

# Development Planning Workshop...

summary note of *Scottish Government workshop* - Edinburgh, Thursday 11 September 2014

*the event provided an update on Development Planning and explored what plans might be ...*

The workshop brought together representatives of Scottish Government policy areas who contribute to single responses to planning authorities as plans are prepared. The workshop considered the nature of what a plan is (and what it might be), with the aim of encouraging:

- a more joined up approach to development plans across SG
- reflection on what kind of plans SG want to see
- consideration of how SG policy officials can contribute to achieving these aims



## Setting the Scene

The Assistant Chief Planner, Fiona Simpson, introduced the workshop by highlighting a continuing commitment to a plan led system and recognised that development planning is a key vehicle for delivering policy aims of NPF and SPP through joint working across SG.

A brief overview summarised plan progress across Scotland (age, review stage), and a SG restructuring from a 'territorial approach' to a 'policy approach' with the establishment of the DP Gateway to collate a single SG response; this requires strong collaboration and effective communication. Key issues included the integration of supplementary guidance, use of action programmes and linking with community planning.

## What should plans be...?

Eric Dawson from Architecture + Design Scotland helped to facilitate a workshop to consider what a plan might be. Reference was made to [research into Graphic Communication in Strategic Development Plans commissioned by SG, SDP managers and A+DS](#) – whilst this focus is on graphics in plan making (and includes a range of supportive information) it also prompted consideration about the purpose and underlying messages of what a plan might be.

Participants initially worked in groups to rank twelve statements about plan expectations. Clear consensus existed regarding the 'top' three statements:

1. Development Plans promote good placemaking with policies and proposals that help to achieve high quality places
2. A Development Plan should identify what goes where and why, and provide a clear programme for actions
3. Development Plans are not just for planners; but for multiple audiences with differing needs

The following four had broad 'mid-range' support:

4. A Development Plan is a Development Management tool with clear policies
5. Development Plans should be engaging documents setting out what places are like, and the specific vision for them
6. Development plans should be a corporate document for the planning authority, Community Planning and other Partners
7. LDPs link with NPF, SPP, SOA and CPP; include MIR, SEA, EIA, HNDA, HRA and SG

Two of the statements achieved minimal scoring:

8. Development Plans should be visual documents and make more use of maps and plans
9. Development Plans contribute to the delivery of climate change targets, and ensure that all new buildings avoid a specified and rising proportion of the projected greenhouse gas emissions

Three comments weren't selected by any of the groups:

- a) It should be possible to negotiate a Development Plan through intuitive understanding
- b) A Development Plan is a promotional document for place to attract inward investment
- c) Development Plans should consider matters that extend beyond their boundaries



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The [research into Graphic Communication](#) identified 6 criteria for assessing a plan by asking 'Does the plan ...

- 1. PLACE** - ... demonstrate how it is rooted in an appreciation of place identity? (the qualities and characteristics of the area)
- 2. Vision** - ...convey an inspiring vision?
- 3. Prioritise** - ...communicate clearly the scale, location, focus and hierarchy of change?
- 4. Richness** - ...provide a three-dimensional richness to the plan that makes it come alive?
- 5. The Story** - ...explain the rationale and provide a compelling narrative?
- 6. Scalar** - ...span the scales – from strategic to local?

Prompted by these criteria and the earlier ranking of statements, the six groups reviewed a selection of plans drawn from Scottish and international examples. Group feedback provided a range of comments:

- If plans are for multiple audiences, avoid graphics that are baffling and complex
- Visions can read as 'motherhood-and-apple-pie'
- Plan shouldn't read as if it has 'top down' policies
- Messages should not be generic
- Why is key information located 'at the end'?
- Plans can be swamped by heavy branding /styling
- Lengthy, dull, dry documents don't engage
- Key information should 'stand out'
- There should be a clear feel for what is happening
- Plans should excite and engage
- Avoid over design and being text heavy

Overall, the key message was that plans should strike a balance between containing the necessary text to fulfil its purpose in relation to planning process, and being presented as visually appealing, succinct documents.

*One plan in particular - a plan for Sydney - received favourable comments from the group in terms of:*

- a strong vision
- a clear structure and format
- ability to access information
- an emphasis on deliverability
- good supporting information
- a logical intuitive format
- a 'people rather than policy focussed' plan based on strong ideas



## SG policy officials' contribution to plan making...

Robin Campbell, Senior Planner, provided more information about the Development Plan Gateway:

- A central mailbox contact point for all matters relating to the processing or content of Development Plans in Scotland, with a dedicated team that manages and monitors the Gateway
- Benefits include: a single point of contact and a co-ordinated approach; national overview of planning matters to monitor progress, trends and issues; a chance to provide a single co-ordinated SG response; greater consistency in responses.
- Comments should focus on policy priorities and seek to improve the plan - consider whether a plan is delivering on SPP and NPF3, and aligned with Ministerial priorities; be proportionate
- Identify innovative approaches and potential solutions

A final discussion amongst the groups examined the potential for a checklist to inform whether plans align with Ministerial policies and priorities, and what key things might be looked for within plans.

It was emphasised that rather than taking a 'tick-box' approach, comments should add value to the process. Participants welcomed the chance to review or 'self reflect' upon a combined SG response to identify how their individual responses worked together to provide coherent comments on the plan as a whole.

*... individual comments as part of informing a collective whole to positively shape the plan...*