This requires planners to think outside the planning framework and to ‘put themselves into other people’s shoes’.

In **Sheffield** the sustainable community strategy sets out five key ambitions for the city. A recent meeting of LSP partners looked jointly at the issue of improved public transport, one of those five ambitions, and used the LDF to demonstrate, as part of a wider policy discussion, how it can contribute to the city achieving its ambitions on transport. The LSP was also actively involved in a major public consultation event held by the planners leading, for example, workshop discussions on how the environmental challenges of the city can be addressed through the LDF. Specific events such as these are helping LSP partners appreciate what planning and the LDF can contribute to the city.

Hambleton’s LSP has a series of area groups, each of which prepares action plans for their area. Planners have met with LSP area and thematic groups at key stages in the process of preparing development plan documents. They have explained how the LDF can give spatial expression to detailed actions, for example providing more affordable housing and market town regeneration. Specifically, planners have been able to take area group proposals for the regeneration of individual market towns,



developed by the communities with the support of the Regional Development Agency, and include them in the LDF, allocating sites for development where these have been identified.

‘The LSP can see that the LDF is a powerful tool for implementing some of their priorities’

Mick Jewitt, Head of Planning and Economic Development, Hambleton District Council

the view from partners: what do LSP members think of planning and the LDFs?

Brian Paine is a member of the **Wycombe Partnership**. He is General Manager of the Buckinghamshire Lifelong Learning Partnership and believes that the LDF is now fairly well understood by the LSP members at Wycombe. The lifelong learning partnership is currently examining the future provision of community learning. It raises the question of long-term needs, and Brian Paine believes the LSP has a valuable role here when it comes to the LDF. ‘We are satisfied that there are links between the LDF and the community plan. But there is no point in having this relationship between the strategies if it is not monitored. The LSP will hopefully have an important watching brief on the implementation of the LDF.’

The Chair of Horsham Association of Local Councils, Paul Byford, is a member of the **Horsham District Council Community Strategy Board**. He says that the various meetings and presentations about the LDF have helped him to have a ‘good general grasp’ of how the LDF and sustainable community strategy, together with parish plans and design statements, can be integrated to meet local community needs. He believes that his parish concerns have been ‘taken on board’ by the LDF and has been impressed by efforts to explain the LDF to community members. For example, at a recent community strategy event for young people, the LDF was discussed and the information was well received.



benefits of integrating the LDF with other corporate strategies

Sustainable community strategies and LDFs are both likely to address certain key issues – such as the accessibility of housing, transport, health, education, training and jobs, waste reduction, recycling and renewable energy production. The processes involved in the preparation of both sets of documents are also similar – gathering evidence, involving the local community, appraising options, producing a core strategy, and developing an action plan.

joined-up working for real

The case study authorities are finding that making links between their community strategy and LDF is leading to better joint working between different parts of the local authority, and between the authority and its LSP partners. In **Horsham**, the new system has helped planners to learn to build relationships in and out of the council. While working in separate departments is the norm in public sector, the good news is that joined-up working, while difficult in the beginning, can be a better way of operating. Barbara Childs, LDF Project Manager, says that ‘in practice it has proved to be much easier to work in the same team. The head of department is responsible for helping to write both the community strategy and the core strategy.’ As a result, there is a high level of understanding about both strategies at a senior level in the organisation.

‘While joined-up is an overused expression, we really do seem to be working in this way much more now and reaping the benefits of that.’

Barbara Childs, LDF Project Manager, Horsham District Council

ownership by local communities

In councils where consultation on planning and the sustainable community strategy has been combined, officers are noticing that communities have a better understanding of what the strategies mean for their local area, and where their own views fit in, for



example as shown by the comments from Paul Byford, of the **Horsham District Council Community Strategy Board**, detailed previously.

better-informed planners

By working more closely with their LSP members, planners are seeing the value of liaising early with other major stakeholders in the area, and are learning to build new relationships in and out of the council. Planners are also encouraged by closer working to understand the constraints, such as funding arrangements, under which other service deliverers are operating. This has led to better and more timely delivery programmes. The example of **Sevenoaks** explained below illustrates how this increased working relationship has benefited the negotiations on major planning applications as the officers, through increased contact and discussion with the LSP partners, have a greater understanding of their needs to incorporate into the planning process.

gains in efficiency

Integrating consultation for LDFs and sustainable community strategies can reduce duplication, save money, and be a good focus for pooling resources. **Hambleton’s** joint consultation process, referred to previously, demonstrates this. Conversely, where councils are failing to integrate they may experience unnecessary duplication, a waste of resources, potentially conflicting plans and confusion in local communities.

promote the benefits of integration to planning – a two-way process

As well as highlighting how the LDF can achieve wider corporate objectives, the experience of the case study authorities shows how planning has benefited from integration with other corporate plans and processes.

