

STRATEGIC ACTION PLANNING (SAP)

This leaflet tries to explain the difference between a conventional strategy and one developed using SAP.

A Conventional Strategy has one, agreed, best future and an action plan setting out the steps needed to achieve the future.

This may sound simple, but it is often very difficult to agree on the one best future, especially where there are many uncertainties and many stakeholders. It can be so difficult that the search for agreement has to be abandoned, and the way forward is chosen by individuals who are in a position of power of some sort.

A Strategy Developed with SAP has a number of acceptable or possible futures combined with a Strategic Action Plan. This Strategic Action Plan shows what you would have to do to be able to reach these possible futures.

During the process of selecting acceptable or possible futures there will some futures that are agreed as not acceptable or less desirable and these can be excluded.

This approach means that the search for just one most desirable long term future, on which everyone has to agree, can be put aside. In its place will be a strategy in which there are a range of possible futures, all or any of which are acceptable.

SAP is a tool to expose and creatively manage the uncertainties inherent in any scenario. It is crucial to acknowledge uncertainties and agree what to do about them instead of suppressing or ignoring them.

- A scenario is a sequence of activities leading to a particular long-term future

SAP is not a tool to choose between scenarios, or a tool that will produce “an answer”.

Outcomes from a SAP process are likely to be:

- Knowledge about what short-term actions/decisions are needed to keep a range of futures open/possible.
- Recognition of dates or timeframes by which if actions/decisions haven't been taken some of the acceptable futures are no longer possible.
- A set of agreed explorations that are needed to reduce the most significant uncertainties
- A set of contingency plans that are sensible in case any of the assumptions made in a scenario turn out to be wrong
- And a great deal of learning and shared understanding amongst the participants doing the work.

SAP Map

The following diagram is offered as an explanation of the iterative SAP process.

