The Role and Scope of Spatial Planning

Literature Review

Spatial Plans in Practice: Supporting the Reform of Spatial Planning
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Supporting the Reform of Spatial Planning
On 5th May 2006 the responsibilities of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) transferred to the Department for Communities and Local Government.
Introduction

1.1 The *Spatial Plans in Practice* project was commissioned to investigate the implementation of the local development framework system and to identify emerging issues and good practice for wider dissemination. This note provides a summary of an extensive literature review on 'the role and scope of spatial planning'.

1.2 The terms of reference for the review were:

- to explain the origins of and issues influencing the idea of spatial planning;
- to explain how the spatial planning approach differs from land use planning; and
- to set out what some of the implications might be for local development frameworks in the context of delivering the government's objectives for sustainable development.

1.3 This note is concerned with the *principles* of the spatial planning approach. It is primarily intended to stimulate thinking about the potential of the new system, especially in addressing the need for improved coordination of the spatial impacts of sector policies. It draws on many sources but the many references to supporting documents and evidence in the main review have been omitted for ease of reading. A note on further reading is given at the end.

1.4 Whilst there are numerous commentaries on what the spatial planning approach entails, the reality is that it will be built and defined in practice through the creation of regional spatial strategies and local development frameworks, and in the way these tools shape decisions. The argument implicit in this paper is that putting 'the spatial planning approach' into practice will be well served by an understanding of what the planning reforms are expected to achieve and an appreciation of the reasoning that went into making them.

1.5 The goals of planning reform, as expressed by government and other stakeholders, are very ambitious. They are to put planning at the centre of the spatial development process, not just as a regulator of land and property uses but as a proactive and strategic coordinator of all policy and actions that influence spatial development; and to do this in the interests of more sustainable development. This note takes a positive position in relation to the possibilities for change, reflecting the conclusions of numerous reviews of practice that have spelled out the potential of a reinvigorated planning system. But we should not be blind to the difficulties that reform will entail and the depth of change that is needed.
1.6 Planning has always played a prominent role in local government through the regulation of development. In some places planning professionals have played central roles in wider initiatives for sustainable development, urban and rural regeneration and place-making. Nevertheless, the planning function has become largely disconnected from other sectoral policies that drive spatial development patterns and the quality of places. There has been little in the way of a spatial strategy expressed at any level of government for some time.

1.7 Reconnecting planning with other sectors (even closely associated ones like transport) will not be an easy task. Other sectors are just as likely to see planning as part of the problem, as part of the solution. Changing attitudes will require time and resources. More fundamentally, planning lies in the uncomfortable position between property markets and diverse local political demands, where win-win solutions are difficult to find. Though government attitudes about the role of planning are now much more positive than in the recent past, the pressure to make decisions in the relatively short term interests of economic performance will remain and they will be difficult to reconcile with the goals of environmental sustainability and social cohesion. Thus, whilst grasping the opportunity to make a fundamental change in the style of planning intervention, we should beware raising false expectations.
The need for reform

Box 1

The more prolonged the development plan process the more divorced it becomes from the mainstream of local authority policy. Rather than being the principal vehicle for linking local authority policy with other public and private investment decisions, development plans are seen as unwieldy statutory documents and the preserve of specialists.

Local Government Association 2001: 2

There is a multiplicity of often overlapping and sometimes conflicting plans and strategies. Nowhere is the whole picture brought together and the respective responsibilities of all the different bodies clearly assigned.

Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, 2002 : 1

2.1 The critical measure of success of planning is the extent to which it really adds value, and leads to the improvement of places and the circumstances of communities through the use of plans by a range of different players. Whilst at the end of the 1990s there was support for the positive role that planning can play, there was a consensus that the system was falling far short of meeting these objectives. Indeed, as the quotations above illustrate, there was a view that planning had become marginalized in government policy and action.

2.2 Though addressing the planning system from very different perspectives, the reviews generally agreed that radical change was needed if planning was to make a more effective contribution in government. They argued that if planning is to make a more positive contribution to achieving society’s goals then it must have:

- a more dynamic and timely plan and decision making process that enables planning to positively shape rather than report on outcomes;

- a more inclusive and effective process of participation and consultation that lends confidence to plans and decisions;

- more effective collaboration with other policy makers in other sectors and stakeholders that leads to integrated objectives and joined-up policy;

- more positive, evidence-based reasoning in the formulation of strategies and policies, and in managing change;
• a focus on the delivery of wider priority outcomes defined at national, regional and local levels, so that it can truly make a difference.\(^1\)

2.3 It is worthwhile briefly reviewing the main strands of these arguments here. They point to some generally accepted views about the role and scope of spatial planning and at the same time raise fundamental questions about expectations of the reformed system. To what extent can any form of planning be more inclusive \textit{and} more efficient \textit{and} more joined-up?

