

# Discussion Paper on Strategic Planning of London and the Wider South East

London & Wider South East Strategic Planning Network

July 2021

Contact us 

[duncanbowie@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:duncanbowie@yahoo.co.uk)  
[christopher.tunnell@arup.com](mailto:christopher.tunnell@arup.com)

Learn more 

[www.wseplanningnetwork.org](http://www.wseplanningnetwork.org)

*This discussion papers seeks to represent the general consensus of views of Network members. It should not be read as representing the policy position of individual members of the Network or of the organisations for whom they may work.*

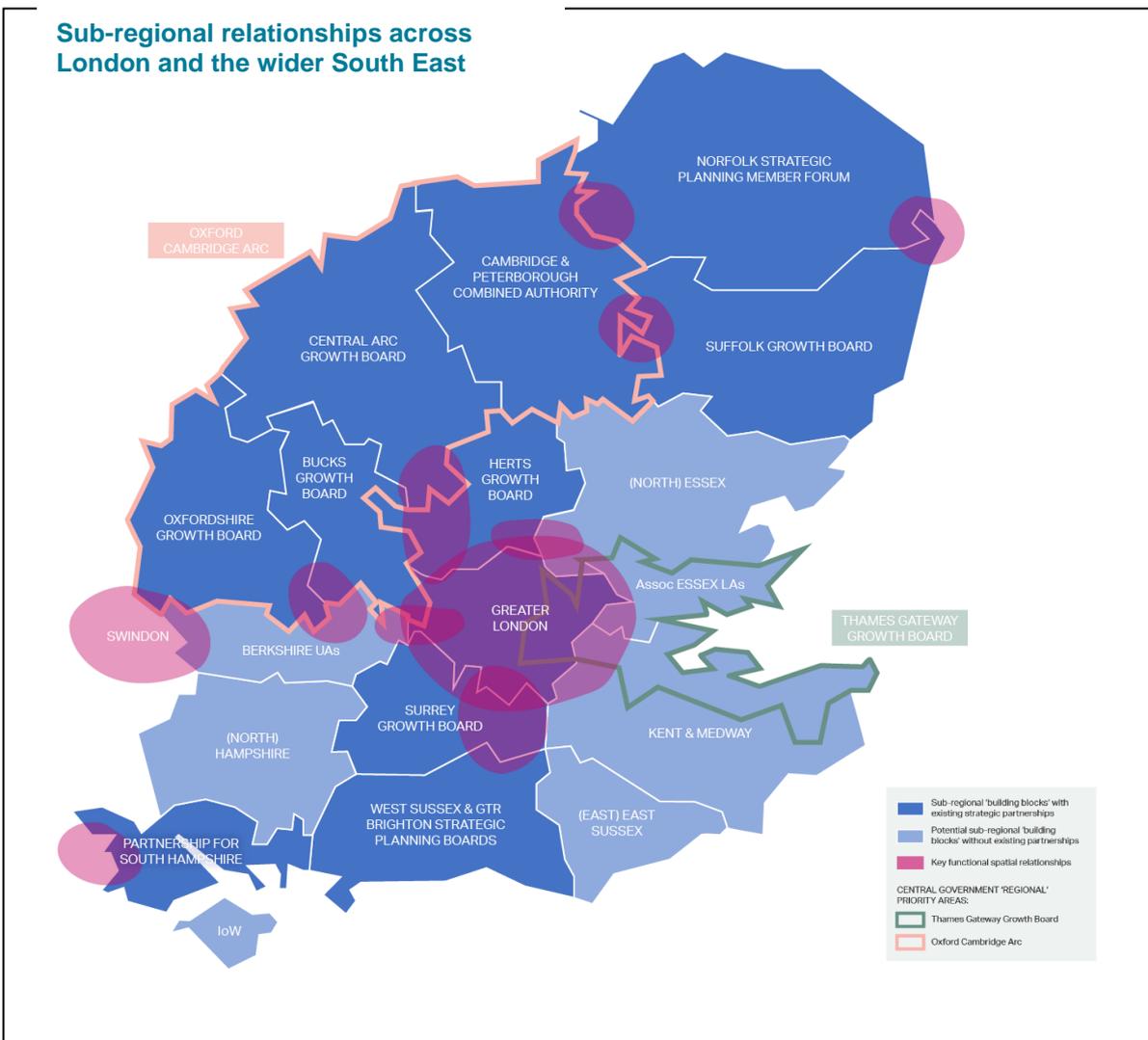
## Summary of Discussion Document

The Government has set out its ambitions to 'level up' economies and disparities across the country but the reality is that this can only be successfully achieved if London and the wider South East function efficiently.

This requires a co-ordinated approach to planning across the city region, one that is underpinned by strong, collective leadership and based on consensus around the long-term strategic priorities to support 'good' growth and deliver mutual benefits. Strategic planning is currently managed across the region through a

range of different mechanisms and partnerships – illustrated by the map, below.

- **Within Greater London**, the Mayor's London Plan provides the strategic context for Greater London.
- **Outside London**, local authorities are working on joint strategic plans, non-statutory strategic planning frameworks managed by growth boards and strategic partnerships, and through the Duty to Cooperate.
- There is also the emerging government-led approach to supporting growth in both the **Oxford-Cambridge Arc** and in the **Thames Estuary**.



Although the Government has declared its intention in the Planning White Paper (Planning for the Future, August 2020) to abolish the Duty to Cooperate, there is no indication as yet, of what the replacement mechanism to support strategic planning would be. In the meantime, there is an urgent need to secure consensus across the region on how the different approaches to strategic planning can collectively address the immediate and critical challenges around the economic recovery, climate resilience, infrastructure capacity and meeting housing needs.

**The proposals set out in the paper prepared on behalf of the London and Wider South East Strategic Planning Network recommend a new approach to strategic planning which builds mainly on existing local partnerships and aims to deliver benefits for all parts of the region.**

If done properly, this new approach would help realise the wider benefits of effective strategic planning, aligning priorities around economic growth, tackling climate change, protecting our environment and improving the overall health and wellbeing of the region and its diverse communities.

**The proposals would also provide a much better framework for building investment confidence in the interests of boosting the economic potential of both Greater London and the wider South East and delivering positive outcomes for the country as a whole. There is no downside to this approach.**

Any new arrangements will be building on a long and established history of voluntary collaboration on strategic planning between Greater London and the wider South East.

This experience provides some clear principles on which to develop a new relationship. These include the need for form to follow function with 'mutual benefits' for those inside Greater London and outside; decision-making at the lowest practical level of government; a system developed through evolution rather than revolution; and clarity around desired outcomes and how the new arrangements would help deliver these.

