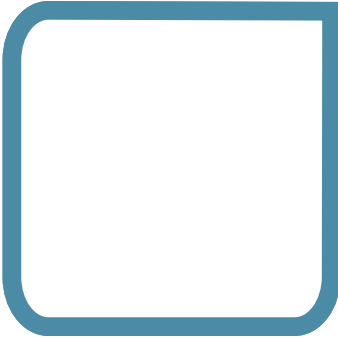
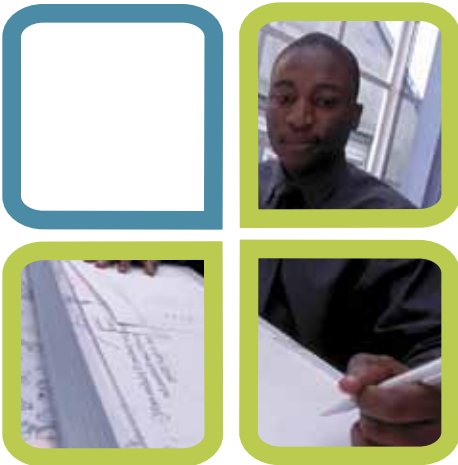


Signed, sealed, delivered



the benefits of an adopted core strategy

Signed, sealed, delivered:
the benefits of an adopted
core strategy



Summary

Every local planning authority (LPA) should produce a core strategy as a fundamental element of spatial planning and the cornerstone of their local development framework (Planning Policy Statement 12 – Local Spatial Planning). But at the end of 2009, only 14 per cent of LPAs had an adopted core strategy.

This case study uses the experiences of a range of authorities to highlight the benefits of having an adopted core strategy. Case study authorities report that an adopted core strategy allows them to:

- move from plan-making to place-shaping: the core strategy sets a clear planning framework that enables planners to get on and deliver the vision and objectives unique to their area
- provide certainty for developers and utility providers: people investing in an area value the strategic clarity that a core strategy provides
- influence corporate decisions: an adopted core strategy is a crucial document for the wider council, and the case study authorities are using it to drive change and raise the profile of planning
- help colleagues and partners to deliver: it's not just planners that recognise the value of an adopted core strategy – other departments and external organisations are using it for their own benefit too
- access more funding and attract investment: the clarity of the planning framework set out in an adopted core strategy has helped the case study LPAs to make the case – directly and indirectly – for more money to be spent in their areas.

The authorities featured in the case studies are:

- Hampshire County Council
- Lancaster City Council
- North Norfolk District Council
- Reading Borough Council
- South Tyneside Council
- Wakefield Council.

Introduction

What is a core strategy?

Planning Policy Statement 12 (Local Spatial Planning) (PPS12) requires every LPA to produce a core strategy as a fundamental aspect of their spatial planning and corporate role. This core strategy should include:

- an overall vision that sets out how the area and the places within it should develop
- strategic objectives for the area
- a delivery strategy to achieve these objectives
- a description of how this delivery will be managed and monitored.

What are the forecast benefits of this approach?

PPS12 lists the advantages of a spatial planning approach for councils and local strategic partnerships (LSPs). In summary, spatial planning:

- underpins the wider corporate strategy of the council and LSP
- plays a central role in the overall task of place shaping
- facilitates the delivery of sustainable communities through coordinating social, physical and green infrastructure
- assesses and provides support for infrastructure and natural resources for economic development
- coordinates the identification and release of land for services such as health facilities
- brings in money from the private sector by creating incentives and promoting and coordinating investment
- provides a robust base for making bids for public funds and for assembling land for projects.

It also helps to deliver a range of other housing, economic growth, regeneration and environment objectives (see paragraphs 2.2–2.7 of PPS12).



Where are we at?

At the end of 2009, 56 LPAs in England had adopted their core strategy, which is around 14 per cent of the total.

This is a low number given that PPS12 emphasises the central role of the core strategy in the spatial planning process, and urges councils to make progress with their local development frameworks (LDFs) to take advantage of the benefits described above.

