

The Planners' take on 'community' involvement:

on integrating 'community plans' with
spatial plans

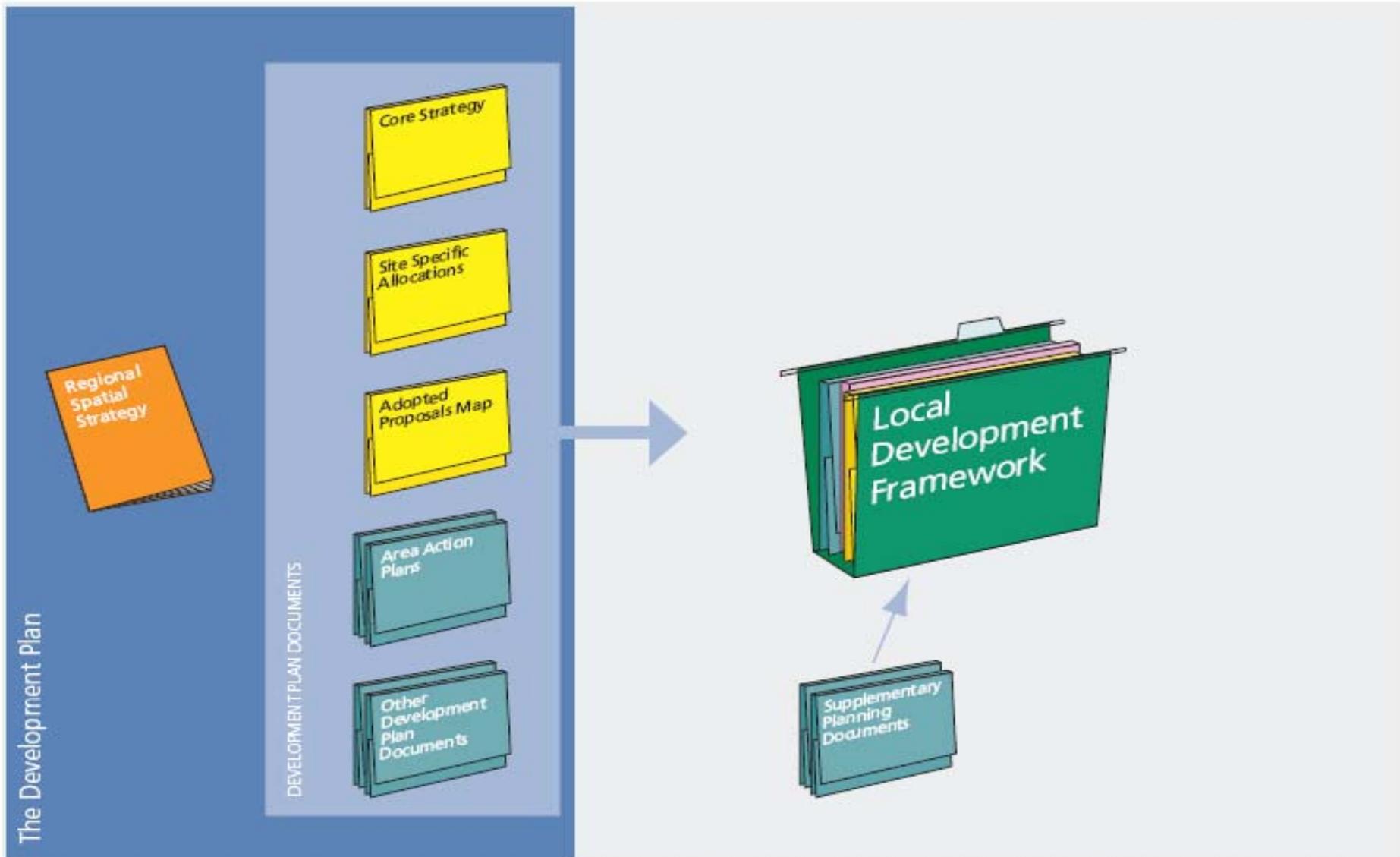
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Outline

1. What has the Government been telling the planners to do?
2. Why should the planners do it ('integrate') – what's in it for them?
3. Why they might be resistant to doing it
4. What the planners are actually doing!

