

Integrated Approach to Planning of Land Use

In Norway the main responsibility for planning of land use and approving new housing and building developments rests with local authorities. Local authorities are also in charge of infrastructure for water supply, sewage and waste disposal and must ensure that appropriate restrictions are applied in the relevant watersheds.

Through local planning and local solutions the authorities, developers and concerned local interests cooperate on how building developments should be implemented and on the requirements to be met in order for the developments to be successful. This contributes to cost-effective solutions that are accepted and rooted in the local community. At the same time the formal framework ensures that solutions are in accordance with regional and national requirements and legal provisions.

Locally approved plans provide for simultaneous building of housing and integrated management of water supply and sewage disposal systems so that unnecessary and expensive retrofitting is avoided at a later stage. The plans also provide the basis for accurate calculations of technical costs at the same time as drinking water supply, pipe systems and recipients are ensured.

1. Description of Initiative

In Norway the responsibility for facilitating new building developments is a local one. Local authorities prepare and decide on plans to ensure that new developments are localised in ways that are favourable to the environment, to social conditions and in correspondence with rational development of the technical and institutional infrastructure such as water and sanitation, transport, energy, schooling and other community needs.

Legislation is continuously improved so as to give municipalities the responsibility and powers needed for solving these tasks and meeting new challenges while preserving the rights of individuals. Norwegian planning and building regulations have evolved over the past 150 years in parallel with the growing role of local government. It has had its present form since 1986 with some later changes to adapt to changing conditions. The most recent improvements have been made in order to reduce costly delays by introducing a fixed time limit for planning approval and to limit opportunities for lodging objections to decisions taken at earlier stages of the planning process.

Planning legislation is a framework for taking into account provisions which are included in sector laws, at the same time as different considerations are weighed against each other in specific situations. Consideration of the different factors is based on national or regional guidelines, but approval of the plans is now a local responsibility based on local assessments. Whereas the national government previously was responsible for approving community wide plans, it now only intervenes in major cases of conflict. This means that the municipalities take the final decisions in 99% of all cases. Plans approved by the municipalities are required before the public or the private sector has the right to start new building developments.

The municipal types of plans are either so-called municipal master plans or local plans. The aims of municipal planning are long-term and cross-sectoral. The plans should find a balance between use and protection of land and natural resources, involve the local population and different interest groups, be action-oriented and based on existing economic conditions. The master plan for land-use can where needed determine the use of coastal areas, land along rivers and lakes as well as designate areas for waste treatment and restrict the uses of relevant parts of natural watersheds to avoid contamination of the water supply. The municipal master plans can also include programs for building for a certain period and couple such programs with investment programs for infrastructure. The development pattern is determined in these plans and the plan can also determine in what sequence the land areas shall be developed for instance in order to ensure access to water supply, sewage, waste disposal, public transport, energy and other services.

Local plans are detailed plans for development of a specific area. A more detailed framework for the development can be specified in this plan. Private interests have the right to take initiatives and can propose plans, which the municipality is bound to consider.

Legislation provides the basis for:

- Planning the need for (scope, dimensions etc), and for cost calculations for water and sewage infrastructure
- Localising new building developments in places which are cost-effective in terms of access to water supply and to the possibility of finding acceptable recipients for waste or other ways of treatment
- Achieving a cost-effective and efficient utilisation of the infrastructure, i.e. when the infrastructure is in place and financed it is also important to make best possible use of it so that costs are distributed amongst as many users as possible and so that as many users as possible have access to clean water and sewage treatment facilities
- Safeguarding and protecting drinking water in groundwater or on the surface (exclude use and building developments that can pollute)
- Evaluations by area of, for example, how much groundwater can be used without lowering the water level (resource management).

The legislation ensures that the environmental impacts of plans and projects are assessed and described to the extent necessary. The municipalities have a duty to ensure the active participation of the local population and of concerned groups and individuals in the preparation of these plans. This takes place through announcements of plans in the local press and the possibility to submit written comments to the plans. Public meetings can also be held where the plan proposals are presented and discussed. The comments submitted on the plans must be provided to local authorities before decisions are taken on plan proposals. Concerned groups and individuals also have the right to appeal against decisions taken by the local authorities.

2. Mainstreaming/Sustainability

The Norwegian legal system ensures links between land use plans, building permits and other sector permits and that the builder takes on the necessary share of financing the installations needed such as expanding utilities such as water and energy supply and ensure that new roads or public transport links are funded. It also ensures that these occur in a proper and coordinated sequence. This contributes to cost-effective solutions both for the particular building development and not least for the local society as a whole since we thereby avoid

later expensive measures to mitigate negative impacts that may develop if such installations are not fully operational when needed.

For housing, plans will determine appropriate siting in with respect to overall infrastructure and landscape etc, at the same time as one has the possibility to specify the appearance of the building, the intensity of utilization of the plot, while at the same time ensuring the environmental quality.

This also applies to safeguarding drinking water sources and necessary technical infrastructure for water transport and water supply, water pipes in building areas and buildings for this purpose, and also sewage disposal and treatment.

3. Replicating the Initiative

Planning is based on – and designed as a tool for – local democratic processes, development and control, while allowing for regional or national authorities to intervene if the plans conflict with national or regional interests.

This system presupposes a formal framework (legislation) which allocates tasks and responsibilities between authorities, but which assigns broad powers to the municipalities/lowest level of administration to consider local plan initiatives and needs, drive the planning process forward as a democratic process with public participation, and to take binding decisions. This ensures local involvement and provides concrete and action-oriented plans that are prepared to meet actual needs in the local environment.

This requires active leadership and organisation by local authorities as well as cooperation with regional and national authorities.

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