**New arrangements could be put in place relatively quickly in order to deliver a strong region that benefits all those that live and work within it, as well as the country as a whole.**

But for it to work properly the new arrangements must set a strategic framework for investment with a clear focus on outcomes and specific problems and not seek to deal with all issues. It must also be adequately resourced, supported by the right skills and expertise and with a clear link to funding streams.

**Our solution is therefore to promote a more comprehensive network of sub-regional partnerships, many of which already exist, including those which would cross the Greater London administrative boundary. Top-down special strategic vehicles like the Oxford-Cambridge Arc and the Thames Estuary Growth Board would be seen as special cases and not the norm.**

But this is not about reinventing the regional planning 'wheel' but bringing together a new and potentially stronger collaboration developed from the bottom up with a shared interest in addressing some of the key challenges we all face binding it together.

So, what is needed to make this happen? The Network is committed to undertaking a series of discussions on key themes and with partners, with a view to developing a suitable and deliverable model by Autumn 2021.

**But this can only be achieved if we can secure consensus from the relevant local authorities and the Mayor of London on the need for a new approach and what that might look like.**

**This process must therefore be seen as the start of a proactive, ongoing conversation with all involved, with a commitment to try and construct a new partnership across Greater London and the wider South East that serves us all.**

**London and Wider South East Strategic Planning Network**

**July 2021**

***‘My Government will level up opportunities across all parts of the United Kingdom, supporting jobs, businesses and economic growth and addressing the impact of the pandemic on public services’***

*(Queen’s Speech, May 2021)*

## Context

- 1 Delivering on the above commitment in the Queen’s Speech to *levelling up all parts* of the United Kingdom (not just the poorer parts) will mean strengthening the Union and its connectivity, securing the powerful and internationally competitive economy which must underpin ‘Global Britain’, and aligning England with all three devolved nations.
- 2 This cannot be achieved by focusing merely on the English regions and devolved nations, vital though that is. It means securing a better functioning, more resilient and competitive core in London and its city region which complements the approaches elsewhere in the UK, managing local growth effectively, so that the UK flies on all its engines.
- 3 This task will be increasingly urgent as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic which could accelerate trends already in the pipeline (refer to Annex A). London will always have a competitive advantage but ‘hybrid working’ may enable a wider distribution of economic activity and travel across the London and wider South East region.
- 4 The argument in this paper is that growth in London and its city region of the wider South East must be planned by mutual agreement, replacing confrontation and short-term thinking. This process cannot be imposed. It must emerge from below – from agreement led by local communities, private investors, Government departments and agencies, infrastructure providers and others.
- 5 The UK has lost the EU structural funds and regional development budgets. The Government proposes to replace the EU funds with a new shared prosperity fund, details of which are awaited. This paper suggests that local communities in the L&WSE could be incentivised to carry out effective strategic planning which would include a regional development budget for local authorities which are demonstrably collaborating in strategic planning.
- 6 Here is a ‘win-win’. Local communities reach agreement on priorities and secure access to funds over a long timescale; as a result, private interests can make investment decisions based upon certainty about where the opportunities lie; Government avoids unnecessary confrontation on house building; and, infrastructure providers, utilities companies, Government and its agencies know where local communities want their new investment and what is needed to service that requirement. Rising confidence displaces risk and uncertainty.
- 7 This paper supports the Government’s stated desire to give further consideration to how best to deliver strategic planning. It therefore sets out a basis for achieving this, in particular, the scale at which plans are best prepared, and how the Government can help incentivise and reward planning authorities to fulfil their responsibilities to have regard to a wider community of interests.

## The need for strategic planning in London & the wider South East

- 8 The communities of the London and wider South East region (L&WSE)<sup>1</sup> are expected to have to accommodate at least a further 1.2 million and, possibly, as many as 3.2 million new homes by 2040.<sup>2</sup> This scale of development needs to be strategically planned if the quality of life of existing communities is to be safeguarded and the Government's ambition for clean growth and the transition to zero-carbon are to be achieved.
- 9 A principle of planning is that development decisions are best taken by local planning bodies. However local plans are often prepared for areas which are not well related to the areas within which people search for work or homes, or environmental resources which are impacted by a development proposal.
- 10 Consequently, with the current geography of local plan preparation, planning choices and decisions taken locally are constrained by the extent to which they are dependent on decisions taken in adjoining areas and the impact on them. This challenge is compounded by the competing or conflicting timeframes for planning decisions that councils and agencies adopt, as a result of their fragmented geography. The solutions to issues – in particular local plan areas – often lie outside the immediate areas and collective action to address them is more effective, more consistent – and resource-efficient – than areas acting alone.
- 11 Strategic planning has in the past underpinned policies for regeneration, new and expanded towns, infrastructure investment and the green belt. Local communities in particular benefit from effective strategic planning to provide them with confidence to plan and provide for their futures by understanding how they fit with other places. The potential benefits are highlighted in the CCN report, are summarised in Table 1, overleaf, including sharing expertise and information not available locally, and generating funding options that can only be mobilised on a wider, cross-boundary basis.
- 12 Strategic planning is needed to tackle growing social and environmental challenges to ensure the quality of life of all communities. This increasingly includes issues related to child poverty, excessive commuting distances, water shortages and pressure of green spaces. Intra-regional inequalities are becoming critical.
- 13 The region's complex environmental challenge cuts across administrative boundaries. In the past the main issue has been controlling urban sprawl through green belt policy. This challenge still remains but it has become more problematic with the lack of strategic planning. However, environmental issues are becoming more complex and extensive in their geographical impact whether in the transition to a zero-carbon economy or the management of water supplies. As summarised by the Chief Executive of the Environment Agency:  

**“(Climate Change + Growth) =  
an Existential Threat  
to our economy, environment,  
security, happiness, way of life.”**
- 14 Ineffectual strategic planning damages economic growth, housing costs, quality of life and the resilience of the natural environment. Our report sets out a common perspective on the need for more effective strategic planning, both at the sub-regional<sup>3</sup> and the regional level.

---

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this paper, L&WSE relates to the Greater London, South East and East of England administrative regions; South East and Eastern 'Regions' refers to the former Government office regions; and, London City Region – London and immediately adjoining 'county' areas generally within daily commuting distance.

<sup>2</sup> See Spatial Blueprint: AECOM and One Powerhouse Consortium

<sup>3</sup> Sub-regional – as defined by local authorities and may be within one larger LPA (e.g. the Bucks UA), a combined authority area or a collection of authority areas which make up a functional urban area

### Table 1: The potential of strategic planning

Strategic planning overcomes the fragmented, competing or conflicting planning decisions that arise from the fragmented, diverse geographical areas, timescales and goals, and delivers the following benefits.