1. What has the government been asking the planners to do?

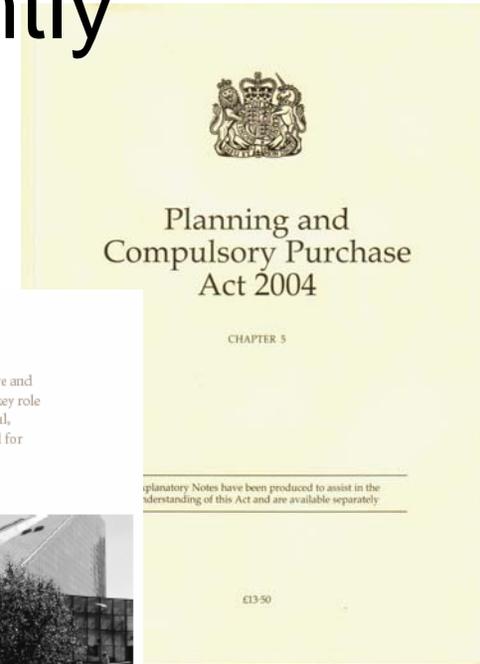
The new style Development Plan



The profile of community involvement has increased significantly

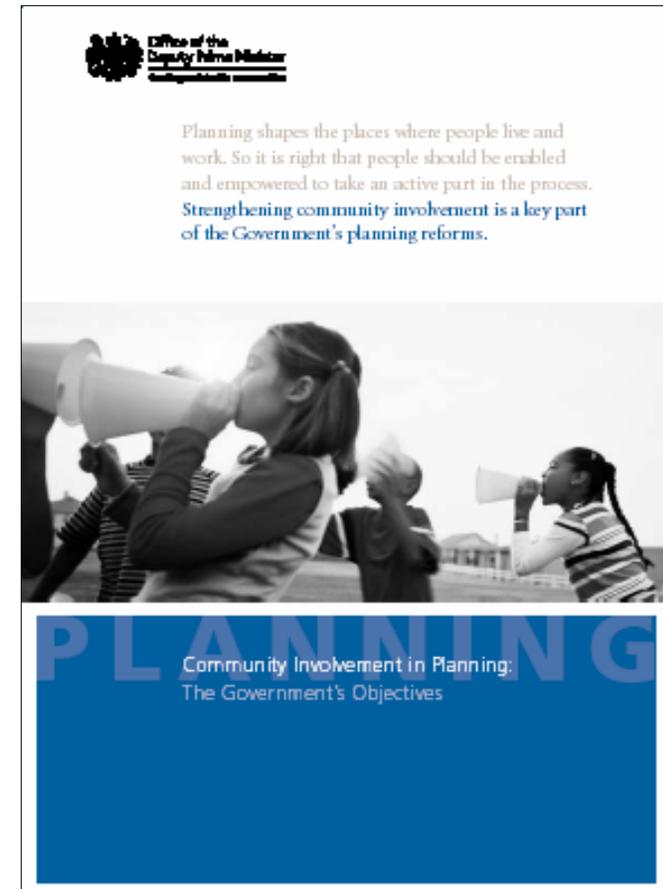
Given official boost by:

- new Planning Act (2004)
- 'Community Involvement in Planning: The Government's Objectives' (2004)
- PPS12 Local Development Frameworks (+ Companion Guide) (2004)
- PPS 1 Delivering Sustainable Development (2005)



The Official Aims for Community Involvement:

“Community involvement in planning should not be a reactive, *tick-box*, process” (para 1.3) “It is important that LPAs do not just take a compliance approach. ... Minimum standards are a floor, not a ceiling” (para 3.4)



The Official Aims for Community Involvement

“the aim is to build strong *empowered* and active communities, in which people increasingly make decisions for themselves, with the state acting to facilitate, support and enable citizens to lead self determined and fulfilled lives” (para 1.9)

“the process must allow the community to feel that they have had *real influence*” and “provide real opportunities for *communities to shape the critical decisions* about their future” (para. 1.12)

The Official Aims for Community Involvement:

“it is not enough to focus on providing information and consultation on proposals that have already been developed to the point where it is difficult to take their views on board... *Active participation in the development of options and proposals should be at the heart of the process.* The community must be able to put forward and debate options and help mould proposals before they are settled. *People need to feel their participation can make a difference*” (paras 2.4-2.5)

