



Cross boundary working

Spatial Plans in Practice: Supporting the reform of local planning



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Chapter 1: Executive summary

INTRODUCTION

1.1 This study seeks to provide detailed analysis of the practice of cross boundary working in local development framework (LDF) production, including evidence of good practice. It is based on the findings of work specifically undertaken for this study and from other research on the Spatial Plans in Practice (SPiP) project. It concludes by recommending to local planning authorities, Communities and Local Government, Government Offices and the Planning Inspectorate, ways to achieve this.

APPROACH

1.2 The strategic surveys, longitudinal case studies and literature reviews of the Spatial Plans in Practice project contributed to this report, along with additional research material derived from a questionnaire survey emailed to 40 local planning authorities.

1.3 The key questions for the research were:

- what efforts have been made in LDF work to identify cross boundary issues and what mechanisms are used to pursue them?
- to what extent does LDF policy and decision making address cross boundary issues?
- why are some areas able to address cross boundary issues better than others and how can barriers be overcome?
- does the new system make a difference and what more could be done to promote effective cross boundary collaboration?

RESEARCH FINDINGS

1.4 This research has identified four key factors that lead to joint working:

- the recognition of an overriding need to tackle a shared development issue
- a previous history of beneficial cooperation across boundaries
- leadership from politicians and from senior officers
- the benefit of a stronger 'voice' in regional planning matters

1.5 Within the context of the above, the form of joint working varies, only in some cases leading to joint development plan documents. Relationships are dynamic and develop over time. Formal joint committee approaches are less prevalent than informal approaches that seek to synchronise plan

production timetables and see considerable flows of information and ideas across borders. Informal collaboration between planning authorities sometimes results in joint documents, and sometimes in separate documents that have compatible and complementary policy content.

- 1.6** Much of the cross boundary working activity to date has been in relation to issues that self-evidently require such working, for example waste development plan documents (DPDs) and LDF core strategies in areas of growth, and may indeed have been the subject of some form of joint activity for some time. Cross boundary issues are therefore, in many instances, a given. There has also been, in some cases, a significant top-down encouragement for joint working, not just in terms of the new planning legislation but also through pro-active involvement and advice by some Government Offices and Regional Assemblies.
- 1.7** The dynamics of the overall picture are quite strong, in that there appear to be shifts in the level of integration being achieved as planning authorities ease themselves into greater coordination or collaboration, as they become more comfortable with, or recognise the benefits of, such increased joint activity. This can to some extent be attributed to the new LDF process.
- 1.8** Barriers to cross boundary working include the sometimes complex and difficult relationships that neighbouring authorities may have historically had with each other, for a variety of reasons, and sometimes the potential difficulties of the logistics of organising joint working given staffing and other resource constraints, and timing issues relating to committee cycles and consultation requirements. However, over time the barriers to joint working are reduced as there is growing realisation of the potential benefits.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.9** Based on the findings of the research the following recommendations are made.
- 1.10** All local planning authorities are recommended to take a pro-active approach to joint working by making a conscious decision to examine the potential benefits.
- 1.11** It is recommended that the following steps should be considered by local planning authorities to instigate or further develop joint working:
 - identifying whether there are strategic or shared development issues that would benefit from a joint approach, and engaging with the relevant neighbouring authorities to explore joint working potential

- carrying out analysis of potential benefits of joint working in the local context, to help to highlight and explain the benefits identified, and communicate them to decision makers
- examining existing joint working arrangements that may already be in place, considering their effectiveness and whether there is a need for revision to increase effectiveness, and whether there is scope to increase the range of joint working activity
- establishing joint working as a corporate priority and key area of activity for senior members and officers, encouraging a culture of joint working and a confidence about its potential
- considering how joint working will operate best, taking local circumstances into account; should there be a form of joint committee or more informal arrangements; will it mean alignment of programmes and a strong two-way flow of information to ensure alignment of complementary DPDs, or will there be a joint DPD; make early contact with the Planning Inspectorate to explore issues or concerns related to joint examination
- instigating measures to establish/strengthen professional and political relationships between authorities involved, to help cement a culture of joint working

1.12 It is recommended that Communities and Local Government should:

- consider ways of encouraging the RSS to identify issues/broad locations where joint working is desirable on cross boundary development issues within the region as well as at regional boundaries
- consider establishing mechanisms for Government Offices and Regional Assemblies to direct that local planning authorities should engage in joint working where clear circumstances that require it exist, and where voluntary arrangements are not being made
- consider providing an advice note on procedures for establishing joint committees, addressing how joint working might be achieved without the need for changes to primary legislation
- consider providing additional advice to LPAs on how key stakeholders can make timely and effective inputs to the delivery of the DPD, so that the potential for delay is minimised

1.13 Government Offices are recommended to:

- encourage cross boundary working in the interests of better planning at regional and sub-regional levels, and more locally where there are shared problems which would be better addressed jointly by local planning authorities
- be pro-active in assisting local authorities in identifying opportunities to make revisions to local development schemes (LDSs), to align programmes for evidence gathering and decision making to facilitate joint working on complementary DPDs

1.14 The Planning Inspectorate is recommended to:

- make it known to planning authorities that there is no impediment to the joint examination of complementary DPDs produced by neighbouring planning authorities, and that the tests of soundness will apply to joint examination without need for modification
- encourage local planning authorities to consider joint examination in appropriate cases, and to contact the Inspectorate early regarding procedures for joint examination so that potential uncertainties can be addressed.

Chapter 2: Introduction and approach

BACKGROUND

- 2.1** The reformed planning system encourages and facilitates cooperation between two or more local authorities on the preparation of local development documents. *Planning Policy Statement 12* (PPS 12) (ODPM 2004b) explains that the local development scheme (LDS) must state ‘which, if any, local development documents are to be prepared on a joint basis with one or more local planning authorities’ (PPS 12, paragraph 3.20).
- 2.2** The test of soundness (PPS12, paragraph 4.24(vi)) requires that ‘the strategies/policies/allocations in the plan are coherent and consistent within and between development plan documents prepared by the authority and by neighbouring authorities, where cross boundary issues are relevant’.
- 2.3** An agreement between authorities may be made to establish a formal joint committee through an Order made by the Secretary of State. Such a joint committee then becomes the local planning authority for the area specified in the agreement and for matters specified in the order (PPS 12, paragraph 2.37). However, this is only available in the specific circumstance of counties and districts working together. Other combinations must use the provisions under Local Government legislation for joint committees – and then each authority (and not the joint committee) has to be accountable for the formal actions in plan making.
- 2.4** Where joint arrangements are not in place and the Secretary of State believes that issues considered in a development plan document extend into a neighbouring planning authority’s area, intervention may be considered, ‘either in the form of a direction to modify or a direction to submit for Secretary of State approval’, (PPS 12, paragraph 4.32).

AIMS

- 2.5** This study seeks to consider the practice of cross boundary working in local development framework (LDF) production. The purpose of the thematic study is to provide more detailed analysis of the topic and evidence of good practice.
- 2.6** We understand cross boundary working in planning to mean cooperation on spatial development between local planning authorities and/or regional planning bodies across their administrative boundaries. The thematic study is particularly concerned with cross boundary cooperation on the production of local development frameworks.

2.7 The thematic study will concentrate on a number of central questions:

- what efforts have been made in LDF work to identify cross boundary issues and what mechanisms are used to pursue them?
- to what extent does LDF policy and decision making address cross boundary issues?
- why are some areas able to address cross boundary issues better than others and how can barriers be overcome?
- does the new system make a difference and what more could be done to promote effective cross boundary collaboration?

APPROACH

2.8 The importance of cross boundary working is recognised by the Spatial Plans in Practice (SPiP) project. It is one dimension of the integration theme that is reflected in the five core research questions set out in the SPiP Inception Report (ODPM, 2006a). This study draws upon previous work streams undertaken within the SPiP project:

- the literature reviews
- the strategic survey – round 3 of the survey enquired about joint working. Relevant findings are presented in Chapter 4
- the longitudinal case studies (LCS) – round 3 of the LCS investigated issues including cross boundary working. The findings are recorded in Chapter 4

Research specifically for this thematic study has involved:

- a focused literature review
- a questionnaire to 40 selected local authorities
- a round table discussion with planners working on cross boundary issues. This is reported in Chapter 4

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.9 A review of key literature has been undertaken, to identify the conceptual frameworks already constructed on policy integration; and second, to identify any relevant previous findings on practice in cross boundary working in planning. This includes, for example, recent work on the appropriate geographic areas for planning (Ove Arup 2006); the 2006 Local Government White Paper: *Strong and Prosperous Communities* (which considers appropriate authority boundaries); and cross boundary working in other related fields such as waste planning and integrated coastal zone management.

LOCAL AUTHORITY SURVEY

- 2.10** The thematic survey of selected local authorities was designed to address the four central questions highlighted above. Central to this was the overall question of why some places are able to address cross boundary issues and overcome political and practical problems, whilst others are not. The questionnaire (see Annex 1) sought to gather evidence of recognition of the need for collaborative working; what organisational arrangements are being used; the depth of collaboration between authorities ; and the role of the new planning system in facilitating cross boundary working.
- 2.11** In March 2007 the questionnaire was emailed to a selection of 40 local planning authorities, outside the main group of longitudinal case study authorities, where there is evidence from the strategic survey returns of cross boundary activity in the production of local development documents. By the end of April, 18 positive responses were received (see Annex 2).

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION

- 2.12** Finally, the draft thematic study report was circulated to a representative group of planners working cross boundary on DPDs and they were invited to participate in a round table discussion on the findings (see Annex 3). The outcome of that discussion, reported in Chapter 4, has also contributed to the conclusions and recommendations of the study.