- To effect structural change in response to national policy and priorities, especially to support clean and inclusive growth, national infrastructure priorities, delivering new homes, improving health and wellbeing, and tackling climate change. Many of these issues demand a national framework for change but are more effectively delivered through the sub-regional level which is more able to reflect the particular local context and circumstances.
- Greater ability to secure long term (vision-led) transformation across an area especially in places that require a different investment model and therefore a different spatial strategy and distribution of growth, with a larger spatial canvas to facilitate this.
- Stronger collective 'place leadership' to influence the decisions of others which is particularly important for local authorities around large cities, near major growth areas (e.g. Heathrow) or where national infrastructure is being delivered (e.g. Lower Thames Crossing, East-West Rail, HS2).
- To provide collective clarity for the public about the long-term vision/ ambition for a place and ensure that the different partners involved in supporting place-based growth (including Central Government departments and agencies) are aligning their investment priorities.
- To secure additional Government resources, freedoms and flexibilities, providing increased confidence in local delivery of strategic priorities with all partners aligned e.g. through growth deals or competitive funding processes.
- Increased ability to deliver and improve infrastructure and support an 'infrastructure first' approach to growth (as advocated by the Government), with the shared vision underpinning the business case and increased investor confidence because of the strength of collaboration (and increased credibility of the partnership).
- Increased ability to seek a different approach to business cases and project appraisal related to new outcome-based objectives, which value other (quality of life) deliverables and outcomes in addition to financial return on investment.
- Reduced risks in relation to delivery of statutory development plans as a result of clarity around the collective vision - it will be much harder to undermine a local plan that has been developed to deliver a vision shared by other local authorities and strategic partners; a more defensible, shared evidence base; and a quicker timetable if key strategic matters have already been resolved.
- Reduced risk of speculative and unsustainable development as a result of a more robust framework of development plans (and other partner plans and strategies) that are all pointing in the same direction and therefore more resilient to change (especially political and organisational change) providing a more stable delivery context.
- Potentially significant cost savings and better use of resources as a result of a shared strategic evidence base and efficiencies of scale, the ability to lever in more funding to support the development and testing of evidence, and shared access to technical resources (data and information, skills and expertise).

**Source:** Catriona Riddell: Planning Reforms & the Role of Strategic Planning: CCN 2020

## Strategic planning in London & the wider South East

- 15 The UK is the most centralised country of the advanced democratic economies. As a result, decisions are often taken by central Government which could be undertaken, and would generally be better taken, at a more local level. This is especially so where councils work together on issues of common concern. The problem exists that there is no common basis for strategic collaborative working so the solutions are driven by very local concerns or by central Government policy.
- 16 This deficit is now being recognised in devolution-deals for combined authorities and counties, the promotion of pan-regional bodies in the north, midlands and south-west of England as well as the decentralisation of Government departments to the regions and voluntary initiatives like the Heathrow Joint Spatial Framework the geography of which straddles administrative boundaries. However, although there are some sub-regional efforts to fill this gap, there is no common basis across the region as a whole.
- 17 These steps to empower local communities are piecemeal and need to be set within a more comprehensive framework. Power, responsibilities and resources should go to the lowest practical level of government as an entitlement and not a privilege to be won. This is especially so in the London and wider South East region where there is no coherence as to where power lies.
- 18 The fragmentation of this region into 1564 local planning authorities is a real challenge in dealing with the scale of development proposed for Greater London and the wider South East region, which is complicated by the imbalance between the arrangements for the GLA and those for the WSE. The interdependence of these communities in terms of the areas within which people search for jobs and homes as well as the shared natural environments mean that development options and sustainable outcomes depend on alignment with the policies and programmes of action of others.
- As a result, local aspirations risk being undermined by inconsistent decisions and competing aspirations. In effect the current planning system leaves the strategic power with Central Government, and de facto decision-making with utility providers or major development interests.
- 19 However, the future planning of L&WSE is critical to the wellbeing of not just local communities but also the rest of the UK. The intended devolution White Paper has been deferred to be superseded by a levelling-up White Paper and the planning reforms as suggested in the 2020 White Paper will not enhance the effectiveness of the current limited duty to cooperate.
- 20 Consequently, a solution needs to be found within the existing system to address the inadequacies and cannot wait indefinitely in the hope of something better.

---

<sup>4</sup> Source: [GLA report](#)

## The outcomes of the current system

- 21 The debate about planning arrangements is not academic. The scales of development pressure within this L&WSE mega-region are enormous. They are reshaping communities and adversely impacting on the quality of life. This applies in particular to the planning for new housing. London cannot provide enough housing to meet the needs of everyone with some connection to the city, nor at every stage of their lives. This unmet demand results in the out-migration of Londoners with a significant proportion of London's housing requirements needing to be met outside the administrative Greater London boundary.<sup>5</sup> Planning for this kind of complexity requires strategic planning. The lack of strategic planning and the failures of governance in the London and the wider South East do not allow sustainable options (for example, new towns<sup>6</sup>) to be considered.
- 22 As a result, the current system comes at a very high cost in terms of its outcomes. These have been set out in other reports but include the following key indicators.
- a Lack of agreed housing targets and under provision of new housing, especially for the most vulnerable or to encourage home ownership – Government's most recent calculations indicate that output in the L&WSE needs to increase by nearly 100K units per year – a current 50% shortfall.
  - b Failure to meet local housing needs - housing has become increasingly unaffordable across the region, especially for young families including those in relatively well-paid jobs.
  - c Commuting distances are steadily **increasing** - putting pressures on already overloaded transport systems, and major development projects are being delivered in places where the private car is the only viable means of moving around.
  - d Pressures on environmental resources, particularly water supplies, are becoming critical, as highlighted by the Environment Agency.
  - e Finally, Despite the wealth of the L&WSE region, it is becoming increasingly polarised, with some of the most unequal communities not just in the UK but also internationally.<sup>7</sup>
- 23 The costs that are arising from the scale and pattern of development in the L&WSE are being borne by the whole of the UK, for example, in terms of additional housing benefits and health costs. Although these current burdens are already high, they are expected to become even higher. It is estimated that if there is no change, and trends continue, housing costs will continue to escalate, commute levels will become even greater and diseconomies will set in, putting a brake on the economic performance of L&WSE, and the UK economy.

