

DesignWays

An Approach to Participatory Planning

Introduction

DesignWays is a toolkit for enabling community and stakeholder participation in spatial and ecological planning. Large, colourful Mind Maps provide a transferable structure to coordinate the hands-on process. Participants use creative thinking tools to develop new options. The ecological design process helps participants go 'beyond end-of-pipe thinking' to create alternative scenarios for sustainable development. DesignWays offers an integrated approach to active involvement in designing plans and projects. Its interactive tools and creative methods deliver dialogue that is animated and engaging. The process helps participants take a holistic view, considering economic development, quality of life and environmental protection. The expected results are twofold:

- viable plans that reflect participants' aspirations and the distinctive character of an area,
- and capacity building, such that participants learn skills of communication and ecological design.

This capacity building enables participants to better contribute to 'planning for sustainability'. DesignWays provides a bridge for productive dialogue between local and professional participants. This helps to integrate bottom-up and strategic planning.



Background

Following successful piloting in rural regeneration in Southern Africa, DesignWays has been used in a variety of projects, including teaching environmental science at Dominican University in California, and in workshops with companies such as Hewlett Packard and Mondavi Vineyards.

The latest application was to develop a strategic framework for regeneration in the heavily urbanised Irk Valley in North Manchester with a broad range of stakeholders. In parallel, a plan was developed for the former landfill site, Moston Vale. This Ph.D. research looked at the potential of such a process to help deliver the EU Water Framework Directive and the participation requirements of regional and local planning. The supervisors were Prof. John Handley and Joe Ravetz (University of Manchester) and Walter Menzies (Chief Executive, Mersey Basin Campaign). The external examiner, Prof. Tim O'Riordan, Sustainable Development Commissioner, described the process and research as "novel, imaginative and very comprehensive".

Comment from Newlands Project Officer

"We supported this trial of DesignWays for one of the potential Newlands sites for landscape regeneration, Moston Vale. After this process, Moston Vale was chosen for Phase One of the programme, partly due to the interest and enthusiasm generated, and the fact that the proposed ideas were seen as viable. I think we have benefited from this planning process. The community involvement deliverers, Groundwork, are further ahead with this project than another Newlands site they are working on. They have a much sounder base for their consultation. The very good exercise exploring existing social capital has facilitated looking at innovative ways of involving the community in managing the site in the long term. I think there are a lot of lessons to be learned from this type of integrated consultation, actively involving people in understanding sustainability. The proposals for Moston Vale seem to have a clearer orientation, and are based on a better sense of the existing economic, social and ecological capital, than others being developed without the benefit of this process".

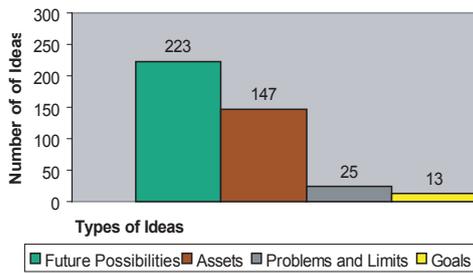
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Benefits

- Increases stakeholder commitment
- Enhances productive dialogue
- Develops skills
- Enables long-term planning and cooperation
- A practical way to apply principles of sustainability
- Encourages innovation
- Encourages focus on positive aspects and solutions, instead of problems

Creative Futures - Moston Vale
Types of Ideas Developed In Workshops



Recommendations (summary)

- Provide increased opportunities for active stakeholder involvement in planning at the sub-regional and landscape levels of scale.
- Catalyse stakeholder and community interest in strategic planning by linking it with planning at the site level.
- Use site and sub-regional planning to inform creation of regional plans in a two-way flow of information.
- Involve partners and possible delivery organisations in the planning process. The planning process can thus foster a partnership approach to delivery. Partners can provide in-kind support to the process, such as mapping and data analysis.
- Explore the possibility of pooling resources for different participatory processes (e.g. those required by the Water Framework Directive, Community Strategies and regeneration programmes) to allow for more resources for such integrated planning.
- Develop a regional participatory planning resource team ('Design Team') to provide support for developing plans at the landscape level of scale.



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