

Joint infrastructure planning: South Bedfordshire and Luton, Surrey, Swindon and Tower Hamlets

Synopsis:

<p>Abstract</p>	<p>This case study demonstrates how four local areas – South Bedfordshire and Luton, Surrey, Swindon and Tower Hamlets in London – are working to achieve this.</p> <p>Benefits include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing a common understanding of what and where the most significant local infrastructure issues are – a number of the case study areas have commissioned joint studies to do this • developing a delivery focus for public sector partners • helping to lever more financial resources into an area, and potentially create more efficient use of the existing resources of partners • helping to meet the requirements of the forthcoming (April 2009) Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) by identifying the infrastructure needs of the local area and working in partnership to meet these needs, deliver outcomes and achieve value for money. <p>Lessons include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a solid evidence base and the identification of community concern about future infrastructure provision is an important first step to securing the commitment of LSP partners • moving beyond evidence gathering and planning to delivering infrastructure may well need a reconfigured structure that puts the LSP at the heart of corporate efforts to achieve this • working in partnership is complex and needs time and energy to ensure that partners continue to stay committed and involved • getting service providers to think about future infrastructure requirements over the medium- to long-term can be challenging, but this can be overcome by identifying the benefits of taking a long-term approach • within the existing performance framework each area needs to develop a model for joint infrastructure delivery that reflects their specific circumstances and requirements.
<p>Date published</p>	<p>February 2009</p>
<p>Authorities involved</p>	<p>Tower Hamlets Luton Surrey Swindon Central Bedfordshire Council (Shadow Unitary)</p>
<p>Themes</p>	<p>Land use</p>

	<p>Local strategic partnerships (LSP)</p> <p>Partnership working</p> <p>Planning</p> <p>Sustainable community strategies (SCS)</p> <p>Sustainable development</p>
Performance indicators	<p>3 Civic participation in the local area</p> <p>5 Overall/general satisfaction with local area</p> <p>154 Net additional homes provided</p> <p>155 Number of affordable homes delivered (gross)</p> <p>186 Per capita CO2 emissions in the LA area</p>

Detail:

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Introduction

This case study describes practice in four areas:

South Bedfordshire and Luton

The South Bedfordshire LSP and the Bedfordshire, Luton and South Bedfordshire Joint Committee commissioned a social infrastructure study as a result of a clear message from consultation about the need to deliver this alongside future housing growth.

Surrey

The Surrey Infrastructure Capacity Study is a three-year project that has strong links to the Surrey Strategic Partnership (the county-wide LSP). It has been set up in response to the regional spatial strategy growth forecasts and concerns about existing under-provision of infrastructure in some parts of the county.

Swindon

As part of the council's determination to plan positively for significant levels of future growth, it set up an infrastructure delivery board. The board reports to the council and the LSP and its work is driven by the sustainable community strategy and core strategy which have both adopted the same long-term vision.

Tower Hamlets

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets and the Tower Hamlets Partnership (the LSP) are working closely to align their strategic policy and delivery framework. They are mapping infrastructure need and demand because of a clear message arising from consultation that access to existing infrastructure and services for some members of the community is difficult, and because of projected high levels of population growth.

What local authorities and local strategic partnerships (LSPs) are doing

South Bedfordshire and Luton

South Bedfordshire LSP and the Luton and South Bedfordshire Joint Committee (a legally established entity that is the planning committee for both areas), supported by the Joint Technical Unit, consulted on the South Bedfordshire Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) and the South Bedfordshire and Luton Core Strategy (issues and options). One of the pressing issues to emerge from this was the need to ensure that social and community infrastructure – for example, GP surgeries, dentists, nurseries, schools, community facilities, community groups, and local networks and groups – is delivered in step with future housing growth, rather than after the houses are built.

As a result of this finding the LSP and the joint committee commissioned a social and community infrastructure study, funded partly by Growth Area Funding and partly by the LSP. The objectives for this study included:

- a detailed outline of the current infrastructure provision in the area, including surpluses, deficits and inadequacies
- identification of the future infrastructure requirements to 2021 and 2031, expressed spatially
- an action research component which focused on a major development south of Leighton Buzzard to help to ensure that the study's recommendations respond to the challenges that delivering infrastructure on major developments present.

The final draft of this study is currently being considered by the LSP and the joint committee.

Planners from the joint technical unit, the LSP manager and the community involvement team have met regularly to guide the social infrastructure study. Officers hope that this joint working will lead to more formalised arrangements when South Bedfordshire District Council, Mid Bedfordshire District Council and the services run in these areas by Bedfordshire County Council are replaced by the new authority Central Bedfordshire Council on 1 April 2009 as part of local government restructuring. Karen Oellermann, LSP Manager at South Bedfordshire, says that 'we are at the stage where there are a number of recommendations we need to run by planners and the LSP to see what is practical to take forward and how we want those relations to develop and what structures we need to have in place.'

