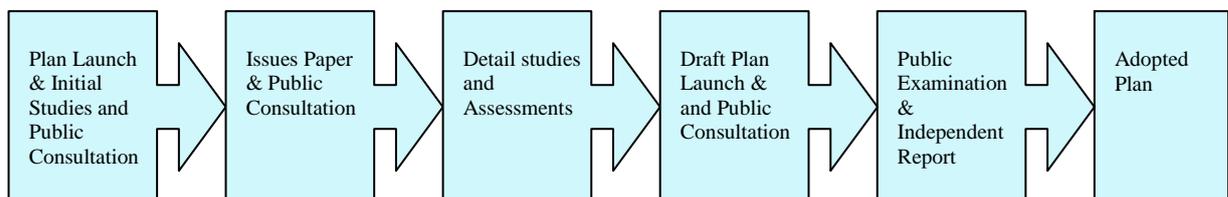


An Introduction to the New Local Development Plan System

1. The Planning Act 2011 has introduced fundamental reforms to plan making with the introduction of Local Development Plans. The legislation will introduce a plan led system and empower Council's to make their own Local Development Plans, however, it does not empower them to revise or alter existing plans.
2. The new system has been designed to speed up plan making, to deliver more effective stakeholder engagement and public participation early in the plan preparation process, and to provide a more flexible approach that is responsive to change and capable of faster review. It is intended that the new local development plan system will be supported by secondary legislation, a Strategic Planning Policy Statement and essential guidance for the transfer of planning powers to the new councils in May 2015.
3. The Department considers that the time it takes to produce a plan under the old plan system is much too long and as a result the system is no longer appropriate in our fast changing society. Even with the best project management skills and with no unforeseen problems the Department considers it is not possible to prepare a development plan under the existing system in less than six years.

Figure 1: Existing plan making process (in excess of 6 years)