AUDIENCE

- 2.13** There are a number of key audiences for this report: local planning authorities, Communities and Local Government, Government Offices and the Planning Inspectorate. Chapter 6 sets out recommendations for each audience based on the findings from the research.

Chapter 3: Issues for collaboration

INTRODUCTION

3.1 This chapter draws on the literature review to present findings on cross boundary working in order to inform the research work.

POLICY ON CROSS BOUNDARY WORKING

3.2 The 2004 reforms¹ address the need for better cross boundary working. In general, the emphasis on a strategic approach, policy integration and the evidence base are conducive to more effective working across boundaries. Sections 29 to 31 of the Act specifically make provision for joint committees to be established to be the local planning authority for matters specified. In this case the policies adopted by the joint committee (including any local development documents) are the policies of the constituent authorities.

3.3 Both *Planning Policy Statement 11: Regional Spatial Strategies* (PPS 11) (ODPM 2004a) and *Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Development Frameworks* (PPS 12) refer to cross boundary working in relation to the test of soundness, which says that the plan is sound if ‘the strategies/policies/allocations in the plan are coherent and consistent within and between development plan documents prepared by the authority and by neighbouring authorities, where cross boundary issues are relevant’ (PPS 12, paragraph 4.24 vi). PPS11 also mentions cross boundary working in relation to assistance of county councils and other local planning authorities in RSS preparation.

EXPERIENCE OF CROSS BOUNDARY WORKING IN ENGLAND

3.4 Like government administration generally, the need for joining up policy and action across jurisdictions is widely recognised in principle. It arises because some development proposals concern two or more planning jurisdictions; because spatial development relationships such as links between home and work cross boundaries, expressing themselves in the need to travel; and because planning authorities have shared concerns about similar problems. The *Local Government White Paper of 2006* draws attention to the lack of fit between many district and regional boundaries and the reality of community identity and ‘the natural economic boundaries of a city or town, making it harder to plan for growth (page 19). The boundary problem has been particularly prominent in the relationship between urban and rural areas and their respective planning authorities. The Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution points out that one

¹ The term ‘2004 reforms’ is used here as a shorthand for the changes to planning that began in 2000, which continue into 2007, and that centre on the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act.

of '...the original motivation[s] for town and country planning was to integrate the planning and development of urban and rural areas ...' (RCEP 2002, page 48).

- 3.5** Cross boundary issues will apply to all planning authorities to some degree (even islands). Yet, over the last 25 years practice at whatever scale (district, county, region, or nation) has tended to be contained firmly in its administrative area of authority: its jurisdiction. Planning at the regional and sub-regional scale may have considered the broader spatial relationships across boundaries but has still tended to devise and apply policy to the administrative units within its territory. Cross boundary spatial development issues were central to sub-regional studies and joint structure plans of the 1970s (Cross and Bristow 1983) but through the 1980s and 1990s were largely limited to voluntary and *ad hoc* initiatives. Lack of attention to cross boundary issues reflects in part the relatively narrow scope of the system and the limited attention to regional and strategic planning from the 1980s. This has contributed to the lack of integration and coherence in policy formulation and implementation that has been widely recognised (CBI-TUC Investment Group 2001, Christie *et al* 2002, Local Government Association 2001, Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution 2002, Town and Country Planning Association 2000, Vigar *et al.* 2000).
- 3.6** Voluntary cooperation on cross boundary working has been a feature of planning at the metropolitan level since the abolition of the metropolitan county councils in 1985. Similar voluntary arrangements were created at the regional level. Joint structure plan committees were created where required in some parts of England in the mid-1990s. In these cases county and unitary authorities prepared a joint structure plan, for example in the case of the Devon Structure Plan. Other local initiatives have established formal collaborative arrangements at the regional and sub-regional levels. For example the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH) brings together 11 local authorities with other stakeholders.²
- 3.7** The evidence of the thematic survey and the strategic survey suggests that the effect of the 2004 reforms has been to increase the amount of informal cross boundary joint working. Regional spatial strategies and core strategies are beginning to address cross boundary issues more fully and encouraging local authorities to work jointly on sub-regional issues.³ The South Dorset Strategy, for example, brings together three authorities

² This example is cited in the 2006 Local Government White Paper, page 76.

³ For example, the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West addresses housing market linkages with South Wales and the Draft East of England Regional Spatial Strategy establishes housing market areas irrespective of the district boundaries.

in undertaking a sub-regional study which contributes to the South West Regional Spatial Strategy.⁴ At another scale, the recent development of inter-regional working, particularly *The Northern Way*⁵, is a further recognition of the need for joint working. As reported below, there also appears to be a significant number of new informal cross boundary planning initiatives coming forward, although the opportunity to establish statutory joint committees for local development frameworks has been taken up in only one case: North Northamptonshire.

SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT, THE BORDER PROBLEM AND OPPORTUNITIES

- 3.8** Debates at the European level centred on the preparation of the *European Spatial Development Perspective* (ESDP) (CEC/Committee on Spatial Development 1999) have played a central role in shaping thinking on planning reform and in the revival of strategic spatial planning in England (and elsewhere) (Healey *et al.* 1997, Salet and Faludi 2000). A principal theme of the *European Spatial Development Perspective* is the need for more effective cooperation across national and regional borders on spatial development. It has been followed through in implementation by the Interreg Community Initiatives and from 2007, the territorial cooperation objective of the Cohesion Funds. These approaches are informed by a considerable literature on cross-border cooperation (Meyer 1997).
- 3.9** Debates around the fit between the spatial units for public policy and the reality of functional regions in economic, social and environmental terms have been around for some time. The city-region concept based on commuting flows was first developed in the 1930s (Wannop 1995, Hall and Pain 2007) but the network society is now more geographically spread, more complex, and more intense. Thus there is renewed interest in ‘functional territories’, such as the re-emergence of city-regions (ODPM 2006b) and wider use of spatial policy concepts such as urban networks, development corridors and polycentricity (Meijers 2007, Zonneveld 2005, Davoudi 2005). This type of understanding has started to inform analysis for regional planning in the UK (Harris and Hooper 2004, ECOTEC 2004). The implications of this debate go beyond simple reconsideration of administrative boundaries. Recognition that many drivers and consequences of spatial development lie outside of the area of direct jurisdiction lends weight to a ‘generative role’ of planning, that is, with less emphasis on seeking direct control over development and more on shaping the attention of a wider range of players and building *joint capacity* to act and innovate (Healey 2004: 50, emphasis added).

⁴ The Local Government White Paper 2006 notes the potential for groups of local authorities to prepare multi-area agreements (MAAs) to strengthen cross boundary working between local authorities and their partners (page 89).

⁵ *The Northern Way* is a partnership of the three regional development agencies in the north of England which has, inter alia, promoted joint working among local authorities and other organisations in, for example, city regions.

WHAT FACTORS EXPLAIN CROSS BOUNDARY WORKING?

- 3.10** Joint working by administrations across borders to any significant degree implies giving up some autonomy in policy and decision making. The principle of 'subsidiarity' is often applied to address questions where power is ceded to a higher or joint authority. According to the 'subsidiarity principle', competences should rest (or stay) at the lowest level possible, and should be ceded upwards from lower to higher levels of government only when there is good reason. Those reasons have been summarised in two simple criteria that match very well the practical concerns that explain cross boundary working (Nadin and Shaw 1999): the 'sufficiency criterion' and the 'benefit criterion'. This structure can help to organise ideas about the important factors that lead to joint working across planning authority boundaries.
- 3.11** The 'sufficiency criterion' (or necessity) would suggest that joint working will be needed where objectives cannot be achieved otherwise because of functional linkages across boundaries. Classic examples include new physical infrastructure at borders including bridges and roads, but would also include social infrastructure. There might also be a need for joint action where to do otherwise leads to inconsistencies in policies and action. The need for joint working may be determined by higher level government requirements, for example, in relation to requirements for accessibility to services or comprehensive plans for shared territorial designations. It might also be a product of longstanding commitments to achieving joint goals.
- 3.12** The 'benefit criterion' suggests that cross border cooperation may be appropriate where it can bring added value in contributing to the goals of the individual authorities, in particular through improved policy coordination horizontally and vertically; increased consistency and fairness in decision making and harmonisation of policy and action; improvements in the effectiveness of measures taken independently; improvement in the efficiency of implementation of agreed objectives, by reason of increased speed or better coordination; increased transparency in decision making; or improved knowledge through the exchange of experience.
- 3.13** There are also potential disbenefits from cross boundary working or other barriers particularly in relation to effects on perceived competition between local authorities and democratic structures. Competition among places is inevitable though it might vary from competition to attract new development to competition to avoid it. Competition is more acute where it is perceived as a zero sum gain, that is, where it is impossible for both sides to win. Cooperation across boundaries will often mean some adjustment to political objectives is required, and it will also multiply

the problems of organisational and political complexity (Meyer 1997). Ceding competences to a joint body may have a negative effect on the accountability of decision making, on public participation and consultation in the preparation of proposals.

