

MESSAGE FROM HRH THE PRINCE OF WALES FOR THE LAUNCH
OF THE ACTION PLANNING HANDBOOK, SJPSA:
THURSDAY, 11TH JANUARY 1996

Ladies and gentlemen, I must first of all say how extremely sorry I am that I cannot be with you this morning - for reasons totally outside my control, and which I hope you will understand, I shall be representing Her Majesty at a Requiem Mass for the late President Mitterrand of France. I was greatly looking forward to this launch meeting, particularly because it is addressing an issue which I believe to be of the greatest importance for the creation of a more appropriate and harmonious built environment.

Action Planning is a process which I have followed with particular interest ever since I visited the first Anglo-American Action Planning event held in Pittsburgh in 1988. I sensed then that there was great potential in this kind of approach, not only for the way it brought together both the professionals and the community, but also for the way in which it gave the community a voice in the planning of the buildings and environment in which it would be living and working.

Since then, Action Planning has begun to take firmer root in Britain. There is no doubt, in my view, that the process has proved itself consistently with the communities where it has been tried, as I can testify from having been involved in some of these events myself - for example, in Brick Lane in East London in 1989, at Poundbury in the same year, and more recently at West Silvertown in the London Docklands, at Blairs College beside the River Dee near Aberdeen, in the Shankill Road area of West Belfast with its very special problems and in the enormous high-rise estate of Hellersdorf in East Berlin.

Sometimes these planning events have fallen foul of wider factors which prevent the ideas generated by them from being put into practice. But everywhere, in my experience, the spirit generated by the process - the energy, the enthusiasm, the excitement, the pride and commitment - really is remarkable. That spirit seems to linger in the air long after the event itself is over. There is an infectious quality to the way in which communities can come together and begin to exercise some common influence over their environment, and in which the creative energies of everyone, lay and professional, can be effectively harnessed. The wider benefits of the process, for example in places like the Greater Shankill community, which is now anxiously waiting to hear if its £27 million Millennium bid for the physical, social and economic regeneration of the area is successful, are, it seems to me, obvious and important.

I am therefore delighted, ladies and gentlemen, that my Institute of Architecture has taken the lead in producing this Handbook to help others organise their own action planning events. I am particularly grateful to English Partnerships, the major regeneration agency in Britain, for its enthusiastic support for this project and for co-sponsoring, together with Inner City Aid, the research and production of the Handbook. With their help, I hope we can look forward to a new generation of projects across Britain which will adopt this consensus approach to building.

My own Institute of Architecture, through its "Tools for Community Design Programme", intends to produce a series of handbooks to spread the word about more of these valuable techniques of community architecture and planning. I am very pleased to learn that it will soon be possible to discuss the lessons to be learnt from Action Planning events through regular forums to be

held at my Institute which will, I hope, provide a useful new working and information centre for the movement. The Urban Villages Forum, who are co-publishers of this handbook, has already co-hosted an action planning event and is keen to be involved in more. Other members of my family of organisations, including my Business Leaders Forum, who see the potential importance of this approach in cities emerging from the Communist past, and Business in the Community, hope to become involved in action planning activities.

Building more sustainable communities where people can live in greater harmony with their surroundings is, I believe, one of the most important, yet most difficult, challenges we face. We need to start getting things right first time. I am convinced from what I have already seen that the best way to do this is for all parties to work creatively together from the outset. I hope this Handbook will enable Action Planning to be used more often in developing the initial ideas for Single Regeneration Budget applications, for Millennium and other lottery bids and even, perhaps, for the development of local structure plans in both rural and urban areas.

It is time, ladies and gentlemen, for Action Planning to move from the margins into the mainstream of the planning process. I hope very much that your discussions today, and this excellent new Handbook, will help push forward that process in a significant and lasting way.