**Dynamic and timely policy and decision making**

2.4 The difficulties experienced by planning authorities in adopting planning policy in good time and then keeping it up-to-date are well known. The reasons have been widely debated. The effect of the ‘district-wide’ requirement and advice in the early 1990s to include in local plans all policies that might be used to reject planning proposals led to complex plan and policy construction. Plans have proved to be unwieldy in the adoption process leading to widespread delays. Moreover, once adopted these plans have often been inflexible in use and difficult to review and modify. Numerous studies have also pointed to the need for more effective project management of the plan process including the availability and deployment of staff resources and expertise. To meet expectations of improved performance in leading development through up-to-date plans, experience suggests a much more selective and strategic approach to plan-making, targeted at critical spatial development issues and places where coordination is needed. The single blueprint approach to plan-making will need to give way to a layering of interlinked plans and a continuous process of review and adjustment. Whilst this should help to unblock the system, it will put great pressure on process and performance management systems. It also has implications for how plans are used in the development control process and decision making.

**Inclusive and effective community engagement\(^2\)**

2.5 Planning has a longer history of community engagement than other policy sectors, but by the 1990s the system was struggling to effectively cope with increasing active involvement in (and often opposition to) development proposals. Many authorities continued to follow traditional approaches in the formal plan-making process, using consultation exercises based on draft plans, limited discussion of alternatives and options, and little attention to the underlying strategy and vision. The approach has tended to reflect a defensive

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\(^1\) These five categories have been used to structure the core research questions of the \textit{Spatial Plans in Practice} project, as explained in the \textit{Inception Report} (2006)

\(^2\) A separate literature review summary has been prepared on \textit{Achieving Successful Participation}.
mindset with insufficient attention to engaging with, and building the capacity of others to participate. The formal procedures have been dominated by more powerful interests; elected members have not always been engaged effectively especially in the wider issues, and in places, lack of local ownership of the plan has led to contrary decisions. Developments in local governance, particularly the community strategy, offer potential if they can express locally distinctive objectives and effective connections can be made between them and the planning process.

Collaboration, integration and joining-up

2.6 The lack of complementarity and coordination between policy sectors is widely recognised, and the aim of better ‘policy integration’ is at heart of the planning reforms. Whilst there are best practice examples of area-based coordination of policy and action; for example in coastal zone management and regeneration, the core development plan work has not been performing this task, nor has planning generally been prominent in recent initiatives to ‘join-up’ policy in local government. The proliferation of disparate government initiatives has tended to exacerbate the problem and contributed to ‘partnership fatigue’, confusion about the purpose of partnership and lines of accountability. In particular the potential to join up sectoral activity, both public and private (such as environment, transport, health and education), in the way that they impact on particular places, (be they neighbourhood, city or region) was not realised.

2.7 Entrenched organisational cultures and the diverse priorities, timescales and procedures across many sectors make the joining up task particularly difficult. Planning officers tend to have little experience of working with other sectors or knowledge of how their policy processes work. The perennial tensions among levels of decision making from local to national level and lack of joining-up in national government have led to inconsistencies. The local planning process has not been taking on a leadership role in joining-up and has concentrated instead on the narrow task of land use regulation. It has generally lacked corporate support for a wider coordinating role and other sectors have not looked to planning to do this job. Experience in other countries has provided more positive models of how spatial strategies and visioning can coordinate the impacts of sectoral policies in particular places.

Positive, evidence-based reasoning

2.8 It may seem self-evident that planning should be based on sound evidence, but decision-making has tended to rely more on local negotiation with reference to deeply embedded planning principles (such as urban containment) and general criteria in national planning policy. There is very little evidence of the use of formal analytical methods of policy analysis, and most local plans do not address or demonstrate an understanding of the spatial development characteristics of their areas. Few local plans go beyond a collection of policy criteria and decision
rules for development control, and the formal procedures have turned on the
defence of individual policies and land allocations. Important though that is,
practice at the local level has undervalued an understanding of spatial
development patterns and trends, and the generation of strategic options that
might flow from that understanding.

2.9 Early examples of structure planning did examine spatial structure and options
but in later years have concentrated on the allocation of quotas of housing,
employment and other uses. Similarly, the regional level has made only a small
contribution to the evidence base. The lack of attention to the spatial dimension
of development is most evident in the way that plans have been bounded by
administrative divisions, ignoring, for example, the realities of housing markets
and commuting flows across district boundaries that would require joint working
between authorities. This applies even to the few examples of local plans that
have confronted strategic questions and options about the spatial distribution of
growth, perhaps because of concerns about the legitimate jurisdiction of the
development plan and unwillingness of politicians to cooperate across
boundaries. There is also now a substantial skills deficit in this area. The
requirements for sustainability appraisal and strategic environmental assessment
together with the test of soundness have turned attention on the role of the
evidence base in preparing strategies and policies and the systematic
consideration of alternatives and options.

