

London and Wide South East Strategic Planning Network

Note of meeting on 25.5.2021 (via MS Teams)

Present: Chris Tunnell (chair), Duncan Bowie (notes), , Andrew Jones, Vincent Goodstadt, Catriona Riddell, Andrew Barry-Purcell, Alan Mace, Michael Knott, Robert Purton, Tim Marshall, Jonathan Blathwyt, Nick Wolfenden, Dave Valler, James Stevens, Sue Jacota, Jorn Peters, Chris Lamb, Penelope Tollitt, Simon Dishman, Ian Wray, Judith Ryser, Neil Border, Kinga Salisbury, Deborah Sacks, Simon Eden, Michael Thornton

Apologies: Peter Eversden, Martin Simmons, Richard Simmons , , Ian Gordon, Peter Studdert, Neil Sinden, Martin Crookston, Hilary Chipping, John Lett, Nicolas Bosetti, Nick Smith, Ismail Mulla. Janice Morphet

Attendees introduced themselves

1. Implications of proposed Planning Bill

Noted circulated Government brief on proposed Planning Bill. In response to questions, Jonathan Blathwyt said that he was not in a position to provide an update on timescale for the Bill or the Levelling Up White Paper but that engagement with interested parties would continue, although he was not aware whether or not there would be consultation on a draft Bill. Duncan Bowie expressed concern that the Government brief did not include any reference to strategic planning at inter-authority, sub-regional or regional level, and that the network would welcome any update on the matters it had discussed previously with Kevin Reid at MHCLG. Deborah Sacks raised the issue of waste and minerals planning. Andrew Barry-Purcell pointed out that local authority planners could assist MHCLG in the development of policy on this and other matters relating to planning policy.

2. Discussion paper on strategic planning for London and the Wider South East from sub-group

This had been circulated and a number of network members had sent comments.

The paper was introduced by Andrew Jones.

The paper was based on a bottom-up approach, while recognising the need for strategic planning co-ordination at a spatial level above that of a single local authority. Strategic planning was essential if housing targets were to be met with homes built in appropriate locations and for environmental resources to be managed effectively. The Government's planning reform proposals lacked a strategic basis. The Shapps rail review had however recognised the importance of strategic partnerships. A more stable and formal system of strategic planning was necessary – current ad hoc arrangements were inadequate. A strategic planning framework had to be stronger than just advisory could not be limited to advice and clarity was required on the appropriate spatial level for different planning functions. This included the collection and sharing of information.

The starting point should be the development of a more comprehensive network of strategic

partnerships, based on functional areas and which crossed the existing London administrative boundary. As a second stage, a pan-regional framework was also required. The paper proposed a set of next steps.

Vincent Goodstadt added that the paper was synoptic and sought to reflect a diversity of views within the sub-group. Duncan Bowie commented that there was considerable agreement within the group, with there being two key questions – the extent to which more formal governance arrangements were essential, including the option of statutory requirements and whether central government were or were not likely to respond positively to our proposals. He also noted comments that the paper should focus more on the implications of COVID19 for spatial planning. He however considered that given the uncertainty over whether impacts were short term or long term and the limited evidence base, that these issues were best covered in a separate paper, rather than risk delaying the promotion of our proposals. Catriona Riddell commented that the approach taken in the paper was a pragmatic one. Tim Marshall said it was important to influence central government's agenda and that we should argue strongly for strategic planning and point to the costs of an inadequate planning framework. He emphasised the importance of developing a strategic planning framework above the sub-regional level.

Chris Tunnell stressed the importance of winning support from planning authorities in the wider South East. We needed to demonstrate what a modern strategic planning system actually looked like, as in practice, much local planning debate focused on details rather than objectives and strategy. Andrew Barry-Purcell felt that the paper had an appropriate balance between principle and pragmatism. We should focus on plan implementation as well as plan preparation and demonstrate what the benefit was to 'the person in the street' on key issues such as housing, waste, climate change and spatial inequality. We could not wait for government initiatives and need to demonstrate our argument by examples of practice.

