

industries have generally moved on, but the legacy of this distinctive settlement pattern remains.

With the loss of industry, the conurbation lost much of the physical 'glue' that fixed the settlement pattern. Whilst this presents a significant challenge for economic regeneration, it also represents an opportunity for development to support a new quality of life, to respond to changing aspirations for sustainable lifestyles and to adapt to future climate change.

To date, much of the redevelopment of former industrial areas has had a low quality, disjointed and 'out-of-town' character, which has made the heart of the conurbation seem a confusing place, with a negative image. The design guidance proposes a new, green character for these 'in between' areas so instead they become an environmental asset, create a more positive image, aid wayfinding and support sustainable regeneration.

Stakeholders were unfamiliar with the concept of strategic urban design. However, the results of a workshop session devoted to this subject showed that most people felt it to be an important scale for the guidance to address.

INTEGRATED TRAINING AND ENGAGEMENT

Front-loaded consultation involved council officers, elected members, representatives of public sector agencies, developers, architects, RSLs and amenity groups. Tibbalds devised and ran a programme of engagement together with Urban Vision's urban design skills training for local stakeholders. Training elements included an inspirational visit to Sheffield and outside speakers to highlight the benefits of design guidance.

Events were aligned with the work programme, so each session included both engagement and training. Progress updates and workshops encouraged people to feed in local issues and concerns, to discuss concepts and debate priorities.

At 'guidance testing' workshops, planning officers and potential applicants used drafts of the guidance to assess sample planning applications (already determined). This format of workshop, in facilitated groups, provided a productive combination of feedback (to the consultant team) and skills sharing (both between participants and with the facilitators).

JOINED UP DESIGN: STRATEGIC GUIDANCE ACROSS LOCAL AUTHORITY BORDERS AND MULTIPLE TOWN CENTRES

The recently published Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent urban design vision is among the first in the UK to set out strategic guidance across local authority borders and multiple town centres. But any move forward requires that key local officials be prepared to make robust decisions in the interest of supporting holistic design.

The planned growth for Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent is set to deliver 20,000 homes, 332 hectares of new employment land and 155,000 square metres of retail space in coming years, together with a wide range of supporting community infrastructure. Tibbalds Planning and Urban Design was appointed in 2007 to prepare design guidance for Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent. 'The key aim of the design guide was to achieve a step change in the design quality of new development, both by the public and private sectors, says Jane Dann from the Tibbalds team. 'On the one hand, the guidance needed to be aspirational and inspiring, and on the other it had to provide practical and pragmatic advice to prospective developers and their designers on how to achieve urban design quality without compromising development viability.'

'We are already using the guidance,' says councillor Robin Studd, Newcastle Borough Council Deputy Leader and cabinet member with responsibility for regeneration & planning. 'It's going to be of great value to us. Basically, our area has been a bucket shop for poor design over the past years. We urgently need guidance that will help us to raise the game and begin to create the heritage buildings of the future – and that means ordinary homes, not just iconic commercial developments. This guidance will become the vehicle by which we embed new thinking and a new approach.'

'We had a lot of discussion about how broad the urban design principles needed to be. It was crucial to get the right balance between contextual issues and general placemaking principles,' says Katja Stille, urban designer with Tibbalds. Despite the proposed abolition of regional spatial strategies, the evidence base on which they were based is still valid, says Stille. 'The design guide brings together evidence and information from a wide

range of studies carried out over the years, a very useful process that is far too rarely undertaken.'

Strategic planning is necessary, says Stille, to ensure that 'larger than local' planning and investment initiatives make sense. It ensures that investment in major infrastructure is cost-effective and serves both the needs of local communities and the wider area. 'Placed in context with the current reorganisation of planning policy, it seems that design guidance created at the scale of the Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent document becomes even more relevant,' she adds.

Given that producing holistic design guidance at this scale is quite a new approach, we faced several challenges, says Mick Downs, executive director of Urban Vision North Staffordshire. 'When you're trying to get a message across to development control officers, they're not necessarily used to operating at that level. They are more likely used to dealing with a specific site, so they're not used to seeing a "big picture" of the way development is going to form part of an even bigger jigsaw. It was problematic getting that message across, and we went through several drafts before getting it right; when the local authorities were comfortable that the guidance was sufficiently understandable to be used by planners from day to day.' The complete process has taken two and a half years, and the document has been written in such a way that it also has some promotional value,' says Downs. 'It's painting a picture of where the area is trying to go, to but obviously achieving aims requires pretty robust decisions by the councils. Their support is the key to the whole initiative.'

'I intend to stress the need to use this guidance,' says Cllr Studd. 'I understand that we may need to apply a little pressure if we want to change things. The guidance shows us what can be achieved. There are a number of policy and decision-makers across the local authorities who are reluctant to embrace change, but I intend to encourage them to take another look at their traditional ways.'

Although guidance rather than regulation, Downs describes the vision as 'directional guidance'. Enforcement remains a local authority issue. 'I believe that the local authorities need to take