Delivery and outcomes

2.10 There are obvious difficulties in measuring the contribution of planning to
achieving broad goals such as sustainable development or economic
competitiveness, especially isolating the effect of planning from other factors and
the actions of other agencies and programmes. There are few substantial studies
on the subject. Nevertheless, there have been unquestionable weaknesses in the
local planning system that inhibits its contribution to delivering wider goals.
These include:

- the narrow land use scope of plans that has reinforced the focus on outputs in
terms of housing numbers or employment land rather than broader outcomes;

- the vague expression of goals in general statements which do not say how
they apply to particular places or how they are locally distinctive, coupled
with extensive development control criteria which create ambiguity and
inconsistency;

- insufficient flexibility in the form of the plan and policies to address particular
issues, to cope with changing circumstances and to arrive at more sustainable
solutions through the application of principles rather than decision rules;

- diffuse approaches that do not concentrate sufficiently on strategic goals and
targets, those places experiencing change, and seeking to influence those
responsible for delivery.
2.11 Although this agenda for the planning system is undoubtedly very challenging, it is proposed in the context of very positive expectations of the system. Many interested parties have canvassed for a planning system that has greater ambitions and achieves more. In particular, the principal theme in this review is the potential for planning to take a much more positive and proactive role in managing spatial development through a territorially based strategy that influences the policies and actions of other sectors.

**Fundamental reform**

2.12 There is a temptation, given the way that the issues are presented above (and in other commentaries), to tackle each set of issues independently. Previous reforms such as the *Modernising Planning* agenda have tended to do this though incremental amendments to instruments and procedures. Given the scale of change in the world in which planning seeks to intervene, this approach is not likely to lead to a more effective system; nor could incremental change properly address the ‘tensions’ between demands for more timely production of plans at the same time as more effective community engagement and increased inter-sectoral working. Thus many commentators have been pressing for a more comprehensive rethink – one which redefines the role of planning.

2.13 The listing of issues and challenges to be addressed may obscure this more fundamental problem: the continued confusion about the role of planning. The forms of the system – its tools and procedures – tend to assume that planning is about controlling development outcomes by regulating the supply of land and property uses. How relevant is this for achieving stakeholders’ ambitions for the system in the context of the fragmented and ‘congested’ governance system and development process in which planning now operates? With little direct responsibility for resources, the role of planning is in practice, not so much about controlling the decisions of others, and certainly not dictating solutions, but about shaping attention to particular opportunities and threats; providing a spatial framework to encourage the formulation of complementary strategies across all activities; and facilitating coordinated action. A central problem for the planning system is not to find more effective means of control and regulation, but to find ways of engaging and exerting influence over other actors – the points of intervention or levers that will enable planning to facilitate more sustainable spatial development. This is an opportunity for those working in the planning system. Incremental reforms or piecemeal adjustments to planning tools are not likely to be successful. This opportunity demands a fundamental rethink of the role of planning its tools and ways of working, and perhaps even more challenging, a change in mindset and planning culture.

2.14 Inspiration for the direction of change has come from many sources – from political demands for better delivery on policy; from the challenge of achieving more sustainable development; from recognition of the increasing complexity of spatial development; and especially from the wider discussion on the nature of
spatial planning arising in the European arena. There are no models for the new system on offer, but these sources have provided a very positive context for rethinking the role of planning and providing directions in the evolution of the spatial planning approach. Awareness of these wider debates should help to clarify the role and scope of spatial planning and understanding what the reforms are expected to achieve.
Influences on the planning reforms

3.1 Underlying changes in government, economy and society are the broad forces of globalisation and shifting relations between the state and the market. Arising out of those forces are four interrelated debates that provide inspiration for the rethinking the role and scope of spatial planning. They are:

- joined-up government
- sustainable development
- European spatial planning
- changing realities of space and place.

Joined-up government

3.2 The need to connect the disparate compartments of government to help achieve cross-cutting objectives is a perennial concern. It may be self-evident that the planning system has a role in this task through the coordination of policies and actions in strategies and plans for particular places or territories. In practice the depth of joining-up through planning has varied considerably. In the immediate post-war years the planning system was at the centre of reconstruction that brought together the efforts of various government departments, and again in the 1970s, early structure plans attempted to deliver comprehensive ‘joined-up’ spatial strategies. Subsequently, interest in a spatial approach to joining-up policy and action virtually disappeared in England, in stark contrast to practice in some other European countries. At the same time, the need for joining-up increased as neo-liberal ideology reinforced trends for increasing fragmentation of government.

3.3 ‘Modernising government’ and other reforms during the 1990s addressed the compartmentalisation of government and widened the scope of planning to address other sectoral issues, particularly transport. The general question of joined-up government then became a central concern for the incoming 1997 Labour Administration, with its strong emphasis on joining up in pursuit of social welfare and equity outcomes. All government departments and agencies had to reassess how they were assisting in the delivery of a fairer distribution of services and opportunities. The Labour Administration also brought forward an agenda for ‘democratic renewal’ with commitments to community engagement and empowerment and devolution to the regions, presenting further opportunities for planning. Whilst there is a strong spatial dimension to the problems being
addressed (fairness, opportunity and disadvantage, for example) the role of planning was not an immediate priority. Most joining-up has been about linking sectoral interests with limited attention to the spatial dimension.