The Official Aims for Community Involvement:

- “A community involvement process should ensure that people:
- Have access to information
 - Can *put forward their own ideas* and feel confident that there is a process for considering ideas
 - Can *take an active part in developing proposals and options*
 - Can comment on formal proposals
 - *Get feedback* and be informed about progress and outcomes” (para 2.2)

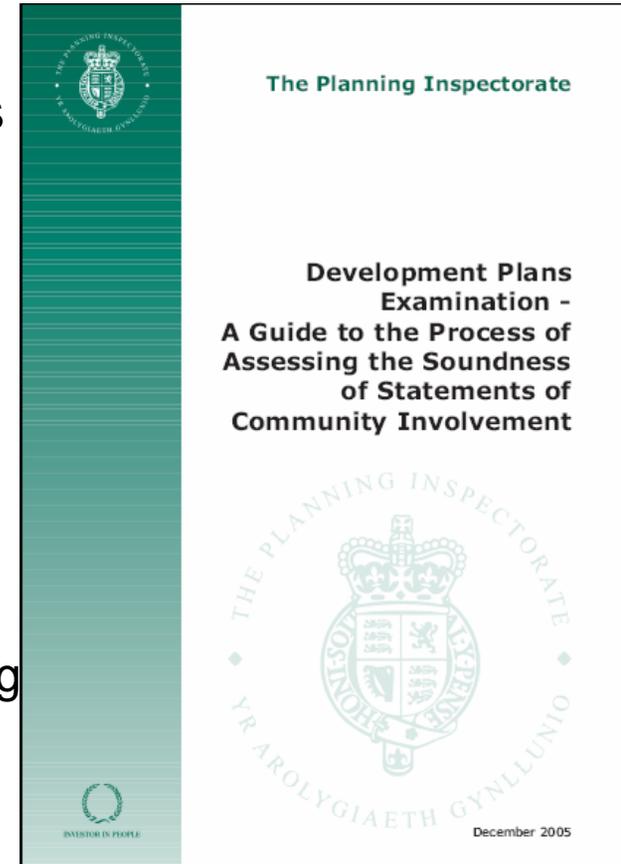
The Official Aims for Community Involvement:

“planning should provide opportunities for people, irrespective of age, sex, ability, ethnicity or background ... to make their views known and have their say in how their community is planned and developed ... the reforms are designed to provide an accessible system with clear formal stages for participation *which reaches out to groups that have not, historically, easily engaged with planning*” (para 1.2)

“authorities should ensure the involvement of the widest possible range of interests, *particularly hard to reach groups who do not usually participate in the planning process*” (p.66 PPS12 Companion)

Statements of Community Involvement

- Set out LPAs vision, strategy, policy, principles and standards for community involvement in LDDs and planning applications – clearly, so public know how and when they'll be involved
- Set out how LPA will meet *or exceed* the minimum legal requirements, whilst being tailored to local circumstances
- Improve the quality of the planning process
- Address the following:
 - For what applications and documents is CI being sought
 - How and when will CI be sought
 - Who will be involved
 - How this links with other CI
 - In a way that is fit for purpose and recognises limits on LPAs resources



The Official *Tests of Soundness* - SCIs should cover:

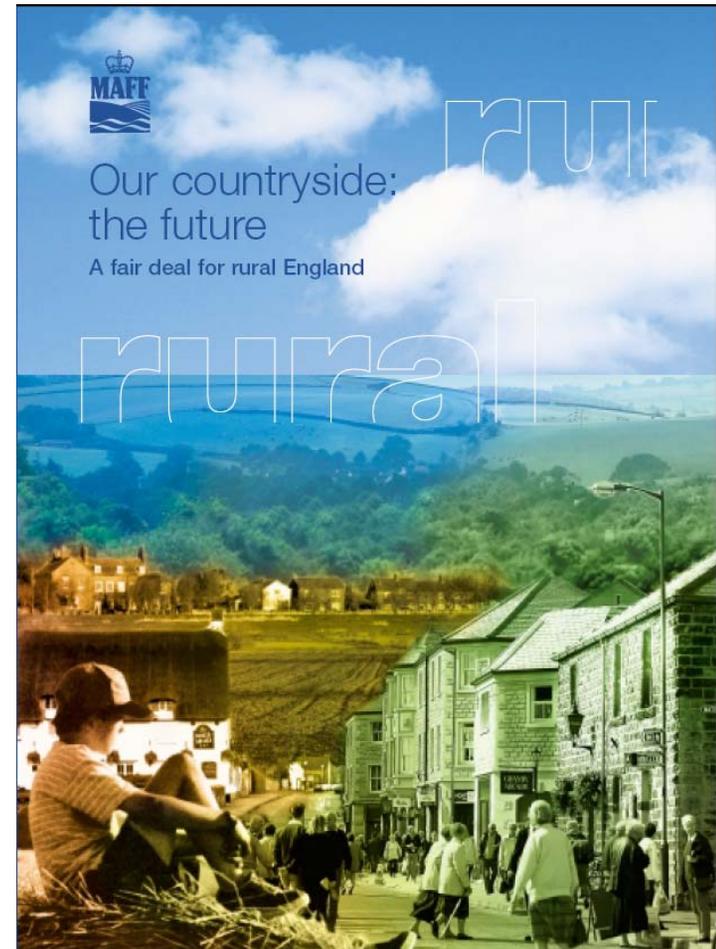
- 1 Should meet minimum legal requirements
- 2 Linked with other community initiatives
- 3 Show broad community groups to be consulted
- 4 Show how community will be involved (methods)
 - timely and accessible
- 5 - suitable for intended audience, different stages
- 6 Show resources for effective CI
- 7 Show how CI results will be fed back into plan preparation
- 8 Reveal mechanisms for reviewing SCI
- 9 Include policy for CI on planning applications



And what about *community plans*?

Rural White Paper (Our Countryside: the future, DETR 2000):

- “local communities have a real opportunity to influence the nature of future development ... and providing their Plan is consistent with the local Development Plan and relevant national planning guidance the design and land use aspects can be endorsed by the LPA as SPG. This approach has the potential to reduce the adversarial nature of new proposals and reduce costs for all, but this will only be achieved if everyone in the community has a real opportunity to contribute their views”



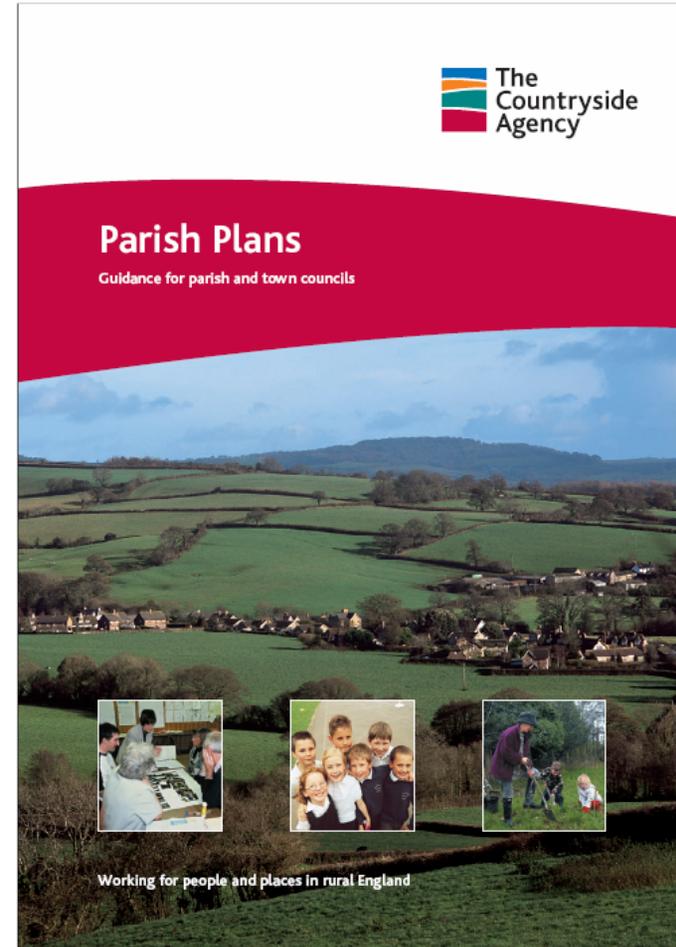
And

Parish Plans: Guidance for parish and town councils, Countryside Agency, 2003

- “there is a new opportunity for parish plans to form the bedrock of the new local development frameworks that will be prepared by every LPA to replace existing Local Plans. So Parish Plans are already influential and increasingly important”