ORGANISATION OF CROSS BOUNDARY WORKING

3.14 Cross boundary working is one of three dimensions that tend to be identified in the extensive literature on policy integration, though it is generally given far less attention than inter-sectoral working (Balloch & Taylor 2001, Cabinet Office 2000, Cowell & Martin 2003, Lenschow 2002, Ling 2002, Morphet 2004, Rhodes 2000, Steurer 2005, Sullivan and Skeltcher 2002, Wilkinson & Appelbee 1999). The three dimensions of integration are:

- horizontal - across sectoral, departmental and/or professional boundaries
- vertical – across jurisdictional boundaries between levels of government
- territorial – across boundaries between administrative territories

3.15 The literature on sectoral policy integration provides a useful source of ideas on the various kinds of institutional arrangements that are needed to enable working across administrative boundaries. Many writers agree about the continuum of forms of working across boundaries which stretches from simple sharing of information or collaboration in the form of relatively open networks, through more formal partnerships to statutory committees. These arrangements are likely to involve joint working across sectors, levels of government and territorial boundaries. Sullivan and Skeltcher (2002: 42) explain the continuum in terms of formality:

‘.....at one end are informal and largely ad hoc relationships and at the other highly structured and formalised interactions, which ultimately may lead to the integration of collaborating agencies into a single organisation...’

3.16 What distinguishes these organisational forms is the *level of commitment* given by the various partners, ranging from situations where partners maintain their individual authority and *cooperate* on issues of mutual interest, to others where partners pool authority and share decision making or cede it to a joint body. (Balloch and Taylor 2001: 6). Formal partnership and committee arrangements suggest commitment to a long-term working relationship ‘to secure the delivery of benefits that could not have been provided by ... acting alone’, (Sullivan and Skelcher 2002: 6), that is to secure a ‘collaborative advantage’.

- 3.17** In a similar fashion, other research points to the variety of approaches and tools used to secure integration across boundaries. Jordan (2002: 39) refers to eight styles of coordination that are used to achieve improved policy integration in varying combinations. Though not developed in a cross border context, they are nevertheless relevant to all situations of organisational cooperation on policy and action and stretch from approaches that maintain the autonomy of one organisation, through consultation to avoid inconsistent policy, to establishing common goals and methods of working.
- 3.18** We have used the existing conceptual frameworks on policy integration to suggest a typology of possible forms of policy integration in cross boundary working which is shown in Figure 1. This understanding was taken forward into the investigation.

Figure 1 Forms of integration for cross-boundary working

Organisational integration						
Independence	Loose network	Limited agreements to avoid inconsistencies	Informal joint activities	Formal joint bodies	Formal bodies holding joint competences	Mergers
Policy integration						
Protecting own policy	Information sharing	Consultation and harmonising	Cooperation	Coordination	Collaboration	Joint goals and policy
Dialogue						
No dialogue It is more important that we compete than cooperate	One way dialogue using 'public channels'. "We have a new housing policy, here it is"	Limited reciprocal dialogue, avoiding policy conflicts through formal consultation. "We are developing new housing policy, we will take account of your policy to avoid inconsistency."	Reciprocal dialogue in specific arenas, data sharing, working together to achieve own goals "We both need to produce new housing policies, let us share information but continue to produce separate policies."	Reciprocal dialogue and data sharing, seeking positive benefits, policy convergence; synchronising timetables. "We are both producing housing policy, let us share information and coordinate our policies to achieve compatibility and synergy."	Reciprocal dialogue, data sharing, ensuring coherence and consistency of policy by establishing shared objectives possibly joint working on delivery mechanisms. "Let us work together to produce our separate policies that are integrated in the around a shared objective"	Sharing the same objectives, resources and possibly delivery mechanisms. Limiting autonomy of each partner. "Let us work together to produce a single housing policy that meets our joint objectives."

Chapter 4: Research findings

4.1 The research findings are derived from four main sources:

- strategic survey 3
- questionnaire to 40 authorities known to be engaged in joint working
- third round of longitudinal case studies
- round table discussion with practitioners

The findings are set out below.

STRATEGIC SURVEY 3: THE EXTENT OF JOINT WORKING

4.2 The third round of the SPIP strategic survey provides good information on the extent of joint working. The survey was sent to all local planning authorities in England in January 2007 and 181 authorities responded, giving a response rate of 46 per cent. With this relatively high response rate, the findings from the returns will be a good representation of the picture for all authorities. However, the question on joint working was not included in the previous surveys so information on trends is very limited.

4.3 Table 1 shows that of those responding, the majority of joint activity was in gathering and sharing information, followed by monitoring activity.

Table 1 The extent of joint working

Type of joint working		Number	%
DPD production	Core Strategy	20	11
	Waste Core Strategy	46	25
	Minerals Core Strategy	22	12
	Area Action Plan	24	13
Gathering and sharing information		110	61
Monitoring		65	36

Note – Multiple responses allowed.

4.4 DPD production was more limited, with most activity being in Waste Core Strategies (25%). Only 11% are currently engaged in joint Core Strategy production.

WHY DO AUTHORITIES ENGAGE IN CROSS BOUNDARY WORKING?

- 4.5** The responses on the thematic study questionnaire survey returns point to four key factors that lead to joint working;
- the recognition of a overriding need to tackle a shared development issue
 - a previous history of beneficial cooperation across boundaries
 - leadership from politicians and senior officers
 - the benefit of a stronger 'voice' in regional planning matters
- 4.6** The strategic survey returns also indicate that joint working is most likely to occur due to overlapping strategic interests and the pooling of information. The latter is reflected in the high proportion of respondents to the survey engaged in this activity (61%).
- 4.7** Cambridge City Council is a typical example of the situation where there is an overriding need for cross boundary working. In this case a site for a major urban extension at Cambridge East for 10 to 12,000 homes crosses the boundary with South Cambridgeshire District Council. A second development site in north west Cambridge is also affected by cross boundary issues. Action area plans are being prepared for both sites, and joint working between the authorities is effectively a requirement.
- 4.8** Similarly, the designation of the North Northamptonshire Growth Area required joint working on the delivery of very large scale development between districts and the county council. Close geographical interrelationships may also necessitate joint working, as in the case of New Forest District Council and the National Park Authority which are preparing a joint Core Strategy.
- 4.9** Whilst spatial development relationships and cross boundary designations will inevitably raise cross boundary issues, the form of joint working varies, only in some cases leading to joint development plan documents. Relationships are dynamic and develop over time. This is particularly important given the relatively recent encouragement to address cross boundary issues. One council reported that cooperation with other authorities is positive but only at an early stage where there is consultation, but with decisions resting with the constituent councils. It is anticipated that there will be further development in cooperation in the future towards a joint decision making body so as to ensure efficient and effective progress on difficult issues. Another council reports that it has a cross boundary development site, but that so far the preparation of joint documents has

not been agreed and joint working is informal, with alignment of core strategies and programmes for production of documents.

- 4.10** Existing cooperative arrangements among local planning authorities have been important in providing a basis for cross boundary working on local development frameworks. For example, a previous history of close working among the Hampshire authorities facilitated joint working on development plan documents, particularly the joint Core Strategy being prepared by the New Forest District Council and the National Park Authority. The cooperative arrangements in the Black Country (the boroughs of Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton) formed to produce advice on the sub-regional component of the Regional Spatial Strategy also formed the basis for cooperative working on the joint Core Strategy. Norwich City Council and Preston City Council and Redcar and Cleveland Council all drew attention to the importance of a history of joint working. In some cases previous cross boundary working was the result of requirements for a joint structure plan following local government reorganisation in the 1990s, as, for example, in facilitating the joint working of Wiltshire County Council and Swindon Council on the Minerals and Waste Development Framework.
- 4.11** In contrast, one council reported that due to strong political differences in attitudes towards releasing land for development, working with a neighbouring council has often been complex. In this case it has taken five years to establish joint political meetings about proposed joint working, and the proposed joint action area plan is not yet programmed in the LDSs.
- 4.12** Leadership is reported to have been a central factor in facilitating cross boundary working by numerous authorities, both in the sense of political leadership and the lead given by senior local government officers, often chief executives. For example, Christchurch reports a critical factor in its extensive collaboration with East Dorset and other neighbouring councils, which has involved agreement on shared policies and joint development plan documents, is political will and leadership. This is said to be particularly important for bringing forward the new system in these relatively small authorities. At New Forest District Council both politicians and officers have been instrumental in ensuring joint working is in place.
- 4.13** Firm ‘encouragement’ in a top-down way from Government Offices and regional planning bodies is an important factor, and is linked to the point about an identified need. For example, an East Midlands council mentions the ‘strong encouragement’ given by the Government Office for the East Midlands and the Regional Assembly. The role of the same bodies

was also a factor in the creation of the statutory joint committee in North Northamptonshire. Norwich City Council reported that the Government Office for the East of England had played an important role following a lead given by the examination in public (EIP) Panel for the Regional Spatial Strategy. But the top-down factor is not always present. One respondent pointed to the way that the Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West encourages collaborative working by local authorities on a number of themes, but stops short of specifying where cross boundary working is needed and why.

- 4.14** In a number of cases joint working is thought to be beneficial because it strengthens the voice of the area in policy arenas at the regional scale. Three neighbouring councils, for example, made joint submissions on the city-region debate in the *Northern Way* process (see footnote 5, page 12), and the same three authorities made joint representations to the Regional Economic Strategy and the Regional Spatial Strategy. The four Black Country councils have been working within the Black Country Consortium to inform the sub-regional component of the Regional Spatial Strategy. The corollary of a stronger voice up to the region is perhaps the danger of weaker linkages to citizens, since compromises might be necessary in speaking with one voice. Questions of maintaining the legitimacy of decision making in joint working were raised by a few authorities. In one case early voluntary cooperation between two councils was thought desirable to avoid the imposition of a development agency which would have reduced local accountability.

FINDINGS FROM LONGITUDINAL CASE STUDIES

- 4.15** Round three of the longitudinal case studies included investigation of issues relating to cross boundary working. The findings from the interviews with South Hams and Plymouth, Stoke on Trent, Horsham, and Wokingham offer an insight into joint working issues across a range of types of authority. The nature of these studies, and the interview format, allowed for a more in-depth discussion. The findings are reported below.

