



Planning positively through partnership

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Introduction

The planning system is vital for shaping the future growth of our society. Where it works well, it is one of the best tools that we have to unlock economic growth and to deliver the homes and jobs that are needed in our towns and cities. However, for this to happen developers, councils and local communities must work together to create effective partnerships, and do this as early as they can in the planning process, before the planning application is submitted.

This is now happening. Up and down the country we are seeing sites unlocked and high-quality buildings going up. Councils, developers and house-builders are making this happen by working together effectively.

The facts speak for themselves – planning approvals are at a 10-year high and December 2013 saw house building grow at its fastest pace in a decade, thanks to the combined efforts of both developers and councils.

This publication brings together case studies that highlight the huge breadth of effective partnership working that is now taking place – from small residential sites to large inner-city regeneration schemes. While there is no single model for success, the case studies have highlighted six valuable rules to help get things right:

1 Early discussion when local plans are being developed

Early engagement between councils, developers and communities while local plans are being developed is the best time to ensure that the scene is set for the direction and scale of development in the area. With policies in the plan that developers understand because they were engaged in the process, development proposals that fit with the plan can be brought forward more quickly, and meet fewer obstacles.

Case study 8: Bloor Homes Limited and Central Bedfordshire Council worked together during local plan preparation to smooth the delivery of their housing site.

2 Involvement in pre-application advice services

Pre-application engagement between all interested parties helps shape better quality developments that are more likely to win public and council support. It also ensures improved outcomes for the community.

Case study 4: Broadland District Council and Norwich City Council provided an integrated service that cut across the administrative boundaries to deliver regional infrastructure

Case Study 3: Great Portland Estates and Westminster City Council began work at the earliest stages to develop a landmark regeneration development.

Case Study 7: Crest Nicholson and LB Hounslow used a planning performance agreement to ensure that mutual needs were tied in to a timely process.

3 Engagement with communities and local councillors

Actively involving communities and parish, town and ward councillors at an early stage of the planning process is important. It provides opportunity to inform the community as well as seek views on local needs, to influence content and design. This can lead to significant improvement in the quality of place, and build trust and acceptance.

Case Study 5: Wealden Homes and Sevenoaks District Council engaged early with residents on their needs and aspiration to deliver a scheme that the community endorse.

Case Study 6: Taylor Wimpey, Oxford City Council and Oxford Housing Association worked closely with their tenants and communities to bring forward a scheme that met residents' needs and high sustainability goals.

Case Study 12: Ashford District Council has a service offer that embeds active community engagement for all major developments.

4 Implementing permissions swiftly

The ability to implement permissions swiftly once granted is important in order to get development off the ground. Effective early discussions can: reduce the need for conditions; integrate considerations for non-planning consents and ensure developer contributions and other requirements are agreed. This will deliver a smoother, quicker journey to construction.

Case study 11: Taylor Wimpey and Durham County have worked jointly through the application and delivery phases.



5 Site assembly and de-risking of sites

Councils can do a lot through site assembly and de-risking of sites, for example through development briefs, Local Development Orders or compulsory purchase powers, to incentivise development by creating confidence and certainty for developers.

Case study 10: 'Birmingham City Council – de-risking investment in their strategic hub through a Local Development Order.

Case Study 9: Swindon Borough Council has a development brief drawn up with the developer and English Heritage to find a solution for a fire damaged listed building in the town centre.

6 Leadership and the role of councillors

The leadership of democratically-elected councillors is a vital overarching principle. Councillors, whose job is to voice the aspirations for the future of their area, is always going to be central to successful partnership working. As representatives of their communities, democratically accountable decision makers and leaders of local partnerships, elected members play a crucial role at all stages of the planning process. Early discussions and engagement, prior to an application being received, between councillors and developers helps to: shape schemes; provide a steer on what is likely to be acceptable to the local community; explore how problems can be resolved and raise extra opportunities.

Case Study 1: Salford City Council has worked for many years with The Peel Group to deliver the docks as a key strategic regeneration project.

Case study 2: Leicester City Council and Sainsbury's development of a new site and reuse of the existing site delivered big employment goals.



