

To Chief Executive Officer
County Councils in England
District Councils in England
Unitary Authorities in England
London Borough Councils
Greater London Authority
Regional Planning Bodies
Council of the Isles of Scilly
The Town Clerk, The
City of London
National Park Officer, National
Park Authorities in England
The Chief Planning Officer,
The Broads Authority
Chief Planning Officers of local
planning authorities

John Stambolliouian
Head of Planning Delivery and
Performance
Zone 4/H2
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DU

Direct line: 020 7944 8075
Direct fax: 020 7944 5004

Web site: www.DCLG.gov.uk

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Dear All

Letter to Chief Planning Officers following the first two DPD examinations

The Planning Inspectorate has reported on the first two examinations of the soundness of core strategies under the new LDF system. I regret to say that both these plans have been found unsound. This means that the authorities concerned will have to withdraw their core strategies and start again, with the inevitable knock-on delays to other related plans they are preparing. I am therefore writing to you to highlight the issues raised by these cases so that those authorities which are following on can seek to avoid encountering the same difficulties at the examination stage.

The first two core strategies to be examined were found unsound because they did not meet all the following criteria largely reflected in current guidance. Core strategies should:

- Set out broadly but clearly what kind of place the area will be in the future; what kind of changes will be needed to make this happen; and how this will be brought about.

- Be prepared through a process of options generation and appraisal. Options should be alternative strategic spatial options, effectively alternative scenarios for the future development of the area. These options should be consulted on. The preferred options report should set out the alternative options considered; and give clear reasons including sustainability appraisal findings for the selection of the preferred option or options and for the rejection of others. .
- Make serious spatial choices about what will happen and where in broad terms it will happen over the life of the strategy, underpinned by consultation and sustainability appraisal. This will then provide clear guidance to subsidiary DPDs and avoid a return to the old process of protracted arguments over site allocations.
- Avoid the repetition of national and regional policy but explain how these have been applied to the spatial decisions which have been made about the future development of the area
- Look to the long term and include sufficient flexibility to be able to deal with a variety of future circumstances.
- Be cross sectoral - developed with regard to (and ideally in conjunction with) the community strategy, in partnership with the Local Strategic Partnership and other parts of the Council and other key organisations and with wide community involvement.
- Not contain excessive detail.
- Be supported by relevant evidence
- Set clear goals, show how these will be delivered (including through other DPDs), and show how progress on delivery will be monitored.

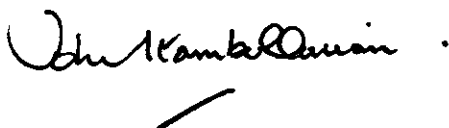
The first two examinations were of core strategies. However many of these considerations apply to all kinds of DPDs.

We are working with Government Offices, the Planning Inspectorate and the Planning Advisory Service to ensure that the early lessons of the new system are disseminated quickly. Where Government Offices offer advice on the preparation of development plan documents, failure to heed that advice may result in the Secretary of State issuing Directions so as to avoid the waste of time and resource involved in examinations which lead to plans being judged unsound. PAS will be running another series of regional seminars to help local authorities in the autumn and they have developed a soundness self-assessment toolkit which is available on their website. The Inspectorate's Guide to Soundness of DPDs was published in December 2005 and remains crucial to successful examinations. In addition the Inspectorate will be publishing the lessons learned at the end of the first six months of examinations.

We want local authorities to get on quickly with making plans under the new system but they must ensure that the plans are able to meet the test of soundness. We know that there is a lot of good work going on around the country and we have no reason to believe that the majority of plans which are being prepared will not meet the requisite tests.

If you have any queries about any matters do speak to your Government Office LDF contacts. As part of their ongoing support, Government Office staff will be happy to discuss any of the issues in this letter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Stambollouian', with a short horizontal line underneath.

John Stambollouian