PPS1 General policy and principles, ODPM, 2004

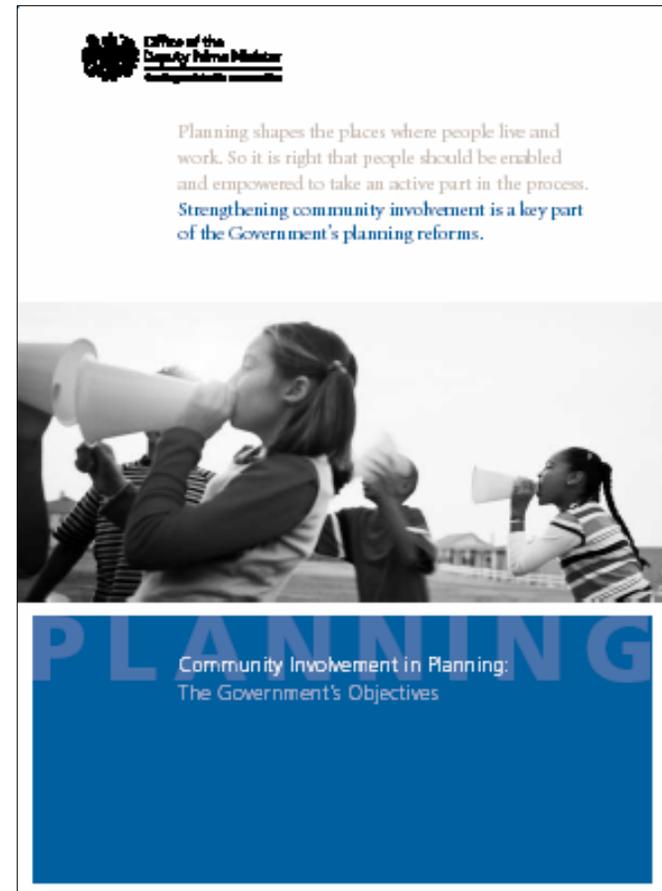
- “LAs will need to consider how best to incorporate parish plans within SPDs, particularly their potential to provide further detail in core strategies, area action plans and other development plan documents”