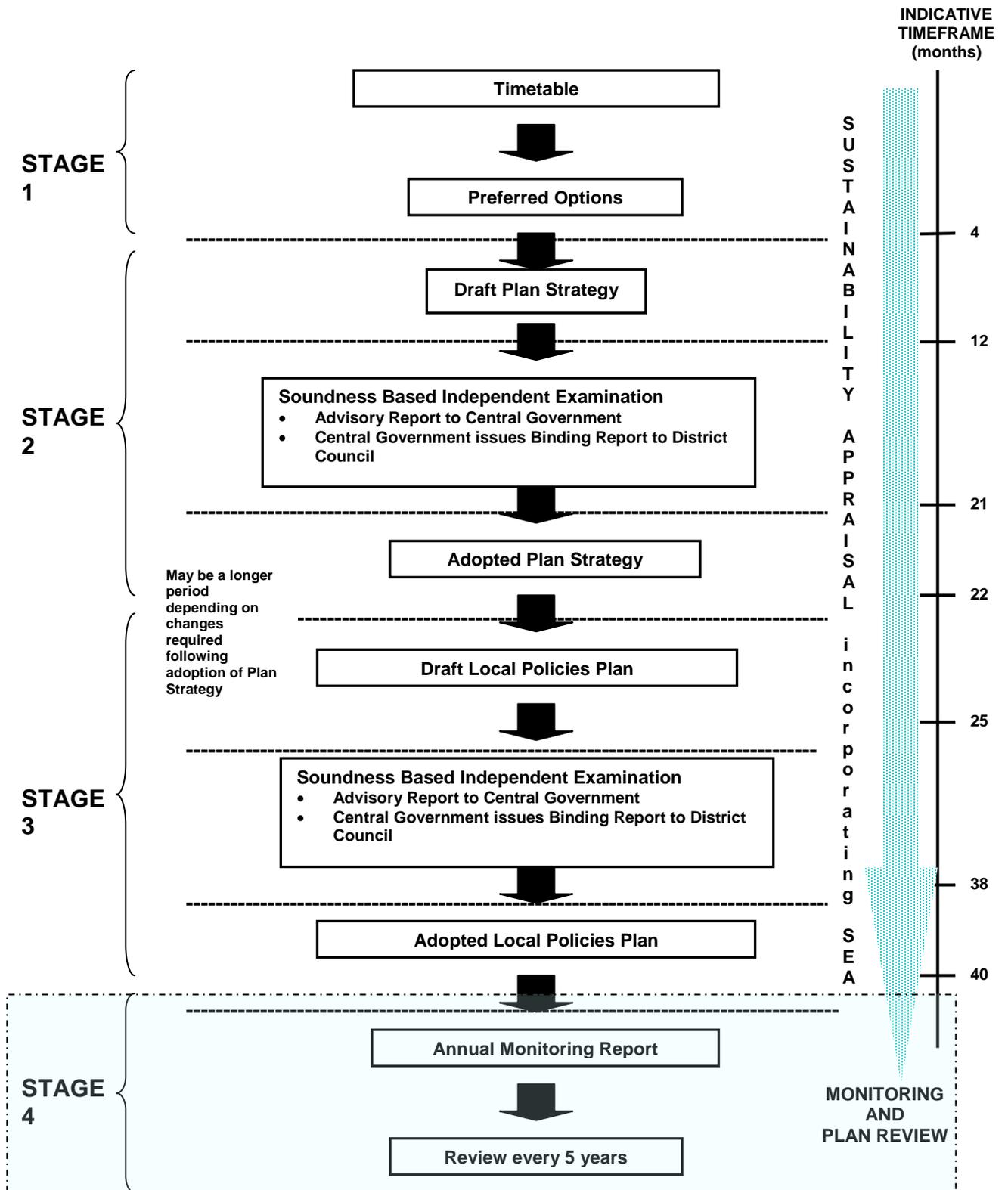


4. Under the new Local Development Plan system, it is anticipated that proposed changes will reduce the length of the overall development plan preparation process from 72 months plus to approximately 40 months (see Figure 2). The key changes being:
 - a new, more flexible and faster local development plan that consists of two separate but related documents – a

Plan Strategy, incorporating the vision, objectives, growth strategy and strategic policies for the area; and, a **Local Policies Plan** document, incorporating policy and proposals and zonings that are of a more local and detailed nature. These two documents will be published, examined and adopted separately, enabling the Plan Strategy document to be adopted quickly, within approximately two years;

- a new, more meaningful and effective approach to enabling interested parties and the local community to engage early in the plan process through replacing the current issues paper with a **Preferred Options** paper and requiring the plan process to follow a clear statement of community involvement;
- new procedures in relation to plan programme management and preparation of a “Timetable” through to ensure better managed and faster plan production;
- a new, faster and more effective basis for examining plans at independent examination, moving away from the objection-based examination process to one which tests the ‘soundness’ of the plan – in terms of (a) plan content, (b) its conformity with central government regional plans, policy and guidance; and (c) the process by which the plan has been produced;
- a new streamlined approach to the form and content of objections to, and representations about, the draft plan and the way they are dealt with at independent examination;
- a requirement that sustainability appraisals are carried out for local development plans to ensure that economic and social effects are included along with environmental effects in plan assessment and to assist in the objective of plans contributing to the achievement of sustainable development; and
- a requirement that plans are regularly and effectively monitored and reviewed in order to ensure that new plans are as flexible and responsive to change as possible.

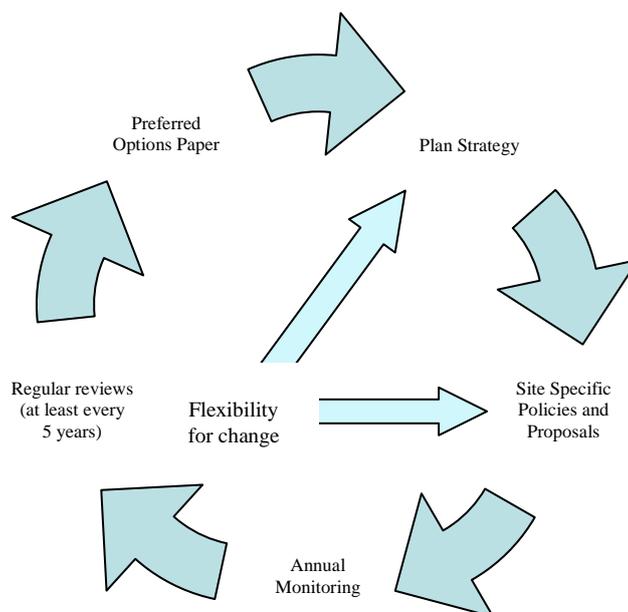
Figure 2: Proposed local development plan process



5. An important element of the new system is the concept of “*plan, monitor and manage*”. The traditional approach of only visiting a plan every fifteen years will be replaced by one of programme management and review (see Figure 3). Once the two parts of the plan are in place Councils will be required by legislation to prepare an annual monitoring report. These reports will provide the basic information for the Council to regularly review implementation of the Plan, at least every 5 years, and to consider the need to bring forward alterations as required.