3.4 Of particular importance was the orientation of government activity around goals and desired outcomes, such as reducing child poverty, raising educational attainment, or improving the health of the population. This approach presented, and still presents, a fundamental challenge to a government system that is inevitably organised at national and local level on departmental or sectoral lines, often reflecting traditional professional boundaries and expertise. Ministers pressed for more cross-departmental working in coordinating the effects of sectoral policies (as realised for example, in the structure of the (integrated) government offices for the regions). General policy goals are now expressed at national level in public service agreements, and a similar approach is emerging at the local level through the community strategies and area agreements. Each division of government is expected to review and monitor its activities in relation to the achievement of these corporate goals and outcomes.

3.5 The renewed emphasis on coordination of policy and action might have presented an opportunity for planning, but the growth of collaborative working in local government has largely by-passed the planning system, which has in many places, rather perversely, operated in a narrow regulatory sectoral silo. Joining-up efforts were concentrated in other fields and produced the plethora of collaborative and partnership initiatives noted above, and in which the planning system rarely figured. The proposals for planning reform expressed in the 2001 Green Paper (and first demonstrated in the 2000 version of *PPG 11: Regional Planning*) sought to give planning a more central role in helping to deliver joined-up government goals. The potential for joining up policy and action around a territorial strategy is back on the agenda. There is a recognised need to present analysis of spatial development trends and sectoral policy interconnections, and the coordination of mutually beneficial intervention.

**Sustainable development**

3.6 The wide interest in ‘joining-up’ government and to some extent devolution has been driven primarily by concerns about social cohesion and economic competitiveness, but similar concerns arise from the sustainable development agenda. During the 1990s the Local Agenda 21 process addressed cross-cutting themes by drawing sectors and actors together to identify sustainable development indicators, though with varying levels of commitment. At the local level this has largely been superseded by the local strategic partnership and community strategy process, though the goal of sustainable development remains important.

3.7 The delivery of more sustainable development requires a shift in thinking for many sectoral interests towards collaborative working and approaches, which cut across traditional disciplinary, professional and administrative boundaries. It
demands more integration in the formulation and application of policy and action, and in the evaluation of outcomes. In particular, the environmental sustainability agenda, promoted very strongly by environmental lobbies such as the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, supported radical reform of the planning system to widen its scope and to introduce new methods and principles that were recognised to challenge fundamentally well established ways of working.

**European spatial planning**

3.7 There has been extensive debate about the role of planning among the EU member states and institutions, and this has been an important source of ideas for planning reform in England. It should be stressed that the European debates do not provide a specific model for a new approach to planning, but rather they have informed and been informed by, developments in the UK. Government institutions and lobby groups have drawn inspiration from the development of a European dimension to planning and from comparisons with other countries.

3.8 The growing interest in ‘spatial planning’ in the institutions of the EU began with the European Commission’s *Europe 2000* studies of spatial development trends at the European scale in the early 1990s. This began a long debate among member states on spatial development that culminated in the publication of the *European Spatial Development Perspective* (ESDP) in 1999. These initiatives have facilitated a sharing of ideas among member states about the role of spatial planning from a starting point that is quite different to the land-use regulation role which has tended to dominate debate about planning in the member states.

3.8 The Community institutions are self-evidently less interested in the detail of land use regulation, and indeed, have no formal competence to be involved in these matters (though they are concerned about how regulation can assist in areas where they have competence, such as environment and agriculture). Rather the debates have recognised the paradox of the fundamentally spatial nature of the EU’s core goals – economic competitiveness, social cohesion and sustainable development – and the lack of any systematic means to co-ordinate the spatial impacts of actions in pursuit of those goals.

3.9 It is also important to note here the broad understanding of the notion of ‘development’ that flows from these goals. It means not just physical change but social and economic change and its impact on the life experiences of citizens. Community actions are spatially discriminating; they affect the development of places in different ways: directly, for example, by targeting funding to designated areas, or indirectly through the spatial effects of non-spatial policy, such as research and development funding. European spatial planning is concerned with the costs of non-coordination of these ‘spatial policy’ impacts, avoiding contradictory actions with perverse outcomes, and the potential of improving policy delivery and adding value through more coordinated action. These ideas owe much to cultures of governance and planning that are far more proactive and interventionist in seeking to manage spatial development than in the UK.
3.10 Thus, European level debates on planning have centred on the role of territorial or place-based strategies as a mechanism for policy integration in three dimensions. In summary they are:

- ‘horizontal’ coordination of largely independent EU sectoral policies such as regional policy, environment, transport and research and development, particularly in the way they impact together on particular territories;

- vertical coordination among jurisdictional levels, the need for which is particularly evident in the EU context with tensions between EU, national and regional actions, and which in turn draws attention to the subsidiarity principle requiring justification for decisions to be ceded to higher jurisdictional levels; and

- joint working across administrative boundaries in a cross-border or inter-regional fashion to address problems as they occur in their ‘functional regions’ such as cross-border infrastructure or environmental catchments.

