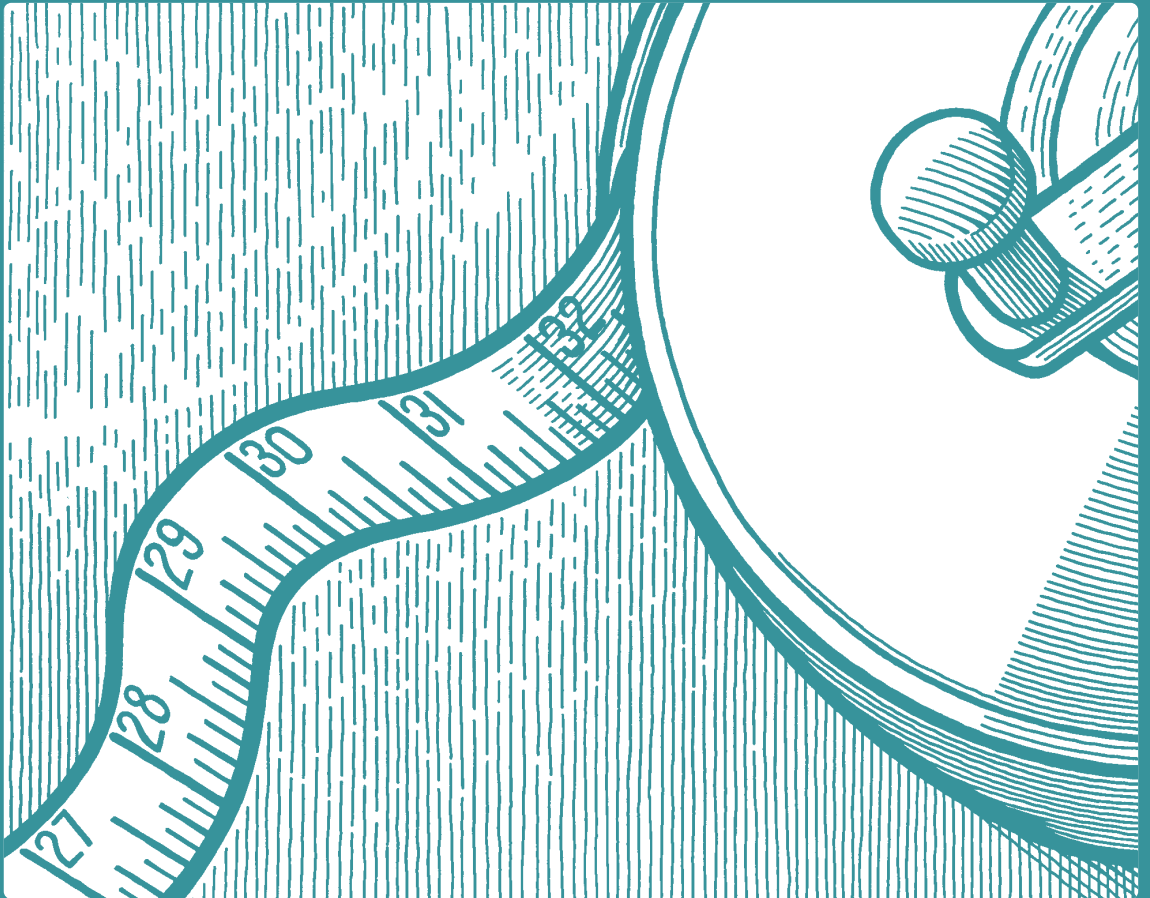


town & country planning
tomorrow series paper 8

monitoring outcome quality in planning - challenges and possibilities

By Matthew Carmona



Introduction – complexity and distortion

A decade ago the House of Commons Public Services Committee described the state of performance measurement across the public sector as ‘*data rich and information poor*’. The statement reflected the fact that the performance of most public services is extremely complex to measure, and, as a result, performance measurement is often limited to those aspects that can easily and expediently be measured.

The complex, inherently political and multi-objective nature of spatial planning makes this a particular conundrum for those seeking to monitor how the service performs. Attempting to understand this complexity, let alone develop a framework for how to monitor success, is therefore a major challenge. Yet if this does not happen, and monitoring and incentivising of planning occurs on the basis of a partial view of the service, then those seeking to make measurements will be open to the charge that what they are doing distorts practice.

This has long been a charge levelled at central government in England, where speed rather than other aspects of the quality of the service or – more importantly – the quality of outcomes has historically been the main basis on which planning performance has been judged. This perception of distortion has been widely debated over the years and has often been disputed by policy-makers. However, the perception remains both widespread and persistent, and as such acts to undermine confidence both in national monitoring and incentivising (the latter recently through the Planning Delivery Grant – PDG) and in the day-to-day operation of planning services locally.

Local planning authorities, for example, have frequently been tarred with allegations of shady practices, indulged in as a means to massage performance figures and attract more PDG. A related long-standing concern has also been the failure to engage adequately with design issues because of the lack of time to deal with such concerns when faced with the speed targets, and because design quality is not appropriately incentivised through the performance regime. The consequence is the undermining of resources allocated to this aspect of planning.