Case Study 2: Sainsburys and Leicester City Council

Case studies

1. Salford City Council and The Peel Group – MediaCityUK a long term partnership for regeneration

Close collaboration between Salford City Council and The Peel Group has delivered one of the UK's largest regeneration schemes of the last 10 years. MediaCityUK at Salford Quays has a national profile, housing facilities for the BBC, ITV, Salford University and a broad range of digital and media companies, providing 5,000 jobs with potential of up to 15,000. As a whole the Quays have become a vibrant residential and business district employing 35,000 people and it is one of the most visited tourist locations in the North West.

Salford City Council has led the successful redevelopment of the former Manchester docks (now Salford Quays) since the early 1980's. This has required sustained political leadership and a multi-disciplinary officer team.

Throughout the process the project's success has been the result of a partnership:

City council and other public agencies	Planning and regeneration vision, and secured the infrastructure
The Peel Group and the private sector	Secured the delivery of new housing, offices and leisure facilities

The council developed the vision for the area in a development plan which was key to driving delivery. The plan has been subsequently reviewed and revised as the ambition and aspiration for the area widened.

Part of the site, known as Dock 9 was developed into offices and apartments in the 2000s.

The Peel Group continued to work on proposals for the remaining Dock 9 lands and worked with the city council in developing the master plan.

In 2006, the BBC's decision to bring a range of its departments to Greater Manchester, and then its decision to locate specifically at Salford Quays marked the start of a greater, collaborative working relationship.

The successful bid to the BBC was based on a clear vision of extending the Media Quarter so that the whole of the Quays was recognised as part of MediaCityUK.

Ever since the partnership has continued to work together to resolve the issues and timetable pressure inevitable in a scheme of this size. The first phase, spread over 36 acres, was completed in 2011 but there is the potential to use up to 200 acres of land over the next decade. MediaCityUK provides a purpose-built home for creative and digital businesses development and is an important catalyst in raising the investment profile of Salford as well as creating job opportunities for local residents.

"The regeneration of Salford Quays and the creation of MediaCityUK is one of the finest examples of partnership working between the public and private sectors in Britain in the last decade. The close co-operation between Salford City Council and The Peel Group ensured that the vision to build Britain's first dedicated home for the creative and digital sectors became a reality.

"By working together, we brought the world's most recognisable media organisation – the BBC – to Salford. Hundreds of small and medium-sized businesses have followed in their footsteps to make MediaCityUK one of the country's great success stories even in difficult economic times."

Ian Stewart, Salford City Mayor



Case Study 1: Salford City Council and The Peel Group

2. Leicester City Council and Sainsbury's: development of a new site and reuse of the existing to promote employment

A strong and effective partnership between Leicester City Council and Sainsbury's has been fundamental to the success of two major interlinked regeneration schemes in the city, both of which are key gateway sites, in order to facilitate the relocation of a Sainsbury's store to a site just over a mile away. The City Mayor played a key leadership role during the early stage of the project in setting out his economic and transportation priorities for the area.

This has resulted in the regeneration of a former factory site in Leicester with a new, larger 80,000 ft² replacement Sainsbury's store, creating 300 jobs, which opened in November 2013. It is one of the most environmentally-friendly stores of its kind in the UK and includes a nine-pump petrol station, which gains its energy almost entirely from solar panels. Additionally, a third of the site has been reserved for business use and is currently being actively marketed for this purpose.

The old Sainsbury's site will be transformed into a mixed-use development with (non-food) retail units, food outlets and business use space. This will be accompanied by the removal of a flyover which will open up the site and surrounding sites as well as improvements to the highways and pedestrian links. This work will commence in February 2014.

A dedicated partnership project team negotiated and oversaw the evolution of the schemes for both sites – this included weekly pre-application meetings. The council provided clear direction on planning policy guidelines and development principles for each site, working closely with Sainsbury's to ensure commercial considerations were taken into account.

The council and Sainsbury's also worked together to design a consultation process for effective local engagement, with the council facilitating existing links with local business and community groups.