Sevenoaks now ensures that development control planners take major planning applications to the LSP. They find it beneficial to have all the partners around the table as it makes negotiations with applicants much easier. Using this approach and identifying the LSP needs, the council has been able to secure the area’s

largest S106 agreement. The council has also involved front-line staff and the voluntary sector in consultations around the LDF through making use of the expertise of the community development team. The local knowledge of staff such as health workers – especially around community care, key worker housing and patient access to services – has been fed back into the plan-making process. The Community Development Manager, Lesley Bowles, believes that this demonstrates that joint working ‘has been of mutual benefit to the LDF too’. Officers have also noticed that communities have a better understanding of what the strategies mean for their area, and where their own views fit in.

be customer-focused

As well as the potential for saving time and money through undertaking joint consultations, some councils have realised that it fits with their objective to be customer-focused too.

Wycombe exploited the flexibility of its sustainable community strategy review timetable to plan it around the timescale for consultation on the LDF. Based on their understanding of how confusing it can be for communities to be consulted on multiple plans, Wycombe’s Head of Planning and Sustainability and Head of Policy, decided to undertake joint consultation. According to Charles Meakings, Head of Policy, one outcome of this approach has been that the LDF has given a local focus to the community strategy, which is something that communities can ‘latch onto’.

This aspiration to be customer-focused needs to extend to how communities are involved in joint consultations. **Chelmsford** wrote its consultation materials in user-friendly English to help engage the community, while **Sevenoaks** ‘goes to where the people are’ and uses existing community events to involve people in consultation, rather than expecting them to come to events which have been organised specifically for joint consultation on the plans.

‘We have moved from consulting people to working with them to achieve something – and that has to be a good thing’

Barbara Childs, LDF Project Manager, Horsham District Council

what does success look like – some hints and tips

While the approach of every council will be different, there are nonetheless some broad themes that are common to those authorities that have successfully integrated their LDF with their sustainable community strategies and other important corporate documents and partnerships.

- **Spatial planning policy needs to make links with other policies and programmes.** Council leaders, members and senior officers need to recognise that spatial planning and the LDF are significant tools which will help to deliver a range of corporate objectives as expressed in the sustainable community strategy. If LDFs are to be taken seriously then managers, members and partners need to be persuaded to participate early.
- **Integration with other strategies.** The best-laid plans involve considerable input from other perspectives and partners. LDFs benefit from widespread consultation and collaborative working. Efficient integration might include running joint consultations, pooling LSP resources, involving LSP members in developing the LDF or merging community planning with planning policy.
- **The benefits of this integration are two-way.** An example is that planners will be better informed about the needs of local communities and partner organisations and can feed this into spatial planning, and LSP members will understand how strategic aspirations can be achieved through the planning process. The processes for developing the documents have clear similarities and the benefits of integration result in many advantages for the area.
- **Linking the LDF with the sustainable community strategy makes sense to local communities.** Linking is one of the ways that councils can demonstrate their commitment to being customer-focused. It can make consultation more direct and demonstrate to the community how their concerns can be



addressed through spatial planning. Planning is full of jargon to non-planners. Ensure that LSP members and the general public have information that is presented in ways that they understand.

- Councils which have successfully integrated the LDF into their wider corporate processes are likely to have **influential champions** within the authority or LSP who recognise the benefits of spatial planning, **resources and structures that promote integration**, and **planners who are skilled at working collaboratively across different sectors** with people in other partner organisations.

more support and advice

- The Planning Advisory Service, in conjunction with the Planning Officers Society, will shortly be publishing a tool-kit to help planning officers 'make the case' for corporate managers to consider the role of the LDF in achieving corporate objectives.
- The RTPi is currently preparing detailed guidance on how LDFs can link with community strategies and the work of LSPs.



relevant guidance

Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 12: Local Development Frameworks Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping their future (consultation paper)

abbreviations used in this briefing

LDF – Local Development Framework

LSP – Local Strategic Partnership

PPS12 – Planning Policy Statement 12

The term 'sustainable community strategy' is used to refer to both community plan/community strategy, in line with anticipated forthcoming guidance.

For definitions of these and any other terms, see www.pas.gov.uk – glossary

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