



# Collaborative Working in Development Planning

Analysis of Planning Authority and Key Agency Responses to Scottish Government, HOPS and KAG Questionnaire





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# INTRODUCTION



Among the key principles underpinning the modernised planning system in Scotland are: a re-affirmation of the plan-led nature of the system; an emphasis on front-loading engagement in planning processes to ensure that expertise can be tapped and any conflicts resolved early; and a closer involvement of important stakeholders in the preparation of plans so that the 'ownership' of these documents is more widely shared.

In order to deliver on these principles, one important new feature of the modernised Scottish planning system introduced by the 2006 Planning Act was the identification of a number of 'key agencies' which planning authorities were obliged to consult at the main stages of the production of development plans and their associated action programmes, and who in turn were obliged to cooperate with planning authorities in the preparation of their plans. As well as the agencies specified in regulations, there are a number of other agencies who, while not statutorily identified, nevertheless are recognised as having important contributions to make to successful development planning. Many of the national agencies have come together in a Key Agencies Group with the aim of supporting the Scottish Government's 'Delivering Planning Reform' agenda, including improving the way in which agencies interact with development plan-making.

In March 2013, the Scottish Government, together with Heads of Planning Scotland and the Key Agencies Group issued short questionnaires to Scottish planning authorities and key agencies with the aim of taking stock of how well key agencies and planning authorities were collaborating in the preparation of development plans some four years on from the introduction of the new development planning system. The questionnaires sought to identify what techniques were being used to facilitate that collaboration, what was working well, and what needed to change to improve that collaboration in the future. We also hoped to identify some specific examples of good practice that other authorities and agencies could then refer to in planning their future engagement.

We were pleased to receive an excellent response to both questionnaires, with returns from 28 planning/ national park/ SDP authorities (74% response rate) and 8 agencies.

This paper summarises the main messages that identified through analysis of the responses. It also highlights some particular examples that illustrate important points.

We hope that the messages in this paper, along with the very process of carrying out and discussing this survey, will all positively influence the quality of agency/ authority collaboration going forward into the second round of Strategic Development Plans/ Local Development Plans.



**What techniques have you used to involve agencies at different stages of the preparation of your development plan and action programme?**

**Q1**

A wide range of techniques have been used to involve key agencies, with the most popular being meetings and workshops.

- One-to-one meetings
- Joint meetings with related agencies/ topic groups
- Workshop/ briefings with all agencies
- Agencies invited to wider stakeholder workshops
- Views on draft documents
- Sent regular newsletter/ e-updates
- Liaison at national groups/ events
- Actively sought agency views on what MIR/ plan should cover
- Consultation on sites emerging from Call for Sites/ sending GIS shape files
- Consultation at formal stages
- Virtual e-sounding board
- LGA Knowledge Hub website
- Meetings programmed well in advance
- Seeking views on existing policies
- Charrettes
- Seconded staff from agencies
- You tube video

## PLANNING AUTHORITY FEEDBACK | Q2



### Q2

With the benefit of hindsight, what would you do differently next time?

In a move to provide clearer communication and help shape the form and content of an emerging LDP, a local authority described how they *“storyboarded the whole plan from the start point and used this in briefings to explain their aims to the Key Agencies”*.

Planning Authority Testimony

#### KEY THEMES

1. **Engage as early as possible in the plan making process**- there would be a benefit in consulting earlier in the process (ideally at pre-MIR stage), and in ‘building in’ more time for key agencies to prepare their responses.
2. **Clearer communication** - there is a need to clarify the aims of the development plan to key agencies, how it is relevant to them and how they can contribute. Also, it would be beneficial if clarity was provided from the outset about what kind of input will be needed and what the timescales are.
3. **Resolve Conflicting Agendas** - Some key agencies find it difficult or are unwilling to engage unless there are specific policies or sites ‘on the table’. This could potentially conflict with the desire to engage at Pre- MIR stage. Other key agencies are reluctant to look past their own narrow remit or self-interest and look to the wider spatial picture.
4. **Tackle the lack of consistency** - Staff turnover within Key Agencies can lead to communication problems, a lack of consistency in views expressed by the organisation and even unexpected objections late on in the process.



## KEY AGENCY FEEDBACK | Q2



Key Agency Group Development Planning Workshop



KAG Masterplan Training Event

With the benefit of hindsight, what could you have done differently to influence development plans and action programmes more effectively?

Q2

### KEY THEMES:

1. **Engage as early as possible at Pre-MIR stage;** which “facilitates ability to influence and also reduces the potential for future disagreements”; some acknowledgement that they could initiate the engagement themselves. Early engagement is particularly useful in relation to ‘visioning exercises’.
2. **Conduct multi-agency meetings** between different Key Agencies working within similar areas, for example between SEPA and SNH.
3. **Clarify our role with Local Authorities** and what exactly we are being asked to comment on- and ensure that the information is presented in a useful, usable way.
4. **Early communication** with local authorities as to the role and remit of the Key Agency at an early stage, especially if this has recently changed.