Drawing on extensive ESRC-funded research examining the conundrum of performance measurement in spatial planning,¹ this paper considers how outcome (particularly design) quality could feature in the measurement of planning performance. It briefly examines the history of performance measurement in English planning; reveals the challenges that will need to be overcome before a more quality-focused

measurement system can be devised; and examines the options for moving practice forward in this vital area, both now and in the future.

Where are we coming from?

Performance and planning

The history of performance measurement in English planning has, in short, been an excruciating series of modifications to a limited range of national indicators aimed at encouraging a faster development control function in local planning authorities.

Attempts to streamline the planning process represent a recurring theme, although the reasons vary over time. In the 1970s the property boom of the period gave rise to concerns about the huge increase in applications and appeals; in the 1980s the economic cost of the planning process was the major concern; in the 1990s attempts were made to balance efficiency with better-quality public services; and since 2000 the issue of relieving business from the perceived burden of regulation has increasingly come to the fore.

This is still a major concern of the Treasury, as the recent appointment of the economist Kate Barker to review the planning system revealed. Significantly, despite concluding that planning plays some part in delivering the UK’s current productivity gap with its major competitors, Barker also recognised the vital role of the planning system in influencing the quality of the built environment, arguing that desired improvements in the quality of the planning service should not mean less focus on wider quality outcomes.

Planning takes time

This is just the latest review of the planning system, a system that many would argue will always be subject to conflicting views about the speed of operation versus the quality of outcomes (and processes). In a democratic society, certain aspects of planning will inevitably take time, not least the need for consultation and engagement with those affected by planning decisions. Another factor will be the time it takes to reach an acceptable, agreed design solution.

In short, creating and managing the built environment is a creative problem-solving activity in which objectives and constraints are weighed and balanced, and solutions that best meet a set of defined needs are derived. The nature of this process is one that requires:

- a dialogue between stakeholders;
- an understanding of context;
- a trial and refinement process; and
- an acceptance that in order to deliver the optimum solution, sub-optimum solutions will sometimes be rejected.



Left

Place-making in Warrington

Inevitably this takes time to run its course, and if the process is artificially curtailed the outcome may be a reduction in the quality of the resulting development, and also, perhaps, in the quality of the service offered to the applicant (and other stakeholders).

The question of indicators

The development of performance indicators in planning graphically illustrates this historic concern for speed, above all else. Performance indicators can help to measure the progress of complex systems such as planning by breaking them down into their constituent parts and giving information on whether they are getting better or worse or staying the same. But indicators do 'just what it says on the tin': they only 'indicate'. They cannot demonstrate causal links or provide explanations about why results vary.

Whether revered or reviled, performance indicators are nevertheless a fact of life and are likely to remain a key source of performance information for planning (and other policy sectors) into the future. As such, when choosing indicators, policy-makers should be aware of the trade-offs that need to be made between the conceptual strength of an indicator and the availability of the data. This has not always been the case in planning. Although indicators measuring aspects of the processes of planning are not as conceptually strong as those measuring the outcomes of policy, they are easier and cheaper to collect, and hence have tended to be used as surrogates for the whole of planning performance.

Planning indicators in England

Table 1, overleaf, summarises the range and evolution of indicators used in English planning. It shows the following:

- The speed in determining planning applications has remained a paramount concern.

- The measurement of the cost of the planning process has also been a persistent feature of the indicators until very recently.
- The suite of indicators has been dominated by a concern for the development control function, while plan-making has been an intermittent concern, albeit more important recently.
- Outcome-based measures have only recently come onto the agenda, but have so far remained extremely limited – for example, the re-use of brownfield land and the triennial user satisfaction survey.
- No consistent set of performance indicators has ever been formulated for planning, a factor that inevitably undermines long-term comparison.
- The suite of indicators has become increasingly complex over time, but has always been, and remains, extremely partial, and includes no reference to design quality or other outcome quality concerns.
- The availability of design skills has recently been added as a 'surrogate' for these concerns, alongside the availability of guidance on submission requirements.

This final point is of particular importance in view of the objective stated in the 2006 Local Government White Paper to reduce the number of national performance indicators, and to reduce top-down monitoring of local authorities. This could too easily manifest itself in a reversion to a focus on speed and easy-to-measure outcome factors and the abandonment of even the limited process-based surrogate indicators for quality that have been added in recent years.

The concept of measuring the performance of planning in terms of the quality of outcomes it delivers is therefore a largely untried concept in the UK – but one whose time may have come.

Towards a quality-based indicator – the challenges

Outcome versus process

A Catch-22 is obvious in the discussion so far. If no attempt is made to measure the performance of planning, then planning will have a hard time making the case that it is a service worthy of public investment. Yet, because indicators are required that are simple and general enough to be used at the national scale, over-simplification distorts practice. What is required is a set of national indicators that provide the necessary 'hooks' from which a more 'holistic' picture of local performance can be hung, without the need to measure every aspect of planning.

An important distinction has already been made between the processes of planning and the actual outcomes that result from planning activity. This distinction is critical in developing an effective framework for monitoring and measuring the quality of decisions.

A final assessment of the 'outcome quality' of any episode of development, or of the impact in any one

place of development processes over time, can only be made when the actual outcomes from the process themselves are evaluated. Moreover, these may only be intermediate effects, as the long-term impact of a development – whether it contributes positively or negatively to the delivery of sustainable development and urban change – may only be known after knock-on effects from its realisation have been worked through. For example, a project in a regeneration area may set the scene and standard for subsequent episodes of development, helping in the process to generate a new sense of place.