3.11 Comparative studies of spatial planning systems across the EU have examined their potential for coordinating the impacts of sector policies across territories and across jurisdictions. They found that ‘sectoralised’ planning systems dealing with the regulation of land use change were the norm, though in some countries there is much more positive use of the planning system in providing a framework and direction for investment across sectors with stronger coordinating mechanisms. Whilst these might involve more direct powers of regulation, and intervention in investment and development, they more commonly use indirect or softer mechanisms of spatial strategy and vision building to guide and organise activity around common goals. These strategies tend to make use of visualisation techniques to expose the spatial relationships and the spatial impact of sectoral policies.
Influences on the planning reforms

Changing realities of space and place

3.12 The reality of space and place (and their meaning for us) is changing simply because we travel more often and further; because economic activity and investment are much less tied to particular places; and because communications and media technologies have opened up the world in our homes. This is the changing geography of social and economic relations. Extensive mobility of people and investment has created strong interconnections between (sometimes distant) places. It draws attention to the importance of networks and flows between places and the creation of new enlarged and layered functional regions within which markets operate and citizens’ lives are played out. But this is a complex matter with few simple conclusions for planning. Whilst there is now more freedom of movement, proximity is still important. There is an increasing spatial concentration or clustering of some activities and mobility is often accompanied by lower accessibility. Though they present difficulties, new spatial relations do prompt us to ask if planning within the administrative areas of district or borough continues to make sense. Should we be paying more attention to the networks of connections and flows cutting across boundaries at different scales? Certainly, if planning is to influence spatial development it must pay attention to these matters.

3.13 These concerns of space and place are not new to planning – the city-region concept based on commuting flows was first developed in the 1930s – but they are now more intense and complex, and present a considerable challenge. An understanding of the implications for planning is emerging (or perhaps re-emerging) through the increasing work on spatial strategies and networks, the definition of new ‘functional territories’ (such as the re-emergence of city-
regions) and the employment of ‘new’ spatial concepts. It is most evident in the European Spatial Development Perspective (CEC 1999), in aspects of the transnational spatial visions, such as the Spatial Vision for North West Europe and in national strategies such as the Spatial Plan for Wales (NAW 2004). These documents are employing new or renewed concepts to understand and explain spatial development trends, and to promote certain actions that reflect the importance of flows – including urban-rural relations, city-regions, urban networks, development corridors and polycentricity. Analysis of the reality of spatial development for an area also helps to tease out its distinctive qualities in terms of its connections and character of place.

3.14 Understandably planning practice at the local level in England has been slower to respond, hampered in part by the old system and its concentration on the production of district-wide plans. Most plans and strategies present a rather ‘unreal spatial reality’ of an administrative space or island seemingly disconnected from its neighbours. Statutory obligations aside, this reflects a view of planning as a regulatory activity to be administered and contained within the areas of jurisdiction, rather than one that seeks to understand the nature and drivers of spatial development for the authority. A stronger interest in the spatial dimension of development is coming through in the regional spatial strategy process and inter-regional working, but they are generally less well developed in this sense than their equivalents in the 1960s. Some early examples of development documents are demonstrating more interest in the reality of spatial relations, (illustrated for example, in the recognition of the influence of cities outside the administrative area or urban-rural flows) and prompting joint working across authorities.

3.15 A stronger focus on the significant spatial relationships and drivers suggests a corresponding change in the organisation of key actors and agencies around the critical issues identified. That is, the governance arrangements normally centred on the authority (and the boundaries of its administration) may not be appropriate; new organisational arrangements are required and a new mix of players need to be brought together which reflect the cross-boundary and cross-sectoral issues to be addressed. The arrangements for the joining-up task, discussed above, will be informed by an understanding of spatial relations and development in the area. Furthermore, the interconnectedness of places lends weight to the argument that development plans created and implemented within territories are no longer able to pursue a prescriptive or controlling role seeking to determine decisions and activity. They can instead help others to both understand the spatial dimension and impacts of their activities; how this interacts with other activities to create outcomes; and how a coordinated approach can help to achieve their goals.
How does spatial planning differ from land use planning?

4.1 So what is different? Obviously there are substantial changes to the framework of policy instruments and procedures (which are not repeated here). But these are only the tools; they need to be used to build the spatial planning approach. The discussion above suggests three central themes to this:

- to make more effective use of the planning system to help achieve shared goals by focussing more on outcomes;
- to inject an understanding of the spatial or territorial dimension as a device to help join-up policy and action;
- to engage communities and stakeholders more effectively in the planning process and create new policy communities that reflect the realities of spatial development and its drivers.