---

<sup>5</sup> Town & Country Planning October 2018: M. Simmons

<sup>6</sup> The Challenges of London's growth: Strategic planning and the failures of governance in the Greater South East: D. Bowie: September 2014

<sup>7</sup> For example, London has the third highest Gini coefficient (of inequality)<sup>7</sup> out of the 290 OECD regions: The UK's Sub-regional Inequality Challenge: CPP: January 2021

## Cross-boundary issues

- 24 The key issues for planning decisions relate to housing, the economy, community facilities and infrastructure – as well as providing the basis for conserving and enhancing the natural and historic environment, mitigating and adapting to climate change, and achieving well designed places. These include strategic issues such as large-scale developments, new settlements, or significant urban extensions<sup>8</sup> as well as national/strategic infrastructure.
- 25 The scales at which these decisions must be made depend on the geography of the ‘community of interest’ affected. In L&WSE, Annex B illustrates these in terms of housing market areas, economic development, transport networks and ecosystems. These all have varying geographical coverage but nest within the ‘footprint’ of the greater London metropolitan functional economic region. What is evident is that these can be grouped in terms of local, sub-regional, regional and national scales for decision-making.
- 26 Table 2 (overleaf), therefore, lists the range of planning issues classified in terms of the scale of planning which is deemed as most appropriate. It also summarises the existence and adequacy of current arrangements. This draws upon a benchmarking of current arrangements against the criteria established in the European Benchmarks of Effective Strategic Planning (refer Annex C).
- 27 This summarises where decision making powers lie across four key areas:
- The technical assumptions used in plan making
  - The formulation of planning policies
  - Development management (including the use of national call-in powers); and
  - Funding and taxation arrangements
- 28 It also summarises at what level they operate (national, regional, sub-regional or local). In some cases, this raises significant issues (orange boxes), foreexample in the use of national standard methodology for local housing numbers or the role of local councils in reviewing strategic greenbelt designations. In other areas of activity, the powers are at an appropriate level but in some cases are problematic, for example linking national transport investment decisions to other policy areas managed locally.
- 29 The table also indicates where strategic powers are needed for a range of reasons (yellow boxes). In some cases, this is because it is a more appropriate scale at which to take decisions, for example in terms of regional transport decisions. In other cases, it could be more effective, for example, in terms of housing tenure assumptions. In some cases, the most appropriate level at which decisions should be taken is open to discussion (highlighted by a (?) notation) and will depend on practical considerations, for example as to where a new infrastructure funding arrangement might lie. This table also shows where there are no (or minimal) powers (grey boxes).
- 30 This table is synoptic but highlights the fact that few issues have a body with a clear statutory responsibility for which it is accountable. These are mainly in transport and environmental protection at a national level, or housing policy at the local level, but do not include agreed cross-boundary development decisions, for example, in terms of the balance of housing and employment opportunities, and resulting commuting demands across the regions.<sup>9</sup>
- 31 As a result, the output from the current system is dysfunctional:
- a there is an aggregate 57K annual shortfall in housing provision in London and about 100K in the wider South East as a whole (as considered by the new standard method);
  - b the review of Metropolitan Green Belt is treated as a local environmental designation when it should reflect the regional strategy for managed urban growth;
  - c infrastructure and transportation planning is not integrated with, nor demonstrably consistent with, future housing and employment growth;
  - d strategic growth and new settlements outside London are not aligned to the centres of employment growth; and
  - e environmental protection or gains are treated as a matter for local development control and not strategic action.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/plan-making#delivery-of-strategic-matters>

<sup>9</sup> Town & Country Planning October 2018: Simmons

Discussion Paper on Strategic Planning of London and the Wider South East

Table 2: Planning decisions in London and the wider South East

Planning Activity	Scales at which planning decisions are taken in London and the wider South East			
	National	Regional (L&WSE)	Sub-regional	Local
<b>Assumptions for Plan Making</b>				
Scale of growth in regions				
Setting of Targets for Housing Numbers	Standard Methodology		(P) (e.g. thro' DTC)	
Setting of Targets for Housing tenure & Type				
Setting of employment Targets	(P)		(P)	
<b>Planning Policy Decisions</b>				
Location of growth areas, corridors and New Settlements	Ox-Cam Corridor			Local Planning
Site Allocations			(?)	
Regional Transport Priorities and Investments	(P)	(?)	(?)	
City/Town Mass Transit Networks and Investments	(P)			
Strategic Environmental Designations and ENG/BNG				
Local Environmental Designations				
Regionwide designations/Policies (Metropolitan Green Belt)	(?)	(?)		
<b>Development Management</b>				
Strategic Schemes	(?)	(?)		
Local Schemes				
<b>Funding &amp; Taxation</b>				
Funding of Strategic Infrastructure	Insufficient	(?)	(?) (e.g. Crossrail, VNEB, WLO)	
Residential Council Tax				
Business Rates				(P)
Stamp Duty				
CIL (outside London)		(?)	(?)	
S106				
Tourist tax				

Footnotes: **Orange** – Where current arrangements exist but are problematic: **Yellow** – where strategic powers are needed: **Green** – where statutory powers exist and where they are not fully used. **(P): (?)** indicates where there are options as to where powers should lie