In the case of planning, the assessment is complicated by the multi-objective nature of the process itself; by the fact that final outcomes may be delayed for many years after decision-making has occurred; and by the difficulty of distinguishing the impact of planning from other influences, either other public sector services or the wider development process (the questions of 'additionality' and 'attributability').

The implication is that if addressed purely in terms of performance indicators, a focus on quality

Table 1
National performance indicators in English planning

	1979 Quarterly figures	1982 Statutory provision	1992 Citizen's Charter	1995 Citizen's Charter	1999/2000 Audit Commission	2000/01 Best Value indicators	2001/02 Best Value indicators	2002/03 Best Value indicators	2003/04 Best Value indicators	2004/05 Best Value indicators	2005/06 Best Value indicators
% of applications processed in 8 weeks	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
% of applications processed in 13 weeks	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Response to telephone	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Answering letters	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Complaints handled by Ombudsman	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Checklist	Checklist	Included	Included	Included	Included
Classification of complaints	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Checklist	Checklist	Included	Included	Included	Included
Number of applications	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Authority target for householder applications	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
% of householder applications processed in 8 weeks	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Performance against a target	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Number of applications taken to appeal	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Number/% of successful appeals	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Checklist	Checklist	Included	Included	Included	Included
% of population covered by plan	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Number of advertised departures	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Net expenditure per head of population	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Number of householder applications	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
% of non-householder applications processed in 8 weeks	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
% of new homes built on previously-developed land	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Average time taken for all applications	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
% of applicants satisfied with service	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Operates triennially	Operates triennially	Operates triennially	Operates triennially	Operates triennially	Operates triennially

Key: Included as an indicator Checklist item within an indicator Operates triennially

outcomes at the national level is unlikely to be fruitful and may be distorting. Instead, based on the observation made during the research on which this paper is based that optimum processes are far more likely to lead to optimum outcomes, a focus on processes as opposed to outcomes may be all that can realistically be achieved at the national level, at least in the short-term.

Relating performance to place

Although national policy sets out key objectives for planning at regional, sub-regional, and district scales, locally-specific issues increasingly come into play for which objectives cannot be set at the national level. For example, a district with a lot of industrial dereliction will have very different planning objectives from one with a high proportion of conservation areas; not only might the ‘dimensions’ of quality be different, but even where they are shared the degree to which something constitutes good, acceptable and bad will vary.

Therefore, measuring the effectiveness of planning at the local level amounts to more than whether authorities are meeting the broad-brush national

aspirations. The larger the physical scale covered, the more generic planning objectives need to be, and thus it may be unfeasible and even distorting for central government to set overly-prescriptive national benchmarks of outcome quality, or even to dictate the applicable dimensions of quality, since much of the judgment will be context specific.

Again, this suggests that a focus on ‘process’ at the national level may be more appropriate, with assessments of outcome quality made at the local level in light of local circumstances. It accords with the principles of devolving decisions down to the local level as espoused through Sir Michael Lyons’ review of local government and in the 2006 Local Government White Paper.

Measuring across the process

With this in mind, outcome quality is not only dependent on the social, economic and environmental context of the site; it is also critically dependent on the quality of proposals put forward for planning permission. The role of planning is therefore to ‘encourage’ high-quality development, offer appropriate ‘incentive’ (not least increased certainty

Table 1 continued
National performance indicators in English planning

	1979 Quarterly figures	1982 Statutory provision	1992 Citizen's Charter	1995 Citizen's Charter	1999/2000 Audit Commission	2000/01 Best Value indicators	2001/02 Best Value indicators	2002/03 Best Value indicators	2003/04 Best Value indicators	2004/05 Best Value indicators	2005/06 Best Value indicators
Score against a checklist (see issues marked)											
Presence of up-to-date plan or timetable for adoption											
Monitoring of development plan policies											
Adoption of SPG – link to plan policy											
Charter with performance targets											
Delegation to officers											
Award of costs against the authority											
Availability of pre-application advice											
Equal-access policies											
% of major applications processed in 13 weeks											
% of minor applications processed in 8 weeks											
% of other applications processed in 8 weeks											
Guidance on submission requirements											
Availability of design advice											
Availability of historic environment advice											
Multi-disciplinary team approach for major applications											
Capability for an electronic planning service											
Submission of LDS and three-year rolling programme											
Meeting the milestones in the LDS											
Publishing the annual monitoring report											

Key: Included as an indicator Checklist item within an indicator Operates triennially

over the likely granting of planning permission), and adequately control applications as they come forward for planning permission – ‘adding value’ in the process by preventing the worst proposals (by rejecting them) and negotiating to help weak or mediocre proposals achieve better-quality outcomes.

