

How to Commission a Masterplan.

Advice to public sector bodies from Arthur Pangloss, Director of the influential Policy Research Unit.

- 1) The brief for the commission should be long, informative, studiously neutral but need not be relevant. Be careful not to give any appearance of political or personal prejudice which might influence the choice of consultant team. Keep this a secret.
- 2) All masterplanning briefs should ask for a baseline study. The object of this is to demonstrate that your local economy is in a state of collapse and deserves more government support. It should therefore consist entirely of unfavourable statistical comparisons with other towns and cities – any statistic will do if it is unfavourable enough. The best of these should be recycled in political speeches as often as possible.
- 3) The baseline study should be completed as early as possible in the programme so it is out of the way and need not be referred to again. It is not necessary for the rest of the masterplan team to read the baseline study since it contains nothing of any help to them.
- 4) For statistical purposes, the study area should be carefully defined so that it does not correspond to any existing political or administrative unit.
- 5) It is helpful to give an indicative fee budget. This should be approximately 65% of the real cost of carrying out the brief. As a general rule, the more time you have had to prepare for the study, the shorter the programme should be. So, if you have had two years warning that the study will be needed, the consultants should only need three months to complete it.
- 6) The tender process should be dealt with by a neutral procurement professional (ie one who knows nothing about the project). They will be able to select a contract form (JCT or NEC as appropriate) for the job.
- 7) Collateral warranties are essential for all consultants.
- 8) By demanding copies of three years accounts, health and safety, equal opportunities, money-laundering, environmental, green travel, charitable donations and quality assurance policies, the procurement professional can ensure that all but the usual suspects are excluded from the tender. But, just to keep people on their toes, it's good idea to ask for a policy that no one has ever asked for before. To ensure that smaller practices are excluded, demand professional indemnity cover of £10m.

- 9) Selection of the masterplanning team should be a straightforward choice between four different approaches:
- best practice
 - community-led
 - visionary
 - “Field of Dreams”
- 10) The best practice approach involves the rigid application of a method that has been developed somewhere completely different. This enables your consultant to write the report with the spellcheck. “Delete Barnsley, insert Grimsby; delete coal insert fish.” In you are in inner Manchester, the method should have been developed in Dorset. If you are in Dorset, the method should have been developed in America. There is no need to prove that the method actually is best practice or has ever worked. It is sufficient that it has been endorsed by an influential body with design credentials. There are enough such bodies around these days that any such method can be endorsed by someone, if required.
- 11) The community-led approach was pioneered by Pontius Pilate. The advantage is that it absolves the commissioning body from all responsibility for decisions or their consequences. The objective is to come up with a set of aspirations that no-one could possibly disagree with, like a new shopping centre with a Waitrose/Harvey Nicks, a faster train service to London and economic parity with a nearby city that used to be a rival but is now twice the size. The community-led approach works best if the community is firmly led by the nose at all times.
- 12) The visionary approach involves the selection of a big-name architect, preferably one who cannot draw rectangles. The attraction of the visionary approach is that it generates PR very quickly – especially for the architect. Selection by design competition is a useful way of getting the PR off to a good start. It is unnecessary to worry about whether the masterplan works or not – indeed it is much safer not to implement it. Once your bid for City of Culture / Olympics / URC / City status is over, it can be quietly forgotten.
- 13) The “Field of Dreams” approach says “If you build it, they will come.” It eliminates any need to worry about demand or capacity and gives the masterplanners freedom to provide for as many office blocks and houses as they can fit onto the plan. This approach also enables the planning department to block any new or innovative development on the grounds that it does not accord with the plan.
- 14) On no account should your consultants offer any advice on delivery, cost or practicality. The delivery plan should be developed to ensure nothing physical has to be done for at least three years, after which the masterplan can be dismissed as out of date.

- 15) The choice of approach should be decided on the day of interview according to personal prejudice and political requirements.
- 16) Some misguided people have been arguing that the baseline study and the masterplan should be linked in some way, that a multi-disciplinary approach is required, that each masterplan should be tailor-made for the study area and be tested to make sure it will improve the prosperity of the local inhabitants. However, we see no reason to abandon the tried and trusted procedures outlined above.