## PLANNING AUTHORITY FEEDBACK | Q3



**Q3**

**What was the best example(s) of good joint working between you and an agency / agencies in the preparation of your plan or action programme?**

### KEY THEMES:

1. Information and data sharing and the help of agency staff in applying and analysing these.
2. Making the best use of Key Agencies own technical capabilities.
3. Engaging at an early stage and continual dialogue, holding face-to-face meetings and telephone conversations.
4. Conducting multi-agency meetings to build consensus and bring to light different viewpoints.

### PLANNING AUTHORITY TESTIMONY:

**Green Network Technical Note** *"FCS, SNH and SEPA contribution to the development of the Green Network Technical Note in support of the Proposed Plan was probably the best example of collaborative working in SDP1. The use of the agencies' databases and the application of agency resources in the analyses of these in collaboration with the Core Team and member authorities provided a very valuable evidence base to inform the Proposed Plan."*

**Multi-agency Roundtables** *"Round tables on specific sites/issues with multiple KAs present were useful. For one site we held a round table involving SEPA, SNH, Scottish Water and Transport Scotland as the site has issues relating to contamination, flooding, nature conservation, and access...The session resulted in a consensus on the developable area and the preferred route of an access road through it. This will be reflected in the Proposed Plan along with other matters of detail that emerged during the discussions that the Council were unaware of."*



## KEY AGENCY FEEDBACK | Q3



What was the best example(s) of good joint working between you and an authority in the preparation of their plan or action programme?

Q3

### KEY THEMES:

1. Working together to improve policy and Supplementary Guidance.
2. Embedding Key Agency staff within local authorities.
3. Providing guidance, training and assistance with Strategic Flood Risk Assessment.
4. Short-life working group to resolve particular issues about developments.
5. Infrastructure working groups (e.g. Aberdeen FIRS).

### AGENCY TESTIMONY:

Green Networks “The best example to date has been a series of design workshops with Fife focussing on Green-networks around key settlements. The resulting joint Fife/ SNH Technical Paper on Green-networks is the best example we have seen of using green-networks as an enhanced framework for growth that delivers multiple benefits. We expect the outputs to be incorporated into Fife’s Proposed Plan and intend to nominate this work for a Quality in Planning Award.”- SNH

Aberdeen FIRS Group “We have had regular FIRS meetings and it has been used as a platform to focus discussion on particular issues and look at how the groups experience can be used to drive the Plan forward and ensure development is delivered successfully. We have also worked together in writing policies.”- Scottish Water

## PLANNING AUTHORITY FEEDBACK | Q4

### Q4

What was the best example of your plan or action programme being improved as a result of an agency contribution?



#### KEY THEMES:

1. Improvement of policies / Supplementary Guidance.
2. Resolution of outstanding issues with development sites.
3. Improving the accuracy of data and maps.
4. Enhancing the quality of graphics.
5. Technical studies and assessments.
6. Input on likely infrastructure requirements and interventions.

#### PLANNING AUTHORITY TESTIMONY:

**Graphics** *"A+DS assistance with the Plan's graphics was a good example of working collaboratively utilising colleagues different skills and knowledge to achieve a better quality of output..."*

**Identifying Green Networks** *"Assisting the Process to identify green networks – existing assets and opportunities for inclusion in the LDP and the development of Green Infrastructure supplementary guidance to encourage the provision of better quality green infrastructure through new development. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) provided resources for writing up the outcomes from the workshops (the methodology and the green network descriptions), worked with Fife Council to progress mapping of the green network, and helped to facilitate the workshops and lead discussions. SNH also provided some local natural heritage specialists to come along to the green network workshops when required."*

**Wording of Policies** *"Where Key Stakeholders had concerns on draft policy wording (rough draft ahead of the Proposed Plan being finalised internally), and following discussion, those agencies (SNH and SEPA) were asked to re-draft those policies to meet their requirements/needs. This assisted all parties involved in better understanding each other's needs, and provided a more positive and better informed platform for discussing and agreeing the final policy wording."*

## KEY AGENCY FEEDBACK | Q4

What was the best example(s) of a plan or action programme being improved as a result of your contribution?

Q4

### KEY THEMES:

1. Wording of policies and drafting of Supplementary Guidance.
2. Comments on draft plans.
3. Providing the evidence base for plans and Supplementary Guidance.
4. Correcting inaccuracies in information and data before it reaches the public realm.
5. Technical Studies and assessments.
6. Advising on the impact of particular development sites, which were amended.