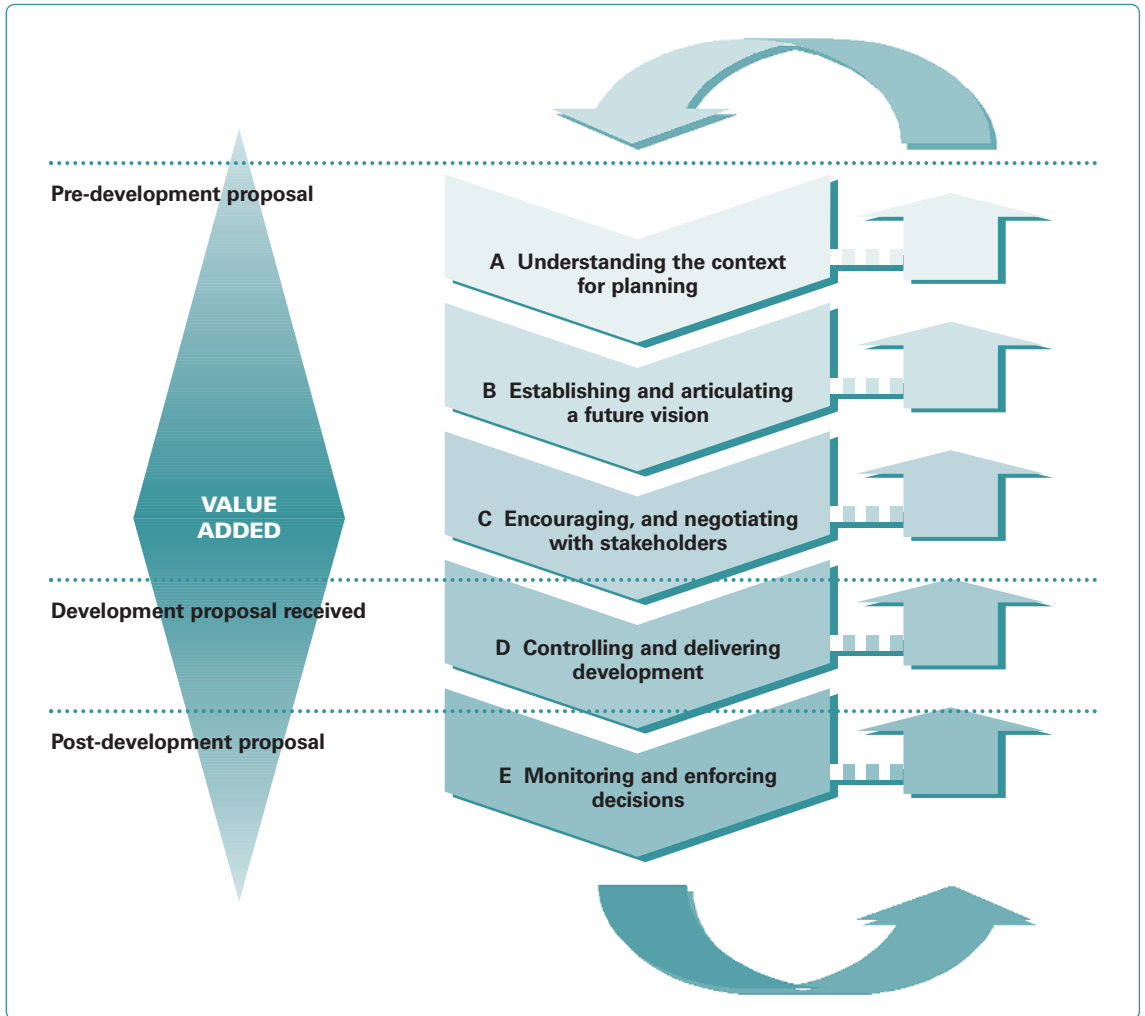
Furthermore, because many of a planning authority’s decisions are made at the time of generating policy and guidance, rather than at the development control phase, it is important that aspects of policy-making are fully reflected in any measurement system. This reflects the fact that development control is not a free-standing process, but sits within a complex and long-term process of planning that can crudely be divided into five key phases:

- It begins by seeking to understand the broad context for development and planning, including the broad range of public policy remits.
- It establishes policy objectives at different scales,

from authority-wide policy, to area- and site-specific guidance.

- It moves through a promotional/negotiation phase, only some of which is formally part of the development control process.
- It moves into the formal process of development control, aimed at controlling and actually delivering development once an application has been received.
- And finally it moves on to a long-term monitoring, feedback and (if necessary) enforcement phase.

Fig. 1 summarises this idealised (and highly-simplified) model of the planning process. It helps to emphasise the importance of thinking about planning as a continuous (as opposed to an end-state) activity that encompasses but goes beyond statutory processes, particularly in view of the move to ‘spatial planning’.



Above

Fig. 1 Idealised model of the planning process

The diagram illustrates that much of the creative and critical 'value-adding' activities of planning take place before development proposals are formulated; in the processes of establishing a place-based vision and policy framework, and in encouraging and negotiating with potential applicants about what form development will take. This is inevitable, as once a proposal has been formulated all the key decisions concerning the type, amount, location and form of development have been taken; positions of the different stakeholders harden around the proposals on offer; and the role of planning becomes one of reaction rather than pro-action.

The formal development control process is therefore dependent on the pre- and post-application phases of the process in order to establish appropriate quality aspirations in the first place, and thereafter to ensure that, first, development is delivered on the ground as envisaged in the planning consent and, second, it does not deteriorate over time through inappropriate alterations. Any system of performance measurement should reflect this.