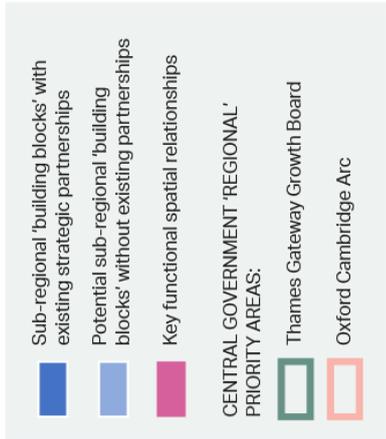
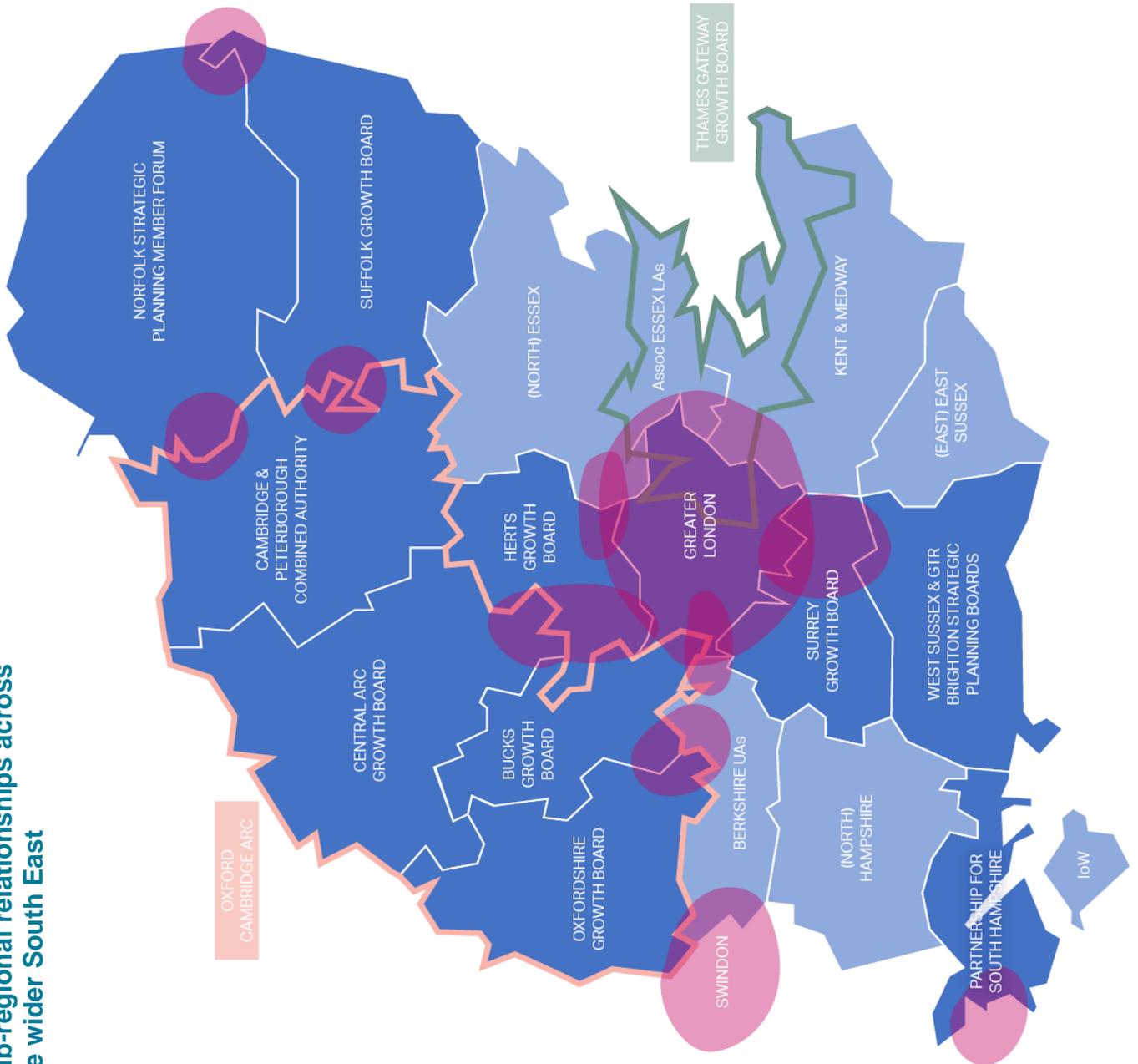
## Principles for new strategic planning arrangements for London & the wider South East

- 32 Currently the Government has not expressed an intention to legislate for improved strategic planning arrangements, even though it has acknowledged the failings of the current arrangements. Therefore, the GLA will remain as the only formal strategic body in the region which is required to prepare a regional or sub-regional spatial plan and strategies. There are also an emerging range of approaches and proposals which provide a basis for moving forward. There is experience even within the current system of arrangements being tailored to the context of each area to allow for a diversity of areas in size and scope. However, the White Paper is silent about it and it is not clear how the current model local plan would fit with a reformed system.
- 33 At a sub-regional level, the diagram overleaf illustrates the level of coverage which includes the following initiatives which are preparing or proposing sub-regional strategies. In addition to the mayoral plans for London and Cambridgeshire-Peterborough, these include:
- a Central Government-led initiatives for Oxford-Cambridge Arc and the Thames Estuary;
  - b the independent report proposing a more strategic planning role for County Councils based on setting out long-term visions for their areas to encompass infrastructure, local economies, and health;
  - c corridor-based collaboration, for example, London-Stansted-Cambridge, Horsham/Gatwick/Brighton, Heathrow JSPF and Blackwater Valley;
  - d the new Herts and Surrey growth boards;
  - e the work of the non-statutory sub-regional transport bodies which are going some way to align investment priorities with economic and housing growth proposals (such as England's Economic Heartland or Transport South East); and
  - f cross regional engagement, for example, in relation to the M4 Corridor/ Western Gateway with Swindon.
- 34 At a regional level, there has been a plethora of strategic planning arrangements for L&WSE over the last 60 years. Even over the last 25 years there have been 3 different systems, with SERPLAN being abolished in 2000 and replaced by new regional planning arrangements, themselves replaced by the now discredited duty to cooperate in 2011. In each re-incarnation, the planning of the Greater London administrative area has been separated from that of the wider South East. Throughout, systems for the wider South East have been under-resourced, underpowered and subject to 'stop start' policies<sup>10</sup>, a situation not remedied by the proposed new planning system.
- 35 Based on experience, the absence of a statutory context is however no reason for competent bodies (councils and agencies) taking a more strategic approach to the way they exercise their functions, at both a sub-regional and regional level. The most recent experience, related to the WSE Grouping set up to contribute to the London Plan, demonstrated the need and potential. However its output was limited.
- 36 Although this paper is about L&WSE, the need for strategic planning at a regional level applies to other parts of the country including the need to have regard to the inter-regional relationships, demonstrated by the work of the UK2070 Commission and One Powerhouse. The particular form it takes will vary but it is increasingly important to have more effective means to resolve the relationships and explore inter-regional opportunities.

---

<sup>10</sup> For example, as set out in the [special edition](#) of the TCP Journal

