

- 1. Does the Spatial Portrait provide a reasonable snapshot of the area and the issues which face it?**
- 2. Are the Strategic Objectives broadly consistent with the aspirations of organisations and the population and do they provide appropriate goals for the Council to pursue?**
- 3. Are there any Visions which the Council has put forward which are inappropriate or unrealistic?**

General

The initial chapters, at first glance, provide what is expected with recognizable elements of a modern plan such as a spatial portrait, a vision and strategic objectives. Lots of worthy statements and wholesome words appear, as might be found in the introductory sections to any recently prepared Core Strategy. On a proper reading and a harder look however, the material is not what the plan should contain. The consequences of these early and basic failings resonate throughout the plan and the plan is an entirely insubstantial effort, a catalogue of expedient measures rather than a genuine strategy. From the outset the Core Strategy fails two basic tests, which can be labelled as the 'visitor from Mars' and the 'golden thread' tests. These are developed in relation to the Inspector's questions below, insofar as they fit the issues identified for this part of the Examination. The themes set up are then developed through other Position Statements in response to the matters and issues raised by the Inspector for specific parts of the Examination.

1. Does the Spatial Portrait provide a reasonable snapshot of the area and the issues which face it?

A spatial portrait is an accepted way of beginning a plan. Presently fairly briefly it introduces what is particular about the place being planned, what its needs are and how its characteristics might influence the management of change through the influence of the plan to address those needs. There is indeed description of places in this plan, but the description fails the 'visitor from Mars' test. Somebody who knew nothing of the area who landed in Bristol, spent a day looking around and then came across and was able to read the plan would never realize that the plan was about an area including parts of Bristol and under the influence of the major urban area of Bristol. Reading the plan it is as though the population and economy of Bristol don't exist. Of course there is much else to South Gloucestershire including the settlements of Yate and Thornbury, but these are additional to Bristol and subordinate to Bristol in terms of the population and economy of the area. The Council has greater autonomy in creating a plan for the District than it had before, but this does not absolve itself of the responsibility to recognize the formative influences of the place and to work with these, or against them where necessary and realistic, to bring about the kind of place that is wanted.

If the plan had been prepared by a Council that recognised the role of its area as part of the West of England and with a vital role in harnessing the energy of Bristol and managing its change, it would be a different plan. It would certainly be so if it had been prepared as part of a collaborative effort with other West of England authorities and had been positively planned, as guidance has always indicated was wanted, as legislation now requires, and as national policy defines the way the soundness of the plan is to be examined.

2. Are the Strategic Objectives broadly consistent with the aspirations of organisations and the population and do they provide appropriate goals for the Council to pursue?

The way that the plan sets up objectives fails the 'golden thread' test. From the early days of testing

core strategies for soundness, Inspector's have found it easier to understand a plan and to find it good and sound where it is constructed around a golden thread (a term since appropriated for the Planning Framework in relation to sustainable development). What is meant is that a clear strategy is set up at the outset which is a recognizable and appropriate response to the needs and character of the place and community and that this strategy evidently flows through the plan determining all of the actions provided for in the plan as the means of delivering that strategy. Whatever the opposite is of a golden thread, that would describe this (threadbare) Core Strategy. The plan has been prepared backwards with the spatial strategy a list of what has been found possible and acceptable. There is no real sense from the outset of what the planning authority is setting out to do, with what is provided only an often inconsistent and sometimes spurious post hoc rationalisation of the decisions taken. The target figure for the provision of housing is a clear example. Providing for housing to take place is a fundamental part of a Core Strategy, to meet requirements and to use one of the basic building blocks of physical form to create the best pattern of development in the future. The opening chapters do not explain what the Council is seeking to achieve through planning for additional housing and there is no explanation of why the target that has been adopted for housing provision is the target. This paucity of explanation reinforces the sense that the amount of housing is little more than the sum of the capacity of locations in which the Council believes development can take place with the least resistance. Far from what is in the opening chapters setting up a purpose and a structure for the rest of the plan, what is missing casts doubt on all that follows in the plan.