Different perceptions of quality

Adding to the complexity is the fact that the quality of outcomes will be judged differently by different stakeholders. In particular, notions of quality will be predicated on the different types of value placed on those outcomes by the various stakeholders. Obtaining information on whether or not an outcome has fulfilled the quality criteria of each stakeholder may require the use of different sorts of measures, addressing the various dimensions of their interest.

A wide range of methods for measuring aspects of quality are already established – for example, the Design Quality Indicator (DQI), the Placecheck appraisal tool, Local Environmental Quality Survey (LEQS), opinion surveys, Building for Life criteria, valuation techniques, and so forth. All provide different perspectives on quality and value, although for local authorities the simple notion of compliance with policy or guidance may be the most direct means to measure quality.

In practice, planning is a negotiation process that reconciles the interests of the various stakeholders, with planners acting as mediators between interests according to a political process and set of priorities. Whatever their differences, the various stakeholders exert their demands on a proposal, and if a consensus of some sort is reached, development can take place. One view of quality may therefore be that the maximum possible satisfaction of all stakeholders is viewed as the best possible planning outcome in any given context, whether or not this meets the standards laid down in policy. Consequently, any definitive measure of outcome quality will also need to reflect some notion of satisfaction that the needs of different stakeholders are being met.

What outcome-based possibilities exist to improve practice?

New possibilities for outcome measurement

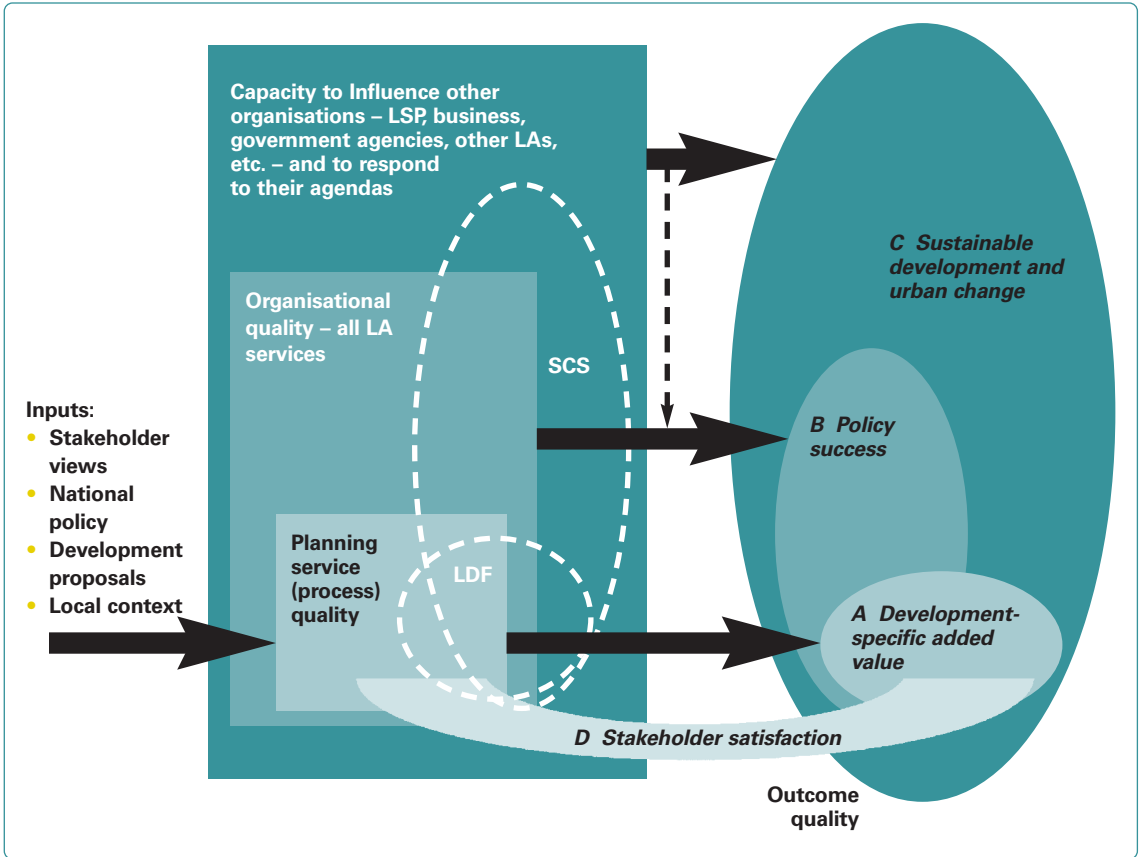
The discussion so far has revealed both a range of conceptual dilemmas and also some opportunities for measurement focused on different notions of outcome quality. These can be represented in a simple analytical diagram (see Fig. 2 overleaf) as part of a broader four-part model of planning quality. This reflects the fact that delivery by the planning system on four fronts is important:

- as an important player in a network of services and organisations, reflected in planning's 'capacity to influence' and its 'responsiveness' to wider agendas;
- as part of a public organisation, reflected in its 'organisational quality';
- as a service provider, reflected in its 'service – or process – quality'; and
- as a modifier of the built and natural environment, society and the economy, reflected in its 'outcome quality'.

With the recent move to a system of spatial planning, the first of these four fronts is even more important, with planning sitting alongside and needing to work with a wide range of other local and national government services (transport, street scene, housing, education, health, etc.), and with non-government organisations, to meet its aims. Within this framework, four notions of outcome quality are represented (italicised in Fig. 2), each reflecting different opportunities for measurement and increasing spatial and temporal scales.

