

London and Wider South East Strategic Planning Network

Note of meeting on 16th September 2019

Present : Duncan Bowie (chair), Hannah Hickman, James Harris, Chris Tunnell, Simon Eden, John Lett, Dave Valler, Peter Eversden, Martin Simmons, Nick Falk, Ian Gordon, Martin Crookston, Ismail Mulla, Kevin Reid, Judith Ryser

Apologies: Corinne Swain, Nicolas Bosetti, James Stevens, Andrew Jones, John Denham, Richard Simmons, Peter Studdert, John Hollis, Jorn Peters, Vincent Goodstadt, Rebecca Neil, Tim Marshall, Neil Sinden, Michael Edwards, Nick Smith, Nick Wolfenden

1. City Regional Growth and Infrastructure

Hannah Hickman (University of West of England) gave a presentation on her recent research for the RTPi undertaken with Keith Mitchell of Peter Brett associates. A copy of the presentation would be circulated. The research report was to be published in a few weeks' time.

The research comprised a survey of authorities with 54 responses and three detailed case studies: Glasgow city region; Cambridgeshire and Peterborough; Staffordshire.

The UK was a relatively poor performer both in terms of investment in new infrastructure and maintenance of existing infrastructure. This had been noted in the work by Graham and Marvin on splintering urbanism and fractured governance.

The new research had five main themes:

- a) Infrastructure's relation to the planning system
- b) Prioritisation and funding
- c) Engagement and alignment
- d) Resourcing capacity and skills
- e) Demonstrating delivery

a) The role of place was critical. Governance arrangements are complex and multi-layered. There has to be a constructive dialogue between planning authorities and infrastructure providers. There was no accepted definition of functional space as a basis for spatial and infrastructure planning. Strategic planning had largely demised, but we were witnessing localised attempts at partial rebuilding of strategic planning structures. Some LAs or groups of LAs were promoting non-statutory rather than statutory plans, but as yet there was no clear guidance on non-statutory plans.

b) There were lack of clear priorities for infrastructure funding, either nationally or at city region level. At present there was a cocktail of different funding arrangements such as city deals and bidding regimes. Much infrastructure funding was allocated through a competitive bidding process. This was an expensive process for bidders with no guarantee of a positive outcome. Moreover, deals were for time limited funding and not linked to long term funding agreements or strategies. Some agencies felt left out of the process – for example Staffordshire County Council. However, bid recipients could also lack the delivery capacity – this had been the case in

relation to the housing infrastructure fund. Government focus was on 'quick wins'. Infrastructure funding remained too dependent on developer contributions through section 106 agreements relating to individual developments. Funding restrictions could however encourage an entrepreneurial approach. Projects however tended to be funding led rather than plan led. Local plans and EiPs had become less important.

c) Experience of engagement with infrastructure providers was variable and there was limited dialogue on 'place' objectives. Arrangements in Scotland generally worked better. In England, there was little alignment on boundaries and funding cycles. Infrastructure providers tended to have a short-term commercial focus. Consultation on Infrastructure Delivery Plan was more important than Local Plan consultation but could be more of a wish list than a prioritisation process. Engagement tended to be better on sport, education and green infrastructure but weaker on health, energy and emergency services.

d) Infrastructure planning was often not a high priority or transparent. LAs had little competence on infrastructure planning either in terms of skills or information base. Infrastructure providers understanding of the spatial planning process could be poor. Data sharing was critical.

e) Strategic planning and infrastructure investment and delivery must be integrated. In Glasgow there were issues of financial viability of delivering the city deal. In Cambridgeshire, where a non-statutory approach to planning was preferred, there was a hope that the new Mayoral structure would provide new leadership. In Staffordshire, the main difficulty was the lack of powers for the County Council relative to metro-regions.

The presentation was followed by discussion. Nick Falk referred to URBED's work in Manchester and Sheffield, and to French and German experience of land value capture. Simon Eden commented that shared vision between organisations did not necessarily depend on a statutory governance structure. Hannah commented that in Cambridgeshire the new governance structure could destabilise historic co-operation arrangements while in Staffordshire the County Council was seeking to take a leading role despite its limited powers. James Harris commented that it could take time for new governance structures to gain legitimacy. Peter Eversden commented that few London boroughs appeared to be assessing infrastructure deficiencies. They were too dependent on developer contributions which were constrained by viability issues. Revenue support was needed in addition to capital grant and he referred to TFL's current budget problems. He referred to the fact that too often infrastructure funding followed development rather than preceding it. James pointed to the work of the new GLA Infrastructure delivery team (to which he was seconded part-time) and recognised that outside London, infrastructure planning and delivery was even harder.

Martin Simmons pointed to the need for greater powers for County Councils. Hannah referred to the fact that Staffordshire were undertaking a county-wide IDP on the Kent model. Ian Gordon queried what he considered a 'plan-centric' approach. More attention needed to be given to the perspective of infrastructure providers. Plans needed to be deliverable and credible. Chris Tunnell stressed the importance of strategic planning involving infrastructure providers. James Harris pointed out that utility provision was consumer driven.

Kevin Reid stressed that the government sought to give LAs powers which met local circumstances rather than devise a single nationally applicable governance structure. The new

Prime Minister was focusing on 'levelling up' giving LAs more bespoke powers (following the recent city region devolutions), but it was recognised that central departments would wish to retain some functions. Infrastructure was now getting higher priority within government. He gave the example of the Nine Elms infrastructure steering group. Hannah commented that government focus tended to be on nationally significant infrastructure projects rather than enabling locally significant schemes. Dave Valler raised the issue of prioritisation of infrastructure beyond the Oxford/Cambridge arc. James Harris referred to the recent Institute of Civil Engineers report: State of the Nation 2019: Connecting Infrastructure with Housing. The RTPI was organising infrastructure delivery workshops with infrastructure providers. He pointed to an improved approach at Highways England. Martin Crookston referred to the Scottish experience where there was a unified approach with providers managed by the Scottish government.

Ismail Mulla referred to the role of the IDP in relation to the Local Plan. Infrastructure deficiencies should be identified at an early stage in the plan making process to supplement what tended to be a focus on housing numbers. Judith Ryser raised the issue of regional rebalancing of national infrastructure investment. Policy transfer from other countries was constrained by different governance and funding structures. She noted that in France, infrastructure planning was run by engineers, while in Germany, planning was managed at state level rather than at federal level. James Harris pointed out that the focus of the current RTPI research was on regional and sub-regional infrastructure planning and delivery. Simon Eden pointed out that vision was important Portsmouth, Southampton and Bournemouth were seeking to develop a joint 'narrative. Peter Eversden referred to the London 2050 Infrastructure Plan, but questioned whether there had been follow through. He referred to constraints on water supply in North London. Nick Falk commented on experience in the Oxford/Cambridge arc.

Hannah was thanked for her presentation.

Kevin Reid (who had to leave the meeting) gave an MHCLG update. It was now expected that the London Plan panel report would be submitted to the Mayor in mid-October. The Mayor was required to publish within 8 weeks, but the Mayoral response could be later. In response to a question, he was unable to confirm a timetable for the publication of the anticipated Accelerated Planning Green Paper.

2. UK2070 Commission.

Duncan provided an update on behalf of Vincent Goodstadt.

A second report would be published in the following week. This addresses some of the key areas to promote further discussion. This includes the issue of transregional strategic planning in the LWSE area. The Commission wanted to give greater recognition to this question in a strategy to rebalance the economic geography of the UK, recognising the importance of safeguarding the global business role of London and identifying the infrastructure investment necessary for this role to be retained. The report also addressed the issue building the foundations of local economies.

The proposed London seminar had been rescheduled from 31st October till 4th December (details to be confirmed). The Commission still intended to produce the final report by end of December

to be launched in early 2020, but this may be affected by political timetables. The Commission had been undertaking further research, including a new report on transport infrastructure requirements and welcomed further contributions to its work from both the LWSE network and from individuals.

<http://uk2070.org.uk/publications/>

Duncan also gave feedback on the Leeds launch of the Commission's first report.

Martin Simmons commented that the UK2070 London seminar had not adequately focused on the relationship between LWSE and the rest of the UK. In his view the critical issue was whether or not HS2 should be supported – did it support rebalancing or just increase London's dominance ?

Chris Tunnell (after declaring ARUP's commercial interest in HS2 commented that the key issue in the current HS2 was the potential rephrasing of elements of HS2 rather than abandoning the project. He pointed out that HS2 had been a catalyst for investment by others in infrastructure and employment in some Northern cities.

Peter Eversden put the case for dropping the Old Oak to Euston link and using Crossrail to disperse passengers. John Lett pointed out that London was a net contributor to the UK economy, while recognising that London received a high proportion of transport investment.

Judith Ryser stressed the importance of reviewing the wide transport network and the importance of city regional transport plans. She referred to the German experience of transport planning, where inter-regional transport links remained poor.

3. Update on Labour Party Planning Commission

Duncan, who was a member of the Commission's academic panel, gave a summary of the recommendations in the draft report. While he welcomed the recognition of the importance of strategic planning, he suggested that the report could be strengthened in a number of areas: The overall recommendations need to be more specific, especially in relation to powers and mechanisms for implementation

The use classes order needed to be amended to distinguish between specific housing tenures
Tighter income-related definitions for different categories of affordable housing were necessary
There needed to be a greater focus on LA plan making setting clear policies; LA's should be required to publish clear planning briefs for all potential development sites and reject applications which are not policy compliant.

The viability assessment system needed to be revised based on land value at existing use value with LA power to CPO.

An LA power to take equity stake in a private development as condition of planning consent should be introduced.

Planning enforcement should be strengthened.

The increased focus on placemaking supported in the draft report needed to include a) criteria for identification of locations for major development and b) ensure that development briefs are based on an assessment of competing requirements for development both locally and in the wider area. Placemaking needs to focus on the people who live and work in an area, reflecting the full range of housing, employment, transport and environmental requirements rather than be based on concepts of what constitutes an 'ideal community' or 'ideal place'.

The group endorsed these points. It was also commented that the Commission needed to be explicit about the key purposes of planning in relation to community health and wellbeing, environmental policy and climate change and social justice. The objective should be equality as well as quality. Duncan also referred to discussions on this issue at a meeting of the planning panel of the Building Better Building Beautiful Commission.

4. Updates by attendees on other initiatives and reports

Simon Eden referred to a conference on 20th September to launch a report on developing a common strategy narrative for Central Southern authorities.

<http://southernpolicycentre.co.uk/2019/09/is-there-a-strategy-for-the-central-south-conference-to-launch-spcs-research-report/>

Duncan referred to the Policy Exchange report: Tomorrow's Places

<https://policyexchange.org.uk/publication/tomorrows-places/>

Nick Falk referred to his report for the TCPA on land value capture and circulated copies. This was also on the UK2070 Commission website:

<http://uk2070.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/LandValues.pdf>

5. Update on website and symposium

<http://wseplanningnetwork.org/>

Duncan Bowie gave an update on behalf of Corinne Swain.

Website: Corinne with ARUP colleagues was adding recent reports onto the website and asked for any additional relevant reports to be sent to her. The sub-regional section could be expanded with details of joint planning initiatives, emerging strategic plans and devo/combined authorities' proposals and arrangements. The intention was to make the website a useful resource for those operating within the WSE and other interested parties.

It was agreed that network members and organisations be included on website (unless requested otherwise) and that notes of meetings from now on should be added (agendas and presentations only from previous meetings)

Symposium on 25th October:

The programme was on the website

<http://wseplanningnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/WSE-symposium-flyer-for-25-Oct-2019.pdf>

The event was hosted by ARUP but jointly sponsored by the network, The Southern Policy Centre, Design South East and the Centre for London.

About 80 had already booked. The symposium was by invitation only, focusing on decision takers and influencers and researchers in all sectors but any network member not registered but interested in attending could contact Corinne. There was however already a waiting list.

6. Any issues outstanding from previous meeting

There were none.

7. Next meeting

Monday 25 November, 11am at Arup

Agenda to include follow up on symposium and future priorities for the network