4.2 These points are elaborated in Table 1 which presents the practice of land use planning and spatial planning as ideal types. The content of the table is derived from the preceding discussion of how planning shapes up to aspirations for the system, and the broader influences and discussion about the nature of spatial planning that have helped shape reform. This comparison goes much further than government guidance, but like the rest of the paper, it is not presented as a model, but as a guide to provoke thinking about how planning might change and what the implications are for practice. The local development framework will be to some extent a combination of these ideal types, and most local plans will fall somewhere between them.

4.3 If there is one common theme in all this, it is integration. This is reflected in what the professional bodies say about spatial planning and the ODPM interpretation given below. We should note here that the integration and engagement challenge is not new; it has been visited many times and was part of the original elaboration of the modern planning system in 1947. However, the context is very different and there is no suggestion of a return here to comprehensive rational planning. A reminder of the government’s emerging policy on spatial planning for England is given below. The extract from the Wales Spatial Plan illustrates how the same ideas are being taken up in practice there.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Land use plan</th>
<th>Spatial plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose</strong></td>
<td>Regulating land use and development through designation of areas of development and protection, and application of performance criteria.</td>
<td>Shaping spatial development through the coordination of the spatial impacts of sector policy and decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Form</strong></td>
<td>Schedule of policies and decision rules to regulate land use for the administrative area. Mapping of designation of areas and sites for development purposes and protection.</td>
<td>Strategy identifying critical spatial development issues and defining clear desired outcomes across functional areas. Visualisation of spatial goals, and key areas of change. Principles and objectives that will guide coordinated action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Process</strong></td>
<td>Discrete process leading to adoption of final blueprint plan. Confrontational process, instigated through consultation on draft plans and political negotiation. Stakeholders using the process to protect and promote their interests.</td>
<td>Continuous process of plan review and adjustment. Mutual learning and information sharing, driven by debate on alternatives in collaborative political process. Stakeholders using the process to achieve their own and mutual goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ownership and policy community</strong></td>
<td>A document of the planning authority providing guidance to other professional planners promoting and regulating development.</td>
<td>A corporate document of the local authority in shared ownership with communities and other stakeholders, partnerships and NGOs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Procedural safeguards</strong></td>
<td>Final plan determined through adversarial inquiry on parts of plan subject to objections.</td>
<td>Final plan determined by inquisitorial examination of the soundness and coherence of the whole plan.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How does spatial planning differ from land use planning?

1. Note: These are ideal types – local plans and development documents in practice will exhibit characteristics of both.

**Table 1: Comparison of ideal type land use plan and spatial plan (cont’d)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Land use plan</th>
<th>Spatial plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Delivery and implementation</strong></td>
<td>Seeks to direct change and control investment activity in land use through prescriptive regulation, whilst mitigating local externalities through conditions and planning agreements.</td>
<td>Seeks to influence decisions in other sectors by building joint ownership of the strategy and a range of incentives and other mechanisms including land use regulation and planning agreements.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Monitoring and review** | Measures conformance of the plan’s policies and proposals with planning control outcomes.  
Data provides portrait of plan area as general context for implementation of proposals.  
Periodic but infrequent review of whole plan. | Measures performance of the plan in influencing sector policy and decision-making.  
Data informs understanding of spatial development and the application of the strategy.  
Regular adjustment of components of plan around consistent vision. |

The Government perspective on spatial planning

The new system of regional spatial strategies and local development documents should take a spatial planning approach. Spatial planning goes beyond traditional land use planning to bring together and integrate policies for the development and use of land with other policies and programmes which influence the nature of places and how they can function. That will include policies which can impact on land use, for example by influencing the demands on or needs for development, but which are not capable of being delivered solely or mainly through the granting or refusal of planning permission and which may be implemented by other means.

(ODPM, 2005: paragraph 30)
4.4 Broad policy statements are one thing, application of these principles is another. It is unlikely that anyone will underestimate the integration task. The planning system has no special rights or position to act as an integrative focus for sectoral policy, indeed, much progress has already been made in ‘working across boundaries’ in and outside government that barely refers to the planning system. Planning’s particular claim for the joining-up task is in the significance of place or territory as an organising device for joining up policy and action. But political and professional boundaries and allegiances are very firmly established along different lines – in sectoral policy communities, in the professions, and in political constituencies. All this raises considerable questions for the application of the spatial planning approach.

**The Wales Spatial Plan**

Spatial planning is the consideration of what can and should happen where. It investigates the interaction of different policies and practices across regional space, and sets the role of places in a wider context. It goes well beyond ‘traditional’ land use planning and sets out a strategic framework to guide future development and policy interventions, whether or not these relate to formal land use planning control.

[For the role of the Plan, it suggests this means]

making sure that decisions are taken with regard to their impact beyond the immediate sectoral or administrative boundaries; that there is co-ordination of investment and services through understanding the roles of and interactions between places; and, that we place the core values of sustainable development in everything we do.