**Sub-regional relationships across the wider South East**



## Options

- 37 Collaboration between existing bodies and communities based on the following principles can be effective.
- a **Form should follow function** – i.e. relate directly to the critical issues which arise from the current institutional arrangements and can be seen as delivering the ‘mutual benefits’ for those inside Greater London and outside.
  - b **Decisions should be taken at the lowest practical level of government consistent with the effective taking and implementation of those decisions** – i.e. tailored solutions to different circumstances, not imposed uniformity.
  - c **Proposals to improve the system through evolution rather than revolution** – i.e. responsive to the highly stressed environment for government at all levels, in terms of their resources and capabilities to manage change.
  - d **Proposals should be informed by a clear view of the desired outcomes** and how new arrangements will deliver these - and by the need to make the best use of available resources.
- 38 For strategic planning to be effective, it needs to be more than advisory, or discretionary. It needs to have impact. Without prejudice to those initiatives already being taken, there are a range of options for strengthening the status of non-statutory strategic plans. Such plans may be :
- a a matter to which LPAs must have regard in the exercise of their responsibilities<sup>11</sup>
  - b endorsed by Government (e.g. by formal policy response or secondary instrument)<sup>12</sup>;
  - c incorporated subsequently into the development planning process in terms of ‘general conformity’ or as a new test of soundness; or
  - d some form of hybrid, whereby those components are recognised as national priorities for its agencies to help deliver.
- 39 Any strategic planning arrangements for the L&WSE region must however have the capacity to agree the basis for shared population and household and employment projections in order to ensure that local planning in the region has regard to their interdependent relationships. Any arrangement to establish a strategic planning capacity needs to be flexible and strategic, with a clear focus on key issues with dedicated resources to manage and service any partnership arrangements.
- 40 In view of the above considerations, it is considered that the initial cornerstone for improving strategic planning capacity in L&WSE should be through promoting a more comprehensive network of sub-regional partnerships, including those which would cross the Greater London administrative boundary. The top-down special strategic vehicles like Oxford-Cambridge Arc and the Thames Estuary Growth Board are seen as special cases and not the norm.
- 41 Any approach has to allow a level of flexibilities in terms of boundaries and focus, and even overlapping engagement (as has been the experience for Cambridge City). Any arrangement has added strength where it is generated locally around matters of common interest, and with organisational ‘fit’ to local circumstances. One of the strengths of SERPLAN was that it was seen as needed by the local authorities<sup>13</sup>. In addition, with the growth of participatory processes it will be important to develop new forms of civic engagement.

---

<sup>11</sup> Comparable to the provisions of s 342 of the GLA Act 1999

<sup>12</sup> Comparable to the status given to Regional Reports in Scotland

<sup>13</sup> Foreword to SERPLAN: 30 years of Regional Planning 1962-92: by Secretary of State.

## Discussion Paper on Strategic Planning of London and the Wider South East

- 42 At this stage, this paper has not sought to identify such a sub-regional framework, but it should be noted that these can be smaller cross-boundary partnerships as well as the big issues between Greater London and the surrounding impacted districts/counties. However, if the principle is accepted then the L&WSE Network will work with local bodies to explore possible options since 'consent' is critical to the success of such initiatives. Collaboration needs to be based on established relationships rather than imposed by central Government. From experience this is secured by two factors.
- 43 First, strategic planning has to be seen as not just an aggregate of local plans and should set a strategic framework for regional spatial structure and for investment with a clear focus on outcomes and specific problems (i.e. not to seek to deal with all issues). An analysis of the key gaps in current joint working would be a valuable starting point to progressing this proposal, as was adopted in Germany.
- 44 Secondly, the process needs to be incentivised by linkage to funding streams. Past experience in North West England shows the value of linking ERDF funding as a catalyst to developing a regional strategy based on agency collaboration. As a corollary, experience in the West of Scotland and France demonstrate the power of strategic plans to unlock funding streams for urban renewal, environmental action and transport investment.
- 45 Even with a more comprehensive sub-regional planning framework, it needs to be recognised that there are matters that need a wider geographical perspective and capacity to act on a greater scale than any individual sub-region or development corridor, requiring a wider collaborative approach which is sub-national or pan-regional. These have traditionally included strategic planning of transport, water and energy infrastructure and ecosystems. There are also opportunities to enable more local decisions which are otherwise being made centrally, for example, regional management of the Shared Prosperity Fund and Green Book procedures, and the proposal for a network of national centres of excellence (see Plan for Growth).
- 46 In England, there is an emerging pan-regional framework in terms of the Northern Powerhouse, Midlands Engine and the newly created Greater South-West partnerships. There is, however, an absence of an equivalent strategic capacity for London and the Wider South East.
- 47 The potential for developing spatial strategies at this scale has been tested by the RTP1 'Ambitions for the North' and the One Powerhouse Consortium mega-region blueprints, which include the AECOM report for L&WSE, building on its earlier report London 2065. There are a range of international comparators of this scale. In the USA these include the tristate collaboration of the Regional Plan Association in New York-New Jersey-Connecticut, the San Francisco Bay Area and Southern California, and in Europe, there are formal strategic arrangements in the Paris mega-region. Smaller but extensive in scale include, for example, the formation of the Greater Sydney Commission and regional plans in Catalonia.
- 48 Regional collaboration across the whole L&WSE region has the benefit that it:
- allows integration across the plethora of spatial units used by the statutory authorities, as well as local government;
  - allows more flexible geographical partnerships to be put together according to the specific issue, e.g. transport or flood management;
  - is clearly differentiated from those matters that can be dealt with by the GLA, or lower-level strategic bodies (e.g. unitary councils) or sub-regional partnerships;
  - enables a range of devolution and decentralisation initiatives, for example, financial block allocations and the regional application of Green Book rules; and
  - allows growing recognition on public debate e.g. 'powering up the North'.
- 49 Various models have been promoted in the past. All would focus on major settlement change, transport, energy, major protected areas to establish a framework to be updated every 5 years in tandem, for example, with the National Infrastructure Assessment and National Infrastructure Strategy. It could be serviced by a combination of statutory bodies, utilities, funding and business actors, but at a minimum just the sub-regional bodies, working in close conjunction with the National Infrastructure Commission.

## Next Steps

- 50 Central Government is key to supporting the strategic input into planning processes. Government shapes the strategic input into planning processes through its control of resources, policies and decisions. It has accepted that the current 'duty to cooperate' has failed, and as a result, is to be abandoned but as yet with no replacement. Further consideration is to be given, by the Government, to the way in which strategic cross-boundary issues, such as major infrastructure or strategic sites, can be adequately planned for, including the scale at which plans are best prepared in areas with significant strategic challenges. The need for a replacement in the London and the WSE is however urgent.
- 51 Even without a new statutory basis for regional planning being created, there is a range of actions that can be taken to help fill the gap in strategic planning. These include:
- Building on the current approach on a sustained basis and with full commitment by the bodies;
  - Powers for delegated joint working under the respective local government acts managed through a joint standing committee of local government. These options could be supported through such mechanisms as strategic planning advisory bodies with ten-year delivery plans;
  - Active engagement of civil servants, possibly through secondment or informal joint working; and
  - Creating a range of incentives to reward collective action in terms of regional investment programmes and operational arrangements. There is already much experience of the benefit in linking funding regimes to the approved regional development strategies. Similarly, there would be clear benefit in direct support of local initiatives to establish and maintain dedicated local joint institutional arrangements.
- 52 **This paper has been prepared as the basis for promoting a coherent approach to the issues which require a strategic cross-boundary response. All communities lose out from such a gap in policy making. It is vital that this gap is filled before the start of the next iteration of plans for the region.**
- 53 **The Network will:**
- **Set up an initial series of small round tables with 4-6 key participants at each to discuss the Network's proposals in relation to key themes, including economy, infrastructure, climate change, governance and social justice.**
  - **Liaise with and hold discussions with stakeholders e.g. the Department for Transport, DEFRA, Homes England, Network Rail, the Environment Agency and RSA.**
  - **Update this Discussion Note for publication immediately following the 2021 Summer recess in the light of any discussions that have been possible, to feed into the Autumn programme of activities.**
  - **Convene in Autumn 2021 a high-level grouping of public and private interests, comparable to those in comparable mega-regions in the States and Europe, to promote the most suitable option for strategic planning arrangements in L&WSE.**

