



Consultation Response – Local Strategic Partnerships

1. Introduction

British Council of Shopping Centres (BCSC) is pleased to be able to respond to this Government Consultation on Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). BCSC was established in 1983 to represent the retail property industry; all those engaged in shopping, shopping centre development and management including local authorities, developers, planners, architects, shopping centre managers and many others who either work in, or supply professional services to, the retail property industry.

BCSC is extremely interested in the role out of Local Area Agreements (LAAs) and have previously been involved in dialogue with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) on this topic. Of the four policy fields around which LAAs are structured, BCSC are particularly interested in the fourth strand on economic development and enterprise. We believe this strand of LAAs operates at the very core of our work. Our members are involved in retail led regeneration projects across the country, both in smaller towns and in our cities. These projects involve considerable dialogue and involvement with Local Authorities and other key stakeholders, making BCSC well placed to contribute to this consultation.

2. Sustainability

BCSC members are experts in planning and developing sustainable communities and our members are supportive of planning obligations such as Section 106 agreements, which represent the core of this work. We are keen to encourage our members to take a lead in regeneration and renewal when planning new retail projects and to ensure new developments have infrastructure to support and sustain the needs of the local community.

Whilst BCSC agree with the ODPM's vision for the local accountability of LSPs, we are concerned about the potential effect other local government reforms could have on this. The Government's proposed Planning Gain Supplement (PGS) is one such example of this. The current proposal for PGS is that money would be collected nationally before being redistributed at a local level. Sustainability is unlikely to be fully recognised unless all decisions are made, including the distribution of money, at a local level. Section 106 agreements work solely at a local level between the local authority and the developer and ensure that revenue is put back into the local community. Along these lines, we believe all decisions on local development planning and the distribution of funds must be made locally.

Sustainability could also be assisted by the greater involvement of trained town planners. The consultation calls for "*planners to be much more involved in local area priority setting*" in order to ensure the success of LAAs. BCSC have long called for initiatives to ensure that more town planners are recruited and are trained appropriately

in order to fully understand the complexities of their role. Town planners have a crucial role to play in all aspects of development and assessing the requirements of a local community.

3. Statutory Requirements

The involvement of the private sector in the work of LSPs and the development of LAAs is essential. The consultation recommends “*imposing a statutory requirement upon local authorities and specified bodies to work together*”. BCSC support this recommendation and suggest that LSPs have a single point of contact responsible for liaising with the private sector to ensure co-operation and to minimise bureaucracy. This individual would be able to present the position of the LSP to the private sector in a clear and cohesive fashion, establish positive working relationships with all those concerned with the development, and ‘champion’ the involvement of the private sector in the success of the LAA. The involvement of the private sector needs to be co-ordinated effectively from the earliest possible point in order to harness the full support and engagement of both sides.

4. Neighbourhood renewal and regeneration

Neighbourhood renewal is just as important to regeneration as building new developments and the work of LSPs should support both equally. However, planning reforms currently proposed by the Government are likely to make it more difficult for existing neighbourhoods to improve current facilities. In particular the proposed Planning Gain Supplement (PGS) could potentially undermine the quality of the built environment as it would act as a disincentive on property owners to maintain and update existing properties as the supplement becomes payable on extensions and potentially external refurbishments.

A “broad brush” policy such as PGS is inappropriate for planning, and the formulation of LAAs must include focused analysis of an area’s specific needs. The private sector has a vital role to play in this and BCSC would recommend focusing attention on two areas in order to achieve optimum involvement:

- **Increased expertise in local planning offices.** Increasing the number of trained planners, raising the standards of expertise within planning departments and working in partnership at the beginning of a project to draw on the expertise of the private sector would ensure faster decision making, improve the quality of schemes and ensure earlier completion.
- **Earlier involvement of private sector developers in the planning process.** Asking developers to pitch on the basis of their credentials and then working with a preferred bidder to create a scheme which fulfils the requirements of the local community would allow developers to input their skills and creativity at a point in the process where unnecessary costs and delays can be avoided.



5. Conclusion

Putting appropriate structures in place will encourage the more coherent involvement by the private sector in the work of LSPs and the development of LAAs. BCSC firmly believe this involvement would contribute to the overall successful outcomes desired by all associated parties.