Surrey

The draft regional spatial strategy – the South East Plan – sets out that Surrey will need to accommodate over 59,000 new houses to 2026, with associated forecasted increases for employment and economic growth. This growth is unlikely to be spread evenly across the county with further implications on the spatial distribution of infrastructure requirements. There is also a perception that the economy in Surrey has grown but without an adequate investment in existing infrastructure, a view supported by previous research. This deficit needs to be addressed

This background led Surrey County Council, the 11 districts and boroughs, and infrastructure providers to think about how they could work together to better meet the infrastructure demands that this new growth will require and address existing deficiencies.

The Surrey Infrastructure Capacity Project (SICP) is a response to these concerns. It is a three year project that will provide an audit of current infrastructure condition and capacity, assess infrastructure requirements to meet projected growth and produce a set of costed strategic infrastructure schedules to form a blueprint for infrastructure provision.

While the project is not being driven directly by the county LSP – Surrey Strategic Partnership – there are reporting, personnel and strategy links. For example, the SCS (currently under review) has as one of its priorities the provision of more affordable housing and quality infrastructure. There is a thematic partnership set up to support this priority – housing, infrastructure and environment – and members of this partnership sit on the SICP project board which is overseeing the three-year project. In turn, members of this partnership will report to the Surrey Strategic Partnership which is driving delivery of the SCS.

The sponsor of the SICP is David Hill, Chief Executive of Guildford Borough Council. He says that the Surrey Strategic Partnership wants to get to the point where the SICP 'gives us absolute certainty about the evidence base for the need for significant county-wide infrastructure... and to make the case to government about the need to fund this to unlock other development... to maintain Surrey's economic contribution to the UK'.

Swindon

As a planning authority Swindon has been heavily involved in the preparation of the revised regional spatial strategy for south west England. This has included undertaking the Swindon Joint Study to determine levels and future direction of growth. Swindon is projected to accommodate an extra 36,000 houses by 2030, with an increase in the population from 185,000 to 250,000.

Members decided to plan proactively to meet this growth. This included beginning to develop a long-term vision for Swindon and setting up the Swindon Infrastructure Delivery Board (IDB), which includes a number of regional agencies and infrastructure providers. The leader of the council chairs the IDB and the LSP (Swindon Strategic Partnership). The chief executive and deputy chief executive also sit on both, with the latter having specific responsibility for the growth agenda and ensuring that the right links exist between the LAA board (which is the LSP executive board), the LSP and the IDB.

In 2007 the Swindon Strategic Partnership and council planners jointly consulted on a review of the SCS and the draft core strategy. As a result of this consultation both strategies adopted the same vision. The SCS – a Shared Vision for Swindon – deliberately takes a long-term view to 2030 to take account of the significant growth agenda for the area. This in turn drives the work of the IDB, which, according to Celia Carrington, Deputy Chief Executive at Swindon Borough Council, is about ‘sorting out and unplugging the obstacles to delivery planning’.

Tower Hamlets

In 2007 the London Borough of Tower Hamlets submitted its proposed core strategy for examination but then withdrew it because of concerns that it wasn’t sufficiently spatial. During the same period the LSP was undergoing a review including the refresh of the SCS and its LAA agreement.

This provided planners with an opportunity to think in more spatial terms about how the revised draft core strategy can be delivered, including how to meet demand for new infrastructure. As a result planners have become much more engaged with the Tower Hamlets Partnership (the LSP). In practice this has meant aligning consultation on a revised SCS with consultation on issues and alternative options for the core strategy.

One of the key issues to emerge is where future infrastructure and services should be located due to community concerns about the impact of growth in the number of new homes and the potential difficulties in accessing services and infrastructure in some parts of the borough.

These concerns are being addressed through ‘places plans’ which bring together social infrastructure and physical infrastructure plans. The four places plans – to be published later in 2009 – sit beneath the core strategy and are based on local priorities – they are therefore also fundamental to the delivery of the Tower Hamlets Community Plan (the SCS) . The plans have a series of maps in them that illustrate the projected physical infrastructure changes in the short, medium and long term, and the consequent social infrastructure provision that will be required. The LSP intends to adopt the places plans as delivery plans for implementation.

Shazia Hussain, Acting Director of Tower Hamlets Partnership, says that ‘the LDF and the community plan are two big strategies across the borough and they are brought together in the places plans... someone will be able to pick up the plan and have a very clear idea about what is happening in that area now, and in five and ten years time.’

Impacts

South Bedfordshire and Luton

South Bedfordshire LSP has driven the focus on social infrastructure planning because this was such a key finding to emerge from the joint consultation on the community strategy and the core strategy. Planning to meet infrastructure requirements is now a key aspect of the core strategy and is also well recognised by members of the LSP.

This focus on infrastructure planning has helped the main service providers to understand that they need to talk to each other and work better together. This is not only within the local authority area but across council boundaries because of the nature of infrastructure and the potential population it services (for example, a hospital). Karen Oellermann says that when she began the process of engaging the LSP in infrastructure planning there were 'lots of blank faces' but over time they have come to understand the need to work together'.

The infrastructure study led by the LSP has provided a rationale for partners to document some of their key infrastructure requirements which, prior to the formality of the study, planners had found difficult to extract from some service providers. This LSP lead has also helped planners to meet key contacts within LSP member organisations, which in the past had proved difficult to do in some instances.

