

London and Wide South East Strategic Planning Network

Note of meeting on 23.3.2001 (via MS Teams)

Present: Duncan Bowie (chair), Chris Tunnell, Kevin Reid, Andrew Jones, Vincent Goodstadt, Piers Warburton, Michael Thornton, Simon Eden, Judith Ryser, Jorn Peters, Dave Valler, Penelope Tollitt, Nicolas Bosetti, Martin Crookston, Nick Smith, Nick Woolfenden, Michael Knott, Sue Janota, James Stevens, Ismail Mulla, Neil Borden, Andrew Barry-Purcell, Catriona Riddell, Michal Edwards, Simon Dishman.

Apologies: Peter Studdert, Martin Simmons, Richard Simmons, Michael Bach, Peter Eversden, Chris Lamb, Ian Gordon.

1. Update from MHCLG and GLA on strategic planning collaboration following publication of London Plan.

Kevin Reid confirmed that options for strategic planning were under consideration within the department and a Planning Bill anticipated to be published in the Autumn. Work was continuing on drafting the Devolution and Recovery White Paper but publication date was not yet known. A report on the responses to the Planning WP consultation would be published later in May. Discussions with the GLA would be progressed following the outcome of the Mayoral election.

Jorn Peters referred to the letter of 19th March from the Mayor to the Minister responding to a number of points made by the Minister in previous correspondence. The letter included a statement that the Mayor had no powers to set housing targets for planning authorities outside London and that it was incumbent on the Minister to put in place structures and mechanisms to ensure the delivery of housing across the wider South East.

https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/letter_to_sos_robert_jenrick_19.03.2021.pdfs

James Stevens welcomed this clarification of the Mayor's position and commented that it would have been helpful to have had such a statement earlier. Andrew Barry-Purcell commented that it was the government that had scrapped the framework for inter-regional co-operation. Catriona Riddell was of the view that it was correct for the Mayor to pass the issue back to central government, who in her view should follow the precedent the Oxford Cambridge AC and support the establishment of other sub-regional planning frameworks. Any wider regional approach could only be based on sub-regional blocks. The Government had received advice from a range of bodies including the County Councils Network, the RTPi, the UK2070 Commission and the One Powerhouse project as well as this group on a way forward and she hoped the issue would be taken forward in the forthcoming Devolution and Recovery White Paper. Simon Dishman referred to the recent report of the APPG on devolution, to which South East England Councils had contributed.

<https://connectpa.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Levelling-up-Devo-The-role-of-national-government-in-making-a-success-of-devolution-in-England.pdf>

2. H M Treasury Report on Build Back Better: Government Plan for Growth

Tim Marshall commented that the report failed to analyse the spatial linkages between infrastructure investment and growth or the implications for London and the wider South East. He pointed to the lack of a research evidence base, which should cover both spatial distribution of investment and economic impacts. Vincent Goodstadt considered that the report lacked both integrated analysis and spatiality. Moreover, there was no transparency in the plan's priorities.

3. Key Issues for the Network

Andrew Jones and Vincent Goodstadt introduced their circulated paper. The paper summarised the One Powerhouse framework for the South East mega-region and the UK 2070 Commission project as well as referring to other reports, including the recent County Councils Network report and the London Plan, with reference to the position of Ministers, before commenting on the current deficit in frameworks for strategic planning in the wider South East and proposing that the network set up a task group to prepare a note with options for the network to progress this issue.

Piers Warburton set out the objectives of the One Powerhouse initiative. The project was focused on reducing inter-regional inequality and boosting economic output across England. He had briefed Lord Udny-Lister and Liam Booth-Smith in the Prime Minister's office, Nick Humfrey at MHCLG who was involved in drafting the Devolution white paper and he was speaking at a seminar with Robert Jenrick. The One Powerhouse national report recommended that the proposal for a national spatial plan should be taken forward by the National Infrastructure Commission led by Sir John Armitt. This required regional and sub-regional growth boards but needed to be led at a national level either by the Prime Minister or the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He was disappointed that the Building Back Better report was a summary of existing initiatives and did not set out any new approach to national and regional spatial and infrastructure planning. He supported an approach which combined organic bottom-up initiatives with national government intervention and investment. It was important to build political alliances at a regional as well as national level and One Powerhouse were keen to collaborate with the network.

Chris Tunnell referred back to the conference held by the network in 2019 and subsequent work by network members. The network had focused on the need for spatial planning to support economic growth as a basis for winning support, in an attempt to shift the focus from contentious debates on housing numbers. Catriona Riddell commented that a mega-region approach could not deal with the issues of housing distribution and Green Belt review and that sub-regional strategies were critical. The future structure of local government was uncertain. Reform was required given the financial problems faced by many local authorities. The role of LEPs was also apparently under review. Moreover, politics in the Wider South East was difficult and her focus was primarily on enabling improved relationships between authorities. She was also concerned that the forthcoming elections could lead to some local authorities becoming more locally focused and less committed to strategic collaboration. Simon Eden agreed that in contrast with some other regions, politicians in the South East was struggling to develop effective advocacy for the region. There was a range of evidence to support more strategic co-ordination.