Plymouth and South Hams

- 4.16** The driver for joint working was a structure plan allocation that was originally resisted by the authority that would be the recipient of most of the greenfield development (South Hams). However, the authority reconsidered its stance and commenced constructive dialogue with Plymouth on a joint approach, on the basis that it was better to be engaged and influencing outcomes than to continue to resist and fight significant planning applications. It was also recognised that there were potential benefits for South Hams residents, in the form of affordable housing.

- 4.17** There has been a pragmatic response to the inevitable in coming to recognise the overriding need to tackle a shared issue, and the benefits of doing so. Leadership from politicians and senior officers, plus encouragement from the Government Office, played a part in coming to this position.
- 4.18** An informal approach to joint working has been arrived at to suit both parties, with the support of the Government Office. It was decided that a joint AAP was potentially complicated, both in terms of operating a joint committee and dealing with the implications if things went wrong. There were uncertainties over this process at the time the decision was taken to work jointly, which was relatively early in the new planning system.
- 4.19** Both authorities felt that they could achieve just as much with informal arrangements, with each authority reporting to its own committees, operating to the same timescale, and with the same inspector running consecutive examinations. This informal approach requires flexibility and responsiveness on both sides, in drawing up programmes for DPD production that work together, whilst at the same time committing to delivering at key dates.

Wokingham District Council

- 4.20** Wokingham's involvement in joint working is mainly with other local authorities in Berkshire. It takes the form of strategic information and monitoring work, and minerals and waste planning.
- 4.21** The location of Wokingham in a pressured area to the west of London with a complex settlement pattern and functional inter-relationships suggests a strong need for collaboration and joint working on spatial planning. This is arguably the type of area where the need to tackle shared development issues is high. However, there appears to be a reluctance to engage positively and constructively in wider debates about development and growth. This appears to stem from political factors and a strong anti-development stance among some factions.
- 4.22** However, the potential to have a stronger voice in regional planning matters appears to have stimulated joint working with adjacent authorities in responding to Natural England's proposals for a Delivery Plan for the Thames Basin Heaths special protection area (SPA).
- 4.23** The Joint Strategic Planning Unit (JSPU) provides a research resource for the Berkshire authorities and a mechanism to facilitate the production of the Joint Waste and Minerals DPD, involving all six Berkshire authorities.

- 4.24** *The Thames Basin Heath's (TBH) SPA Delivery Plan* sees 13 local planning authorities, including Wokingham, working together. The 13 authorities began meeting independently to discuss a single response to the South East Plan EIP Assessor Report.
- 4.25** Contact was largely through email correspondence although informal meetings did occur when necessary. Waverley BC frequently took the lead, although there was no formal lead authority. Whilst each LPA had individual concerns, this approach enabled all authorities to gain a better understanding of all of the issues. It enabled informal networking of both development control (DC) and policy officers, which encouraged collaboration and idea sharing both on this and other wider issues. It helped that all authorities were at a similar stage in the LDF process.

Stoke on Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme

- 4.26** The driver for joint working in this instance has been the urgent need for regeneration across the conurbation. The two authorities involved were already working together on regeneration issues as a result of this. Collaboration is a partnership based on traditional working practices rather than a response to reforms associated with the LDF system. Government Office has continued to encourage this approach.
- 4.27** Stoke and Newcastle are currently producing a joint Core Strategy. Some of the key stakeholders in the process are RENEW North Staffordshire and the North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone.
- 4.28** The Regeneration Zone influences the priorities for how the economy should be restructured, with particular onus on focussing development in the city centre on strategic employment investment sites. This body has collaborated with the City Council and RENEW North Staffordshire to produce the "City Centre Development Framework and Investment Strategy" (December 2005). This document arose from a recognition that Stoke lacked a coherent economic and land use framework that supported intervention in specific housing markets (clearance/redevelopment), and needed a core strategy with a strong and refreshed evidence base for the North Staffordshire Urban Core Area.
- 4.29** The document provides a vision for a thriving city centre and is effectively a master plan, allocating different land uses within the city centre, thereby providing a comprehensive development context that it is hoped will encourage external investors to come to the city. The Strategy has been used to inform and influence investment decisions of local key partner organisations and has made a technical contribution towards the preparation of the City Council's Core Strategy.

- 4.30** However, the prior existence of the two regeneration agencies operating in the area appears to have led to some difficulties of timing arising from the need to have the content of strategic documents (eg the core strategy) agreed not only by the two Councils but also by the Boards of the two regeneration bodies (RENEW and North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone). The programming of meetings, prioritisation of strategic issues, and incorporation of changes resulting from meetings, has led to delays in the LDF process.
- 4.31** Further, with joint working additional time can be needed to achieve a political consensus on the contents of a document, with changes being passed back and forth after committee meetings at each authority.

Horsham District Council

- 4.32** The driver for joint working in Horsham is both the existence of a strategic allocation that spans local authority boundaries, and a recognition that spatial planning issues require an outward-looking approach.
- 4.33** Joint working is helped by the fact that Horsham District Council have an enthusiastic and committed professional team, with a full appreciation of the potential benefits that joint working can bring. This has been matched by Crawley Borough Council, Horsham's partner authority for the Joint Action Area Plan (AAP). There is evidence of a pragmatic approach that seeks to engage with new ideas and change, and a pro-active culture in which things can happen effectively and in which solutions are found. All aspects of the work on the Joint AAP are being undertaken jointly between the two authorities, including agreement of consultation timings, locations and methods. Key decisions rest with the individual authorities.
- 4.34** Working groups have been established to progress work on the Joint AAP. The working groups comprise council officers, including officers from building control, the LDF team, development control, transport, housing, environmental health, and the economic development and sustainability officers, together with cabinet members and key external stakeholders such as the County youth officer, utility providers, Environment Agency, landowners, and others. Subgroups have been developed to focus on specific issues and feed into the masterplan.
- 4.35** In addition to the working group there is also a Joint Officer Group comprising officers from multiple disciplines (including housing, leisure, planning policy, property, building control, development control).

- 4.36** The attendance at both the Working Groups and the Joint Officer Group is dependant on the meeting agenda. However the ability to draw on external resources in both mechanisms is seen as very valuable and has had a positive impact on outcomes. All groups meet monthly.
- 4.37** This example exhibits recognition of the need to tackle a shared issue, and leadership of senior politicians and officers, with the addition of a strong commitment to, and positive attitude towards, joint working.

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION

- 4.38** The research team met six representatives of local planning authorities engaged in cross boundary working to varying degrees (see Annex 3). The main points from this discussion follow.
- 4.39** The impetus for cross boundary working is specific to the individual authorities and their circumstances, but the most common stimuli appear to revolve around regeneration opportunities and the growth agenda. Issues such as staff shortages or an organisational vacuum at the sub-regional level can also instigate joint working, particular where there is an imperative to respond to a strategy. Previous experience of working together assists, whether this is in responding to regional documents or simply in data collection. In one instance an Inspector at a local plan inquiry directed joint working on an area with shared issues.
- 4.40** Barriers to cross boundary working are political, procedural and financial in nature. Political differences, particularly where there is a growth agenda, can limit the willingness of authorities under different control to work together. On the procedural side the alignment of LDS programmes and meeting the committee cycles of different councils can be daunting. Additionally the dependence of Planning Delivery Grant (PDG) on plan production performance makes authorities reluctant to commit to joint working. One particularly difficult aspect to joint working comes with the sharing and distribution of developer contributions and their allocation to physical or social infrastructure projects which may not be spent in the same authority area from which they were generated.
- 4.41** Other issues that authorities working jointly have to confront include adjusting their LDS to include not only the joint document but also the implications of the timing of its adoption on the production of other DPDs. There may also be tensions between areas needing regeneration and those identified for accepting growth especially where they fall in different districts. The spread of expertise across the constituent authorities may be uneven, but this can be resolved by utilising specialisms where they exist, and identifying lead authorities.

- 4.42** It was agreed that being able to have a joint examination assists in programming, but although the mechanisms currently exist for this to happen, there is a lack of understanding about the process and a perception that it is not straightforward. It was also questioned whether or not the tests of soundness might need to be changed to accommodate joint examination.
- 4.43** The benefits of cross boundary working can be political, financial and, most importantly, lead to better plans. Some political issues are better addressed through collaboration. A more rational vision can emerge in a cooperative situation rather than having neighbouring authorities effectively bidding for the same role. The pooling of resources enables better quality evidence and the use of the best regarded and most influential consultants.
- 4.44** In summary, the participants at the discussion agreed that working together can produce better evidence which in turn leads to better plans and that some issues, like the Dorset Heaths or the North Northamptonshire growth agenda, could not be addressed in isolation. However, there are practical problems in coordination of activity like LDS revision and the support needed from those organising committee cycles. There are also uncertainties over the impact of local area agreements (LAAs) and multi area agreements (MAAs) as well as the need for greater commitment to strategic planning from the Highways Agency, among others.

SUMMARY

- 4.45** This research has identified four key factors that lead to joint working.

The recognition of an overriding need to tackle a shared development issue

The recognition of the need for joint working is of crucial importance, particularly where there has been no previous history of joint working. There are examples where the recognition of need has come late, but has ultimately been embraced. There are also examples where the need may be there, but recognition of this has yet to come about. Such a need is often identified as a result of recognition of overlapping strategic interests or opportunities to work to mutual benefit.

