

NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

1 INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest challenges facing planning authorities is to ensure that planning frameworks and processes are designed and managed in a manner, which would promote enthusiastic and effective public participation. A decisively important aspect that needs to be addressed in this regard is to ensure that the physical scale of the planning area is such that the residents of that area would identify with it to the extent that they would be encouraged to actively take part in its planning and management. Together with appropriate scale, it is also imperative that institutional structures are created which would ensure effective decision-making and implementation of policy. Residents of an area should be convinced that it would be worthwhile to take part in the planning of the area within which they live.

Whilst the bioregion, the delimitation of a bioregion, offers an effective and appropriate scale for regional planning, it needs to be recognised that the bioregion is not the final planning unit within which planning and management should take place. 'Place-specific' planning requires that there should be smaller, 'finer-grain' spatial planning units, which can serve as 'building blocks' for all forms of land-use and development (e.g. tourism development planning).

As stated above, to be practical, communities, residents, resource managers and government agencies should be able to define the planning area in accordance with the 'place' that most residents and resource dependant people would call 'home' (Miller, 1996).

From the above, it follows logically that there is a need to recognise smaller local-level planning areas within the bioregion, which are demarcated in a manner that would effectively incorporate the interests of local communities in the affairs that affect them directly. Ideally, such local planning areas should be demarcated for the bioregion as a whole and should be contiguous.

2 NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA PLANNING GUIDELINES

In accordance with the place-specific and bioregional planning approaches, the establishment of rural and on-farm settlements should be guided by Neighbourhood Area (NA) development plans. Such plans would, *inter alia*, comprise the following three main components:

- a) Establishing a role / vision for the NA.
- b) Identifying NA issues and the formulation of policies.
- c) Drafting a spatial framework for the NA.

2.1 VISION FOR THE NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA

Development plans of each NA need to be drafted in accordance with the roles of the surrounding Neighbourhood areas. The envisaged role of each NA should determine the kind and intensity of economic activities that should operate in the area and, accordingly, the appropriate size of the community and infrastructural and public facility needs.

The role of the Neighbourhood areas needs to be determined on both the bioregional and the local level.

2.1.1 BIOREGIONAL PLANNING INFORMANTS

On a bioregional level, the IDP provides for the designation of Spatial Planning Categories (SPCs), consistent with UNESCO's Biosphere Reserve concept, to manage development so that sustainability is promoted and the set goals and objectives for the district are achieved.

The SPCs determined specific purposes and appropriate activities for each geographic area of the district. The various SPCs have been determined on a provincial level and are proposed for the designation of land resources across the entire geographic area of the Western Cape Province (refer to the policy document Bioregional Planning Framework for the Western Cape {PGWC, 2000}).

The SPC designation will largely determine the roles of the various Neighbourhood areas by determining the predominance of conservation, agricultural, recreational and settlement areas, and associated social and economic activities.

Further factors determining the roles of neighbourhood areas on a regional level are IDP proposals for community facilities, and industrial and commercial centers.

2.1.2 REGIONALLY SIGNIFICANT CHARACTERISTICS

The following characteristics of neighbourhood areas that are of regional significance should also determine, or verify, their regional role as defined by the IDP:

- a) **Environmental suitability** of the NA for conservation / recreation / development and, thus, its suitability for various economic activities. This could be determined from, amongst others, soil surveys, assessments of biological resources and historic features, as well as visual assessments.
- b) **Community facilities** provided by the NA, e.g. schools, community centers, etc.
- c) **Infrastructural capacity** of the NA, i.e. the availability of sewage disposal, water and electrical infrastructure.

2.2 NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA ISSUES, POLICIES AND ACTION PLANS

The NA level of planning provides an appropriate level for identifying and addressing a number of developmental needs, or issues, in conjunction with the local community.

Development issues specific to a NA, in terms of the vision for its future development, as well as district-wide issues which could be addressed on a neighbourhood level, should, accordingly, be identified for each NA.

Amongst others, the following issues and types of actions could be addressed on a NA level:

- a) **Minimising resource use.**
This includes the following:
 - (i) Community-level recycling, i.e. the reclamation and re-use of wastes (e.g. composting, use of waste water, etc.)
 - (ii) Maximising people's access while minimising the use of fossil fuel and other non-renewable resources.

