Prague as the capital city of the Czech Republic and an important focus of central Europe is entering into the 21st century under greatly differing conditions than under those which existed only ten years ago. The political system and state and city authorities have completely changed in just a short period of time. There have also been changes in ownership, the emergence of a market economy and changes in the social make-up of Prague and in the lifestyle of its inhabitants.

In the face of such changes there has also been a rapid transformation in the appearance of the city. New office and commercial buildings, hotels and shopping centres have sprung up in attractive areas and street level areas have filled with shops, restaurants and other services. After 50 years of isolation the world has rediscovered Prague and we are now awash with a wave of tourists who admire the sights of Prague and enjoy its unique atmosphere. The inclusion of Prague’s Heritage Conservation Area in the UNESCO World Heritage list highlights the unrivalled importance of the historical heart of Prague and reflects the shared responsibility of the city and state towards its conservation.

Prague has a reputation for being a reliable business partner that has low level unemployment and a good credit record, a city which attracts not only trade and investors but also dynamic young people from around the globe. Prague provides an interesting address for all those who want to develop their business activity within a city of exceptional beauty that has an able and well-qualified population and offers new opportunities to all.

On the other hand, Prague has been hampered by increasing car transport and noise emissions, an outmoded infrastructure, lack of available housing especially for young families, an increasing crime rate and inflexible and often ineffective local authorities.

The city has not always looked after its property well and receives insufficient funds to support and invest in the more necessary areas. The historical centre has found it hard to resist the strong commercial pressure and has been overcome by the tide of cars and tourists. These are problems that need to be resolved in accord with the long-term goals of the city and in relation to the opportunities available. These new demands have therefore required a fresh look at how the city’s development is managed. Like other European metropolises, Prague needs a long-term program to compliment the recently approved new land use plan; a strategic plan that stipulates a complete and realistic vision of future economic, social and spatial development which takes into account these new conditions.
Why do we need a strategic plan?

Such a plan would principally help the city to:

- influence processes of change and gradually fulfil the long-term aims and strategic vision of the city,
- make decisions within the representative bodies of the city and its boroughs in a wider conceptual framework,
- co-ordinate the interests and operations of various entities active in the city and make effective use of their opportunities and resources in order to achieve mutual goals,
- better enforce and uphold public interest and open up the possibility of direct public involvement in city development,
- prepare quality guidelines for plans concerning land space and sectoral projects.

The role of the strategic plan in city management

Strategic plans are a new type of project for cities and regions in the Czech Republic. The strategic plan for Prague is a complex program based on negotiation and agreement. It lays out strategic development plans for the whole community, all spheres of its implementation and how far it extends while stressing the importance of the correlation between the proposals, policies and programs. It is a document that sets out the long-term aims of the city covering a period of 15–20 years. It is a document that is designed to attain a balance between what is required and what is possible, between what is realistic and what is optimistic and between city development and urban, cultural and environmental protection. It is a document that should include dynamic and vital solutions in harmony with the city’s needs and conditions. Therefore, it will be continually updated and reviewed accordingly.

The strategic plan is a program for the Prague community as a whole:

- Its preparation was initiated and secured by the Prague political community. Once completed and approved by the Prague Municipal Assembly, it will automatically be incorporated into Prague local authority policy regarding future development.
- It will provide the local borough authorities with a conceptual framework for preparing their own local development programs.
- It is based primarily on the needs of the citizens of Prague. A forum has been established for the public to actively participate in the preparation of the strategic vision and in proposals for its implementation. In this way the people of Prague can influence these proposals and take them as their very own.
- It will be an important tool of communication with the state authorities. It will act as the
basis for future negotiations concerning joint responsibility and the state’s participation in city development – i.e. financial contributions, legislation and other forms of assistance. It will be used as the foundation for a co-ordinated development strategy for Prague and the neighbouring Central Bohemia Region.

- In the form of the Regional Operational Plan, it will become a vital document in communication with the European Union over potential joint EU funding of the strategically important aims of the city.
- It provides the business sector with information concerning the long-term goals of the municipality, including future business opportunities and conditions. It also offers partnership and co-operation for the implementation of joint projects.
- It defines the basic aims and principles of development for policies relating to sectoral concepts (transport and technical infrastructure etc.) and, on a general level ensures co-ordination with other sectors and indicates linkages.
- For the land use plan it serves as a basis for the preparation of the legally required guideline document. On the other hand, the land use plan is one of the key tools for the implementation of the city’s strategic plan and therefore the co-ordination of these two documents (the strategic plan and the land use plan) is of vital importance.

Development procedure

Reaching consensus on such an important issue as the fate of the city in a democratic society is achieved only through tough negotiation and agreement. This means that right from it inception the strategic plan has involved all those who live, work and operate in Prague.