“The entire pre-application process worked extremely well. Having a dedicated officer team, coupled with ongoing consultation with key stakeholders, meant that we were able to evolve two scheme that integrate with their surroundings and have support of the local community”

Matthew Nicholson, Head of Convenience Town Planning, Sainsbury's

“This development scheme proves the value of establishing a development team early in the pre application phase to effectively consider all the relevant planning issues as part of a streamlined process. The close working relations that the council has with the local community has proved essential for Sainsbury's to engage locally on their proposals. The schemes will provide major regeneration benefits for this part of the City.”

Andrew Smith, Director of Planning, Leicester City Council

3. Westminster City Council and Great Portland Estates – redeveloping a sensitive city block within a defined timetable

Collaborative working between Westminster City Council and Great Portland Estates has helped to grasp a rare opportunity to create a landmark development that would make a significant contribution to the regeneration of this part of Westminster. The proposal will deliver a scheme that will provide 142 private flats, 38 affordable flats, 210,000 sq ft net of office space and 42,000 sq ft net of retail space in two buildings arranged around a large garden. Three new pedestrian routes connecting two key streets will also be created.

Great Portland Estates plc (GPE) bought the site of a redundant Royal Mail sorting office in Rathbone Place in October 2011 subject to a leaseback of the premises until summer 2013 to allow continuity of RMG's operations before their planned move.

From early pre-application discussions with council officers, GPE were able to quickly agree the existing land use areas and establish some key principles:

- The site should be mixed use, led by offices and residential.
- The scheme should deliver substantial new public realm.
- The scheme should break down the large city block and introduce new pedestrian routes across the site.

GPE is a large property stakeholder in the Westminster City Council area and over the 18 month period between purchase and submission of the planning application regular meetings were held with active engagement and collaboration by council members and officers.

This enabled issues to be resolved and the design concept to be developed and established at an early stage. This provided confidence to enable the design to be progressed and ensured that the proposal would deliver on the key principles whilst remaining a commercially viable development. In parallel with the design, GPE's planning consultants engaged with council advisors on financial viability to establish the maximum affordable housing provision that could be provided. Agreement was reached between the consultants ahead of the planning committee providing clarity for the members.

Workshops, site visits and presentations from specialist designers on public realm helped support the approach being taken. A limited number of objections to the application were received – rare for a site of this size and a tribute to effective engagement with the community.

GPE obtained a resolution to grant planning permission from Westminster City Council in October 2013. The building is being stripped out in anticipation of demolition in 2014, it is envisaged that the scheme will be completed in late 2016.

“We welcome this type of mixed use development as it provides a good balance between office and residential use, which is very important, and also includes a number of affordable homes in the centre of London. When complete it will also offer new amenity space, improved access and help to create a destination in its own right.”

**Cllr Robert Davis, Deputy Leader,
Westminster City Council**



Case Study 3: Westminster City Council and Great Portland Estates

4. Broadland District Council and Norwich City Council – leadership across boundaries to deliver regional infrastructure

Broadland District Council and Norwich City Council showed strong leadership and joint working to effectively deliver major infrastructure across local authority boundaries.

Norwich International Airport (NIA) has both local and regional significance on a site straddling Broadland District Council and Norwich City Council. When a large commercial, aviation-related development on its northern apron was proposed it was important that both councils worked with the developer to provide seamless consideration.

The two councils agreed that they would work together in order to ensure a consistent approach on negotiations, timescales, decisions and planning conditions. A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was drafted which agreed to:

- provide a single point of contact for NIA and its agents
- send out a single, joint consultation letter from both authorities
- seek to prepare a single agreed committee report
- identify a 'lead' authority to be responsible for the administration of the application.

To help deliver a single, dedicated point of contact a planning consultant was appointed who worked alongside a joint team of senior planning officers. Requests for further information, negotiations and application timescales were agreed with the agent through the planning consultant, who met regularly with the officer teams.

When it came to determine the application a single meeting was arranged with one presentation from officers made to the respective planning committees for each authority: effectively simultaneous but parallel committee processes.

This avoided any inconsistency in the information presented and allowed for each to fully understand all the cross authority concerns. Both committees resolved to approve the application and the two decision notices were issued shortly afterwards with no material variation between them.

The willingness of Broadland DC and Norwich CC to work closely together, both at officer and political level, to streamline process and reduce uncertainty, avoided unnecessary duplication, inconsistency, confusion and delay.