6. A key feature of the proposed new development plan system is that it is cyclical in nature, evidence based and informed by option led stakeholder consultation. The pilot preparatory studies are aimed at establishing a speedy and efficient way to undertake the data collection necessary to build the evidence base on which to undertake consultation on the alternatives and preferred option and assist preparation of the Plan Strategy.

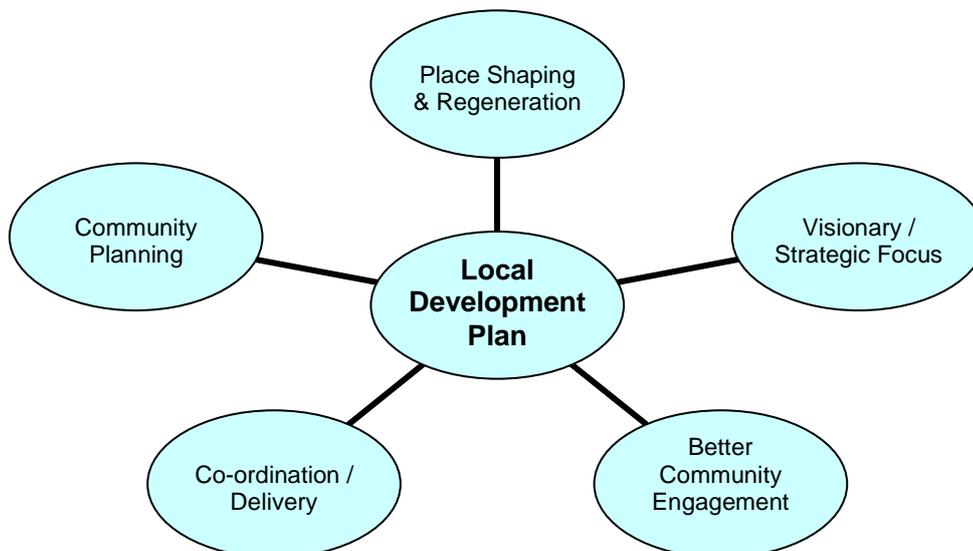
Figure 3: The plan, monitor and manage approach to development plans



7. As well as seeking to ensure that development plans in the future will be more effective, flexible and responsive, it is also intended that the new plan system will enable the new councils to provide a clear and realistic vision of how 'their places' should change and what they will be like in the future. This vision should be based on a thorough evaluation and understanding of an area's needs and characteristics with the aim of creating places in the future that are functional, durable, viable, sustainable, good for people to use and that reflect the importance of local character and distinctiveness. This can be summed up as successful 'place shaping' and adopting this approach seeks to move plans beyond a narrow land use focus.

8. The development plan should articulate the vision by developing a series of high level objectives which address economic, social and environmental issues and by indicating where development, including regeneration, should take place, and what form it should take. It will also help in co-ordinating public capital investment with the efficient delivery of development and new or improved infrastructure. Through the development plan, the new councils will therefore be able to identify the best locations for new homes, businesses, infrastructure, and also protect places of value to people or wildlife. The principles of sustainable development and high quality planning and design should underpin this process.

Figure 4: A new style of development plan



- 9 The new duty of community planning being introduced in April 2015 requires councils to lead the process of creating a long term vision for the social, environmental and economic well-being of their area and its citizens, in partnership with the community and service providers in their area.
- 10 The Local Government Bill introduces a statutory link between the community plan and a council's local development plan, in that the local development plan must take account of the community plan in its preparation. Therefore it provides a context at the local council level for the preparation of the local development plan. It is intended that the local development plan will be the spatial reflection of the community plan and that the two should work in tandem towards the same vision for the council area and its communities and set the long term social, economic and environmental objectives for an area.
- 11 The Department is supporting councils to take forward preparations for the introduction of the statutory duty of community planning. The Community Planning Foundation Programme sets out key building blocks that councils can put in place ahead of the introduction of the statutory duty. These include assembling baseline information, capacity building to address the culture change, development effective partnership working and community engagement, and giving consideration to performance management.
- 12 It is anticipated therefore that there should be opportunities for co-operation between the preparatory plan work and the community planning work which in turn would have distinct advantages for both processes. For example, it may be possible to undertake some of the early informal community engagement and visioning jointly for the community plan and the development plan. This would help establish an agreed vision to be implemented through both plans and could be undertaken in advance of RPA. Planning could also provide much of the evidence base upon which decisions can be made and against which progress can be monitored. Quantitative information could include, for example, census information.