(National Assembly for Wales 2004: 5)
Implications for the local development framework: challenges and tensions

5.1 This final section considers the implications of ‘the spatial planning approach’ for the local development framework. The discussion focuses on the ‘integration challenge’, though it begins with some general issues that arise from the proposed transition to a spatial planning approach.

Applying the spatial planning approach

5.2 Planning reform in England is about reshaping ideas on the role and scope of the land use planning system; the new spatial planning approach is expected to grow from the old and replace it. The assumption here is that it is indeed necessary and possible to do this. This approach to reform may be underplaying the significance of, and weaken support for, land use regulation and particularly the development control function. This remains critically important, not least in being one of the levers that can encourage more positive collaboration around spatial development. The reality of day-to-day planning for interests on all sides is the planning application process and decision criteria set out in policy, which will remain in some form. This raises three questions.

5.3 First, we might ask if the spatial planning approach is a replacement for land use planning, an additional and complementary form of planning, or just a change in emphasis for the existing system. Some authorities have long since separated out the broader strategic function from the regulation task. In other sectors, traditional sector departments are being reorganised into new arrangements that reflect desired cross-cutting outcomes (for example, the change from education to children and young people’s departments). Is it appropriate in the light of the discussion above to separate out the ‘sectoral’ planning regulation task from the ‘cross-sectoral’ spatial planning task? How are authorities recognising and managing the transition in terms of organisational structures and competences, and with what effect?

5.4 Second, concurrent changes are needed to the operation of development control to allow for the shift to more strategic spatial planning. The emphasis in the reform has been on the policy making functions and other implementation tools, with only incremental changes proposed for development control (so far). The discussion of spatial planning suggests more radical changes may be necessary, especially if the transition will fundamentally alter the regulation functions of the local plan. There is perhaps an implication in the spatial planning approach that
there will be less prescription and a move away from working with rules to working with objectives, to allow for widening the scope in decision making and to support the task of strategic spatial organisation. It also reflects the reality of the role of plans and strategies in influencing spatial development. Are authorities involving development control in the fundamental reforms? How is the relationship between development control and planning policy changing? How are authorities managing change in this relationship?

5.5 Third, whilst the apparatus of the local development framework are in place – the Act, Regulations and policy guidance; a very substantial shift in thinking and practice is also needed if the spatial planning approach is to be applied. At the same time, there is considerable pressure on most authorities to drive ahead with the adoption of local planning policy. There may be a tendency to adjust existing practices rather than to undertake the fundamental reform suggested in the first part of this note. Is there evidence of incremental or more radical and comprehensive rethinking of the role – and thus form – of the development document? It may be that the need to get up-to-date policy into place (and the desire to be one of the first) is driving out the application of the spatial planning approach and affecting the quality of plans. It may also be that the scale of the challenge and the opportunity is not fully recognised in the practice world. It may take some years and further iterations of development documents before real fundamental change is realised even where bold approaches are being taken. Are planning authorities taking a longer term view of the challenge, especially in developing the skills, experience and confidence needed to address this opportunity?

The integration challenge

5.6 We should note here that separating out government activity into sectors is an inevitable and beneficial approach to government. It allows specification and concentrated pursuit of more detailed objectives and it encourages beneficial competition among sectors. This is why the sectoral organisation of policy making is robust. Policy makers like it and it has some success. So they will ask – why change? Any ideas about comprehensive integration need to be rejected, partly because of the benefits of working in sectors, but also for practical reasons and the costs. Also, although seen by many planners as a sort of umbrella device for a range of policy sectors, town and country planning is itself a sector, or at least this is the way it is perceived by many other sectors, including perhaps, those where there are relatively close relationships such as transport and environment.

5.7 It is likely that other sectors (for example, environment, housing, education and health) are already engaged in collaborative activity that does not involve planning. Indeed, there is a very extensive theory and practice of policy integration in which the planning system has so far played only a minor role. Moreover, the proliferation of integration initiatives has itself caused an integration problem with multiple mechanisms and foci already promoted for
integrating policy. All this may tend to discourage potential collaborators from more active involvement in the planning process. On the positive side, the statutory nature of the development documents and the potential to deliver infrastructure and other benefits through planning agreements is a positive inducement to collaborate. Is there evidence of a deeper collaboration among stakeholders through the planning process and joint ownership of the planning strategy? The responsibility for collaboration does not just rest with the planning sector. How are other sectors motivated to collaborate through the planning process? Are other sectors adopting practices that engage with others through the planning process and are incentives and sanctions being put in place to make sure this happens?

5.8 Integration is an open and abstract concept – we should ask with whom and how? An approach needs to be devised that guides efforts on collaboration and integration. Authorities might seek to clarify at the outset of the process: the objectives being sought; the outputs partners are seeking (for example agreement, coherency, a single policy, joint delivery etc.); and the means by which it is to be achieved. There is a good understanding of the forms of integration and mechanisms developed elsewhere in government from which planners can learn.