Andrew Barry-Purcell was concerned that authorities within London were not adequately considering the relationship of London to the wider South East and we needed to be explicit about what London would gain from strategic collaboration and give specific examples. Michael Knott noted that there had been a hiatus since the London Plan Examination in Public while we all awaited the outcome and that there was not as yet any political mandate for a specific solution and that the resolution of the matter was now urgent. Penelope Tollitt was of the view that the experience of the Oxford-Cambridge arc collaborative structures had demonstrated the limitations on progress unless the governance issue was satisfactorily resolved. Nick Woolfenden referred back to previous attempts at regional collaboration and noted that we should not underestimate the challenges, a point supported by Tim Marshall. Ismail Mullah stressed the importance of collaboration between local authorities both within and beyond London. Noted that the LWSE political steering group had

last met in September 2019 and the officer working group in June 2019. Nick Smith commented that London Councils had approached councils in the wider south east for improved collaboration. Jorn Peters noted that the proposal for a series of round tables had been delayed due to the focus on COVID19. Simon Dishman referred to a meeting South East Councils had had with Professor Tony Travers. Their preference was for voluntary combined authorities and not metro Mayors.

Duncan Bowie referred to a number of key issues – he considered that a sub-regional growth board approach could work in parallel with a One Powerhouse mega-regional spatial framework and that the approaches should not be seen as in conflict – they had different and complimentary roles. There was agreement for a need for an improved evidence base. There were different views on whether or not new governance arrangements needed some form of statutory basis. There was however a recognition that a combination of top down intervention with involvement of central government was required as well as a bottom up approach.

Vincent Goodstadt in responding to the discussion, proposed that a small working group be setup to draft a further paper setting out how the identified dilemmas could be resolved and which addressed the underperformance of the UK economy and the inter-regional differentials, the need for an improved evidence base ,what needed to be done at different spatial scales and the timing of a phased introduction of the required reforms. Piers Warburton endorsed this recommendation, referring to examples of regional planning in the New York region, the Randstad and the Rhine/Ruhr. Catriona Riddell referred back to the experience of SERPLAN.

It was agreed that the network needed to have a statement for submission to Ministers and others before the Summer recess. Vincent Goodstadt and Andrew Jones agreed to draft a paper for discussion by a steering group comprising, in addition to themselves, the following: Duncan Bowie, Chris Tunnell, Catriona Riddell, Andrew Barry-Purcell, Simon Dishman and Tim Marshall.

4. Planning Collaboration between London boroughs and Home Counties planning authorities

Michael Thornton introduced his circulated paper which focused on the experience of the Heathrow Strategic Planning Group. He explained how the group had to refocus its attention given government and legal decisions in relation to the expansion of Heathrow airport.

Tim Marshall commented that this case study demonstrated the challenge local collaborative planning groups faced in responding to changing external factors. Catriona Riddell referred to other sub-regional initiatives including the Surrey Place ambition project, which recognised the importance of both Heathrow and Gatwick, and the Blackwater Valley in Hampshire.

Michael Thornton agreed to circulate further reports from the group.

5. Intra-region inequalities

Simon Eden gave a Powerpoint presentation (circulated) providing an analysis of deprivation factors in a number of centres within the South Central area, relative to selected centres in the North of England and Midlands. This was to challenge crude assertions of a simple North/South divide in the context of the Levelling Up debate. The analysis demonstrated that centres such as Southampton and Portsmouth had equivalent deprivation scores on factors such as child poverty and life expectancy equivalent to some Northern centres. He noted how government investment through

the Community Recovery Fund was focused on Northern and Midlands cities and towns. Simon pointed to the importance of revitalising city and town centres and for a more polycentric approach to planning.

Michael Edwards welcomed the paper which pointed to the importance of analysing the available data. He was not optimistic about Government adopting a more nuanced approach. Vincent Goodstadt commented that the UK2070 commission was conscious of intra-regional inequalities and data of the kind presented by Simon Eden was essential if we were to develop and implement appropriate solutions to the challenges faced. We needed to be careful to avoid an inter-regional competition as to which area was most deprived. We needed to be clear as to what interventions were needed from national government, what could be achieved at regional and sub-regional level, and what could be led locally. Penelope Tollitt pointed out that paragraph 1.5 of the Oxford Cambridge arc strategy recognised the inequalities within the sub-region. Michael Thornton suggested focusing on 'no one left behind' was perhaps better than on 'levelling up'. Simon Eden commented that the Southern Policy centre would be publishing a further report on the issue.

6. Planning post-COVID

Duncan Bowie referred to discussion on this issue at two recent international seminars – the European Housing Research Network (papers circulated) and the recent RTPI seminar which included speakers from Melbourne, Auckland and San Francisco. He also referred to data on regional economic change (circulated) and to debates over the extent of population change in London during the pandemic, including a paper by Ian Gordon.

Judith Ryser gave an updated presentation (circulated), to supplement her presentation at the previous meeting. The paper set out a number of questions reflecting perceived changes in behaviour in relation to workplaces, travel patterns, shopping activity and use of public spaces, all of which had significant spatial impacts, as well as to the uncertainty as to the extent to which these changes were temporary or potentially longer-term. She suggested alternative approaches to planning were now necessary.

Tim Marshall noted that in Germany community groups were taking initiatives in relation to ensuring effective use of vacant ground floor premises in town centres, while the Permitted Rights provisions in England made this more complicated. Vincent Goodstadt referred to a declaration by European Planners. <http://www.ectp-ceu.eu/index.php/en/13-news/latest-news/555-re-start-europe-manifesto>. He was concerned that short-term decisions could be counter-productive.

7. Other updates from network members

There were none

8. Mattes outstanding from note of last meeting

None were raised

9. Date of next meeting

Agreed Tuesday 25th May at 11am