But, ehrrm, oops, in 2004

Community Involvement in Planning: The Government's objectives, ODPM, 2004

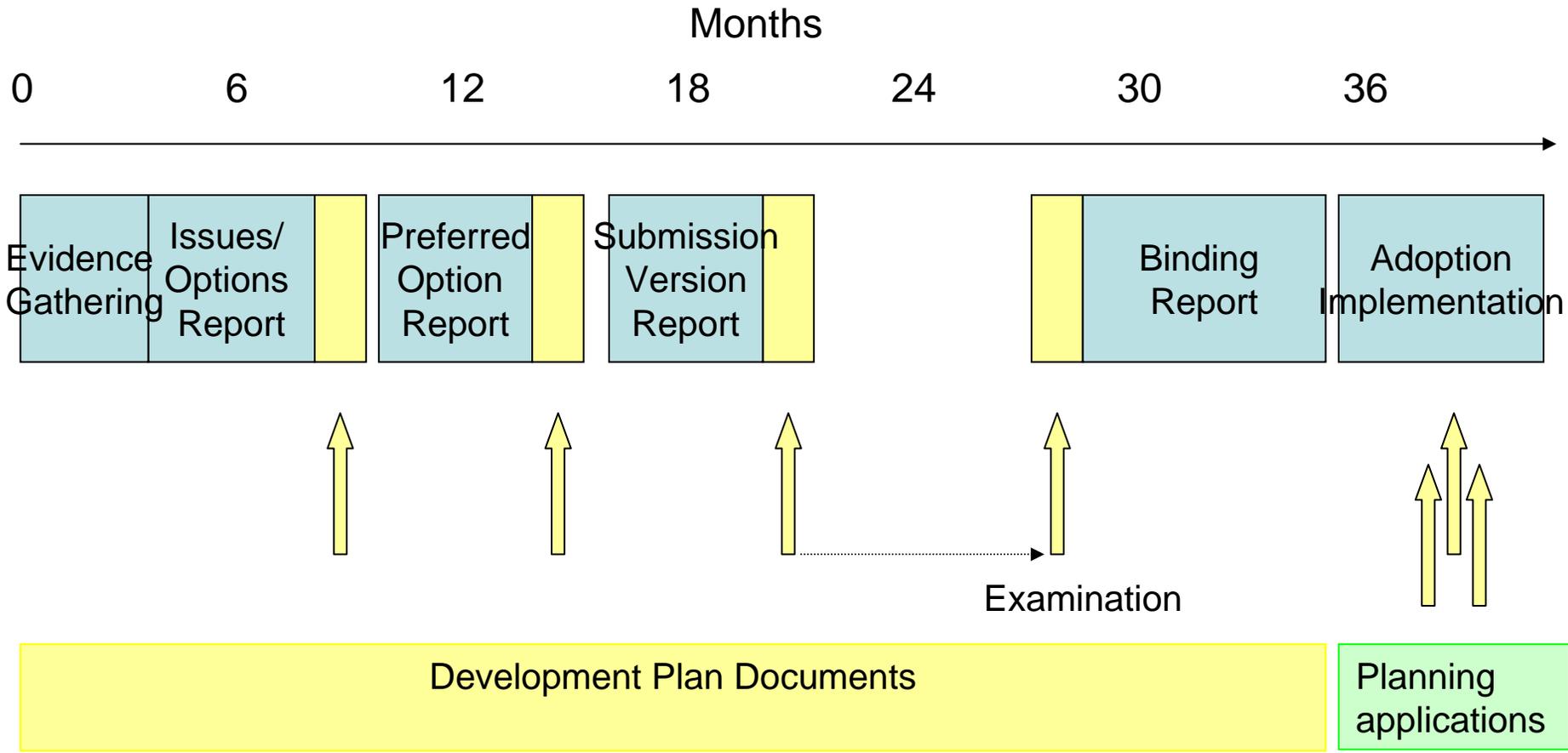
- ... makes no reference to parish plans (or MT plans) at all!



Some realities

- Transitional arrangements:
 - Existing PPs etc. as SPG may effectively be ‘saved’
 - If not yet saved, *retrofitting* is practically impossible. The assumption is that LDF documents are the starting point – CPs may be ‘*incorporated*’ into DPDs and SPDs, but if so will need to pass new tests of community involvement and Sustainability Appraisal –
- There’s no test that SCIs should ‘communicate’ with the public!
- The windows of opportunity for community involvement are few and far between and open only narrowly

Windows of Opportunity for Community Engagement



2. Why should the planners integrate?

Advantages to planners of integration ... 1

- Can help them meet their new CI obligations/ structure the CI they need to do (as in their SCIs), provide a clear 'audit' trail from the community groups to LDFs.
- Could reduce CI duplication and consultation fatigue

Example

- DAWN – village design statements, being converted into SPD

Advantages to planners of integration ... 2

- May reduce objections to their plans in the long run, thus saving time, energy, expense

Recent research:

- 1 Nimbyism is alive a well!
 - 84% of respondents feel their neighbourhood is already overdeveloped or is just fine the way it is
 - a fifth have actively opposed a planning application (e.g. waste & landfill facilities, quarries and power plants, new housing; 44% of these against housing)
 - but only 6% have ever campaigned *in favour* of a scheme
(Saint Consulting Group, March 2006)
- 2 *But* when communities are actively and formally engaged and “presented with information about a range of options, people make reasoned choices and compromises”; they take a balanced view of the need for growth
(Cambridge Architectural Research 2004)

Advantages to planners of integration ... 3

- May give some ideas for their plans. Often the community groups do a better job than planners in assessing local need and thinking up relevant strategies
- May provide a shopping list for s106

Examples

- Holsworthy – found Local Housing Needs Survey too reliant on waiting lists, a lot of concealed need - local people not applying because do not believe there is social housing available
- Launceston – developed the employment land assessment into an employment strategy

Advantages to planners of integration ... 4

- May help support refusals that go to appeal (PINS may take them into account if provide *evidence backed policy* support)
- Some planners may actually be tuned into community led planning!