5.9 Government policy lists those organisations with whom some measure of collaboration is expected, though developing meaningful collaboration with them all would certainly become complex and very difficult to handle. The ‘dimensions’ of integration: horizontal, vertical and geographical may be a useful organising device but practice will inevitably see a very mixed picture. The approach will need to be informed by the analysis of the critical spatial development challenges facing the area (which begs the question of whether this exists) and may be thematic working on integration around critical issues such as housing affordability, service accessibility, or healthy environments. How are local planning authorities making decisions about policy integration? What intensity of interaction is being experienced and what mechanisms facilitate effective integration? How are authorities striking a balance between the costs of further collaborative activity and the anticipated benefits?

5.10 New organisational arrangements will be needed for building collaboration and carrying forward joint policy and action (most clearly illustrated in the joint committee arrangements for development document adoption). This will be achieved only if politicians, policy makers, and other interests are ‘dis-embedded’ from their current ways of seeing the world. So the integration challenge for planning cannot be met without also successfully ‘engaging’ stakeholders in building new ‘policy communities’ around issues defined in a new cross-sectoral and territorial way. To some extent collaboration may be a reorganisation of compartments, so in devising an approach to integration authorities will need to consider equally what changes are needed to existing arrangements and who is going to be left out. Internal integration (within a department or sector, including planning) may be as important as working with external bodies.
5.11 There are logistical problems in working with other sector policy processes (notably, the status of instruments, procedures, timescales, targets and indicators). We should not assume either that there is a single voice from other ‘sectors’. But like the persistence of a sectoral approach in government, these problems are inevitable. A more pressing challenge (and one where some improvement can be made) is in the lack of knowledge that planners have of how the other sectors work, and encouraging those in other compartments to learn about the planning system and the opportunities it offers. What steps are being taken to build knowledge of the operation of policy and plan processes in other sectors?

5.12 The role and scope of spatial planning is determined to some extent by capacity – the resources available in terms of staffing, expertise, experience and funding. This needs to be addressed in other sectors too, and for meaningful collaboration, commitment is needed from all organisations at a senior level. All studies point to the critical issue of leadership in collaborative activity, and in this, the role of elected members who are normally sceptical of working outside their jurisdiction, will be crucial. The community strategy is intended to be a central integrating device. It is more likely to be valuable in the planning process if planners have played a key role in its production. What steps are being taken to improve the capacity in local planning authorities (including elected members) to address the spatial planning approach and to link this with corporate and community strategic planning?

5.13 The focus of collaboration should be informed by the understanding of the spatial development issues and drivers in the area. There is thus, a strong link with the development of a robust evidence base. There has been considerable progress in expanding the evidence base at the local level, notably in the growth areas, but studies, data and indicators tend to be sectoral in nature. The spatial planning approach would encourage more joining-up in this respect too, but there are limitations here. There is a distinct lack of analytical methods and skills to investigate the combined territorial impact of sectoral policies or to assist in joining up actions. The main tool is the sustainability appraisal which can play a central role in analysis of the integration of policy and action, though it is not always seen in this light. What other tools are being used? What analytical techniques can help to understand and communicate spatial development trends?

5.14 Some early examples of core strategy ‘visions’ have addressed the wider scope offered in spatial planning, but they do not reveal an understanding of the local spatial development conditions and as a result they are not locally distinctive. If the argument that the territorial dimension (over which planners claim some expertise) is a valuable integrating mechanism, then the plan must surely be able demonstrate a good understanding of the territorial or spatial consequences of sectoral activity. It is in the presentation of the evidence base, and to some extent its visualisation, that the existing mindset of officers and politicians can be challenged, and a strategic and spatial understanding of development can be encouraged. Is the importance of this job recognised and do we have the tools to do it? Will others be interested in a territorial (planning) approach to integration if the vision or the core strategy does not make a strong argument for the coherence and distinctiveness of the area?
Conclusion

6.1 The emergence of the planning reforms and ‘the spatial planning approach’ have been influenced by many factors. There is no simple equation showing how the factors came together. The perceived marginalisation of the planning system from wider decision making and outcomes, and particularly its limited influence on the factors that are shaping spatial development provide the context. The spur for change comes from awareness of the need for a spatial dimension in the task of joining-up government in order to achieve critical economic and social outcomes and avoid the costs of non-coordination. This is strongly supported by advocacy for a renewed approach to planning in support of sustainable development. In that context, the European spatial planning discourse and emerging or renewed concepts of space and place have provided some inspiration for the direction of change. But all this leaves many questions for how spatial planning is put into practice.
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Further reading and references

Reviews of land use planning and proposals for an alternative approach


Reforming Local Planning, London, LGA

Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (2002) Environmental Planning, London RCEP


Influences on planning reform


CEC/Committee on Spatial Development (1999) The European Spatial Development Perspective, Luxembourg: OOPEC


Integrating sectoral policies through spatial planning


