



East Herts Strategic Sites: Deliverability Advice Project Engagement Plan (August 2013)

1 INTRODUCTION

East Hertfordshire District Council (EHDC) has recently requested ATLAS to provide independent advice to help prepare their District (Local) Plan. The purpose of this Project Engagement Plan (PEP) is to set out:

- **The role & purpose of ATLAS**, including the team's overall vision and objectives;
- **Operating principles** including our approach to Quality Assurance and project disengagement;
- **Engagement expectations** of both ATLAS and the LPA;
- An initial **project appreciation** and the key planning & development issues; and
- The **ATLAS response**, with respect to the team members assigned to the project, defined tasks, and anticipated outcomes.

This document represents the formal record of ATLAS engagement, and should be treated as a 'live' document that will need to be updated as the project progresses. It has no formal statutory or legal status but in effect sets out a basic Memorandum of Understanding between EHDC and ATLAS as to how ATLAS will engage and provide support in respect of the project.

2 THE ROLE & PURPOSE OF ATLAS

The following overall mission statement underpins the operation of the ATLAS service:

"To secure the timely delivery of high quality sustainable development through effective planning processes, collaborative working and the promotion of good practice."

This vision will be met by addressing the following objectives:

- Acting to provide help and support to Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) that are dealing with issues and challenges related to large scale growth;

- Bringing an impartial and independent perspective on issues;
- Helping local planning authorities to develop better and more consistent interaction with the key stakeholders;
- Ensuring the lessons learnt from ATLAS's work are disseminated widely to local planning authorities and the wider development community; and
- Contributing to the establishment of a collaborative planning system based on the principles of holistic sustainable development, spatial planning and development management.

3 ATLAS OPERATING PRINCIPLES

The following core principles underpin the nature of ATLAS engagement in project work:

- ATLAS only work where the LPA requests support;
- ATLAS provides an 'enabling service' taking the role as "critical friend" of the Local Planning Authority (LPA);
- Whilst working with the LPA first and foremost, ATLAS will endeavour to work openly with other key stakeholders in particular the private sector to build trust and ability to influence;
- The LPA or any other project partner is under no statutory obligation to follow the advice we provide;
- The advice we provide will be impartial and independent – we will say it as we see it which may or may not support the position being taken by any specific stakeholder (including the LPA);
- Advice we provide will be for the benefit of all, under an overall ethos that the 'project' is the client;
- ATLAS will aim to enable and support the project partners to deal with and resolve issues as they arise based on the knowledge and experience of the team;
- ATLAS does not provide a direct case officer style resource, although will in some cases offer to undertake specific pieces of work if the project requires it;

- ATLAS promotes that a collaborative, open and transparent process is followed by all parties where possible;
- ATLAS will not charge for its services;
- ATLAS is engaged in many active projects at any given time and draws upon its project work in order to inform its activities, to continually improve the ATLAS offer, and to disseminate best practice. ATLAS may therefore from time to time wish to utilise aspects of project work as case study material, which may necessitate a project being identified. ATLAS will however always strive to maintain the anonymity of individuals involved with a project when requested to do so;
- ATLAS will always endeavour to provide its independent opinion, but will not be the final decision maker on issues. These must reside with the relevant body. In particular, local democratic processes remain unaffected; and
- ATLAS retains the right to disengage from any project without recourse, but will only do so under certain circumstance (see below).

ATLAS Quality Assurance

ATLAS is committed to providing a quality professional service and has several processes in place to evaluate the delivery of the service. Such measures include:

- An independent evaluation process whereby all ATLAS project partners are interviewed regularly (by external independent consultants) to assess ATLAS performance against defined tasks;
- An opportunity for project partners to provide feedback directly to ATLAS on performance at any time during project engagement; and
- A formalised disengagement process to consider the overall value of ATLAS engagement and any lessons-learned.

Disengagement

ATLAS reserves the right to disengage from any project although would seek to ensure that this only occurs where and when appropriate, most likely under the following circumstances:

- All ATLAS tasks are completed;
- The project ceases to be being pursued;
- If tasks are proving unachievable or taking an unreasonable level of resource compared to project progress or added value;
- Lack of trust or support of ATLAS advice; or
- On request of the Local Authority who retains the right to at any time request ATLAS to disengage.

4 ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES & EXPECTATIONS

Expectations of ATLAS

LPA's and other project partners can expect the following from ATLAS staff during the course of engagement:

- ATLAS will seek to formally agree and record tasks and activities as required by the project;
- ATLAS will respond to requests for assistance in a reasonable and timely manner;
- Before using any aspects of a live or closed project for wider dissemination, ATLAS will seek to ensure that the LPA is comfortable with this;
- ATLAS will endeavour to provide advice and assistance based on good and best practice; and
- ATLAS will operate with discretion and courtesy; and will provide honest and open advice at all times.