The challenges facing LPAs that are yet to adopt their core strategy are examined elsewhere. These case studies aim to highlight the benefits that LPAs report once they have adopted their core strategy. This will hopefully encourage other authorities at various stages to continue to prepare a strategy for adoption as soon as possible.

About the case studies

These case studies are based on the experiences of six English LPAs. They have been chosen for two reasons: they provide a reasonable geographic and regional spread, and they reflect the diversity of types of authorities and the different challenges they face:

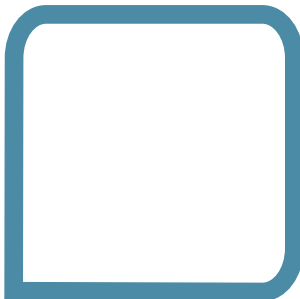
- Lancaster City Council (adopted core strategy July 2008): this district on the north west coast of England has a population of approximately 143,000 people and includes the historic city of Lancaster, the coastal towns of Morecambe and Heysham, the railway town of Carnforth and a large rural area.
- Hampshire County Council (adopted minerals and waste core strategy July 2007): this core strategy covers the areas administered by the county council, Southampton City Council, Portsmouth City Council and the New Forest National Park Authority. The strategy is currently being reviewed to bring it up-to-date with regional and national policy changes, and in response to a successful legal challenge to three policies.

- North Norfolk District Council (adopted core strategy incorporating development control policies September 2008): the district is a large rural area hugging the northern edge of the east Anglian coast (a 45-mile coastline). It has seven principal towns – including Cromer and Fakenham – and an estimated population of 100,600.
- Reading Borough Council (adopted core strategy January 2008): Reading has around 147,000 people and is a very well-connected town 30 miles to the west of London. Its core strategy focuses on promoting growth in the town centre and regenerating an area to the south of the town. It adopted the Reading Central Area Action Plan (AAP) in January 2009. Reading is a unitary council.
- South Tyneside Council (adopted core strategy June 2007): South Tyneside lies within the Tyne and Wear City Region in north east England. It has a population of 150,000 people and is a mix of urban settlements and open countryside. It adopted Hebburn Town Centre AAP in October 2008 and South Shields Town Centre and Waterfront AAP in November 2008. South Tyneside is a metropolitan borough council.
- Wakefield Council (City of Wakefield Metropolitan District Council) (adopted core strategy April 2009): the district lies within the Leeds City Region in Yorkshire and Humberside. Wakefield is a unitary authority. Wakefield is the main urban centre, but the district also includes another 13 towns with populations of between 5,000 and 40,000 people – the total is around 320,000 people. Seventy per cent of the overall land area lies within the green belt. Wakefield adopted its development policies' development planning documents (DPD) in April 2009, its Central Wakefield AAP in June 2009 and its waste DPD in December 2009.

The benefits of an adopted core strategy

LPA's that have an adopted core strategy can:

- move from plan-making to place-shaping
- provide certainty for developers and utility providers
- influence corporate decisions
- help colleagues and partners to deliver
- access more funding and attract investment.



Move from plan-making to place-shaping

The one benefit of an adopted core strategy that the case study authorities put above all others is being able to start delivering their spatial plan.

“The main benefit of having got the core strategy adopted is that it enables you to progress much more with the more detailed elements to get things moving on the ground, which is when people get really interested.”

Andrea King,
Acting Spatial Planning Manager,
South Tyneside Council

For example, Reading’s core strategy takes the Reading 2020 vision as its starting point for delivery. This vision, which came out of a corporate consultation process on the future of the city, sees Reading as the ‘capital of the Thames Valley’ with a new emphasis on high-rise buildings and a much larger and rejuvenated town centre.

Kiaran Roughan, the borough’s Planning Policy Manager, believes there is a connection between having a very clear vision and strategy for the central area of Reading – and some fairly major development proposals as a result.