Thus the *added value* achieved by planning (A in Fig. 2) in connection with a particular proposal will usually be a result of the short-term negotiation process over the proposal; something that it may be possible to distinguish and measure. *Policy success* (B) will tend to be a longer-term objective (and more difficult to measure), such as the delivery of a mixed-use urban extension; although some contributions may be measured over the shorter-term, such as the simple rejection of a sub-standard building design.

Some aspects will be clearly attributable to planning, while other aspects will only materialise (and be measurable) as the result of multiple actions by different services. The contribution of planning to achieving *sustainable development and urban change* (C) will be the most long-term contribution, and here it will be particularly difficult to isolate the unique contribution of planning, as opposed to other services or influences. For such concerns it may be that judgements of success can only realistically be made at an organisation-wide level or even on a multi-agency basis.



Above

Fig. 2 Analytical framework for measuring planning outcomes
Four notions of outcome quality, A-D, are denoted in italicised text

These three notions of outcomes can be conceptualised as embedded within each other. Therefore the value added to particular developments by planning will help (at least in part) to deliver particular policy objectives, which in turn should help to deliver sustainable development.

The final dimension – *stakeholder satisfaction (D)* – exists independently of the other three; although stakeholders will make their judgements of quality on the basis of performance on the other three fronts, as well as more generally in terms of the environmental, social, economic and governance effects. These judgements will be made on the basis of planning and often integrally on the basis of the wider organisational success. Stakeholder satisfaction is therefore a cross-cutting outcome.

Medium-term opportunities for measurement

The research on which this paper is based revealed that measurement is possible across each of the four dimensions of outcome quality, and that attempts to do this are being made in a fragmented manner among local authorities. Each offers

opportunities to encourage (or require) the more systematic monitoring of outcome quality. However, attempts to measure in these ways are so far exploratory and tentative, and each would need further development to allow this to happen.

- **Development-specific added value:** One outcome-focused measure of the success of the planning service could be based on the difference (in qualitative terms) between the approved application (or final outcome) and the submitted proposal. This would help to ensure fairness and continuous improvement between different authorities operating within vastly different contexts. In practice, it is difficult and time consuming to evaluate every application on a 'before and after' basis for the value it adds, and therefore a method of sampling may need to be employed on a cross-section of applications received by any one local authority. Issues of subjective difference between local interpretations of 'value added' would also come to the fore.

As the most narrowly defined of the four notions of outcome quality, this is also the most common outcome-based measure of performance. However, where found, these measures do not tend to differentiate between the value added by direct compliance to policy and the value added by surpassing policy standards or achieving success in areas that lie outside the strict scope of planning policy.

A conceptually robust measure of value added would be the difference between input and output (i.e. a measure of the difference that planning makes between pre-application proposals and the negotiated and approved scheme before other factors such as building regulations begin to influence outcomes). In practice, however, the measurement of value added usually entails the comparison of difference in quality between that which is built and that which was submitted.

This particular comparison is easier to make, especially if elected members are involved in judging the success of the scheme, because it is easier to judge what is actually there than to imagine what a development would be like from a planning approval. The approach also has the advantage that the influence of planning does not stop at the decision to approve or reject an application (i.e. it involves monitoring and enforcement); but it has the disadvantage that other influences come to bear on the finished development before its realisation.

Existing schemes for measuring value added are all in the early stages of development and are in need of refinement. Nevertheless, a national scheme might be developed, perhaps under the auspices of the Commission for Architecture and Environment (CABE). Such a scheme could be developed into a national indicator, or as a required component of the annual monitoring report (see below).

- **Policy compliance:** Compliance with policy provides an obvious measure of success for local authorities because policy provides a ready benchmark (of sorts) against which to make an assessment. This dimension of outcome success is now particularly important given the need for planning authorities to prepare annual monitoring reports, in which they are required to report on whether policies are achieving their objectives, and if not, why not. It is striking, however, that the Government's recently-released good practice guidance on the subject is almost silent on the subject of the design quality and liveability of the places that planning influences, simply pointing to the quality of planning services checklist in BV 205 (see Table 1) as an optional local output indicator.²

Part of the difficulty is the need for clear and measurable objectives to be set out in policy in the first place, something that is rarely apparent. Extensive guidance is now available on monitoring the local development framework, although what this means for issues such as design is still an open question and practice is poorly developed. In some authorities policy-based targets and indicators are chosen to reflect broader quality of life concerns, while in others they relate directly to the development control process, and do not reflect the wider state of the environment.