### AGENCY TESTIMONY:

**Minerals Sites** *"Aberdeenshire LDP – Planning Authority approach to identifying AoS & 'safeguard' areas for minerals was reconsidered partly due to likely impacts on natural heritage assets, (including impacts on Natura sites). The council proposed that a number of sites should be removed on the basis of SNH advice on the potential impacts. Our advice brought in to question whether minerals development at some sites would ever be considered and therefore there was no merit in providing these mineral areas with a safeguard. The Reporter agreed with that approach."* - SNH

**Correcting Information** *"After working closely with the East Renfrewshire planners at draft stage, we were able to work together to improve information regarding Scottish Water that was very outdated and factually incorrect in some areas. By picking it up at draft stage and working with the planners at the Local Authority, we were able to work together on pulling together and correcting the information before it was in the public domain"* - Scottish Water

## PLANNING AUTHORITY FEEDBACK | Q5



Stirling City Vision Workshop

Q5

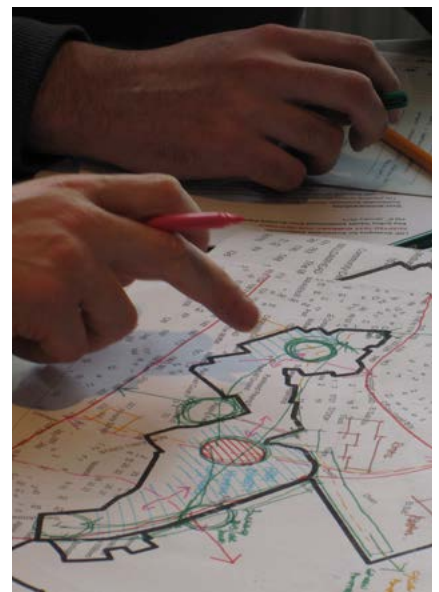
What changes in approach (e.g. to culture, resourcing, format of responses) from agencies would help you prepare a better informed plan and action programme next time?

### KEY THEMES:

1. **Need for consistency from Key Agencies-** a significant number of responses from local authorities raises the problem of Key Agencies frequently changing the personnel dealing with an area/topic- leads to miscommunication, delays and unexpected problems or objections late in the process.
2. **Early communication with the Key Agencies** on the aims and process of producing the LDP; to help the Key Agencies to see the bigger picture of what the development plan is trying to achieve; also to promote a better understanding of the interlinkages between the roles and strategies of different Key Agencies and the development plan. Key agency responses to be concise, relevant and proportionate- not overly technical or general. Encourage KAs to be more positive and engaged rather than as 'objectors'.
3. **Specialist information and resources;** Key Agencies should be better equipped/resourced to provide more technical support where necessary.
4. **Better project management-** agreeing on what will be required at an early stage and agreeing on project briefs for supporting appraisals and technical work
5. **Acceptance and understanding** that planners need to consider a whole range of views and that specialist Key Agency issues may not be whole-plan 'main issues'.



## KEY AGENCY FEEDBACK | Q5



What changes in approach (e.g. to culture, resourcing, format of consultation) from authorities would help you contribute more effectively to plan-making and action programming in the future?

Q5

### KEY THEMES:

1. **Importance of ongoing dialogue** as opposed to one-off consultation
2. **Clear and considered engagement** by Local Authorities- better publicise consultation and ensure Key Agency contact lists are comprehensive and up to date; providing information in a more useful format, for example all site options be entered into a 'master spreadsheet' all KAs can use, and weed out non-starters so KAs are only consulted on 'possibles'. Also ensure that methods of engagement are better thought out so all parties get the most out of them.
3. **Culture change within planning** - local authorities to take up offers of help in drafting policies and Scottish Government when offered; engage meaningfully with Key Agencies rather than seeing them as a box to be ticked; and ensure information provided by KAs is used to improve outcomes rather than as an end in itself.
4. **Clearly communicate** to local authorities the **role and remit** of the Key Agency.

*Visioning Exercises "Dumfries & Galloway/ADS held a series of visioning workshops early on in the process to identify and evaluate the assets and needs of the area and to utilise the findings to inform the production of a Vision for Dumfries & Galloway. SNH was involved together with the other agencies."- SNH*

## FURTHER INFORMATION



This paper has summarised the main messages identified through analysis of the responses and highlighted examples of good working practice.

The messages in this paper, along with the very process of carrying out and discussing this survey, will all positively influence the quality of agency and planning authority collaboration going forward into the second round of Strategic Development Plans and Local Development Plans.

If you wish to discuss any aspect of this survey, or the issues arising from it, please contact:

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- Key Agencies Group



## RELATED READING



### Development Planning Workshop

Key Agencies Group | 31 January 2013



This document can be read in association with a separate report produced by the Key Agencies Group on a joint Development Planning Workshop which was held in January 2013.

[Click here to download report](#)



Produced by the Scottish Government, Heads of Planning Scotland and The Key Agencies Group. Design and Layout Architecture and Design Scotland..