The core strategy also allocates a part of south Reading – which previously was dominated by low-value uses, such as a dump – as a main area of regeneration. Since adopting the strategy, the council has granted permission for a number of new uses, such as private hospitals and hotels. In Roughan's view, the core strategy has created an interest in that area, which is still ongoing.

In a very different context, North Norfolk Council governs a part of the east Anglian coast that is vulnerable to erosion. While the council had been promoting the idea of 'rollback' – where development in this threatened zone is relocated further inland – it wasn't until the LPA adopted the core strategy that it was able to put this radical new approach to coastal management into practice. And it got noticed: the government's 2009 consultation on a new planning policy on development and coastal change talks about the need for 'facilitating relocation of development to safer, low-risk areas inland.'

North Norfolk's core strategy also proposes a significant lowering of the development threshold for triggering a requirement for affordable housing as part of new residential developments (from 25 previously down to 10 dwellings). Increasing the number of affordable housing units in the area was an important priority for the local community. Councillors have been impressed that planning is one of the key tools able to respond to such a key local concern, and that planners have been positive in enabling it.

But isn't this just good planning? Wouldn't these sorts of refinements and improvements have happened anyway with a revision to the old local plan?

No, argues Polly Wake, Senior Planner at North Norfolk. She says that the emphasis of the spatial planning system on delivery has led to a much more evidence-based approach to make sure that the strategy reflects the facts on the ground, for example, that the development proposed can be supported by the infrastructure available.

Andrew Dobson, Head of Planning Services at Lancaster City Council, also believes that the emphasis on delivery has produced a different – and better – strategy compared with a revision to the old plan. He says that the spatial planning process enables planners to deliver development proposals in a way that the local community can understand.

He points to the way that an authority can now deal with housing projections. Previously, an LPA was given a new housing figure and told to implement it. If a local community objected, it wasn't always possible to explain to them why they needed to accept the increased development, since it wasn't spatially informed. Under the new system, planners can put forward a spatial justification for the location of new development. So, for example, it becomes easier for people to understand a new housing allocation if it meets demonstrated local housing need. This, says Dobson, is something that communities can buy into because they can see that it's solving localised housing need. He adds:

“It's a tangible change of having a core strategy and it's a massive benefit.”

Richard Read, Head of Planning and Development at Hampshire, believes that another benefit of having an adopted core strategy compared with an old local plan is that the whole approach under the new system includes much wider engagement of all sorts of interests.



Signed, sealed, delivered:



Provide certainty for developers and utility providers

It's not just planners that welcome the move on from preparation to implementation once a council has adopted its core strategy. Developers and utility providers value the certainty that the adoption of a core strategy brings them.

As Kiaran Roughan, at Reading, says: "Developers are considering investing in the town centre because the core strategy says that it's the place to invest."

One example illustrates the point. The Station Hill redevelopment is a substantial regeneration project adjacent to Reading Station, which is also set to undergo a £884 million transformation.

The 1.8 million square feet project, proposed by Sackville Developments (Reading), will include buildings up to 30 storeys (double the height of the existing tallest building in the town centre). David Lock Associates is the planning consultancy for the project. One of its directors, David Keene, believes that having the core strategy

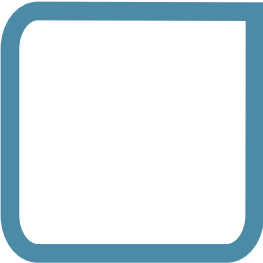
(and the Reading Central AAP) adopted was of great comfort to Sackville. He says: "Obviously, it [the core strategy] encouraged them to take the risk of putting the planning application in [because] we had the planning policy support [core strategy, area action plan]."

Helen Locke, Principal Planner with David Lock Associates, is another member of the Station Hill redevelopment planning team. She feels more confident representing clients in areas where the LPA has an adopted core strategy because it makes the whole process of putting the application together easier. She says: "In very simple terms, when you're writing about the planning policy background you don't have to go into great detail about the principle of the development because it's already been set out in the core strategy. It means that we can really concentrate on what the development is going to be like. It is [much] more simple to put the application together in that circumstance."