A previous history of beneficial cooperation across boundaries

Historical issues are behind all of the activity on joint minerals and waste DPDs, which traditionally transcend boundaries across county areas, and make up a significant part of the overall joint

working activity. This is also the case with pooling of information. Regeneration issues provide another example, with authorities in older conurbations often already engaged in joint work on regeneration, or in established growth areas, where joint working has been well established in considering development and infrastructure issues. This leads relatively easily into joint work on spatial planning.

Leadership from politicians and from senior officers

Leadership is said by many participants in the research to be particularly important for bringing forward the new system and in encouraging joint working in relatively small authorities. Where recognition of the need is not based on historical factors and actual experience, but relies instead on a more detached appreciation of the potential benefits, the ability of the leadership to recognise this potential and have the will to act is crucial in instigating joint working.

The benefit of a stronger 'voice' in regional planning matters

There is evidence of a view that working jointly to represent common interests in regional planning leads to joint working and a consequent stronger voice. The examples of Black Country and North Northamptonshire illustrate the effectiveness of a sub-regional impetus to establishing cross boundary DPD production, in areas where there is no single dominant centre. However, where there is a strong sub-regional centre upon which growth is focused (such as Bristol or Reading) this type of joint working relationship appears to have been far more difficult to establish.

BENEFITS OF JOINT WORKING

4.46 The four key factors identified above encompass a range of benefits that have been experienced to some degree by local planning authorities taking part in the research. These include:

- improved policy coordination on shared issues, with resultant increased consistency in decision making and harmonisation of policy and action
- increased speed and better coordination of implementation, increasing effectiveness
- improved knowledge through information exchange
- greater efficiency through use of shared resources, and the ability to produce better quality evidence

- the ability to cooperate rather than compete, minimising duplication of roles (eg investment on improving individual competing shopping centres might be replaced by more effective concentration on one centre to serve the joint area)
- improved relationships between participating authorities, and a greater collective voice
- arising from all the above, the production of better informed and more effective spatial plans

FORMS OF JOINT WORKING

4.47 Within the context of the above, the form of joint working varies, only in some cases leading to joint development plan documents. Relationships are dynamic and develop over time. Formal joint committee approaches are less prevalent than informal approaches that seek to synchronise plan production timetables and see considerable flows of information and ideas across boundaries, sometimes resulting in joint documents, and sometimes in separate documents that have compatible and complementary policy content.

Chapter 5: Analysis and conclusions

5.1 The research questions set out in Chapter 2 provide the framework for this chapter and address the following issues:

- identification of cross boundary issues
- mechanisms for joint working
- barriers to joint working
- the role of the new planning system

The findings reported in Chapters 3 and 4 are analysed against the background of the literature review.

Identification of cross boundary issues

5.2 There is evidence that the focus on spatial planning and the increasing recognition of the need to consider cross boundary issues under the new planning system is leading to more of an outward look when considering the issues and options stage of core strategy preparation.

5.3 However, the majority of cross boundary working appears to arise from recognition of wider strategic issues that require action, such as minerals and waste planning, regeneration activity, growth area planning, and the extent to which major designations cross local authority boundaries (eg National Parks or Natura 2000 sites).

5.4 To a degree these issues self-evidently require cross boundary working, and may indeed have been the subject of some form of joint activity for some time. This is particularly the case with activities that are currently, or have been historically, associated with county councils (minerals and waste), or with strategic allocations identified in structure plans or regional spatial strategies.

5.5 Cross boundary issues are therefore, in many instances, a given, and sometimes have required little specific effort to identify them in the course of LDF work. They form natural subjects for joint DPD preparation, incorporated into core strategies, site allocations, and joint AAPs.

5.6 Joint working on a topic by topic basis in preparing the evidence base and monitoring activity is also leading to joint supplementary planning document (SPD) preparation. Affordable housing, design guidance and open space are some of the topics that are the subject of joint SPD work.

MECHANISMS FOR JOINT WORKING

- 5.7** The mechanisms for joint working show how integration in joint working occurs in practice. The literature review led to the identification of a typology of forms of integration for cross boundary working, ranging from ‘independence’ through to ‘mergers’ (see Figure 1).
- 5.8** It must be said that there is no suggestion that there is an ‘ideal’ position whereby the higher along the spectrum towards ‘joint goals and policy’, the better. Joint working and the level of integration is dependent on the characteristics of each individual case, which includes not only the issues on which joint working may or may not be necessary, but also the resource base and political factors affecting the participants.
- 5.9** There are no examples in the research sample of complete ‘independence’, where no cross boundary dialogue takes place on any spatial planning issues at all. Indeed the overall picture shows that there is considerable activity in the middle range of the spectrum, from ‘consultation and harmonising’, through ‘cooperation’, to ‘co-ordination’.
- 5.10** Most of the authorities surveyed would fit into this middle range, being engaged in reciprocal dialogue and data sharing, with some evidence that in some cases timetables are being synchronised for compatibility. These authorities are seeking to avoid inconsistencies across boundaries, working together to achieve their own separate goals.
- 5.11** There are a few examples of ‘collaboration’, with formal joint bodies holding joint competences and joint working on delivery mechanisms. An example of this would be Horsham, where a Joint AAP is being prepared with Crawley, under the direction of a joint officers’ group and a joint members’ steering group.
- 5.12** There is evidence of movement towards greater integration, however, with some authorities reporting anticipated further development in cooperation in future, moving towards joint decision-making bodies.
- 5.13** Political differences are cited as a difficulty in facilitating joint working in some cases where a need has been established. The level of integration is likely to be limited to information sharing at least in the initial stages of work. Evidence suggests that such difficulties can take time to overcome, but the result can then be a move along the spectrum to ‘consultation’, ‘cooperation’ and ‘coordination’.

5.14 This dynamic picture is characteristic of organisational integration, and movement up the spectrum of integration (and potentially down, as some cross boundary issues resolve over time) is to be expected. Such movement is a sign of evolving inter-organisational relationships and the complexities of spatial planning activity.

BARRIERS TO CROSS BOUNDARY WORKING

5.15 There is evidence that for the most part, where there are significant cross boundary issues then they are being addressed. However, there is also evidence that in some cases the recognition or acknowledgement that some form of joint working is the answer to addressing the issues has been slow to come about, or is running into a degree of difficulty.

5.16 Such instances include:

- where there is apparently little inclination on the part of senior politicians or officers to grasp the potential advantages and benefits of joint working, and instigate measures to put it into practice. This is the case where a particular authority might take an anti-development stance which is at odds with a neighbour. There may be political differences or historic disputes between the parties involved, to the extent that agreement is difficult to reach due to factors often external to the process
- differing staffing and resource issues between parties, with one becoming dominant; this can lead to some dissatisfaction with the level of influence possible on the part of the weaker party
- the number of different parties involved can sometimes be a limiting factor on speed and decision making, due to the need to coordinate several committee cycles. The need to align timescales and procedures, and the need to get member approval at certain stages, causes disincentives to the production of joint documents

5.17 Evidence suggests that gradually over time the barriers to increased levels of joint working do fall as there is growing realisation of the potential benefits. At the same time, the potential adverse consequences of not being involved may also become more apparent (for example, in areas where significant growth is planned that spans boundaries, the difficulties of dealing with planning applications being made without a joined up policy framework).

5.18 Participants at the round table discussion considered that dissemination of good practice information on joint working and the types of mechanisms that have been used to good effect is a welcome influence in encouraging

further joint working. Advice on how to deal with issues such as resourcing and organisational structures, including the pros and cons of various arrangements, would be of benefit. For example, joint committees will have greater relevance in some circumstances than others.

- 5.19** There is evidence that the Government Offices and Regional Assemblies have in some instances played a valuable role in encouraging and promoting joint working. This role could be enhanced by more widespread recognition that they may be able to assist those authorities who are nervous or reticent about engaging in joint working, by providing advice and support to overcome uncertainties and arbitrating in potential points of disagreement.

THE ROLE OF THE NEW PLANNING SYSTEM IN PROMOTING CROSS BOUNDARY WORKING

- 5.20** The new planning system has the potential to promote cross boundary working and there is a clear thrust in the legislation that encourages and raises the profile of cross boundary working. All planning authorities appear to be aware of this.
- 5.21** However, many of the authorities surveyed consider that they have been engaged in cross boundary working long before the new planning system came into force, and so this is not new to them. Even these authorities recognise nevertheless that the new system has raised the profile of cross boundary working, and that new forms of organisation are evolving to address the demands of the new system.
- 5.22** The new system requires that there is closer policy integration with the variety of agencies, authorities and bodies that deal with infrastructure provision of various types (such as government agencies, primary care trusts, utilities and service providers), most of which have varying territories that cross boundaries. In the process of dealing with policy integration with these organisations, cross boundary issues can almost inevitably be expected to arise to some degree, and might be a catalyst for joint working in plan making across boundaries.
- 5.23** The introduction of the local development scheme has been viewed as a valuable discipline and aid to project management, but at the same time the difficulty in aligning programmes with other authorities may lead to joint working opportunities being passed over in the interests of making progress with individual plans.