Example

- South Hams – used MTP to back up appeal decisions

3. Why the planners might be resistant

The two cultures

Obstacles ...1

The planners:

- top-down and strategic (including national, regional and sub-regional interests)
- mediate between the broader and the local interests, by having plans
- long term and plan-led
- feel heavily constrained by the law
- control the initiatives of others
- development and delivery/feasibility orientated
- use a long planning cycle

Community planners:

- bottom-up and local
- mediate between conflicting local concerns, by having conversations
- quick-hit and project orientated
- do not feel heavily bound by legal constraints.
- funding and initiative-led
- activity and ideas orientated, problem-solving. Happy to see plans as aspirational, wish lists
- have a shorter planning cycle.

South West



Planning Aid

Problems ...2

- Capacity constraints – huge pressure to get LDFs done vs. planner shortage
- It may be easier to organise community involvement (+SA) themselves; they can ensure it fits their purposes, *their* tight time-frame. Integration may delay their process

Disadvantages ... 3

- May surface even more conflict (NB. They see their job as resolving differences, quietly – via ideas/plans not direct mediation)
- See you as yet another special pleading group, when their job is to provide an overview
- See you as possibly undemocratic

More Problems ... 4

- Think that you often don't understand the planning system and it's just too hard/ time consuming to explain
 - amateurs needing a lot of support, hand-holding?

Planning complexities:

- Importance of legal constraints
- The primacy of central government policy and the *adopted* Development Plan
- The focus on 'development' (and its arcane definition)
- The importance of the private developer for delivery of plans

More Disadvantages ... 5

- Think a lot of your work is irrelevant to spatial planning – so not a priority when their capacity is limited (the emphasis is on ‘development’)

- Footpath maintenance
- Cleaning up/ improving the Park
- More bobbies on the beat
- Dog litter

More Obstacles ... 6

- They've been around a lot longer than you have, have always done it this way – you're the new kids on the block, pushing in on their territory!
- And they've got a job to do!

Sources of resistance ... 7

So:

- Planners have been slow to recognise the significance of the community planning movement
- You will still find some resistance from them – in some places, more than others
- Having said all that ...

4. What the planners have been doing: evidence from their SCIs

SCIs – in practice

- SCIs suggest a big advance on previous community engagement practice:
 - all LPAs promise, for each planning *document*, a range of consultation activities/ events at different stages
 - generally promise enhanced publicity for planning applications
 - there is a change of mindset happening
- However there's big variation

SCIs – in practice

- Most are very long on aims to consult the community *but* short on committing sufficient resources needed to deliver
- Many are stuck in ‘Decide-Announce-Defend’ mode. It’s still engagement on *their* terms.
- Most see CI as an information gathering or PR exercise (tho’ some *are* serious). Few promise much feedback – it’s a one-way street

SCIs – in practice

- Emphasis is still on ‘traditional’ community engagement exercises – whilst they go beyond old fashioned (and largely useless) public meetings most will not engage hard to reach groups (some notable exceptions)
- Most do not talk to the public – they are written by professionals for professionals – full of ‘planning speak’, unappealing

SCIs – in practice

- Many clearly do not reveal a joined up approach within the local authority
- Some don't mention MT groups specifically as consultees (tho' most do)
- Most do not see MT group as a resource, but as a consultee (among others)

SCIs – in practice

- On involvement in planning applications, most pass the buck to developers (without providing safeguards) and duck the issue of delegated decisions

5. Some good ideas the planners have come up with for better integration

Bright ideas!

- Spatial Planning Working Group
- A Plan 'Audit'
- Joint 'Development Briefs'
- Use of Facilitators (CABE, Planning consultants, SWPA)
- MT/P-Planning Liaison officers
- Training in planning for MT/P Chairs/ Officers
- Joint LDF and CS consultation
- Advice on Sustainability Appraisal



South West Planning Aid

- Gives free, independent advice and support on planning applications and development plans to individuals and community groups, particularly those *who cannot afford professional fees*
- Part of the RTPI – independent, charity
- Has been going for over 20 years in some areas (over 5 in South West)
- Recently expanded to all regions as a result of a grant from ODPM - 2004 £3.8m for 3 years nationally
- In each region, a small staff team - of caseworkers and community planners - plus a network of volunteers