In Hampshire, SCA Recycling, a specialist paper recovery company, wanted to submit an application to develop a large recycling facility at a business park at Hounslow near Southampton despite opposition from existing business tenants and the district council. But the clear planning framework set out in the minerals and waste core strategy gave it the confidence to proceed. Richard Read says: "Despite the opposition to the development, our members had no problem going along with the core strategy – they accepted that this development ticked all the right boxes and helped to achieve an important

objective set out in the core strategy to increase capacity for recycling. The application went through in a straightforward way despite it being pretty controversial. This shows the benefit of having a strong planning framework."

Chris Herbert, Planner at SLR Planning Consultants, put together the planning application. As someone who works in different LPA areas he says that there is a clear difference between working in areas that do and don't have adopted strategies. He adds: "A core strategy provides a clear, up-to-date framework in which to place an application, and that was helpful in delivering that site."





“Having a core strategy in place puts you in a good position because it clearly shows that you know where you’re going so that funders and other partners can have some confidence. The continuing investment in significant regeneration schemes in Wakefield through the current economic downturn is evidence of this.”

Ian Thomson,
Service Director,
Planning and Property,
Wakefield Council

At Wakefield, planners have realised that the adopted strategy is forcing landowners and developers to adjust their thinking about how to work within a clear spatial framework. Ian Thomson, Service Director for Planning and Property at the council, says: “The better informed agents, who understand the process, are now coming forward with constructive comments and discussions about how land might be parcelled and how land owners can work together. It is focusing the discussion on some meaningful options.”

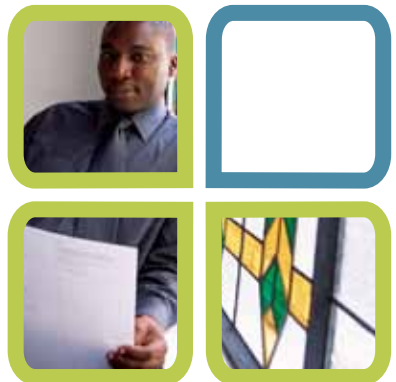
South Tyneside, like most places, has seen a drop-off in new development because of the recession. But planners there have observed that in the areas where they have a full set of adopted plans in place (core strategy and an area action plan), developers and partners have continued to show an interest. Andrea King, Acting Spatial Planning Manager at the council, says: “The core strategy gives developers the confidence that we have a clear strategy and that they know what they can have – there is a clear planning framework, we’re not messing around with draft versions and potential departures because of still having to rely on saved policies.”

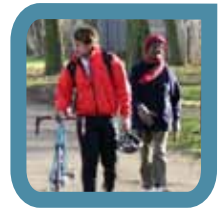
An adopted core strategy also influences how and where utility providers will invest.

For example, by law water companies must submit asset management five-year funding plans to the industry regulator Ofwat. These include proposed infrastructure improvements and plans to service growth areas.

Sue Bull is Planning Liaison Manager at Anglian Water and works with North Norfolk District Council among others. She says that core strategies are the framework to work to. She adds: “Ofwat won’t recognise speculative development – which is what [development] is until it is in a core strategy. So if the core strategy isn’t in place then we have a problem.”

In contrast, if a core strategy has been adopted, then this can favourably influence whether or not funding will be granted. Bull says: “If development is in a core strategy then we have an obligation to service that site. Having a core strategy in place helps us to do our own planning. It pinpoints the key areas without going into specifics – that is extremely helpful in line with our 5 year planning period.”





Influence corporate decisions

A core strategy should only be found sound if planners have prepared a document that is relevant corporately. The strategy should be the spatial manifestation of the sustainable community strategy. It follows that an adopted strategy should influence – as well as be informed by – wider corporate working.

This is what has happened in many of the case study authorities. As a consequence, the core strategy has increased the profile of planning as a significant tool for helping to deliver corporate objectives.