“The two councils had already been working together for some years, with other authorities in the area, to create a Joint Core Strategy. The experience of working through all the challenges involved has been extremely positive resulting in a sound plan created jointly for the greater good of greater Norwich. The Aeropark is just one example of how we can work flexibly together to deliver major consents quickly.”
Cllr Shaun Vincent, Broadland’s Portfolio Holder for Planning

“The development of Norwich Aeropark is highly significant for the wider Norwich economy. It has the potential to deliver significant numbers of high skill and high added value jobs providing sustainable and rewarding training and employment opportunity for local people. It will also support the delivery of wider growth plans and stimulate further development in the area.”
Cllr Mike Stonard Portfolio Holder for Environment, development and transport, Norwich City Council

5. Wealden Homes and Sevenoaks District Council – early engagement with residents on their needs

A collaborative partnership approach between Wealden Homes and Sevenoaks District Council has resulted in high quality homes that meet local requirements advocated by the community.

Wealden Homes purchased the Wheatsheaf Pub, a burnt-out pub in Kemsing, Sevenoaks on a speculative basis with no planning permission in place. The pub was in the middle of the village's conservation area and in an elevated prominent position, next to a number of listed buildings.

The Company had early pre application discussions with Sevenoaks District Council, where both parties were able to make suggestions regarding design and siting matters that fed through into the final scheme. This required flexibility from both sides on issues of local character and the market demands for housing. Detailed advice was given by the conservation officer and development control officer.

The early and active involvement of local district councillors and the parish council was key to influencing the design of the houses as the scheme progressed. This meant that the planning application was already a familiar scheme by the time their comments were formally sought and their input to the final application was a positive one. The local community also influenced the design, internal and external space of the houses. The units of 1331 square feet were aimed at senior citizens wishing to downsize from large detached properties in the area. With this in mind, and as advocated by the community, each unit has generous space standards internally with a small manageable garden and secure garaging to the rear.

The finished scheme has been a success not only in commercial terms (all three units were sold prior to completion of the build programme) but it also has a positive visual impact within the village. The site also generated a financial contribution under local plan policies towards the council's affordable housing budget. The scheme was recently viewed by committee members at the Council who concluded that it was the best scheme to be recently completed within the District.

The success of the scheme was driven by pre-application discussions that considered the overall design concept and the detail of the build. The time invested by both parties at the pre-application stage paid off with a straight-forward progression of the scheme to implementation.

“Wealden homes have provided a beautiful modern development totally in keeping with its location and in line with local housing need – smaller homes for older residents wishing to downsize. This case study could become a ‘best practice’ example proving that the commercial needs of developers, community needs and planning policy can work together to deliver an outstanding result.”

Councillor, Sevenoaks Development Control Committee

“We would like to say how pleased we were with the considerate way in which the houses were built.

Now they are finished, the houses look very much in keeping with the village and look like they have been there for many years.”

Local homeowner

6. Taylor Wimpey, Oxford City Council and Oxford City Housing Association – working in partnership to deliver affordable housing

Taylor Wimpey worked closely with the Oxford Citizens Housing Association (OCHA) and Oxford City Council (OCC) to regenerate the Rose Hill area replacing 117 run down properties with 254 new homes of different tenures. This joint working ensured that the new development would be both high quality as well as being practical to deliver commercially.

The Council de-risked the site by working with the housing association to bring forward outline planning permission. Taylor Wimpey was then selected as the residential developer of the whole scheme to help design and build the 141 affordable homes (three quarters for social rent, and including a new high-quality new sheltered housing block).

Taylor Wimpey built and sold 113 private homes working collaboratively with the council on development of a full planning application. A contribution was made through a section 106 agreement to community facilities and regeneration, which is leading to a new community centre. Oxford Citizens Housing Association focused much of its involvement on community regeneration, leading to a successful bid to the Big Lottery for health, youth and other projects.

The decision-making process within the partnership was formalised through a Development Agreement, which included provision for sharing any financial surpluses.

Monthly meetings of the scheme partners were held to take decisions and monitor progress and included the transfer of land parcels, statutory consents and requirements, the moving and re-housing of existing residents, and build programme updates.