CONCLUSIONS

- 5.24** Much of the cross boundary working activity to date has been in relation to issues that self-evidently require joint working, and may indeed have been the subject of some form of joint activity for some time. Cross boundary issues are therefore, in many instances, a given. There has also been, in some cases, a significant top-down encouragement for joint working, not just in terms of the new planning legislation but also through proactive involvement and advice by some Government Offices and Regional Assemblies. There is also evidence of joint working on spatial planning that has come about through recognition of the benefits that joint working in other areas, such as social and economic regeneration, has brought. Established relationships therefore play an important part in much current joint working.
- 5.25** The overall picture shows that there is considerable activity in the middle range of the spectrum of organisational integration, from 'consultation and harmonising', through 'cooperation', to 'co-ordination'. There are a few examples of 'collaboration', with formal joint bodies holding joint competences and joint working on delivery mechanisms.
- 5.26** The dynamics of the overall picture are quite strong, in that there appear to be shifts in the level of integration being achieved as planning authorities ease themselves into greater degrees of 'coordination' or 'collaboration', as they become more comfortable with, or recognise the benefits of, such increased joint activity
- 5.27** Barriers to cross boundary working include:
- the sometimes complex and difficult relationships that neighbouring authorities may have historically had with each other, for a variety of reasons; this is perhaps the most significant barrier, in that the political background to this can be such as to prevent joint working where it should logically occur, particularly where urban authority boundaries are hard against adjacent 'rural' areas and development pressure is high
 - the potential difficulties of the logistics of organising joint working given staffing and other resource constraints, and timing issues relating to committee cycles and consultation requirements; this can be a hindrance to smooth progress where joint working is in place. It can also be a deterrent to taking joint working beyond joint evidence gathering and monitoring towards joint or coordinated DPDs
 - a lack of clear guidance and advice on when joint working should be considered, on what issues, and what form it should take

- a target driven environment which puts the achievement of individual goals in DPD production above the genuine consideration of wider issues to do with cooperation and collaboration

However, there is evidence to suggest that over time the significance of the barriers to joint working are reduced as planning authorities take initial steps towards joint work, perhaps through joint evidence gathering, and there is then a growing realisation and experience of the potential benefits, which can result in a greater will to overcome the difficulties.

Chapter 6: Key lessons and recommendations

- 6.1** Where joint working is taking place, the research has found that there is a general view on the part of those involved, that it results in better spatial planning. Whatever the reasons for joint working, it is apparent that it is most effective where there is commitment and a positive attitude to collaboration.
- 6.2** **All local planning authorities are therefore recommended to take a pro-active approach to joint working by making a conscious decision to examine the potential benefits.**
- 6.3** This can be achieved by looking outwards and actively seeking to engage with neighbouring authorities to identify issues that might benefit from a joint approach.
- 6.4** This applies equally to authorities that are already engaged to some degree in joint working, as well as those that are not, since established relationships are an important factor. An existing culture of joint working can be encouraged to grow and develop, to the benefit of effective spatial planning.
- 6.5** It is recognised that in some locations there may be little that merits taking a joint approach. In other locations, however, there are likely to be significant issues that require a more strategic view that transcends administrative boundaries, and where current spatial planning work falls short of what could be achieved with a wider outlook. Even in areas where this is being addressed by joint work, the evidence suggests that attempts to do so are sometimes tentative and imperfect due to barriers such as political or resource constraints, a reluctance to move too quickly to a position which might appear to be giving up a degree of local power or identity, or a desire to hang back whilst uncertainties in the new planning system are tested by others.
- 6.6** Against this background, it is recommended that the following steps should be considered by local planning authorities to instigate or further develop joint working:
- **identifying whether there are strategic or shared development issues that would benefit from a joint approach, and engaging with the relevant neighbouring authorities to explore joint working potential**

- **carrying out analysis of potential benefits of joint working in the local context, to help to highlight and explain the benefits identified, and communicate them to decision makers**
 - **examining existing joint working arrangements that may already be in place, considering their effectiveness and whether there is a need for revision to increase effectiveness, and whether there is scope to increase the range of joint working activity**
 - **establishing joint working as a corporate priority and key area of activity for senior members and officers, encouraging a culture of joint working and a confidence about its potential**
 - **considering how joint working will operate best, taking local circumstances into account; should there be a form of joint committee or more informal arrangements; will it mean alignment of programmes and a strong two-way flow of information to ensure alignment of complementary DPDs, or will there be a joint DPD; make early contact with the Planning Inspectorate to explore issues or concerns related to joint examination**
 - **instigating measures to establish/strengthen professional and political relationships between authorities involved, to help cement a culture of joint working**
- 6.7** There is a role for Communities and Local Government and Government Offices in this, in assisting local planning authorities to instigate and develop joint working in spatial planning and overcome the barriers that have been identified. There is varying evidence of such encouragement and assistance in current joint working practice, although there are some good examples.
- 6.8** In some instances there is evidence that adjoining planning authorities with significant cross boundary issues are not working together to address these, due in part to political differences and contrasting approaches to potential solutions. It has to be recognised that, in rare but important instances, effective joint working on important strategic issues is unlikely to come about voluntarily. Some participants in the research have suggested that there should be a mechanism for Government to direct planning authorities to work jointly, where there are clear circumstances that this is likely to be of significant benefit and where there is apparent reluctance to do so.

- 6.9** The clearer identification at regional level of spatial planning issues that would benefit from joint working would assist local planning authorities when considering potential areas of joint activity, and in setting up the necessary arrangements. This is happening to a degree through the identification of sub- regional growth areas and could be reinforced.
- 6.10** The mechanisms for establishing a formal joint committee have been raised by some participants as being a barrier to joint working, since in some circumstances this requires legislative changes, where the proposed partnership is not a county-district arrangement. A simplified procedure, or advice on how to set up joint committee arrangements without legislative changes, might see more planning authorities considering this approach to collaboration.
- 6.11** In some locations the need for a regeneration agency to agree the relevant content of DPDs is said to have caused significant delay in their production. Key stakeholders, such as regeneration agencies are crucial to delivering the DPD for an area. It might be worth re-examining their role to see if further advice can be given on how key stakeholders can provide a timely and effective input to the delivery of DPDs so that the potential for delay is minimised.
- 6.12** There is a potential disincentive to joint working that arises where neighbouring authorities have LDSs that are out of step in terms of key stages. The target-driven nature of the LDS exercise means that many local authorities may wish to meet their own targets rather than risk criticism by delaying to allow for joint work to take place.
- 6.13** A higher level overview of the plan production process across a wider area might assist when setting targets in LDSs for neighbouring authorities, where there are known cross boundary issues.
- 6.14 It is therefore recommended that Communities and Local Government should:**
- **Consider ways of encouraging the RSS to identify issues/broad locations where joint working is desirable on cross boundary development issues within the region as well as at regional boundaries**

- **consider establishing mechanisms for Government Offices and Regional Assemblies to direct that local planning authorities should engage in joint working where clear circumstances that require it exist, and where voluntary arrangements are not being made**
- **consider providing an advice note on procedures for establishing joint committees, addressing how joint working might be achieved without the need for changes to primary legislation**
- **consider providing additional advice to LPAs on how key stakeholders can make timely and effective inputs to the delivery of the DPD, so that the potential for delay is minimised**

6.15 Government Offices are recommended to:

- **encourage cross boundary working in the interests of better planning at regional and sub-regional levels, and more locally where there are shared problems which would be better addressed jointly by planning authorities**
- **be pro-active in assisting local authorities in identifying opportunities to make revisions to LDSs, to align programmes for evidence gathering and decision making to facilitate joint working on complementary DPDs**

6.16 Timing and programming of LDF work is often difficult when planning authorities are trying to co-ordinate DPD production to address cross boundary issues. A particular issue is the examination of these documents, with some local authorities participating in the research suggesting that having a joint examination would assist in programming. The mechanisms currently exist for this to happen, but there is an apparent lack of awareness of this, and a degree of uncertainty about how it would work.

6.17 Similarly, some participants have questioned whether the tests of soundness might need to be changed to accommodate joint examination. There is, however, no clear need for any such changes to happen, since the tests would still apply in the same way to each document even though they are examined jointly.

6.18 The Planning Inspectorate is recommended to:

- **make it known to planning authorities that there is no impediment to the joint examination of complementary DPDs produced by neighbouring planning authorities, and that the tests of soundness will apply to joint examination without need for modification**
- **encourage local planning authorities to consider joint examination in appropriate cases, and to contact the Inspectorate early regarding procedures for joint examination so that potential uncertainties can be addressed.**

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Annex 1: The questionnaire

SPATIAL PLANS IN PRACTICE

THEMATIC STUDY OF CROSS-BOUNDARY WORKING

From your Strategic Survey questionnaire return it appears that you are working jointly with adjoining authorities to produce a core strategy (LDF, waste or minerals) or an area action plan (AAP).

I should be grateful if you would respond to the additional questions below to assist with our research.

1. With which authorities are you working jointly on development plan or supplementary document production?
2. Does the collaboration involve preparation of a development plan or supplementary document? If so on what aspect of the LDF and what principle issues are you collaborating (for example, supplementary planning document on affordable housing)?
3. Does the collaboration involve more informal collaboration which is not leading the production of joint local development framework documents? If so, what is the nature of the collaboration (for example, joint research on traffic or ensuring complementarity of strategies)?
4. Does the collaboration involve the pooling of resources, either financial or staff?
5. For each example of cross-boundary working in which you are engaged please indicate the type of collaboration

Type of collaboration	Explanation	Example 1	Example 2
Brief explanation of collaboration			
Informing	One way dialogue		
Harmonising	Limited reciprocal dialogue, avoiding policy conflicts		
Cooperation	Reciprocal dialogue, data sharing, working together to achieve own goals		
Coordination	Reciprocal dialogue and data sharing, avoiding policy conflicts		
Collaboration	Reciprocal dialogue, data sharing, checking coherence and consistency of policy , considering possible joint policy documents and delivery mechanisms.		
Joint goals and policy	Involve joint policy documents and/or delivery mechanisms.		
Other			

6. Are there other issues related to the production of your local development framework that would benefit from cross-boundary working which it has not yet been possible to establish. If so, why has this not been possible (for example, lack of resources, not a current priority or poor response from neighbouring authority)?

