

## **JCS Note re Strategic Site definition**

There is no established single definition for what constitutes a large scale housing development (RTPI 2013), so ultimately this is a matter for each local planning authority to determine having regard to their particular local context.

ATLAS have been providing and continue to provide critical support to the delivery of key sites within the Joint Core Strategy area. It is recognised that ATLAS sites must be large; either housing led projects (minimum 500 houses) or mixed-use regeneration projects (minimum 200 houses). The Joint Core Strategy authorities have adopted the housing led scheme approach with a figure of circa 500 homes as an appropriate measure.

The Joint Core Strategy is concerned with the strategic levels of development for the three authorities and the strategic response to this is through urban extensions to Cheltenham and Gloucester i.e. making the important decisions on the principally important elements of the planning framework to 2031. This is the local response of three local planning authorities when considering development needs arising within their joint plan area. When considering where to set an appropriate approximate threshold, the Joint Core Strategy authorities viewed the approach taken by Atlas, to be an appropriate measure.

The threshold for strategic development sites should be considered in the context of the overall scale of the provision being made within the plan. The strategic allocations comprise c. 12,000 units of the supply within an overall need of 30,500. There are existing completions/commitments for c. 13,000 units, leaving approximately 6,000 units (half that of the strategic allocations) for the district plans to bring forward. The strategic allocations are a key component of the overall delivery of the Joint Core Strategy and the size of those development sites should be reflect their importance.

A balance needs to be struck between putting the major strategic elements of growth in place in a timely fashion and allowing an element of flexibility for the Part 2 plans and neighbourhood plans. If the threshold is set too low in the JCS, this would result in an unmanageable number of strategic allocations being put forward across the three administrative areas, delaying putting in place the overarching strategy. A line needs to be drawn somewhere and the balance struck by the JCS Authorities is an appropriate one in that:

It ensures that the majority of the development for the plan area is committed within the JCS;

It reflects the general tipping points or infrastructure thresholds which tend to be higher than 450/500 dwellings, for on site provision, the threshold could actually be increased to 1,000 dwellings rather than decreased. However, this would introduce less certainty into the plan, and would not necessarily address fully the meeting of unmet needs within the JCS area. It could also limit the potential for some of the strategic allocations, notably North and South Churchdown sites to be identified in the JCS.

It allows for the Part 2 plans and neighbourhood plans to allocate land of a non-strategic scale thus respecting the principles of localism.

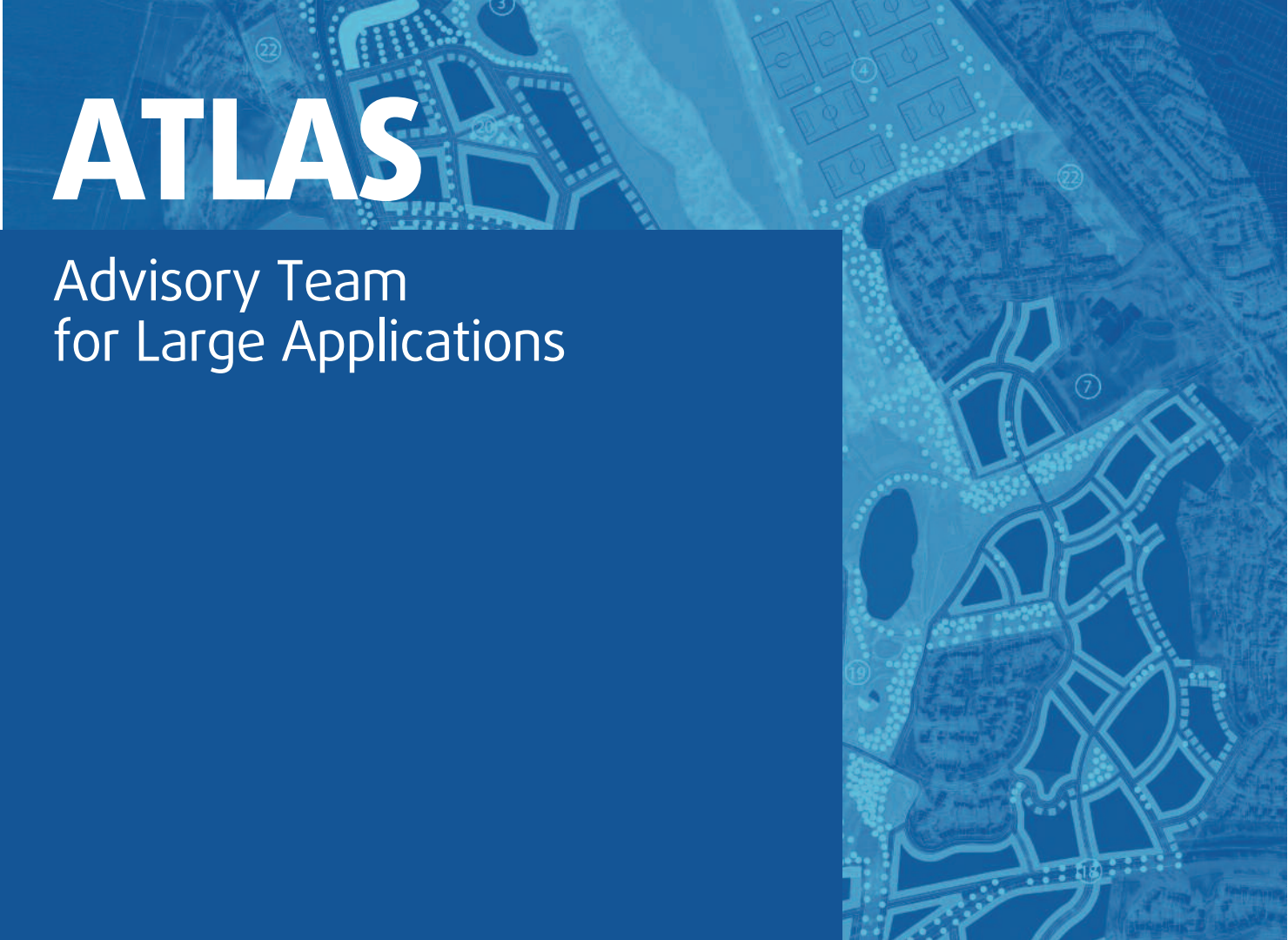
Smaller sites instead of strategic sites have not been considered through this process or tested, nor do we consider that it would be appropriate or reasonable to do so.

Thriving communities,  
affordable homes



# ATLAS

Advisory Team  
for Large Applications



# Advisory Team for Large Applications

## 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](http://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.”**

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**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.**