## ANNEX A: COVID-19 Impacts

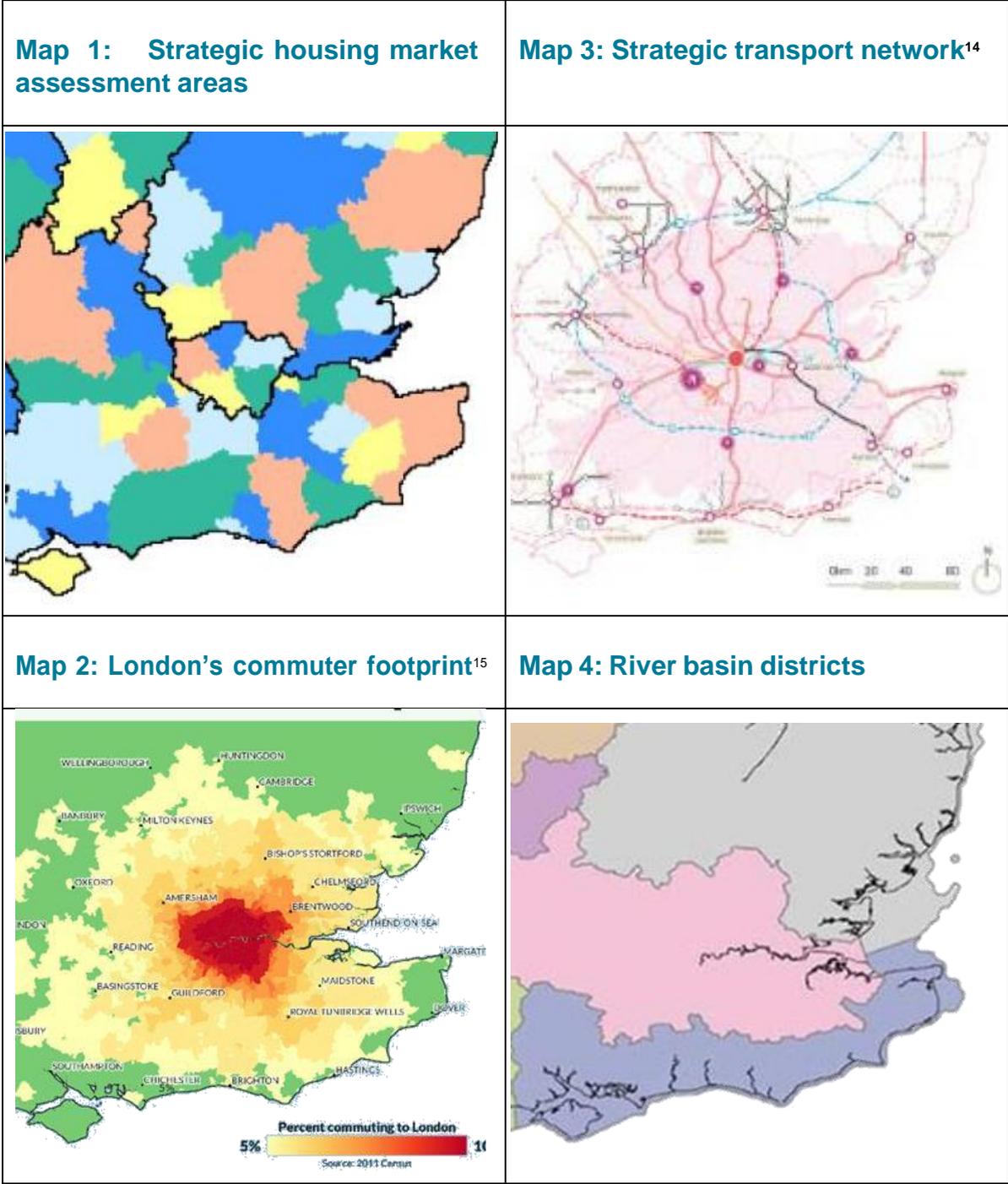
- 1 It is early days, and there is much uncertainty. This is reflected in the range of studies, opinion pieces and reports (refer to footnote)
- 2 However even at this stage, it is generally accepted that the COVID shock has accelerated trends that were in the pipeline but that the centrality of London will always be a competitive advantage. Therefore, even though traditional office and retail commercial operations have been most affected the new more dispersed, less intense or virtual patterns of activity that are emerging may well be to the advantage of cities, given the concerns which were emerging about the overconcentration of commerce in terms of congestion, loss of greenspace and property costs. It may also have created head-room for growth for new entrants that were unable to compete  
e.g. high order social and community functions which need / benefit from this centrality and ability to interface.
- 3 In addition, the issues that London was already facing before remain, for example those raised in the Government's Foresight Project ranging from Changing demographics and Ageing population to Increasing housing pressures on city spaces and Differential connectivity levels between and within towns and the city. It also needs to be recognised that face-to-face contact will still be critical to most of the activities that lie behind the importance of the major urban centres as the heart of the transport systems, centres of commercial transactions for individuals and business and cultural congress which is critical to the creativity required for innovation, productivity and economic growth.
- 4 The implications are that it will become even more important to deliver a better balance and connectivity between London, its wider urban network of towns and cities. This may involve a re-purposing of major centres and re-balancing of the urban networks of which they are part (e.g. will Wembley and Slough lose or grow their office roles). A key action required will be to enhance inter- and intra-urban connectivity within the labour markets and give priority to the internal restructuring of the central areas to enhance their competitiveness, inclusiveness and carbon footprint, and promote the cultural sectors of towns and cities and enhancing the scale and quality of public open space
- 5 This is all feasible since London has been remarkably resilient, with an ability over the years to restructure its urban fabric and its relationship to the network of towns within its sphere of influence. A substantial urban restructuring can now be anticipated, driven by trends accelerated by the pandemic. A falling away of some urban functions will make space for others, overloaded transport infrastructure will be relieved, redundant buildings can be cleared and cities made greener. Making it all work always requires effective plans, tied to effective programmes and long-term implementation. At present the wider London region is short of all this.

