

## **NOTE OF LONDON AND WIDER SOUTH EAST STRATEGIC PLANNING NETWORK MEETING**

**17<sup>th</sup> November 2020 (Microsoft Teams)**

Present: Chris Tunnell (co-convenor-chair) , Duncan Bowie (co-convenor-secretary), Dave Valler, Ian Wray, Nick Falk, Tim Marshall, Catriona Riddell, Martin Crookston, Sue Janota, James Harris, Nick Woolfenden, Andrew Barry-Pursell, Peter Eversden, Nicolas Bosetti. Judith Ryser, Penelope Tollitt, Andrew Jones, Chris Lamb, Jorn Peters. Kevin Reid, Michael Bach, Michael Thornton, James Stevens, Vincent Goodstadt, Chloe Salisbury, Alan Mace, Steve Barton,

Apologies: John Lett, Peter Studdert, Robert Purton, Ismail Mullah, Janice Morphet, Martin Simmons

### **1. Planning Policy White Paper**

The network response to the White Paper, which had been circulated was noted.

Kevin Reid (MHCLG) reported that there had been 40,000 responses to the consultation, of which some ¾ had been standard responses drafted by organisations. Ministers were considering how to progress proposals, and it was likely that different elements of the proposals would be taken forward in phases. It could be six months or so before a Planning Bill was put to parliament. In response to a question, Kevin commented that the Devolution Bill had slipped to the new calendar year. He also responded to a further question that modifications to the Housing requirements formula or algorithm were under active consideration by Ministers and that a revised proposal was likely to be put forward in the next two months. In response to a question as to whether the Government would be making proposals in relation to governance arrangements in the Wider South East and the role of the Mayor of London, matters which were absent from the White Paper, Kevin responded that while this issue would be covered in advice to Ministers, it was unlikely that specific proposals would be made in relation to governance in the wider South East , as the government was focusing on a model that was applicable throughout England. Kevin nevertheless would welcome a further discussion on this issue in the light of the network's specific proposition.

Michael Thornton raised the issue as to whether there would be consultation before a revised algorithm was brought into effect. Kevin responded that this was not certain.

Michael Bach commented that given the Government's apparent focus on the North and the Midlands, that there was some uncertainty as to how the gap between London's estimated requirement and identified capacity was to be resolved. Duncan Bowie asked whether the GLA was in discussions with MHCLG as to how to progress this issue. Jorn Peters (GLA) said he was not in a position to comment at this stage. Both Kevin and Jorn said that the current focus was on agreeing a final version of the proposed revised London Plan.

### **2. County Council Network report on County Councils and Strategic Planning.**

Catriona Riddell presented the report, which had been circulated.

The CCN report was seeking to be both pragmatic and flexible, with proposals deliverable under different potential governance structures. The proposals were similar to the Green Growth Board proposals put forward by the RTPi.

Strategic planning should not rely solely on a statutory governance framework. It was important to

have an integrated framework for growth, which was not limited to new homes targets. Local authorities had enabling powers in relation to wellbeing objectives, though these were no longer mandatory duties.

A clearer definition of sustainable development was required and Councils required enhanced powers. There was also a need for inter-departmental integration at a national level. A reintroduction of statutory regional planning was not seen as a viable option.

Chris Tunnell raised the issue of the CCN position on local government restructuring and unitary authorities. Catriona responded that it was expected that Government would progress their proposals. Duncan raised the question of whether the CCN supported the development of a national spatial plan which would set a framework for sub-regional growth boards and how it would be ensured that the geographical coverage was complete and that no council area was left out. Catriona responded that the CCN's approach was bottom up. She considered that most District Councils would welcome and cooperate with more formal structures. She was not convinced of the case for a national spatial plan but a clearer sense of national government priorities would be welcome. The wider south east was too large an area for a single growth board or spatial strategy, and smaller building blocks were necessary.

James Stevens said that the CCN report was very useful. The HBF was however still considering the best approach to the issue. It was recognised that public finances were acting as an incentive to combine existing district councils. It was expected that the devolution proposals would focus on a voluntary approach to local government restructuring rather than an imposition of unitaries. The government appeared to be less enthusiastic than its predecessor about progressing strategic planning. It was noted that many local authorities were also unenthusiastic as it forced attention on Green Belt release which was unpopular. He gave Andy Street, the West Midlands Mayor as an example. HBF members considered that achieving 100% Local Plan coverage was the highest priority and was concerned that new arrangements at regional or sub-regional level would delay this. He was also concerned that there was a potential conflict between levels of government as to where the power should reside. The HBF would be happy to discuss with CCN how their proposals could be refined.