- (iii) Promoting the establishment of fuel-efficient, movement-minimising living environments.
- b) **Creating employment that reduces poverty and supports resource conservation.**
The creation of jobs from recycling should improve the lives of poorer groups, whilst also promoting resource conservation. Provision should be made for market gardening (or small-scale agricultural production) which should be central to the livelihoods of poorer households.
- c) **Providing minimum basic services to all.**
The public participation opportunities provided by neighbourhood level planning should facilitate more accurate determination of the service requirements and priorities of a particular local community and how these needs can best be addressed in that particular context.
- d) **Generating finance for sustainable development.**
Neighbourhood level planning should promote the mobilisation of community resources for low-income housing and NA development (e.g. finance for community, or neighbourhood level, services and infrastructure such as water, sanitation health care, etc.). Innovative community actions to meet development needs and reduce resource consumption should be supported.
- e) **Meeting citizen's health needs and ensuring a healthy environment.**
Communities should monitor and ensure that water, sanitation and drainage provision maintain public and environmental health. Communities should investigate means of providing health care and emergency services within limited municipal budgets. Domestic violence could be prevented through community mobilisation.
- f) **Transport-minimising** (especially private car use).
This could be promoted through bringing employment opportunities close to public transport nodes and residential areas.

2.3 REGIONAL ISSUES, POLICIES AND ACTION PLANS

District-level development issues identified in the IDP, which could be addressed on a NA level, should be investigated. Examples of such development issues include the following:

- a) **Maintenance of extensive unmodified areas retaining their primeval character and biodiversity.** The resources for nature conservation of a group of farms that form a NA could be pooled, through the establishment of a conservancy, to form an extensive continuous tract of conserved land.
- b) **Maintenance of the primordial quality of the mountains and hills that contribute to the character and sense of place of districts.** Members of a particular NA could co-ordinate their efforts in ensuring the maintenance of the wilderness qualities of the visually prominent mountain / hill slopes of their NA, e.g. collaborating in establishing fire control programs, alien plant removal programmes, etc.
- c) **Conservation of natural habitats and life supporting natural processes.** In response to this objective, property owners of a particular NA could collaborate with one another to establish corridors of conserved land, e.g. a conservancy along a river course.
- d) **Maintenance of the potential of the soils to sustain agriculture.**
- e) **Protection of the visual quality and ambience of rural areas.** A problem cited in this regard is the suburbanisation of rural areas through scattered development (i.e. homesteads and farm-worker and tourist accommodation). This problem could be addressed on a neighbourhood basis through members co-operating in centralising

development in nodes. Accordingly, farm-worker housing of various farms of a NA could be located in a single node as opposed to being dotted across the NA. In this regard, it is to be noted that, in terms of IDP policy, new farm-worker housing on undeveloped land is not to be permitted.

- f) **Maintenance of significant features of the rural landscape.** Members of a particular NA could collaborate in protecting and maintaining important heritage features of their NA, e.g. lanes of trees along access routes.
- g) **Ensuring that communities have access to a full range of community facilities that support their development, health and welfare.** Members of a NA could collaborate in ensuring that everyone has access to necessary community facilities, through combining resources, sharing facilities, or other means appropriate to that particular NA.
- h) **Expanding the range of tourist facilities and recreational opportunities.** For example, adjoining land-owners of a particular NA could co-operate in establishing a network of hiking and mountain biking trails within their NA.

2.4 FUNCTIONS OF NEIGHBOURHOOD AREAS

The functions of neighbourhood areas include the following:

a) **Generation of finance for sustainable development**

Neighbourhood level planning should promote the mobilisation of community resources for low-income housing and neighbourhood area development (e.g. finance for community or neighbourhood level services and infrastructure such as water, sanitation, health care, etc.).

b) **Local Economic Development**

Neighbourhood areas constitute appropriate social and physical units for the promotion of economic development on a local level.

Communities of a neighbourhood area could be encouraged, through developing their sense of pride towards and ownership of their neighbourhood area, to work together to generate employment opportunities and economic development. For example, for the tourism potential of a neighbourhood area to be promoted, all residents need to be involved in making it attractive to visitors, e.g. in cleaning up litter, welcoming visitors, establishing activities of interest, etc.

Furthermore, the promotion of economic development requires a cross- or inter-sectoral approach, neighbourhood planning, which focuses on place-making, and thus concentrates on the inter-connection between different sectoral issues, their connection to physical infrastructure, and to place, would therefore be an ideal vehicle for promoting economic development.

Local municipalities, which in terms of the Constitution have the responsibility to promote local economic development, could collaborate with *Neighbourhood Area Advisory Committees* in creating local employment opportunities and promoting economic development.