### Footnote

The following are examples of the range of bodies that have already prepared reports on the impact of COVID:

[WORLD BANK](#) ; [World Economic Forum](#); [European Union](#) ; [Centre for Cities](#) ; [UK2070 Commission](#); [Industrial Communities Alliance & Coalfields Community Council](#); [McKinsey](#); [KPMG](#) ; [Financial Times](#); [Citiestobe](#); [Foreign Policy](#); [Springwise](#);

**Annex B:**



<sup>14</sup> <https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/reports/rsa-onepowerhouse-south-east-blueprint.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/other/where-does-london-really-end>

## Annex C: Benchmarking the L&WSE Strategic Planning Capacity

- 1 It is also useful to systematically benchmark the strength of the components of the current system. The European METREX network for metropolitan planning has given much consideration to this and established a set of the governance arrangements for the strategic planning of metropolitan regions.
- 2 The following table provides the indicative results for L&WSE and gives a ready checklist of the current arrangements for strategic planning, decision making and implementation for the L&WSE region. The benchmarking identifies a range of factors that critically affect the effectiveness of the planning system. The criteria are grouped under three key themes:
  - **The Competences:** the ability to take effective decisions
  - **The Capabilities:** the ability to take fully informed decisions
  - **The Processes:** the level of engagement, & ability to deliver the strategy.
- 3 There is often a relationship between these themes, for example the powers to prepare a plan and those to implement them. There is however no necessary dependency between them. International experience is that they can be delivered in a range of governance arrangements from top down to bottom systems or from decentralised to federal systems. Experience also shows that weakness in one aspect can be offset by compensatory arrangements. Most notably this applies where the lack of formal powers to prepare and implement a strategy can be offset by embedded and extensive engagement processes with external arbitration. It does however provide a practical starting point for a structured discussion on where and how the current arrangements for strategic planning in the L&WSE region can be enhanced.
- 4 From the following table it can be concluded that the following key issues need to be addressed if there is to be an effective strategic planning arrangement for the L&WSE region:
  - **Competences:** the lack of responsible organisation and national spatial context limits what is done collectively, and makes it dependent on secondary mechanisms to have any bite (e.g. the Duty to Cooperate)
  - **Capabilities:** the technical resources are very constrained and fragmented; technical work therefore tends to be limited mainly to housing numbers and transport priorities, although there is joint working on development corridors and environmental issues
  - **Processes:** the lack of non-statutory or even formal joint work is partly offset by the general duties for transparency and engagement on local government, but the current processes are not set up on a sustainable basis and with longer term commitment

Discussion Paper on Strategic Planning of London and the Wider South East

BENCHMARKS		CURRENT SYSTEM?		
		GOOD/ GENERAL	PARTIAL	MINIMAL /MISSING
<b>COMPETENCE TO PLAN STRATEGICALLY</b>				
1	HIGHER-LEVEL CONTEXT			No national framework
2	RESPONSIBILITIES			Split/Indirect
3	SCOPE OF STRATEGY		Housing & Transport	
4	EXTENT OF THE AREA	Functional Urban Area		
5	STATUS OF JOINT WORKING		DtC only	
<b>COMPETENCE TO IMPLEMENT THE STRATEGY</b>				
6	POWER TO IMPLEMENT & SAFEGUARD STRATEGY			Indirect or Local
7	LINKAGE OF STRATEGY TO IMPLEMENTATION RESOURCES			IndirectLinks
<b>CAPABILITY TO TAKE INFORMED DECISIONS</b>				
8	<b>PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES</b>			
	• SURVEY AND DATA COLLECTION		Fragmented	
	• URBAN DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL		Fragmented	
	• SCENARIO PLANNING			Limited
9	<b>COMPONENTS</b>			
	• ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT			Separate Bodies
	• TRANSPORTATION		Fragmented	
	• HOUSING & SOCIAL DEVT.		Just housing Numbers	
	• RETAIL DEVELOPMENT			Local
	• ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY			Fragmented
<b>PROCESS of PARTICIPATION</b>				
10	LEGAL RIGHTS OF INVOLVEMENT	Statutory		
11	A PROACTIVE AND INCLUSIVE APPROACH			High Level Only
12	STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT	High Level		
13	TRANSPARENCY	Statutory		
14	INDEPENDENT TESTING THE STRATEGY			Indirect thro' LP process
<b>PROCESS of IMPLEMENTATION &amp; REVIEW</b>				
15	IMPLEMENTATION			Ad Hoc
16	MONITORING			Indirect
17	REVIEW			Missing

## London and Wider South East Strategic Planning Network

The London and Wider South East Strategic Planning Network provides a forum:

- to discuss issues of joint interest in the planning of London and its city region hinterland;
- to share best practice in sub-regional planning and economic development, and sub-national transport planning; and
- to advocate for a broader understanding of inter-regional trends affecting the wider South East.

### Membership (July 2021)

Duncan Bowie, Research associate, UCL  
(Co-convener)

Chris Tunnell, ARUP (Co-convener)

Andrew Jones, AECOM

Prof Tim Marshall, Oxford Brookes University

Catriona Riddell, Planning Officers Society

Prof Vincent Goodstadt, UK 2070 Commission

Prof Ian Wray, University of Liverpool

Andrew Barry-Purcell, West London Alliance

Adam Thorp, East of England LGA

Simon Dishman SE Councils

Hilary Chipping, South Midlands Local Enterprise Board

Nick Smith, London Councils

Ismail Mulla, London Borough of Enfield

Sue Janota, Surrey County Council

Penelope Tollitt, Oxford Cambridge Arc

David Godfrey, Thames Estuary Growth Board/Kent County Council

Michael Thornton, Heathrow Strategic Planning Group

Ian Binns, Thames Valley Forum

Robert Purton, David Lock associates

Michael Knott, Barton Wilmore

Nicholas Falk, URBED

Chris Lamb, Design South East

Neil Sinden, London CPRE

Nicolas Bosetti, Centre for London,

Simon Eden, Southern Policy Centre

James Stevens, National Housing Federation

Judith Ryser, INURA

Peter Eversden, London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies

Prof Christine Whitehead, LSE

Prof Ian Gordon, LSE

Alan Mace, LSE

Prof Richard Simmons, UCL

Janice Morphet, UCL

Prof Dave Valler, Oxford Brookes University

Prof Allan Cochrane, Open University

Peter Studdert

John Lett

Deborah Sacks

Martin Simmons

Nick Woolfenden

Martin Crookston

*Meetings may also be attended by officers from MHCLG, Department of Transport, the Greater London Authority and Transport for London, Transport for the South East and England's Economic Heartland (sub-national transport bodies), as appropriate. The network has also a wide range of corresponding members.*