The relationship between Taylor Wimpey and existing residents and the local community was one key to the development's success. Throughout the planning and construction phases extensive community engagement was undertaken. This allowed local residents to view proposals and influence both the shape and content of the development.

The redevelopment was phased so that existing tenants could move directly into their new affordable homes, without having to move somewhere else while they were being built. In total 30 OCC tenants and 15 OCHA tenants were rehoused in the new scheme. Successful delivery relied on co-ordinated build and re-housing programmes, which required all three partners to work closely together.

The working relationships established through the main scheme made it possible for a small additional development to be carried out at the end of project which replaced other substandard street properties and provided a further 5 family house for social rent.

By working collaboratively, this development delivered much more than might otherwise have been expected. The additional community and sustainability benefits included:

- A closer match of accommodation to tenants needs.
- 74 houses meeting Lifetime Homes standards.
- The affordable homes achieving level 3 of the code for sustainable homes.
- Renewable energy technologies being built in.
- A site waste management plan ensured that 100 per cent of demolition waste was recycled and reused on site.
- By designing the scheme around existing road, footpath and services big savings were made to upgrade infrastructure and conserve resources.

“This scheme shows what can be achieved when a community, a local authority, a housing association and a housebuilder work closely together to deliver a fantastic regeneration scheme. Everyone benefited from having a close, on-going relationship in a scheme that was designed, from the outset, to be a partnership between all involved”.

Councillor Ed Turner, ward councillor (Rose Hill and Iffley) and Deputy Leader of Oxford City Council

Case Study 6: Taylor Wimpey, Oxford City Council and Oxford City Housing Association



7. Crest Nicholson and London Borough of Hounslow – a proportionate Planning Performance Agreement (PPA)

A collaborative partnership between the London Borough of Hounslow and Crest Nicholson has brought forward the redevelopment of a redundant previously developed site to provide 59 residential apartments in Isleworth.

A Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) was drafted during pre-application discussions as the issues in relation to the proposed development became clear. The PPA reflected the fact that this was a relatively straightforward proposal, but a shared commitment on the part of the council and the developers ensured that the milestones were identified and obligations put in place to secure a swift resolution to the planning application.

The PPA meant that the Council agreed to identify issues (whether from external or internal consultees) promptly as they arose and the developer agreed to respond to comments and representations within set timeframes. Milestones identified the target committee date providing additional certainty for the developer.

The PPA also ensured a good working relationship between the Council and the developer, which ensured the scheme emerged to match the Council's and the developer's aspirations.

The Council facilitated the engagement of the community in the scheme through their regular development forum. The developer was invited to make a presentation to this forum. This direct engagement gave an opportunity to explain some confusion over the affordable housing element that would probably have led to objections to the application.

The positive approach ensured that the planning application was dealt with within agreed timescales and that the redevelopment of a sustainable, previously developed site is deliverable and can come forward in a timely manner. Planning permission was granted in November 2013.

8. Bloor Homes Limited and Central Bedfordshire Council – working together during local plan preparation

Early and productive joint working between Bloor Homes and Central Bedfordshire at plan preparation brought forward the delivery of nearly 100 houses and significant adjoining amenity land.

Bloor Homes worked with the council to successfully promote a 21 acre site on the edge of the market town of Shefford in Central Bedfordshire through the Council's Core Strategy Site Allocations Plan. This early proactive engagement at plan making stage set up a positive process for the community and the developers to both benefit from the development of this site of nearly 100 houses.

The council and Bloor Homes agreed a Planning Performance Agreement to cover the process of developing a Development Brief alongside preparatory work for a Full Planning Application. This created certainty and confidence for the developer about timescales.

The council and developers both engaged the town council as they worked up the development brief for the site and jointly attended a public exhibition during the public consultation process. The brief was adopted as Supplementary Planning Document in 2012 and two days later, a full planning application for the scheme was submitted.

The application was for 95 dwellings, 33 per cent affordable housing (an agreed reduction of 2 per cent because Bloor agreed to include 6 bungalows within the affordable housing provision), a nature reserve, pedestrian/cycle bridge linking the site to the open space land linking with the town council's Millennium Green, together with a new roundabout.