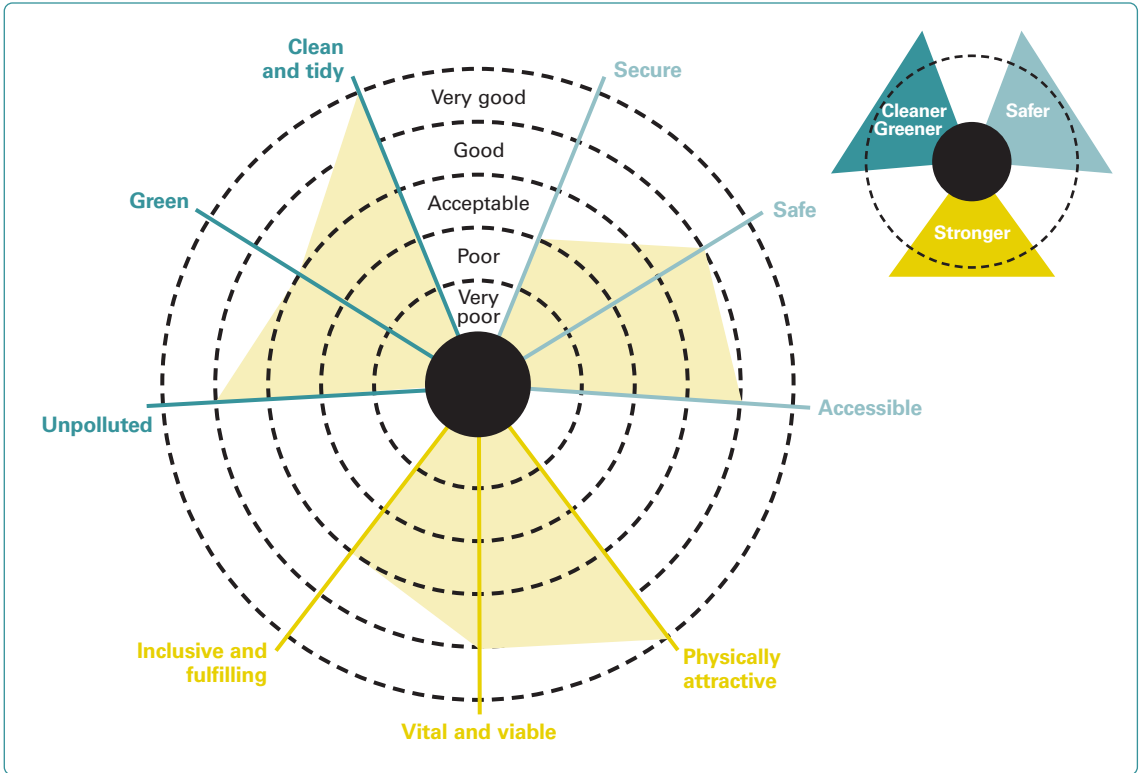
Typically, a set of measurable but highly 'reductionist' indicators are chosen in annual monitoring reports. With careful thought, however, it should be possible to develop a set of demonstration plan-based targets and indicators that suggest a direct causal link between planning action and the quality of outcomes being delivered on the ground.

- **Sustainable development and urban change:** The ultimate objective of planning is increasingly the delivery of sustainable development, and in one way or another most local authorities are engaged in the very broad-brush monitoring of sustainable development objectives through the use of sustainability indicator frameworks and the like. However, most of these are highly partial, and again this is an area for future work to consider to what degree outcome factors can feature more consistently and holistically in assessments.

As a sustainable environment goes beyond the ability of planning to deliver, so too does the influence of these frameworks. At this level we are dealing with organisational-wide and/or multi-agency delivery. For the delivery of better-quality outcomes, it is vital that such factors are fully considered at this level, in a cross-organisational manner, and in cross-organisational/multi-agency policy frameworks such as in the local 'sustainable community strategies' (SCSs). If a concern for outcome quality is absent at this level it is unlikely to feature in a significant way at the service level as it relates to spatial planning.

Monitoring should also occur at this level, and, as the *State of English Cities* research has shown, an increasing body of data is being collected locally that can give an indication of how urban areas are changing. In addition, some local authorities have conducted their own (partial) 'state of the environment' reviews.

Unfortunately, a single survey of the environment may do little to reveal the processes that have led to change (over time), or indeed anything about the role of planning in this change. Instead, a regular survey may be required. Methods such as CABE's Spaceshaper are now available for very local



Above

Fig. 3 Proposed Community Quality Profile (CQP)

analysis; and research for the Department for Communities and Local Government has suggested that a tool to measure the qualities of the local environment at the community (neighbourhood) level should be developed, with the ability to translate data vertically upwards from the neighbourhood, to authority-wide and up to national scales.³ Such a tool (see Fig. 3) might provide a means to regularly monitor urban change and map outcome quality in such a way that allows the influence of planning to be identified.

- Stakeholder satisfaction:** Although planning authorities are subject to the triennial national customer satisfaction survey, this is itself extremely limited in its scope, and attempts to go beyond it at the local level are rare. Questions here concern: who are the customers (applicants for planning permission, agents, the local community, etc.); when within the development process should they be surveyed; what sample is scientifically robust; and what should the focus be (specific projects, the quality of the service, or general outcome quality)? With the move to spatial planning, these questions have become more complex.

Nevertheless, tentative local experiments reveal that opportunities clearly exist for more systematic

engagement with the customers (however defined) of the planning service around issues of quality. A simple toolkit could be developed to allow this to happen more widely and to enable the comparison of results across similar contexts.

External audit

A characteristic of many of the approaches discussed so far is that they would be operationalised at the local level by planning authorities, who would effectively assess themselves. This reflects the more mature relationship that central government is now forging with local government, with greater trust and freedoms flowing from better performance. Self-assessment is a feature of these trends, but it also reflects the primary purpose of performance measurement, as a means to learn and improve, rather than as a crude means to direct change through public embarrassment.