7. Are there other planning issues in your area which you feel will demand cross-boundary working in the future? If so, what are they and why?

8. What were the key factors that enabled your authority to establish cross-boundary working (recognising that many others have not) (for example, lead taken by regional office, political leadership, previous history of joint working)?

9. What has been the effect of the '2004 reforms' on cross-boundary working? Do the changes make cross-boundary working easier or simpler? If so, how?

10. Do you have any other comments about your experience in cross-boundary working that may be of value to other planning authorities?

If you would rather that this interview was conducted over the telephone please email to confirm a good time to contact you.

Many thanks,
Jim Claydon

Annex 2: Questionnaire survey

The results of Strategic Survey 3 were examined to identify local planning authorities that are joint working with others on the production of their local development framework (LDF). To gain further details on the authorities' cross boundary working, questionnaires were emailed to 40 local planning authorities, 18 of which were returned. The questionnaire is attached at Annex 1.

In addition, a meeting was arranged with four representatives of the Greater Norwich Partnership of local authorities. Trafford Council's Planning Policy Manager was interviewed by telephone.

In this way information was gathered relating to twenty cases of joint working on cross boundary issues. The respondent planning authorities are set out below.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| ■ Bury Metropolitan Borough Council | ■ Norwich City Council |
| ■ Cambridge City Council | ■ Greater Norwich Partnership |
| ■ Chorley Borough Council | ■ Preston City Council |
| ■ Christchurch Borough Council | ■ Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council |
| ■ Derby City Council | ■ Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council |
| ■ Derbyshire County Council | ■ Southwark Council |
| ■ Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council | ■ Tewkesbury Borough Council |
| ■ East Northamptonshire Council | ■ Tower Hamlets Borough Council |
| ■ Hastings Borough Council | ■ Trafford Council |
| ■ New Forest District Council | ■ Wiltshire County Council |

TYPE OF COLLABORATION

Local planning authorities were asked on what aspect of the LDF and what principle issues they are joint working on. It is apparent that although most of the respondents are working jointly with others on preparing joint local development documents (LDDs) that form part of the LDF, this is not always the case. Some authorities are working jointly on issues which will not result in a joint LDD of any kind, but are likely to result in separate LDDs. Others are working jointly on documents that will be jointly produced but are not

part of the LDF. In some cases there is joint working and collaboration only on evidence collection.

JOINT WORKING ON LOCAL DEVELOPMENT DOCUMENTS

The table below outlines the types of LDD being prepared jointly.

The data show that:

- fourteen of the twenty respondent authorities are working jointly on core strategies, seven being in the context of (LDF) and another seven being in the context of waste and minerals development frameworks (MWDF)
- nine are working jointly on site allocations, two in an LDF context and seven in a MWDF context
- three are working jointly on other DPDs, including two Area Action Plans and one topic-based DPD
- eight of the respondents are preparing a variety of SPDs jointly with other authorities, covering a range of topics as shown in the table

The responses also indicated that some of the respondents expect joint working on these LDDs will lead to joint working on others in the future. For example, Chorley Borough Council and Preston City Council are working with South Ribble Borough Council on the core strategy. The three authorities have aligned documents and dates in their Local Development Schemes and propose to undertake joint evidence gathering to allow for work on further documents such as Site Allocations and Development Control DPDs.

SUMMARY OF TYPES OF LOCAL DEVELOPMENT DOCUMENT WHERE THERE IS JOINT WORKING		
Type of plan	Respondent authorities	Working with
DPD	Chorley Preston	Each other and South Ribble
Core strategy	Christchurch	East Dorset
	Dudley	Sandwell, Walsall, Wolverhampton
	East Northamptonshire	Corby, Kettering, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire
	New Forest	New Forest National Park
	Norwich	Broadland, South Norfolk, Norfolk County
	Minerals core strategy	Derby Derbyshire
Redcar and Cleveland		Darlington Stockton Middlesborough Hartlepool
Wiltshire		Swindon
Waste core strategy	Bury Trafford Rochdale	Each other, plus Bolton, Manchester, Oldham, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford, Wigan.
	Derby Derbyshire	Each other
	Redcar and Cleveland	Darlington Stockton Middlesborough Hartlepool
	Wiltshire	Swindon
Minerals site allocations	Derby Derbyshire	Each other
	Redcar and Cleveland	Darlington Stockton Middlesborough Hartlepool
	Wiltshire	Swindon

SUMMARY OF TYPES OF LOCAL DEVELOPMENT DOCUMENT WHERE THERE IS JOINT WORKING (continued)		
Type of plan	Respondent authorities	Working with
Waste site allocations	Bury Trafford	Each other, plus Bolton, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford, Wigan.
	Derby Derbyshire	Each other
	Redcar and Cleveland	Darlington Stockton Middlesborough Hartlepool
	Wiltshire	Swindon
Site allocations	Christchurch	East Dorset
	New Forest	New Forest National Park
Heathland Mitigation	Christchurch	East Dorset, Bournemouth, Poole, Purbeck
Area Action Plan	Cambridge	East Cambridgeshire
	Tewkesbury	Cheltenham
SPD		
Affordable housing	Christchurch	East Dorset
	Redcar and Cleveland	Darlington Stockton Middlesborough Hartlepool
Design guidance	Rochdale	Oldham
Landscape character	Derbyshire	High Peak
Developer contributions	East Northamptonshire	Corby, Kettering, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire
	Redcar and Cleveland	Darlington Stockton Middlesborough Hartlepool
Sustainable Design	East Northamptonshire	Corby, Kettering, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire
Open space	Redcar and Cleveland	Darlington Stockton Middlesborough Hartlepool

JOINT WORKING ON OTHER ASPECTS OF LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK PREPARATION

Local planning authorities were asked whether the joint working involves more informal collaboration which is not leading to the production of joint LDDs.

The responses show that most authorities are working jointly on other planning issues, often related to building the evidence base. For example, Derbyshire County Council is working with Peak District National Park on the preparation of a landscape character assessment that will provide evidence for the LDF process. Bury Metropolitan Borough Council is undertaking joint research with the Greater Manchester local authorities on:

- Joint Strategic Flood Risk Assessment
- Employment Land Demand
- Biodiversity
- Historic Landscape Designation
- Ecological Framework
- Employment Land Supply
- Green Infrastructure
- Strategic Housing Market Assessment
- Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment

Although not an LDF document, Tower Hamlets Borough Council, Newham Council, Hackney Borough Council and the City of London are working jointly on the Lower Lea Valley Opportunity Area Planning Framework and have set joint objectives and a spatial strategy

Besides preparing plans jointly with Derbyshire County Council, Derby City Council stated that there is more informal collaboration to coordinate the preparation of Core Strategies with Amber Valley and South Derbyshire District. This has involved alignment of timetables and joint commissioning of an employment land study.

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council's work on a Joint Core Strategy for the Black Country does not yet involve more informal collaboration. However, the potential of further joint working is being investigated, including the alignment of timetables to benefit from joint commissioning of evidence.

East Northamptonshire Council stated that discussions are underway concerning the joint preparation of a Housing Land Availability Assessment. Regular Joint Unit/Wider Team meetings take place involving those from the respective Councils to discuss progress on site allocations DPDs/AAPs. Some progress is being made in resourcing the coordination of major projects through the Joint Planning Unit, with a new post being created.

Hastings Borough Council and Rother District Council ensure the co-ordination of timetabling in respective Local Development Schemes. The authorities undertake joint members' meetings, have jointly commissioned a Housing Market Assessment Study and are investigating the possibility of a joint employment land study.

New Forest District Council has undertaken joint research and joint policy development with the eleven local authorities within the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire and other Central Hampshire/New Forest authorities, including:

- Strategic Flood Risk Assessment
- Appropriate Assessment
- Housing Market Assessment
- Employment Land Availability Assessment
- Green Infrastructure
- Sustainable Development Policies

Preston City Council has no formal agreement on collaboration with Chorley Borough Council and South Ribble Borough Council. The collaboration began with the joint commissioning of consultants to prepare a sub-regional economic regeneration strategy, and has developed from there. The three authorities have made joint representations to the North West Regional Spatial Strategy (NWRSS) Examination in Public.

Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council have undertaken joint research on housing market assessment, strategic flood risk assessment and transport studies with other local planning authorities.

Tewkesbury Borough Council stated that officer liaison working arrangements with Cheltenham Borough Council continue and that leading members of the two authorities have met to discuss issues of interest to both as well as the Area Action Plan for the delivery of an urban extension.

Southwark Council is coordinating work on Bankside with Lambeth's work on the Waterloo area. This involves sharing information in the evidence base and coordinating methodologies.

POOLING OF RESOURCES

Local planning authorities were asked whether the collaboration involves the pooling of financial or staff resources.

Bury Metropolitan Borough stated that officers from the Greater Manchester local authorities work together on a steering group, whereby one authority takes the lead responsibility and financial resources to commission consultants. The Districts also work together to pool resources and share information on housing and employment studies. Trafford Council pools resources and Salford, Trafford and Manchester are in step on their LDFs.

Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council share the costs of producing the Area Action Plans and each authority pays for its own staff costs.

Chorley Borough Council, Preston City Council and South Ribble Borough Council share costs and work load. There is no secondment of staff but members of staff could work in each other's offices. The authorities have jointly commissioned research and are planning to do so again shortly. The Core Strategy issues and options paper was prepared by working groups comprising officers from each of the three authorities. Each authority has taken a lead on different aspects. LDF managers and directors meet regularly and there are joint meetings of the authorities' member working groups.