The early efforts to engage with the community on the development brief paid off with full support from Town Council and minimum local opposition when the application was considered. This meant that the development could be considered under delegated authority. A permission with a signed Section 106 Agreement was issued five months after submission and in accordance with the agreed timetable set under the PPA. The development is now (as at January 2014) 50 per cent built and the much-needed affordable housing element is contracted to a local Registered Provider.

“Central Bedfordshire Council are strong advocates of partnership approaches to positive planning. The site at Stanford Road, Shefford was one of the first schemes in the district to use a Planning Performance Agreement and we have successfully replicated the approach on a large number of other schemes with various landowners and developers. Key to the process is engagement with the local community and the Shefford site is a case-in-point where the Town Council were fully supportive of the proposals”

Councillor Nigel Young, Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Strategic Planning and Economic Development, Central Bedfordshire Council



Case Study 8: Bloor Homes Limited and Central Bedfordshire Council



9. Swindon Borough Council – the Old Town Hall & Corn Exchange – joint work to bring forward a long derelict listed building in the town centre

Swindon Borough Council's role in providing vision, ambition and leadership in collaboration with Swindon Corn Exchange Limited is driving forward the transformation of a complex and problematic site in the town centre.

The Old Town Hall and Corn Exchange buildings (known locally as the Locarno), are extensively fire damaged grade II buildings on a prominent site in the centre of Old Town, Swindon.

A viable, acceptable scheme for the redevelopment of this key regeneration site had previously proved elusive. So Swindon Corn Exchange Limited and the Council leadership agreed in early meetings that a fresh approach to finding a deliverable scheme would require the active participation of both the council and developer acting together.

A working group of council planning and conservation officers, Forward Swindon Limited (the council's regeneration and economic development company), English Heritage and the prospective developer was set up. The group appointed a number of consultants to provide advice and develop options for the site.

The working group drafted a planning brief for the site taking particular account of the historic context and the recent Town Centre Masterplan. The purpose of the brief is to provide a framework and detailed guidance to ensure that a commercially sound and appropriate development can come forward, and crucially, be delivered within a reasonable timescale.

Community engagement in the development of the planning brief was actively encouraged and a public exhibition attracted widespread participation. The brief was approved by the planning committee and adopted on November 2013. It provides a key step in setting out a clear set of planning requirements for the successful development of the site and by confirming that the Council is fully supportive of the evolving process.

The delivery of a regeneration scheme on such a complex site involves land assembly, development agreements and resolution of viability issues, which are material considerations in decision making.

The next steps are already in progress, including scheme refinement, marketing and discussion with landowners to secure development agreements. Swindon Corn Exchange Limited expects to submit a detailed planning application early in 2014 and there is confidence that the project can proceed to implementation.

"I have been delighted by the proactive work of the Planning Officers in helping deliver a viable Development Brief. This is a difficult site where no-one has found a solution in 30 years, but working together, we have and secured widespread public support. Officers have been critical to its success"

Cllr Dale Heenan, Lead Member for Strategic Planning and Sustainability, Swindon Borough Council

10. Birmingham City Council – de-risking investment through a Local Development Order

The Advanced Manufacturing Hub is being delivered by Birmingham City Council (BCC) in partnership with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and will bring forward 20 hectares of vacant / underutilised brownfield land, with the potential to create and safeguard up to 3,000 jobs. It builds on Birmingham's success as one of the main manufacturing areas in the UK, particularly within the automotive and aerospace sector, and home to companies such as Jaguar Land Rover (JLR).

The Hub seeks to proactively facilitate this key growth sector for the City. In addition to existing research and development and supply chain companies in the City who require further space to expand, the AMH also offers the opportunity to attract new companies to Birmingham who would benefit from close proximity to companies such as JLR.

The AMH occupies a strategic position adjacent to the A38M, Junction 6 M6 and Heartlands Spine Road. It is served by two rail stations, providing a direct link to the City Centre and key towns beyond. The strategic location of the AMH is further enhanced by its close proximity to the City's Universities and Colleges and a key element of the proposal is that there should be a direct link between the courses on offer from education establishments and the jobs which will become available at the AMH. This will ensure that companies have a skilled workforce immediately available and also that Birmingham, and particularly local residents have the training opportunities' and skills to benefit directly from the new jobs created.