A light-touch external audit mechanism may nevertheless be required to review a selection of assessments each year, and to offer advice (and if necessary sanction) on the basis of a comparison across authorities. The aim would be to establish that judgements are (within reason) consistent, well justified and honest. The Audit Commission might take on such a role.

Table 2
Outcome quality, process checklist

<p>This indicator is concerned with delivering better-quality planning outcomes. It uses a simple checklist ranging across five key stages of a typical planning process. Authorities should score at least ten from the checklist, including at least one ‘Yes’ in each category</p>	<p>Award one point for each ‘Yes’</p>
<p>Understanding the context for quality</p> <p>1 Do you undertake systematic audits of the quality of the built environment (preferably annually), or have a programme of community-based audits of the built environment (i.e. Placechecks/VDSs/Spaceshaper, etc.), or produce an annual state of the environment report?</p> <p>2 Do you undertake regular customer/public satisfaction surveys of the built environment?</p> <p>3 Are all your conservation areas covered by a character appraisal or is a programme in place to complete the work?</p>	<p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p>
<p>Establishing a vision of quality</p> <p>1 Do you clearly set out your key quality aspirations in your LDF core policies?¹</p> <p>2 Do you have up-to-date authority-wide design guidance to supplement your core policies, either as DPD or SPD?¹</p> <p>3 Do you prepare (or require the preparation of) urban design frameworks, masterplans, development briefs, or design codes for all major applications?²</p>	<p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p>
<p>Encouraging and negotiating quality</p> <p>1 Do you deliver systematic training on design for members and planning officers?</p> <p>2 Are systems in place to offer pre-application advice on design?</p> <p>3 Do you have a designated design champion in your authority?</p>	<p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p>
<p>Controlling and delivering quality</p> <p>1 Do you have an urban design or design/conservation team in your planning department, or otherwise have direct access to staff with urban design skills?</p> <p>2 Do you have a functioning design advisory/review panel (or access to one at a higher level) and mechanisms to act on its advice?</p> <p>3 Do you have mechanisms in place to deliver an integrated development team approach to major developments including planning, urban design, and highways expertise?</p>	<p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p>
<p>Monitoring and enforcing quality</p> <p>1 Do you undertake regular post-implementation reviews of completed developments by members and officers?</p> <p>2 Do you have systems in place to proactively monitor and enforce planning conditions?</p> <p>3 Do you have a local design award scheme in operation?</p>	<p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p> <p>Total:</p>

Notes:

¹ At least to the standards set out in *By Design, Urban Design in the Planning System* or CABE’s *Making Design Policies Work*
² Major applications are defined in the context of BV 109a

What outcome-based possibilities exist to improve practice?

A short-term solution

Because the proposed approaches to measurement above all need further development, none is likely to significantly improve monitoring practice over the short term. As an interim measure it may be worth developing a new national Best Value Performance Indicator with a specific focus on issues of outcome quality. It could also feature as a dedicated outcome indicator in annual monitoring reports. However, for the reasons discussed above, it is likely that any BV

outcome indicator would need to focus on ‘process’ issues as a surrogate for outcomes.

From a trawl of sources of local indicators and suggested national indicators it is possible to identify a range of currently-used process-based performance indicators with direct relevance to outcome quality. Much like the existing quality of planning services checklist (BV 205), it should be possible to develop a more sophisticated process-based indicator using a series of questions and a simple scoring system. Such an indicator should be structured to include questions from across the key stages of the idealised model of the planning process expressed in Fig. 1, thereby encouraging more systematic attention to quality issues ranging across inputs to outcomes.

A single outcome quality indicator

An initial proposal for such a checklist is included as Table 2, although this is only a sketch of what might be proposed. Even here, many of the requirements would need careful definition in a similar manner to those contained in the quality of planning services checklist.

Under such a system, it is likely that a very high percentage of authorities will be able to answer 'yes' to some of the questions, but their inclusion in the list sends a valuable signal about their significance. Importantly, authorities would not have to do everything on the list to satisfy the requirements of the indicator, but the scoring system should be set to challenge existing practice and to ensure that authorities prioritise quality. Over time, the score required for success could be ratcheted up to encourage improvement.

And finally...

The complexity of spatial planning and the multiple challenges inherent in successfully measuring the quality of its outcomes are not to be

underestimated. This will require more than simply cobbling together existing data because it is available and easy to measure; it will also require an explicitly local (as well as national) approach to measurement if a holistic view of outcome quality is to be secured.

After almost 30 years of largely ignoring outcomes in the way that the performance of planning is measured, it is worth spending a little time now to get it right. It would certainly be preferable to measure nothing at all, rather than run the risk of developing another (albeit different) distortionary measurement system. The ideas advanced in this paper show that, despite the complexity, a way forward is undoubtedly possible.

Notes

- 1 See M. Carmona and L. Sieh: *Measuring Quality in Planning: Managing the Performance Process*. Spon Press, 2004
- 2 *Local Development Framework Monitoring: A Good Practice Guide*. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2005
- 3 M. Carmona and C. de Magalhaes: *Local Environmental Quality: A New View on Measurement*. Department for Communities and Local Government, 2007



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