The need for a document which would set out Prague’s long-term development goals, propose ways of achieving them and enable regulation of the decision-making process was recognized by politicians, and even the public, in the aftermath of the “velvet revolution”. Work already began on such a program at the beginning of 1994 when city leaders and the Ecoterra Fund implemented an extensive project based on public research by an independent team of experts. The results were issued in the “Prague 2010” document which set out 10 main areas for development of the city. Prague proclaimed itself as a city wanting to be prosperous, efficient in its operation, healthy and friendly to its inhabitants and tourists alike.

In the middle of 1994 the city leadership commissioned a new strategic plan by the renamed Prague Development Authority (formerly The Chief Architect Office) and charged it with the task of developing a strategic policy for Prague. From the onset Prague sought international co-operation, especially from the UK. The consultancy firm Llewelyn-Davies offered substantial assistance and guidance in preparing the strategic plan between 1995–98 along with the financial aid from the Know How Fund.

The second stage in developing a strategic plan for Prague was an attempt to bring together both the public and the private sectors through dialogue between the people and the authorities as well as with businesses, politicians and specialists. The core of such dialogue was weekly or one-day workshops focusing on the fundamental questions of city development. Together they sought ways how to redirect monocentric Prague into becoming polycentric and how to solve various pressing problems like the provision of housing, transport or how to balance historical conservation of sights with city expansion and development. Many items were covered and explored, including environmental problems and possible solutions, public policy and Prague authorities, security, the economic situation and education amongst others. Over the years about 1000 people (including 36 UK specialists) have participated in this process, be it in the workshops, preparatory research or in giving expert opinions.

Thanks to these steps the strategic plan is not only founded on an overall vision of the city’s future and set in purely academic work, but primarily is drawn from the particular findings of 15 workshops and other joint activities.

The written conclusions and the so-called “complete version” document dating from 1998 contain a more detailed analysis and a deeper discussion of the selected strategy aims and activities than we are unable to include here.
The resulting document – the Strategic Plan for the City of Prague – is therefore a specific consensual agreement on what the city plans to achieve over the next two decades and how the city actually plans to reach the goals in these and other areas.

In the opening phases of this strategic process, that is in the original “Prague 2010” document and the later individual workshops and demographic research, all kinds of solutions to the development question were put forward. When it was necessary to graduate from this theoretical vision and plan towards a more concrete program and define a set of principles, then the plan for Prague underwent specific re-evaluation to provide clear solutions and to produce a document that would be of practical use in managing the development of the city.

The overall concept for the strategic plan was discussed by the Prague City Council on 21st July 1998 and approved as the basis for further work concerning city development. In November 1998 the elected City Council used various parts of this plan as the basis of their program declaration for electoral term 1998–2002. In 1999 the Prague strategic plan was completed by a procedural proposal of priorities on how to achieve these aims extending over a period from 1999–2006. On 24th June 1999 the Prague Municipal Assembly approved and filed this program and the steps necessary for its completion (Municipal Assembly Resolution No. 09/03).

Upon the basis of these two documents and with European Union integration in mind, the Prague Strategic Development Program, Prague Regional Operation Program (ROP) and a consultation document for the ROP were prepared in the very same year. Based on these programs the city will seek financial support from EU funds to aid its most important and difficult projects.

The Prague strategic plan is not merely a political proclamation but is fast becoming an important tool in city management. It had a significant influence on decisions concerning how the financial resources from the second issuance of city bonds would be used, and its priorities and aims were kept in mind while putting together the municipal budget and investment program for the year 2000.
The next steps

The Prague strategic plan concludes an important stage in this long-term project for city development. It is not, however, an inflexible and final document, it will be further updated.

The way forward will be dictated by the following:
1. Implementation of the strategic plan based on the approved implementation program, to be managed by the relevant guarantors.
2. Introduction of a feedback system of monitoring as laid out in the section “Checking and evaluating the implementation process” in this document.
3. Preparation of an analytical and project foundation for the updating of the strategic plan.
4. Projection of results of a census of the population, homes and flats for 2001 to be included along with further current figures.
5. Updating of the strategic plan as a result of the 2001 census.
6. More detailed analysis of the plan as required, for example:
   • EU membership and its implications for Prague • reshaping of the Prague city administration following the implementation of Czech public authority reforms • impact of the strategic priorities and the implementation program on investment into the capital city • review of the strategic plan after approval of the land use plan for Prague and the Central Bohemia Region • deepening of the relationship between core strategy, sectoral concepts and the Regional Operational Program • principle of public involvement in decision making and problem solving within the area of development policy.