Christchurch Borough Council pools financial resources with other authorities, especially for consultancy work. Staff are separate for each authority, but joint teams are formed to deal with document preparation as required.

Derby City Council pools resources with Derbyshire County Council for the joint commissioning of documents, research and studies. The preparation of joint Development Plan Documents involves a joint team of officers and joint acceptance of the principle that the provision of resources is split roughly in proportion to relative population sizes i.e. 25%:75%.

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council stated that each local authority has had to dedicate a staff resource for the work on a Joint Core Strategy. These are being managed from within the authority rather than seconding officers to a joint team. One authority has been nominated as lead for procurement and the management of finances.

East Northamptonshire Council stated that each authority pays into a joint pot that funds evidence base research to underpin the Core Strategy. Each authority agrees, through a Memorandum of Understanding, to second one Senior Planner to the Joint Planning Unit or to pay an equivalent amount in money into the joint pot. The joint funds can be used to pay for agency planner input as necessary, as a result of recruitment difficulties at the authorities.

Hastings Borough Council and Rother District Council have pooled resources for a joint Housing Market Assessment.

The Greater Norwich Partnership of Local Authorities presently benefits from the County Council's planning resources, yet this may not be available in the long term.

Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council jointly fund work and research for the joint Waste and Minerals DPDs and SPDs. The Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit (JSU) is leading on transport and sub-regional housing strategies and Tees Valley City Region studies.

Tower Hamlets Borough Council, Newham Council, Hackney Borough Council and the City of London are not sharing resources, but prioritising early and ongoing engagement through basic meetings, often about both policy and implementation.

Wiltshire County Council and Swindon Borough Council have a Service Level Agreement relating to joint working that covers financial and staffing arrangements. Swindon Borough Council allocates two members of staff to work pro-rata on minerals and waste LDDs. As lead authority, Wiltshire charges Swindon for the preparation of LDDs (including Sustainability Appraisals etc) on the basis of:

- 22% of all costs associated with the preparation of Waste LDDs; and
- 3% of all costs associated with the preparation of Minerals LDDs.

Southwark Council are considering a joint waste LDD with Lewisham, Bromley, Greenwich and Bexley, although this has yet to be confirmed. This is likely to involve the pooling of resources and, possibly, staff. Southwark's work with Lambeth on Waterloo/Bankside co-ordination does not involve the pooling of resources at this stage.

OTHER ISSUES THAT MAY BENEFIT FROM CROSS BOUNDARY WORKING

Local planning authorities were asked whether, in addition to their current joint working activity, there are other issues related to the production of the LDF that would benefit from cross boundary working, but had not yet been embarked upon. The responses are summarised below.

Respondent planning authority	Issue	LPA comments
Bury	Minerals	The need for a joint minerals DPD is being investigated with the other Greater Manchester authorities
Cambridge	No other issues	
Chorley	No other issues	
Christchurch	No other issues	
Derby	No other issues	
Derbyshire	No other issues	Discussions are taking place to explore how the County Council can help further with the districts' LDF work.
Dudley	No other issues	
East Northamptonshire	No other issues	
Hastings	No other issues	
New Forest	No other issues	
Norwich	Further work on AAPs	Need to establish direction of the joint Core Strategy first.
Greater Norwich Partnership	No issues with current LDF	
Preston	Strategic housing market assessment	Collaboration might extend to a large number of LPAs.
Redcar and Cleveland	Employment Land Review	
Rochdale	Not at the moment.	
Southwark	Camberwell area SPD	The district centre is close to the boundary with Lambeth.
Tewkesbury	Cross boundary issues with Gloucester	Discussions have been initiated.
Tower Hamlets	No comment	
Trafford	No comment	
Wiltshire	No comment	

FACTORS THAT ENABLED CROSS BOUNDARY WORKING

Local planning authorities were asked what were the key factors that enabled them to establish cross boundary working.

These factors included:

- the sub regional/city regional planning agenda, where present
- the dictates of strategic minerals and waste planning
- guidance from the Inspectorate that collaboration was anticipated
- a commitment at Chief Executive level to non political issues
- recognition of a benefit in pooling resources and expertise
- working together to gain a seat at RSS Examination
- the desire to avoid potentially having an undemocratic development agency imposed on the area, that would not carry local legitimacy
- political will and leadership, and support from senior officers
- strong encouragement by some Government Offices and Regional Assemblies (notably, in this research, the Government Office for the East Midlands (GOEM) and the East Midlands Regional Assembly (EMRA))
- the inter-related character of the joint working areas
- recognition of the efficiency benefits of joint plan-making
- a previous history of joint working, with relationships and structures already in place
- the identification of Growth Areas, and the need to set up delivery mechanisms

EFFECTS OF '2004 REFORMS' ON CROSS BOUNDARY WORKING

Local planning authorities were asked how the '2004 reforms' affected cross boundary working and whether the changes make cross boundary working easier or simpler.

The responses included the following, which consider that joint working has become easier:

- the reforms enabled the production of a Joint Waste DPD
- cross boundary working is slightly easier, in terms of the processes for taking forward an AAP
- joint working has become easier in the sense that the authorities are starting on the LDF process from similar positions

- the review of the RSS and its enhanced status meant that the District Councils had to make strong representations which were best done jointly
- in some instances, joint working has only happened post-2004
- the changes in principle make cross boundary working more achievable as there is more flexibility in terms of the areas and the types of plans that are prepared
- the reforms have made collaboration easier as it is seen to be sensible to work jointly on a Core Strategy whereas such working on a UDP would not have been acceptable.
- the LDF system introduced the necessary flexibility to adapt development plan production to meet local circumstances. In the respondents' view, this, combined with the Sustainable Communities Plan/Growth Area impetus, provided the necessary conditions for a change in approach to meet the new challenges.

In contrast, some responses found that the 2004 procedural requirements do not make joint working easier, and have not had a significant effect on cross boundary working. Some respondents said that the loss of the Structure Plan has left no clear vehicle to plan for the sub region strategically, and arrangements such as a Joint Strategy Unit have no power to resolve differences of view.

One respondent considered that cross boundary working on DPDs is encouraged by the new system, but that it is difficult due to the legislation and regulations on, for example, issues of governance.

One respondent believes it is too early to state whether the new planning system makes joint working easier or simpler. The potential is there, but the mechanics of embarking on joint working require more thought. For example, the draft RSS for the South West introduces the idea of collaborative working to address a number of themes, but does not describe what joint working may look like, what it should seek to address and why.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON CROSS BOUNDARY WORKING

One respondent to the questionnaire survey considered that local planning authorities work together on a voluntary basis, rather than through political and administrative structure. Another commented that successful joint working is not easy and that it takes a lot of time and effort; however, joint work undertaken so far shows that the overall gain can be worth the effort.

The following points were also raised by other respondents, as being important to successful joint working:

- there is a need for openness
- the involvement of the Executive Members from all sides is important
- discussion of process issues with other authorities can help to find solutions
- collaboration requires commitment, and strains can be expected, especially where politics in one authority cause delay and frustration to the other partner
- avoid over-ambitious targets
- consider establishing permanent posts from the outset rather than relying on secondments, as recruitment difficulties and workloads at contributing districts can pull key officers away and lead to instability and delay

Advantages of joint working raised by participants in the questionnaire survey included:

- the potential for cost savings, especially in the context of rising costs of examinations and the ability to make best use of expertise given that different local authorities have different strengths
- jointly learning from each other to find a way through the new system
- the sharing of ideas should result in a better quality end-product

Disadvantages reportedly relate to:

- being able to move only at the pace of the slowest
- risks involved for the overall LDF timetable if the Core Strategy is delayed for reasons outside of the local authorities' control
- plan preparation is more time consuming

One respondent commented that joint working often fails to realise its potential, and results in presenting weak or parochial recommendations for addressing planning issues. There are seen to be too many negative 'blockers' to joint working ranging from political un-willingness through to officer-level reticence. However, part of the problem is believed to be the key to the solution, namely the artificial nature of geo-political boundaries.

This respondent also commented that if the notion of plan making is to be considered truly spatial, it cannot rely upon the security of traditional 'Plan areas'. When it comes to collaborative working the '2004 reforms' provide the opportunity to 'think outside the box', but authorities appear to be unwilling or un-able to identify solutions to tackle what are often inter-regional and sub-regional issues.

The respondent believes it would be helpful if the Regional Planning Bodies (RPB) identified strategic issues at the regional scale and directed planning authorities to work together on joint strategic solutions. The purpose of locally testing the sub-regional apportionments for aggregate minerals and waste is questioned. It is proposed that this could be undertaken more appropriately at the regional level and supported by evidence based upon identifiable regional pressures, market assessments and supply patterns, regional infrastructure capacity and environmental designations.

This respondent has also found that if a group of authorities argue that they cannot meet their forecast targets, they have to report to the RPB in order to trigger a process of re-apportionment. It is seen to be likely that issues with supply could be addressed if plan making became more responsive by accepting the need to present solutions at a broader scale.

Annex 3: Round table discussion

The research team held a round table discussion on 12 September 2007 at the University of West of England, Bristol, with planners working on cross boundary issues. The participants were drawn from three different regions and from unitary and district planning authorities, as well as two joint units:

Black Country Consortium

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council

South Gloucestershire Council

Bristol City Council

North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit

East Dorset District Council

Participants were briefed through the circulation of the draft thematic study report and advised in advance of the agenda which addressed questions of the drivers and barriers to joint working; organisational/management issues; the benefits and the results.