

London and Wider South East Strategic Planning Network

Note of sub-group meeting on 30th April 2021

Present: Chris Tunnell (chair), Duncan Bowie (notes), Andrew Jones, Vincent Goodstadt, Tim Marshall, Catriona Riddell, Andrew Barry-Purssell, Ian Wray, Joseph Ward

Noted Vincent and Andrew Jones' paper together with benchmark paper and governance framework matrix. Agreed we focus in first instance on sub-regional frameworks as a pragmatic response to context and given government resistance to establishing new regional planning framework. Duncan raised the question as to whether sub-regional plans could be advisory or whether a statutory framework was necessary. It was considered that LEPs were not a strong basis for sub-regional planning and it was important that sub-regional plans had traction with local plans. Catriona suggested that a way forward was have sub-regional delivery plans with a formal sign off from central government and from key government agencies such as Highways England. While central government has a team working on the Oxford Cambridge arc and was setting up a team for Thames Estuary, initiatives for other growth areas and sub-regions should be locally led.

Vincent suggested that the next sub-group paper should set out the strengths and weaknesses of different sub-regional governance options. We should however acknowledge the range of issues which could not be resolved at a sub-regional level, and the One Powerhouse report set these out. Andrew Jones pointed to the recognition by the Dept of Transport that funding of rail transport was critical to reducing demand for road transport.

Ian Wray pointed to experience in North West England where EU and ERDF funding had been a catalyst to developing a regional strategy based on agency collaboration. He referred to experience of sub-regional incentive funding in France and suggested that allocation of the new Shared Prosperity Fund should be conditional on joint bids. (see <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i24579228?refreqid=fastly-default%3A5dc5e317717b0008110944758986b20d>)

Catriona responded that she envisaged that sub-regional contracts would be a basis for funding, for example for the towns fund. She pointed to the fact that most county councils were in financial difficulty acted as an incentive to inter-authority collaboration which generated funding. Duncan stressed that it was important that project funding supported the planning of new settlements rather than just plugging gaps in funding of existing services. It was commented that LA collaboration needed to be based on established relationships rather than imposed by central government. Funding Bids however needed to be set within an agreed spatial framework which was not currently required in some funding regimes, Catriona pointed to the importance of re-educating central government as well as some local authority planners that strategic planning was not just an aggregate of local plans and should set a strategic framework for investment.

Tim Marshall argued that as well as the sub-regional framework discussed, we needed to recognise that a second step was building up regional strategies and governance frameworks. SERPLAN remained a useful precedent. The fact that the government was unenthusiastic about regional approaches was not a justification for abandoning our case, which had in fact been strengthened by the COVID experience. Developing an evidence base was important even if we were not necessarily arguing for a return of statutory regional planning. An associational approach would involve both

sub-regional groupings and central government agencies.

Catriona pointed out that the fringe areas of the wider LWSE region as delineated in the One Powerhouse report (based on the 3 pre-existing regions of London, South East England and East of England), such as South Hampshire and Norfolk/Suffolk, were not part of the London centred Functional Urban Region. Andrew Barry-Purcell referred to the informal sub-regional groupings within London, as well as groupings which crossed the London boundary. Duncan suggested that in preparing our argument for a sub-regional planning framework, we needed to be explicit as to the wider planning issues. Vincent agreed that this could be argued without undermining our principled case for planning at a regional and national level.

Ian Wray suggested that rather than seeking central government support we should present government with a fait accompli in terms of an agreed approach within London and wider South East authorities. He gave examples from Merseyside and Manchester of how local united fronts had forced government decisions. Duncan and Chris however responded that regrettably in the wider London region there was as yet little evidence of such a united front on key issues.

Andrew Jones recognised that local brokering was critical and that we needed to set out a common purpose and demonstrate the benefits of collaborative working. We could perhaps examine the reasons for success and failure of different sub-regional initiatives within the Wider South East. Andrew Barry Purcell noted that due to a focus on COVID19, some inter-authority collaborative planning had lapsed. Duncan raised his concern that voluntary collaboration could allow authorities to opt out, and referred to examples of this happening. Tim referred to differences between authorities and central government in relation to infrastructure to support the Oxfordshire growth plan. Vincent pointed out that as well as incentives for collaboration, there needed to be penalties for non-collaboration. We needed to talk to Network Rail and Department of Transport not just MHCLG.

Agreed that Andrew Jones and Vincent expand their paper to incorporate points raised in the discussion, for circulation for a further sub-group meeting on 14th May at 2pm. The agreed paper would then be presented to the full network meeting on 25th May at 11am.