

APPENDIX B

ADVISORY TEAM FOR LARGE APPLICATIONS (ATLAS)

ATLAS is part of the Homes and Communities Agency. Its role is to help unblock the issues holding up large applications, increase the knowledge and expertise of councils in handling such projects, share good practice across the sector and act as a partner to councils and independent reviewer of large applications and issues.

HOW ATLAS OPERATES

ATLAS will engage where requested by the council on a case by case basis at any stage of the development process. Sites will generally be large (at least 500 housing units).

Following initial discussions of the issues facing the project, the tasks requiring the input of the team will be identified and agreed. An 'engagement agreement' will then usually be put in place with the council including tangible targets and milestones.

ATLAS currently has 20 staff, comprising qualified planners with extensive planning and development experience and specialist expertise in specific areas such as transport planning, environmental sustainability and social infrastructure.

In addition, ATLAS is able to draw on the resources of the HCA's National Consultancy Unit on specialist issues. Consisting of a comprehensive group of development professionals, the Unit includes urban designers, policy planners, transport planners, civil engineers, community consultation experts, sustainable development experts and project managers.

To make the best and most efficient use of its staff, ATLAS provides advice rather than acting as an extra staff resource. Inevitably, there will be cases where it will be appropriate for focused pieces of work to be undertaken by ATLAS staff. However, in most cases the council would be expected to undertake the work supported by ATLAS guidance. This may mean ATLAS would also help local authorities identify and manage external consultants where work cannot be undertaken in-house.

HOW ATLAS CAN HELP

ATLAS can offer councils advice on a broad range of issues, including:

Policy and process

- development planning and the implications of current government policy
- brokerage, co-ordination and negotiation of major development proposals
- project management
- planning frameworks and development plans.

Themes and outcomes

- urban design and density issues
- modern methods of construction and innovation
- building design and sustainable standards of design
- affordable housing negotiations and design
- flooding (including sustainable urban drainage), waste and energy
- transportation and access
- environmental impact assessment
- social, economic and health assessment.

ATLAS has had considerable success in providing independent advice and assistance on a variety of projects in the past year. Feedback from these projects suggests that the earlier ATLAS is engaged in the process, the greater the impact on the outcome of the project. Councils also appreciate ATLAS' ability to access government agencies at all levels to assist the outcome of a project.