Expectations of the LPA

By engaging with ATLAS, the following will be expected from the LPA:

- The LPA will act in an honest and transparent manner, ensuring that ATLAS is aware of and if necessary involved in all matters that will influence the tasks ATLAS have been set or the progression of the project;
- Where necessary the LPA will facilitate ATLAS engagement with other LA corporate and partner organisations and individuals when requested and as necessary to assist project progression;
- The LPA will be required to respond to and engage with an independent evaluation process of ATLAS on request by consultants appointed to undertake this task on an ongoing basis;
- On disengagement, the LPA will be requested to complete a proforma to review the scope and quality of ATLAS engagement and in the majority of cases attend a formal disengagement meeting;
- The LPA should endeavour to learn and build their knowledge and internal capacity through ATLAS engagement.

5 PROJECT APPRECIATION

Considerable work has been done by EHDC and their partners to evolve a planning document that will achieve sustainable development and shape the future of East Herts to 2031.

In light of ongoing planning reform and changes to the procedures relating to plan making, EHDC are in the process of preparing a District (Local) Plan. This will set out the overall planning strategy to meet the needs of East Herts and its residents including identifying the principles of development and where new development will be located for the future.

In preparing the Plan, the Council is taking a stepped approach and has prepared a Strategy Supporting Document to assist in honing down its proposals in a logical fashion. The Council are now intending to prepare a Preferred Strategy for initial consideration by

Members in Autumn 2013, prior to moving forward with further work and formal public consultation at a later date.

The scale of growth brings forward a very wide range of challenges and involves a considerable amount of work to test the suitability of alternative options. This includes background work across a range of environmental, social, economic and demographic factors.

One particular area which has been highlighted and where ATLAS support has been requested relates to how to consider aspects relating to the deliverability of potential strategic sites, especially under situations where options have specific infrastructure implications, notably transport and education.

As such, independent advice has been sought from ATLAS specifically relating to infrastructure deliverability, to help learn from other project experiences elsewhere and provide impartial support to help the Council and key external stakeholders move the process forward.

6 THE ATLAS RESPONSE

Proposed ATLAS Team

Based upon an understanding of the issues, ATLAS proposes to assign the following team to assist EHDC in this project:

- **Rob Smith** (Spatial Planning Manager) will act as the key liaison and project manager on behalf of ATLAS and will provide planning and process advice;
- **Graham Harrington** (Spatial Planning Manager) will support Rob in the provision of planning and process advice.

In addition, should the need arise during the course of the project, ATLAS may also call on specialist technical assistance available within the team, in particular in respect of the approach to infrastructure matters.

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ATLAS Tasks

Clearly the work that EHDC are undertaking to prepare a District (Local) Plan is complex and involves many themes and workstreams.

ATLAS support will not be provided to consider the general approach to plan making, or the robustness of technical aspects of the evidence base. The scope of support will be targeted at the key infrastructure and site deliverability considerations at emerging potential strategic sites only. The proposed tasks are set out in the table below.

The support will be provided on a time-limited basis up to the point of initial consideration of the EHDC approach by Members anticipated for Autumn 2013. Engagement could be extended subject to agreement and ability of ATLAS to add value going forward.

ATLAS Tasks	
1	<p>Task: Draw knowledge from comparable projects and experiences</p> <p>Description: Other projects and Local Authorities have been considering issues relating to large scale growth, and transferrable lessons will be shared.</p> <p>Task Manager: Rob Smith</p> <p>Estimated Completion: Oct 2013</p>
2	<p>Task: Provide advice on infrastructure deliverability and plan making</p> <p>Description: Help shape the approach to consideration of infrastructure deliverability, reflecting upon the current available information and potential requirements of the plan making system.</p> <p>Task Manager: Rob Smith</p>

	Estimated Completion: Oct 2013
3	<p>Task: Support partners to find ways forward to consider key infrastructure and site deliverability issues</p> <p>Description: Consider available information of particular significance to deliverability and work with relevant public and private sector key stakeholders to find ways forward. Attending, engaging and potentially facilitating (as an impartial third party) meetings to help the relevant parties consider issues, notably in respect of transport and education infrastructure.</p> <p>Task Manager: Rob Smith</p> <p>Estimated Completion: Oct 2013</p>

Anticipated Outcomes

Project partners will be contacted as part of the independent evaluation process through which the impact of ATLAS support is assessed with reference to a number of general “added value measures”.

ATLAS support would be anticipated specifically to have positive impacts across the following defined measures:

Added Value	Definition
Improving project management	Improving project management processes and procedures within Local Planning Authorities (LPA) and across the other partners involved in delivering projects
Resolving critical blockages	Enabling partners to clarify and address key blockages
Improving relationships	Improving relationships between key stakeholders and the way they interact with each other
Increasing capacity to deal with large scale development	Building confidence, skills and knowledge in the individuals, and, when requested, the organisations involved to enable them to make more effective and efficient decisions in future