For example, Hampshire, along with its neighbouring counties in the south east, has a lack of sites suitable for landfill, and wants to make more productive use of the waste it generates. While turning waste into energy and materials recovery are emerging as corporate priorities, these activities are most clearly articulated in the core strategy, which has been written to take account of current and emerging corporate objectives.

On this topic, the value of the core strategy as a guide for decision-making for the council was tested in practice. The operator of an incinerator in the county had increased its capacity to the point where it wanted to agree a contract with a neighbouring council to import its waste into the county and convert it into energy. This was a very contentious proposal but it did support one of the objectives set out in the core strategy ('to support the driving of waste resource infrastructure and management up the waste hierarchy').

The core strategy as a corporate document was used to show that councillors should support what was being proposed despite concerns locally. As Richard Read reflects: "The whole issue got very political... but the core strategy did shore up the support for corporate policy."

As outlined above, Reading's core strategy took as its starting point the Reading 2020 vision that had been developed corporately in the years leading up to preparation of the strategy.



Because it so clearly articulates the spatial aspirations of the vision (an emphasis on growth in the town centre, including a desire for landmark tall buildings), councillors and officers can see the links between corporate priorities and the core strategy. These connections are reinforced by the corporate structures of the council. For example, the planning policy manager sits on the borough's corporate strategic policy group.

In Lancaster, Dobson believes that the adopted core strategy has given the council a clear direction of travel – what is the district aiming to do and what does it need to do. "This has absolutely come out of the core strategy," he adds.

Councillor Eileen Blamire is the portfolio member for planning at Lancaster City Council. She agrees: "The process of preparing the core strategy has helped the council to develop a good basis for growing and improving the area that we can all work towards. We now know where in the district we want development and where we don't."

The council has reinforced this corporate commitment to the document with a restructure to help deliver the core strategy. Dobson says that this is to make sure that the carrying out of projects and acquiring money for them is cleared as being consistent with the core strategy first. For example, the regeneration team was moved from economic development to planning to ensure that projects are implemented in line with the development framework.

South Tyneside is home to one part of the UK's current bid for UNESCO World Heritage status, which recognises sites of outstanding cultural or natural significance: Wearmouth–Jarrow (the Jarrow component).

The core strategy (and associated draft Central Jarrow AAP, which at the time of writing was at examination-in-public) both supports this corporate objective and demonstrates how the area would be able to meet the expansion in tourism if the bid succeeds. King says:

“Because we’ve already got a core strategy it has enabled us to push on with detailed planning to really make sure we’ve got sites identified and allocated. We are hopeful that this has produced a stronger bid and maximises the chances of it being successful.”



Help colleagues and partners to deliver

When preparing a core strategy, spatial planners need to be constantly aware of how it will help to facilitate project delivery. An important way of doing this is to involve development management (DM) planners throughout the process.

For example, at North Norfolk, spatial planners made a point of working closely with DM planners when preparing the core strategy. They held workshops for DM planners to provide feedback on the various stages of the core strategy process, and to make sure that they understood the implications for their work once the strategy was adopted.

If a core strategy is to be a truly corporate document, officers other than planners should find that it helps them to do their jobs better too.

Paul Graves is Economic Regeneration Project Manager at South Tyneside. He says that regeneration managers there put a big play on the core strategy and the fact that it is in place when looking for developers and funding to support our schemes. "It

provides the certainty that developers are looking for when assessing schemes," he adds.

At Hampshire, community engagement on the minerals and waste core strategy happened in tandem with a wider consultation on resource management in the county. This was run by planners and staff from waste management and helped to inform the evidence base for the core strategy. According to Read, waste management staff expect to see some of their objectives being delivered by the core strategy, especially future infrastructure.

Councillor Denise Jeffery, Wakefield's Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Culture and Sport points to the way planners have worked with education colleagues to ensure they take the core strategy's clearly defined future growth areas into account when planning the implementation of the Building Schools for the Future programme. This is now being taken forward with further infrastructure studies, which is providing a focus for partners' investment programmes.