Catriona commented that central government needed councils support for any new approach. There was a concern at loss of Conservative council seats due to opposition to what was seen as imposed local growth and development. Government needed to set housing targets, but this needed to be an informed and transparent process. Increasing the power of city region Mayors was not a solution. It was noted that the Greater Manchester Mayor was now proposing a plan that was in effect a very large Local Plan (including site allocations), rather than a strategic plan. No single politician wanted to take sole responsibility for unpopular decisions, such as Green Belt release, and there was a case for sharing responsibility (and blame) between different levels of governance. Strategic planning was about place ambition and economic growth, not just about land use allocations which was a local plan function. Growth. A new definition of strategic planning was necessary.

Vincent Goodstadt agreed the need for a clear distinction between strategic planning and local planning. However strategic planning was necessary if key issues such as Green Belt release were to be progressed. Local Plans could be produced more quickly if there was a

clearer strategic framework. London and the Wider South East was a special case because of the scale and had national implications.

Michael Bach noted that the housing requirements formula was pushing housing targets to higher value areas without the identified development capacity, which explained the extent of local opposition, especially in central London boroughs.. Development remained largely driven by the private sector rather than by local authority plans. Catriona commented that the West Midlands had levels of complexity similar to those in London and the wider South East.

James Stevens said he was not an enthusiast for giving councils more powers, given the number of councils who were opposed to more housing development. The HBF supported the concept of national rules proposed in the WP and would also like to see the metro Mayor model extended (while recognising that some geographic arrangements, especially North of Tyne, were not appropriate). The London plan regime was quite effective, though it should be recognised that the London Mayor's planning powers were greater than those of the metro Mayors.

Michael Thornton noted that many local authorities were focused on new affordable homes rather than market homes. Ian Wray commented that in the absence of strategic planning, there were likely to be more local planning disputes and more Ministerial interventions. Penelope Tollitt commented that a focus on strategic place-shaping would take the focus away from housing targets. It was important to consider the needs of existing communities. Andrew Barry Purssell noted that there were varying perspectives across the wider South East. There was a lot of activity but little coordinated strategic planning. Catriona commented that strategic planning was largely about relationship management and that in the previous SE Regional planning structure, relationships were largely successful.

Kevin Reid recognised that a framework for strategic planning could be helpful. There was a need to focus on those aspects which had been problematic, such as planning for major new settlements. He was concerned that too great a focus on housing tenure may constrain development.

### **3. RTPI/GLA Reports on Infrastructure.**

<https://www.rtpi.org.uk/policy/2020/november/planning-for-critical-infrastructure-in-london/>

[https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/handbook\\_-\\_coordinating\\_utilities\\_infrastructure\\_through\\_local\\_planning.pdf](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/handbook_-_coordinating_utilities_infrastructure_through_local_planning.pdf)

James Harris (RTPI) introduced the report and handbook, with a slide presentation (attached)

James referred to previous RTPI research presented to the network by Hannah Hickman. The new report recognised the current dissonance between strategic planning and infrastructure planning and delivery. This was most notable in the case of utilities. Planning needed to be more proactive to address the infrastructure requirements of new development. There had been some good practice in London, especially in relation to Opportunity areas. He had been seconded from the RTPI to work with the GLA Infrastructure team, established in

2018 and co-located with the London Plan team. The project focused on planning for growth, managing growth and measuring requirements (including costs) and learning from best practice so it became standard practice. The project had produced a report and a handbook, the latter focusing on good practice in coordinating infrastructure delivery and minimising disruption. A number of good practice examples were given, including Tower Hamlets infrastructure planning service which linked use of planning contributions to other capital investment programmes; the Croydon growth zone, Nine Elms and Old Oak Opportunity areas and the City of London.

The report discussed the barriers to infrastructure delivery:

1. Missing national infrastructure strategies and lack of place based approach in some published strategies;
2. Lack of alignment between Local Plans and utilities planning;
3. Fragmented and inaccessible data;
4. Lack of resources and skills.

Report recommendations included:

1. Fill gaps in national infrastructure strategies, clarify role of planning in delivery and devolve infrastructure funding;
2. Develop evidence base for London infrastructure;
3. Align investment in infrastructure with spatial planning;
4. Stable funding for infrastructure planning and co-ordination.

Duncan Bowie welcomed the project and its outputs which he considered to be long overdue. He raised the issue of government role in ensuring that the infrastructure providers collaborated with spatial plans and questioned whether the regulatory framework could be used to ensure this. James Stevens raised the issue of capacity to deliver the required infrastructure, noting the new requirements on energy efficiency being imposed on developers and local authorities competing to have the most ambitious green targets. There was a hollowing out of expertise within government, leading to dependency on expensive consultants. He was also concerned at lack of coordination within government departments and agencies, noting that OFWAT (the water regulator) was planning on the basis of out of date population projections despite MHCLG advise not to use them.

