

Advisory Team for Large Applications

ATLAS





What is ATLAS?

The Advisory Team for Large Applications (ATLAS) provides a free, independent advisory service to local planning authorities and their development partners. An experienced and dedicated team, ATLAS works with local authorities, the private sector and key agencies in helping to deliver high-quality sustainable development through effective planning processes, collaborative working and the promotion of good practice. In particular, the team offers advice to local authorities that are experiencing the pressures of increased development activity in their area.

The key to ATLAS' success is that it provides independent and impartial advice. The team is separately funded, has a governance arrangement with Communities and Local Government and is part of the Homes and Communities Agency.

What ATLAS offers

ATLAS offers local planning authorities and their partners advice on a variety of large-scale housing and regeneration issues and aims to build capacity and improve relationships. ATLAS responds to the needs of the individual project and undertakes a wide range of bespoke tasks at all stages of the planning process. The team works on all types of development including new settlements, urban extensions and estate renewal. Whilst project delivery is the main focus of the team, it also has an important role in capturing and disseminating its learning and using this knowledge to assist the overall development of the planning system. ATLAS is made up of dedicated staff with extensive planning and development experience, including specialists in highway engineering, environmental sustainability, urban design and sustainable communities.

ATLAS aims to:

- ◆ Improve the quality of the planning process and its outcomes, helping to bring forward major housing and regeneration projects across all sectors of the planning/development community.
- ◆ Act as a partner to, and as an independent reviewer of, major applications and related issues.
- ◆ Increase knowledge and expertise within local authorities and their partners to handle large planning applications and to deliver high-quality sustainable communities.
- ◆ Help local planning authorities to build better relationships with the development industry and key stakeholders.
- ◆ Contribute to the establishment of an improved planning system based on collaborative working between partners and stakeholders.

Project delivery

Once we have made initial contact with a local authority we discuss the issues facing the project and identify how we can become involved. A project engagement plan will be agreed with the local authority to include agreed tasks, tangible targets and milestones for both the local authority and ATLAS. Whilst working with the local planning authority first and foremost, ATLAS promotes a collaborative, open and transparent process and we will endeavour to work openly with other key stakeholders, in particular the private sector, to build trust and our ability to influence.

ATLAS will engage:

- ◆ where requested by the local authority
- ◆ on a case-by-case basis
- ◆ and at any stage of the development process.

ATLAS sites must be large; either housing led projects (minimum 500 houses) or mixed-use regeneration projects (minimum 200 houses).

Research and dissemination

ATLAS has established a sound depth of knowledge and undertakes a number of activities to disseminate good practice. The core 'hub' of ATLAS' advice and guidance is the *ATLAS Guide*, (atlasplanning.com) a web-based tool for dealing with large, complex development proposals through the planning system based on practical project experience and research. It also contains full information on ATLAS and the types of issues the team is able to assist with.

Planning system development

Based on its knowledge and project experience, ATLAS has played an important role in helping inform, interpret and implement new planning initiatives. As well as regularly contributing to studies and proposals the team has produced a number of specific initiatives. Examples include developing the concept of Planning Performance Agreements and supporting their implementation through the provision of facilitated inception days.

The team also has an important role in building skills and capacity, firstly through its direct project engagement and secondly by working across the sector to provide co-ordinated learning and support.

Positive feedback

ATLAS is able, with the consent of local authorities, to become involved with private sector developers, improving communication and strengthening relationships.

Feedback from past projects suggests that the earlier ATLAS is engaged in the process, the greater the potential for a positive impact on the outcome of the project. The parties also appreciate ATLAS' ability to access all levels of government agencies to assist the outcome of a project.

ATLAS regularly undergoes independent evaluation. Feedback suggests that ATLAS' mediation, documentation assistance and project management facilitation translate into significant time and cost savings.

Local authorities and developers have also said:

"They are leaving us with expertise which means that next time if we face a similar problem we will know how to deal with it."

"The site has made more progress in the past nine months [since ATLAS' involvement] than in the previous three years."

"[ATLAS] enabled all parties to agree a revised approach and diffused a number of potentially explosive issues."





Homes &
Communities
ATLAS

ATLAS is part of the Homes and Communities Agency and is sponsored by Communities and Local Government.

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

For further information please contact:

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