

NOTE OF LONDON AND WIDER SOUTH EAST STRATEGIC PLANNING NETWORK MEETING

6th October 2020 (Microsoft Teams)

Present: Chris Tunnell (chair) Duncan Bowie, Kevin Reid, Dave Valler, Ian Wray, Nick Falk, