

Note of London and Wider South East Network meeting on 10th February 2020 at 11am at ARUP, 13 Fitzroy Street

Present: Duncan Bowie (chair), Chris Tunnell, Sue Janota, Martin Crookston, Simon Eden, Judith Ryser, Catriona Riddell, Ian Gordon, Andrew Barry-Purcell, Michael Thornton, Martin Simmons, Jorn Peters, John Parr, Nicholas Falk, Dave Valler Vincent Goodstadt, John Lett, Robert Purton, Lawrence Thurbin, Steve Barton, Chris Lamb.

Apologies: Kevin Reid, Janice Morphet, James Stevens, Tim Marshall, Peter Eversden, Faith Wilkinson, Ismail Mulla Neil Sinden, Chloe Salisbury, Rebecca Neil, Ian Wray, Penelope Tollitt, Peter Studdert, Nick Wolfenden, Kate Barker, Hilary Chipping, Michael Edwards, Deborah Sacks

1. Introduction and Apologies

Attendees introduced themselves and apologies were noted.

Tributes were made to Corinne Swain, co-convenor of the network, who had passed away at the end of December. Corinne's family had organised a memorial event in March for family, friends and close colleagues by invitation and Chris Tunnell informed the network that ARUP were organising a symposium to be held in her memory in May.

Chris Tunnell would take over Corinne's role as network co-convenor.

2. Devolution and Spatial Development Strategies.

James Stevens' paper had been circulated. As James was unable to attend the meeting, Duncan Bowie summarised key points in the paper. He however suggested that the discussion focused on options for London and the Wider South East, as he did not think seeking to propose a governance framework applicable for the rest of England was an appropriate focus for the network. This was followed by an extensive discussion.

Martin Crookston stressed the importance of ensuring a democratic legitimacy for any governance structure. Simon Eden referred to the increasing support for county led strategic planning, pointing to the influence of Policy Exchange and the potential significance of the forthcoming Devolution White Paper.

Catriona Riddell referred to discussions over governance arrangements for the OxCam arc. She also noted how some approaches such as the Surrey Place Ambition were bypassing the statutory planning system. The testing of local plans was focused almost entirely on housing delivery, without adequate consideration of whether plans were likely to achieve sustainable development. A rigid system could discount the role of important organisations, such as sub-national transport bodies. Any system

needed to focus on wider placemaking not just housing numbers.

Andrew Barry-Purssell was concerned that the current government was not focusing on London and was taking the wider South East for granted. The former regional geographies were no longer helpful. We needed to be clear about what we wanted from strategic planning and what form of strategic planning was appropriate at each level of the planning hierarchy. The form and boundaries of the planning system should follow function.

Michael Thornton referred to the non-statutory approach of the Heathrow strategic planning group. Judith Ryser focused on the need to get out of the 'planning straitjacket'. Catriona Riddell referred to the fact that voluntary coordination could be specific to a programme or objective – partnerships were not necessarily limited to joint strategic planning.

John Parr referred to different levels of devolution and governance structures. Vincent Goodstadt suggested regional devolution within England could be equivalent to national devolution in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Duncan Bowie queried whether this included a system of regional parliaments.

Jorn Peters stressed that the London Plan's approach to the wider South East focused on willing partners as the basis of collaboration. There was a risk of confusion if there was no clear framework for collaboration. John Lett pointed out that the London Plan approach did recognise the travel to work area and priorities for infrastructure across the wider region. He argued that the London Plan was a useful basis for further progress and should not be discounted. Andrew Barry-Purssell however pointed out that relying on willing partners was not strategic planning. There was a risk of analysis for paralysis. We needed to be clear on the benefits of strategic planning across the wider region. Chris Tunnell however pointed out that the London Plan could not itself be the basis for such a framework given the political difference between London leadership and politicians in the wider South East. Catriona Riddell argued that we needed to focus on the mutual benefits of growth across the wider South East. Ian Gordon agreed that London could not operate on a self-contained approach to strategic planning. John Lett argued that the London Plan inspectors and the Mayor should have given greater attention to the relationship between London and the wider South East and been more proactive about the importance of collaboration between planning authorities across the wider region.

3. Inter Planning Authority Collaboration: The County Scale.

Martin Simmons introduced his circulated paper, on which Catriona Riddell had collaborated. Catriona set out the key strategic planning roles of county councils – in addition to waste and minerals planning: transport; health and wellbeing strategies; flood management and climate change. She referred to a forthcoming county councils network report on Place based devolution. They had responsibilities for social and economic sustainability as well as infrastructure – the key components of spatial planning, while local planning authorities now focused on housing numbers. There was a case for bringing back structure planning and this would be supported by many district councils.

Sue Janota commented that county councils had historic knowledge as well as political authority. Simon Eden questioned whether county councils had the appropriate geographic boundaries for collaboration – for example Hampshire was not an appropriate planning unit while Dorset was now divided - there was a need for more flexible arrangements.

Nick Falk referred to the critical role of funding delivery. The Government was reviewing local government funding. A critical issue was which level of government should raise different taxes. A new form of land value tax was required. John Parr noted that the existence of unitary authorities similar to the former county boroughs, complicated the position. Michael Thornton considered there remained too much overlap between the roles of different authorities and clarification of the planning role of county councils would be useful. Andrew Barry-Purcell agreed that there was a case for re-examining the role of structure plans, but recognised that the role of counties varied according to the area local government structure. Catriona commented that the statutory role of counties in terms of strategic planning and the role of strategic planning within county councils were different issues. Martin Crookston referred to the visibility/ democratic structure of county councils.

Martin Simmons agreed that ‘no one size fits all’ The piecemeal restructuring of local government had not however been helpful. There was however good evidence of local collaboration between counties and unitaries– he gave Kent/ Medway as an example. The formation of growth boards at county level has also been useful. Some growth boards in the wider South East were developing relationships with London, though he recognised that this was less relevant in areas such as South Hampshire or Norfolk/ Suffolk.

4. The London Plan Review

Duncan reported back on the recent meetings of the London Assembly Planning Committee and the Assembly Plenary. The full Assembly had only approved the Plan on the casting vote of the chair, after a 10-10 tie, with Conservatives, BREXIT party and Lib Dems opposing the plan and the Greens abstaining. The key issue in the Assembly debate was the priority to be given to family-sized housing. The issue of relationship with the wider South East was also raised. (The assembly requires a 2/3 majority to overturn the Plan). It was noted that the Secretary of State was due to respond to the Plan on 17th February and might issue directions in relation to policies on Heathrow airport and Fracking. The Assembly might therefore have to reconvene. Duncan also noted that the Mayor was claiming that one of the benefits of the revised plan was that it was transferring key policy responsibilities and flexibilities to boroughs. This did raise the question of the extent to which the plan was still a strategic plan. He referred to his article in *Town and Country Planning* on this aspect. Ian Gordon made reference to the claim by Andrew Boff (Conservative chair of Assembly planning committee) that the Plan was an ‘attack on the suburbs.’

Steve Barton commented that a flawed plan was preferable to no plan. He was concerned at the lack of evidence of willing partners in the wider South East prepared to collaborate with the Mayor. He commented that the Mayor had failed to collaborate with West London planning authorities in relation to Heathrow.

Andrew Barry-Purssell commented that the Plan asked boroughs to deliver three conflicting objectives:

Deliver higher housing targets;

Maintain employment capacity; and

Protect Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land,

The Mayor was transferring responsibilities to boroughs, but not transferring the powers to deliver them.

There was a view that while areas like South Essex had capacity to provide housing and employment, resources were needed to make South Essex an attractive location for growth. Local authorities might be willing to support employment growth but were more hesitant in relation to housing growth.

Ian Gordon commented that the issue of leadership was critical and that political leaders in the Wider South East beyond London needed to be clearer as to what the Mayor was seeking to achieve and what was on offer.

5. UK 2070 Commission

Vincent Goodstadt presented the circulated update. He was concerned at the lack of historic focus of successive central governments on regional inequalities. In his view the position of the Wider South East was unlikely to improve if the current approach continued. The Commission's final report was being published at the end of February with a launch in Manchester on 27th.

In response to questions, Vincent commented that the report would focus on the inter-dependence of different regions and that collaboration was in the wider public interest.

Nick Falk referred to the need for a popular presentation of the argument using maps and images. Judith Ryser warned against maps which established boundaries.

Andrew Barry-Purssell referred to the importance of 'bottom up' innovation.

Professionals needed to take the initiative, as our network was seeking to do, rather than wait for government.

6. Next Steps for Network

Chris Tunnell introduced his circulated paper. The paper was seeking to argue the wider case for strategic planning, within the wider 'ecosystem'; He pointed to the limitations of existing strategic planning practice and the fact that in the absence of adequate governance structures, many plans were failing to be adopted. We needed to respond to the Government's focus on economic growth, and set out the role of various actors within the planning system. There was concern that the proposals set out in the recent Policy Exchange report would weaken rather than strengthen the role of strategic planning.

Catriona Riddell argued that we needed to seek a balance between 'bottom up' and 'top down'. We needed to respond to the Government agenda in relation to climate change and the impact on future generations by focusing on the 'greater good' achievable by planning, the effective use of national capital and the case for reducing social and spatial inequality. We needed to demonstrate that strategic planning could do things which localism could not..

Simon Eden stressed the importance of developing a strategic planning narrative and vision.

It was agreed we needed to promote our case beyond the professionals who had attended our October symposium to those who needed to know and to understand. There was a discussion of the need for an improved information base at WSE level in relation to household population trends, housing outputs and effectiveness of local planning policies as well as analysing infrastructure requirements and financial resources.

Agreed a working group comprising the following to work up paper based on Chris Tunnell's draft for circulation for comment prior to network's next meeting:
Chris Tunnell, Duncan Bowie, Catriona Riddell, Martin Simmons, Janice Morphet, Simon Eden, Andrew Barry-Purcell, Judith Ryser..

7. Updates from Members

Chris Lamb referred to a series of design conferences being organised by MHCLG – in Manchester, Bath and Bedford in May,.

8. Any issues outstanding from note of previous meeting.

None were raised.

9. Date and Agenda for next meeting

6th April, 11am at ARUP

Agenda to include:

Paper on case for Strategic Planning
Minerals and Waste Planning
Update on London Plan
Devolution White Paper (if published)