To support the delivery of the AMH a Local Development Order (LDO) has been adopted for part of the site by the City Council, which seeks to incentivise development by providing a fast and simplified planning process. The LDO allows the council to grant automatic planning permission for certain types of research and industrial development, removing the need for a planning application to be submitted.

To further expedite delivery, approximately £5 million has been secured through the Local Enterprise Partnership Growing Places Fund, match funded by the HCA and the City Council to acquire the remaining land ownerships within the AMH. The funding will also be used to remediate the land, enhance the public realm and implement a new highway scheme to improve site access. The City Council is also working with the Highways Agency to deliver a further £1 million of improvements to Salford Circus – Jct 6, M6.

11. Taylor Wimpey and Durham County Council – effective consultation with the community to meet local needs

An effective partnership between Durham County Council and Taylor Wimpey enabled delivery of a high quality residential scheme of 100 homes in Barnard Castle (70 private and 30 affordable), that delivered a significant amount of the affordable housing required to meet local need.

The success of the partnership highlights the benefits of engaging in early pre application engagement, both with the council and wider community.

The scheme evolved through a partnership led development management approach where consultee views and feedback from public consultation helped shape the proposal at the pre-application stage so that by the time the application was submitted, issues had been identified and resolved and it received very little resistance.

The council and Taylor Wimpey worked together to establish an understanding of the sensitivity of the site and local feeling.

The response to local community input at pre-application stage included:

- A modification of both the scheme and the council's requirements for a percentage of affordable housing in order to provide intermediate tenure housing to meet the needs of first time buyers
- delivery of 30 per cent affordable housing catering for different groups, including elderly accommodation, starter homes for young families and social rent
- Designing at an appropriate density for the edge of settlement site,
- provision of green infrastructure and open space on the site, and
- inclusion of a sustainable drainage scheme,

By engaging with the community in this way, the development will meet the local needs of the area.

A simple planning performance agreement managed the process through to the signing of the section 106 agreement and the council has taken a flexible approach to the timing of the discharge of conditions to ensure the development could start quickly on site.

12. Ashford Borough Council, Kent – embedding community and stakeholder involvement in all major schemes

For the last decade Ashford Borough Council has been leading active engagement with residents and businesses through site based design workshops for major schemes. The approach was developed in partnership with the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) and has led to effective involvement in forty projects – from plans to deal with major expansion of the town to sensitive prominent town centre sites; from major housing schemes to distribution parks.

The workshops are used to inform and develop towards masterplans, development briefs, in some cases design codes and have led to better quality schemes coming forward.

Key aspects of the approach are:

- Bringing interests from all perspectives together, not being worried by differences of opinion but embracing, discussing and challenging them in a supportive, friendly environment.
- Seeking to work towards consensus around key principles of making better places and communities – not accepting the lowest common denominator.
- Injecting independent, national experts to challenge conventional wisdom (e.g. highway engineering standards) and to show new ways of designing places.
- Recording results in a comprehensive way so that all points raised are tracked and dealt with – this gains strong buy-in from participants. The outcomes are tracked from the workshop through to the development brief finally agreed.

- Following up the workshop – often the same evening – with wider public exhibitions/ surgeries where one to one discussions with relevant players can take place.

The evidence from the forty events suggests that this approach is a success. Some developers have experienced radical changes in design approach which can lead to significant improvement in architecture and quality of place.

Service providers have worked together to plan future provision in a more ‘joined up’ way that will meet people’s needs better. Furthermore, because places are more balanced and of higher design quality they are better able to support local services and public transport.

The process itself is seen as having a genuine influence over the results which leads to strong community and political support. Crucially, confidence is engendered early in the design process for the private sector and progressively enhanced at each stage of discussion. Ashford and their partners believe that these workshops reduce the risk of costly surprises, changes of tack or major delays.

Design workshops have been so successful because they expose the issues that matter to people early in the design process, when changes can be made. This builds confidence around emerging projects, helping to generate consensus rather than conflict, and results in better places.”

Councillor David Robey, Planning and Development Portfolio Holder, Ashford Borough Council



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