Simon Eden welcomed the paper. He however thought we needed a greater focus on the role of local government and not just local 'communities'. The paper should focus on environmental planning as well as housing and infrastructure and we needed to engage with partnerships which were not planning led. The paper should be a basis for promoting discussion in local networks. We also needed to be cautious about promoting specific formal structures. Michael Knott suggested the paper be circulated to developers and housebuilders. The paper related to the development of the next London Plan and we needed to be explicit as to timescales for introducing any new approach. Our discussion was parallel to discussions in other regions such as the West Midlands and the West of England. He was concerned as to government's unrealistic expectations of delivery of new housing targets in the South East given both environmental and political considerations.

Ian Wray noted how the paper could assist government with delivering its levelling up objectives. The paper was related to the government's new thinking on restructuring the governance of the rail network. Our proposals were critical to maintaining the role of London and the wider South East in relation to international competition and would assist post pandemic planning and resilience. Catriona Riddell suggested the paper be shared with development forums in Surrey, East Sussex and Essex. Judith Ryser welcomed the paper while suggesting a greater focus on social issues. Michael Thornton stressed the importance

of real-world examples to demonstrate the importance of strategic planning and suggested collaboration with LEP's, noting that the government was consulting on the future role of LEPs.

James Stevens welcomed the paper. He however questioned whether this was intended to supplement government planning reform proposals or offer an alternative. He was conscious that there was increasing popular opposition to the concept of growth and that our case had not been helped by the government's adoption of an inappropriate approach to setting local housing targets. Duncan Bowie agreed that the government's approach to housing targets had stimulated opposition to new housing development. He however pointed out that as government had not at present any specific proposals for strategic planning and, that the paper offered government a potential way forward, which did not necessarily conflict with its planning reform proposals. He also noted that our proposed approach could enable a more effective response to intra-regional inequalities.

Penelope Tollitt pointed to the political complications arising from recent County Council elections where some supporters of growth had met significant local opposition. She stressed the importance of demonstrating how strategic planning could contribute to meeting the challenges of the climate crisis. Catriona Riddell pointed to the progress being made with some joint plans within the wider region. This was however despite rather than because of the current planning framework. She did not however support a return to the previous statutory Regional Spatial Strategy regime. A formal signing off procedure tended to slow down the plan approval process, as had been demonstrated in the Greater Manchester and Oxfordshire cases. Andrew Barry-Purcell noted that structures in London were very different from those in the south east outside London. He agreed that we could not wait for a single 'perfect' institutional solution.

Vincent Goodstadt responded to the discussion. The paper could be revised to incorporate the points made. This would include strengthening the references to environment and social issues, the role of local networks and the relationship of our proposals to the Planning Bill. A short fact sheet could be prepared which covered the negative consequences of not adopting a more strategic approach, including the impact on delivery of the government's housing objectives, the positive benefits of strategic planning and what a strategic plan would look like in practice.

3. Next Steps

The sub-group was meeting on 19th June and would finalise the draft paper including its format and develop a promotion strategy. This would relate our proposal to other government initiatives. It was noted that the concept of more than local planning needed to be handled carefully as local authorities would be sensitive to any proposal to re-establish a formal regional planning regime. It was noted that the Department of Transport now had a key role. There was a discussion as to the timing of any formal submission of the proposal to government and the importance of promoting discussions with key stakeholders at a sub-regional level. The sub-group would consider the option of small discussion groups and a larger promotional seminar. Members of the network were invited to send Duncan names of key contacts not yet on the network mailing list who might be invited to discussion groups or a larger seminar. It was noted that contacts on in the Eastern region would be especially

welcome given that area was under-represented in our discussions to date.

4. Updates from Network Members

Catriona Riddell reported that she was undertaking further work for the County Councils Network on governance structures.

5. Matters outstanding from notes of last meeting

None were raised

6. Date and agenda for next meeting

Agreed Tuesday 6th July at 11am.

The meeting would discuss redrafted paper and sub-group proposals on promotion strategy. Agreed to include discussion of Shapps rail review, updates on Cambridge /Oxford arc (Penelope Tollitt) and on Thames Estuary (David Godfrey to be invited) and Freeports. Agreed update on Airports strategy be considered at subsequent meeting.