Catriona Riddell drew attention to the issue of waste and minerals planning, which had not been covered in the Planning WP. Tim Marshall welcome the report and handbook as co-ordination between spatial planning and infrastructure planning had been deficient. He drew attention to issues in the London periphery, especially in relation to freight and logistics, where there had been a failure to deliver interchanges, notably in Kent, Surrey and in relation to Heathrow.

James Harris hoped that the GA evidence base could be a basis for encouraging greater collaboration across the wider South East. He also raised the question of the case for an incremental shift away from the current privatised model of infrastructure provision.

#### **4. Spatial geographies and planning post COVID19.**

Judith Ryser presented her circulated paper. (Presentation slides attached)

The paper considered the sectoral impacts of COVID19

The paper considered three potential post COVID19 scenarios: Business as Usual; a focus on green, social (egalitarian) and resilient sustainability; a focus on what was 'doable'.

Potential adaptations to the current built fabric needed to be considered:

1. More private space was necessary. The city centre was in decline, with increased suburbanisation. Flats were increasingly unpopular and there was an aspiration for houses with gardens in the suburbs;
2. Physical shopping had transferred to online shopping;
3. There was a move from large high-density cities to medium size and smaller urban areas.;
4. There was demand for more open public space in urban areas, with a case for creating parks from underused space, such as office space no longer required;
5. Did planning have a role in enabling adaptation?

The paper then focused on shifts in mobility:

1. Increase in cycling and walking;
2. Changing relationship between private and collective public transport;
3. Increase in car-hiring and car-sharing with consequent reduction in parking requirements;
4. Reduction in flying; Increased use of digital communication for business; likely increase in flying costs;
5. Role of planning in responding to these changes?

It was noted, that there was some return to normal behaviour after first lock down. Response to second lockdown in terms of public behaviour was more uncertain. There was now a competition for government financial support between different economic sectors and geographical areas.

The potential for substantial physical adjustment of the existing urban structure was limited, for example London could not be cleared and rebuilt from scratch. Smaller scale localised interventions were however possible. Refurbishment could be more appropriate than demolition and redevelopment. There would also be a greater role for smaller urban settlements. It was critical to ensure that economic growth was progressed in parallel with both health security and climate change mitigation.

Chris Tunnell raised the issue of potential decline in Central London employment. Judith responded that this could benefit local shopping centres. Duncan noted the potential significant changes which had spatial consequences - increased suburbanisation; a stronger case for development on London's periphery, both in the Green Belt and beyond; and the issue of reusing unused employment space for residential, without repeating the poor quality output of permitted development conversions. He was interested in whether there was an MHCLG or GLA view on these issues. Kevin Reid commented that the current focus was on finalising the current London Plan. It was at this stage difficult to project and plan for longer term impacts of COVID19. Jorn Peters confirmed that the London Plan needed to be finalised first. Time was needed to consider the implications of BREXIT and COVID19. He referred to

the work of the GLA recovery board with London Councils.

Chris Tunnell referred to the move to blended patterns of working, potentially in the longer term as well as short term, with more home-based working. This had implications for commuting and housing provision. Michael Bach stressed the need to focus on Building Back Better through a new local approach such as the concept of a 5-minute neighbourhood. There was a need to rebuild local communities, with current structures too weak. We needed to face up to significant changes in patterns of working, living and travelling. Penelope Tollitt commented that COVID19 was not a one-off and we needed to plan to accommodate future viruses. Judith confirmed that her paper was focusing on putting people first.

Vincent Goodstadt pointed out that Government resilience planners had been aware for some time that pandemics were the most serious threat to Britain's economy. Yet policies were generally short term and not resilient. He noted that European Spatial Planners (ESPON) were to publish a report on resilience planning in the context of COVID19. There was a case for the network mapping out some of the challenges and potential responses in relation to London and the Wider South East.

## **5. National Infrastructure Commission Report**

Noted this report focused on transport infrastructure Agreed to discuss at a future meeting.

## **6. Economic Recovery in the Wider South East**

Agreed to discuss at a future meeting. Written contributions were invited.

## **7. Member updates**

There were none

## **8. Outstanding matters from minutes of last meeting**

None were raised.

## **9. Date and agenda for next meeting**

Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> January 2021 11am

Agenda to include:

Minerals and Waste Planning

Devolution White Paper

Transport strategy and infrastructure including NIC report and Henty Union Connectivity review

A further discussion on post COVID19 resilience planning would be held at the subsequent meeting.