It is important that local municipalities are allocated sufficient funding and capacity to facilitate local economic development. A 'Help Desk' could be set up within municipalities

to provide assistance in drawing up business plans, sources of funding and training opportunities on the neighbourhood level. Furthermore, a suitably competent official could be charged with identifying and selling business opportunity ideas to larger businesses / farms.

Larger businesses / farms could thus be encouraged, in terms of their social responsibility, to create employment opportunities within their neighbourhood area, rather than import labour from outside. Partnerships could be established between big businesses and small, medium or micro enterprises, and/or venture capital could be supplied by big businesses on the neighbourhood level.

c) Transport / Access

More detailed aspects relating to transportation infrastructure could be addressed on a neighbourhood area level. For example, road finishes, landscaping of verges, traffic calming measures, public transportation shelters, etc. These aspects should be designed in accordance with the specific community needs and character of the neighbourhood area.

In addition, provision for more localised forms of transit, i.e. walking and cycling, should be addressed on a Neighbourhood Area level. Accordingly, the design and management of a system of bikeways and pedestrian paths should be undertaken on a neighbourhood area level with the participation of the local community.

The provision of transportation infrastructure supportive of recreation and tourism should also be addressed on a neighbourhood area level. Accordingly, public access to specific areas such as nature areas, streams, and fine viewpoints should be determined on this level.

d) Aesthetic control

In maintaining the character of the municipal area, it is important that the character of its individual places is preserved. Aspects contributing to the character of individual neighbourhood areas should accordingly be ascertained in co-operation with the local community.

Based upon these findings, manuals/guidelines to inform developers and owners of the valued qualities of the neighbourhood area, appropriate development patterns, and the appropriate siting, form and treatment of new buildings, should be prepared.

Aesthetics committees could also be formed within neighbourhood areas to provide inputs as regards the conformance of development applications with the specific aesthetic quality of their neighbourhood areas.

Types of development that should be subject to aesthetic control/scrutiny include buildings, signage, service infrastructure (i.e. treatment of roads, electricity and telephone cables), etc.

e) Local level community facilities

Needs for localised community facilities (e.g. primary schools, crèches, clinics, sport and recreational facilities, etc.) could be ascertained on a neighbourhood area level by future user groups.

Community facilities can accordingly be tailored to and prioritised according to the specific needs of a particular neighbourhood area. Furthermore, neighbourhood communities could also possibly come up with innovative means of addressing community facility needs, e.g. multifunctional use of certain buildings or areas.

Consideration could also be given to public facilities required to unleash the recreational and tourism potential of neighbourhood areas, e.g. information centres, picnic sites, parking areas, ablutions, etc.

f) Protection of natural and built features

Neighbourhood communities should have the best knowledge of built and natural features contributing to the character of their area. Furthermore, being most affected by their maintenance they could be motivated to become involved in their protection. Accordingly, they would be best placed to ensure the protection of such features.

Aesthetics committees could, for example, assist in scrutinizing development applications to check whether development proposals are likely to adversely affect the integrity of any natural or built features of their neighbourhood area.

g) Rehabilitation and enhancement of environments

The rehabilitation of degraded environments and the improvement of the aesthetic quality of environments could be appropriately tackled on a neighbourhood area basis. Property owners of a neighbourhood area could accordingly collaborate in, for example, eradicating/controlling alien vegetation, cleaning up polluted areas and rehabilitating indigenous vegetation of areas of common concern, e.g. watercourses traversing a number of farms, or hill-sides visible from several farms.

Furthermore, tree-planting or other landscaping programmes could be designed and implemented on a neighbourhood area level with the participation of local communities.

Rehabilitation actions/landscaping projects could be funded through trust funds, established as a result of development rights being awarded to certain farms within the Neighbourhood Area.

h) Safety and security

Neighbourhood area communities could collaborate, in co-operation with the SAPS, in ensuring their own personal safety and the security of their property, e.g. through the establishment of neighbourhood watches (e.g. *Landelike Beveiliging*), etc.

i) Providing a framework for sustainable community-based enterprises

As stated above, in order to ensure the sustainability of community-based enterprises (e.g. community-based tourism), it is imperative that the affected people be involved in a manner that will ensure their constructive participation in the planning and management of all resources (including environmental, cultural and human resources).

The neighbourhood area provides the ideal spatial and social framework within which the required community participation can be achieved.