The concept of urban intelligence puts people back at the centre of the urban agenda. By definition, urban intelligence has social sustainability as its focus. The environmental agenda that generally drives sustainability processes is very often divorced from its *Brundtland* origins, where it was expressed in terms of the need for development to ensure greater social sustainability (locally and globally), while acknowledging the limitations imposed by the environmental context (to paraphrase the definition of sustainability set out in the report of the 1987 Brundtland Commission[2]).

If cities are to strive for sustainability, urban governance and policy should be directed at achieving urban intelligence. This will require a major shift, especially in the UK, so that these two aspects, process (governance) and tool (policy), become more strategic and more integrated, with the aim of being facilitatory rather than directive. The primary arena in which this shift will take place is in planning policy, which sets the framework within which other strategic policies are realized.

## The intelligent city and planning policy

In the UK especially, apart from broad strategic aims set out in unitary development plans, planning policy is essentially reactive and confrontational.[3] The planning system will need to shift from defining possible products and acceptable standards, to becoming the process enabler, by working to articulate ambitions for development and acting to manage the process. Re-orienting policy towards process, rather than product, is the means to

achieving effective policy in tune with the requirements of urban intelligence. The current focus of the planning system is largely based on the physical (or environmental) system, the process container, at the expense of the requirements of urban processes. The focus of the planning system should be to set strategic goals, and then to work with both developer and user organizations to ensure that the city enables transaction and freedom for residents and organizations.

Policy as a system must integrate with other systems that make up the city, and become flexible enough to accommodate, and even drive, development and change. Adaptability is the vital attribute of the intelligent city, and the adaptability of buildings and infrastructure is as much a function of the planning regime as it is of available construction technologies and financial mechanisms.

## Measuring change

*The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill*, currently progressing through parliament, will make the achievement of sustainable development a clear and definite duty of the planning system, and its changes are to be welcomed. However, it does not go far enough in shaking up the planning system as a policy framework. The primary evidence for this is its emphasis on speeding up the process by which planning applications are made. This will certainly be welcomed by business people and developers, but fails to recognize that for the majority of citizens, who are unlikely ever to go through the planning application process, their experience of the planning system is only indirect, and through the resulting created environment.

The challenge for planners will be to recognize that the best results are obtained through an iterative process. By working closely with users, developers and professionals, planners will be able to shift from policy definition to implementation in a seamless briefing process. Policy should be seen as a brief, rather than as proscription (setting out ambitions, defining targets and articulating quality levels), instead of defining how things should or should not be done. The aim of policy as a brief is to create frameworks for development that are flexible and comprehensive, and based on consensus at every decision-making stage. These frameworks can exist across a range of scales, from city-wide strategic visions to site-specific development briefs.