“There’s a lot of buy-in because all staff know that the profile of the LDF is so high. [The strategy] is not just mine and my service’s, it’s everybody’s.”

Andrew Dobson,
Head of Planning Services,
Lancaster City Council

In an era of comprehensive area assessments (CAAs), local area agreements (LAAs) and duties for public bodies to work together, is an adopted core strategy proving in practice to be a benefit for local authority public sector partners?

Reading’s core strategy is well-integrated with the sustainable community strategy (the planning policy manager sits on the project delivery team for the sustainable community strategy and LAA). While Roughan acknowledges that LSP partners are not yet ‘wholly on board’ regarding the potential benefits to them of an adopted core strategy, he argues that the framework of the strategy has enabled planners to engage more holistically with partners about sustainable communities. Roughan adds: “They understand that we shouldn’t just plonk some houses somewhere, it’s about how this links up with transport and services and so on.”

North Norfolk has linked the core strategy and the sustainable community strategy through its monitoring processes.

To get buy-in from public sector partners, planners incorporated relevant LAA indicators as monitoring targets for the core strategy. These are clearly set out in an appendix in the strategy. For example, one of the core strategy's objectives is to improve access to key services by public transport and to facilitate increases in walking and cycling. One of the indicators for monitoring this objective is taken from the LAA: the percentage of rural households (in parishes with less than 3,000 people) within 13 minutes walk of an hourly or better bus service.

Lancaster University has engaged with the city's core strategy because it wanted to ensure that its own masterplan aligned with the objectives set out in the core strategy. The university campus sits within a rural area to the south of the city. The university's management was keen to understand how it could expand the campus within the physical constraints set out in core strategy, which did also recognise the university's growth potential.



Access more funding and attract investment

Authorities have welcomed the incentive of an increased slice of housing and planning delivery grant (HPDG) for getting their core strategy adopted.

However, many of the case study authorities point to the advantages of having an adopted core strategy for indirectly securing funding.

South Tyneside has had success with attracting private sector funding because of the certainty that a clear planning framework has encouraged. Graves argues: "As part of their risk assessment, [private sector funders] are looking at potential risks to the scheme and if the core strategy and documents under that are in place then that removes an element of risk for them."

Councillor Michael Clare is Lead Member for Jobs, Enterprise and Regeneration at South Tyneside. He agrees that the core strategy contributes to building up a picture of their strategic priorities, which helps to justify funding bids.

"It removes the risk for funders if they know that a proposal is likely to get planning permission," he adds.

Experiences at Reading support this view. Roughan says: "Indirectly, the core strategy may have given some confidence about spending money [around Reading train station]. It has certainly given a framework for discussions around money and what form that investment takes."

North Norfolk has recently been awarded the biggest slice (£3 million) of the coastal change pathfinders programme funding. The council believes that having an adopted core strategy was an important element in securing this money because the work leading up to the strategy – for example, exploring issues and options, and testing them with local communities – demonstrated a clear plan for action. As Wake says: "Other places are perhaps still trying to work out what their policy approach should be – but we've done that and we now want to move on and actually help these areas to continue to survive."

More information

Planning Advisory Service

www.pas.gov.uk

Communities and Local Government Plan Making Manual

www.pas.gov.uk

Planning Policy Statement 12: Creating strong, safe and prosperous communities through local spatial planning

[www.communities.gov.uk/publications/
planningandbuilding/pps12lsp](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/pps12lsp)

Planning Inspectorate (local development frameworks)

[www.planning-inspectorate.gov.uk/
pins/appeals/local_dev/index.htm](http://www.planning-inspectorate.gov.uk/pins/appeals/local_dev/index.htm)

Hampshire County Council

www.hampshire.gov.uk

Lancaster City Council

www.lancaster.gov.uk

North Norfolk District Council

www.northnorfolk.org

Reading Borough Council

www.reading.gov.uk

South Tyneside Council

www.southtyneside.info

Wakefield Council

www.wakefield.gov.uk/ldf



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