Swindon

Celia Carrington says that the focus on planning for future growth and the emphasis on joint infrastructure planning has 'completely transformed' the attitude of other service areas and partners towards planning – 'it is now seen as way to facilitate what others need for the long-term future'.

Swindon has found that creating a joint focus on long-term infrastructure planning has led to tangible financial benefits. Early on the IDB attracted funding from infrastructure providers to help devise a transport strategy and to assist with masterplanning part of the growth area. As Celia Carrington puts it, 'the very fact of bringing together these partners has unlocked significant funding and helped to move things forward.'

Surrey

The need for a more corporate and integrated approach to infrastructure planning has been recognised by Surrey County Council, the districts and boroughs, and infrastructure providers. This has led to successful bids for funding to set up the Surrey Infrastructure Capacity Project. Damian Testa, Project Manager of the SICP, says that the partners involved have 'come a long way in a very short amount of time'. This includes developing a work programme for the study and engaging a number of stakeholder groups through a variety of mechanisms. He says that the aspiration of a much more joined-up and coherent approach to strategic infrastructure provision in the county is 'well supported... everyone realises that this is exciting and pioneering and that the benefits could be enormous.'

Tower Hamlets

The corporate approach to infrastructure planning would not be possible without the effort that has gone into aligning the strategic policy framework. The opportunity that planners and the LSP had to align the SCS and the core strategy is leading to a corporate approach that will help to deliver both the LDF and LAA targets.

Close working between strategic planners and the LSP on future infrastructure provision is leading to much better working relationships. Jennifer Richardson says that 'going to LSP executive is the same for us as going to council members – we are reporting almost as much to them as to our own members... people are excited about it'.

Lessons

South Bedfordshire and Luton

Karen Oellermann says that it is: "much better if you have the weight of the LSP behind you... You need senior representatives to see infrastructure planning as a corporate issue." Planners need to keep raising awareness of the changes to the planning system and the requirements that now exist on them and LSPs to develop a joint evidence base and so on.

The complexity of working with a variety of partners – even when they are members of the LSP – should not be underestimated. For example, the contact that sits on the LSP may not be the same person who is responsible for forward planning and so on. Andrew Johnson, Planning Officer at the Luton and South Bedfordshire Joint Technical Unit, reflects that 'we probably would have saved some time and energy if a couple of us had just gone around and pinned down who is the right person.'

Getting some service providers to think about future infrastructure requirements over a 15 year period has been difficult, especially when they are more used to only planning up to three years in advance. The LSP has raised awareness of the need to do this, but there is still a significant amount of work to do in this area.

Swindon

It has been important for Swindon to develop its own approach to tackling infrastructure planning, within the framework of existing government requirements. Celia Carrington says that there is 'no single model that will work, you need to devise a model that works for you'.

Tower Hamlets

For infrastructure planning to be taken seriously it has been important to get it adopted as a corporate priority by demonstrating how the community itself was concerned by access to social infrastructure, as well as providing joint evidence of future needs. One way to do this has been visual representations to demonstrate the spatial implications of infrastructure provision. For example, the Tower Hamlets Community Plan – includes a 'picture of development and regeneration'. This is an artist's sketch of the key centres in the borough which illustrates spatially and with text significant new developments that are earmarked for the area.

Working corporately can be challenging because of the different stages that partners are at. Infrastructure planning requires long-term thinking and strategies that can be interpreted spatially, and some LSP partners did not have these. It can also slow down processes, although building up relationships with individuals over time has helped to overcome this. Shazia Hussain says that 'it is important to be clear about the commitment to infrastructure provision because in some cases it is about aligning resources that are unknowns. However, everyone has really embraced the concept and all partners are ambitious and committed to developing the physical and social infrastructure'.

The future

South Bedfordshire and Luton

The transition to being part of a new local authority will create fresh challenges in securing buy-in from the new Central Bedfordshire LSP (which will take in the areas of South Bedfordshire and Mid Bedfordshire but not Luton). One of the complexities that the LSP manager and the joint planning committee/technical unit will need to address is delivering infrastructure within a context where the core strategies and sustainable community strategies will not align geographically (that is, there will be a single community strategy for Central Bedfordshire in due course, however, the LDF for Luton and South Bedfordshire will continue until at least 2012, with Mid Bedfordshire continuing to prepare its own separate LDF).

Surrey

Surrey is looking at ways of engaging stakeholders as much as possible in the infrastructure capacity project. For example, it hopes to map the infrastructure data the project is collecting and use GIS to create a visual tool for stakeholders to see how this work is progressing and to keep them involved.

Swindon

Partners are currently examining how to strengthen the role of the executive board of the LSP by involving it more in a commissioning role for infrastructure delivery for its growth agenda and the regeneration of Swindon Town Centre.

Tower Hamlets

The revised core strategy will be submitted in April 2009 and the places plans will be published later in the year. The LSP will continue to gather data from service providers to help complete the infrastructure requirements set out in the places plans.

Further information

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[Shape Your Future](#) - The published social infrastructure study will appear on this website

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[Tower Hamlets Community Plan: 2020 Vision](#)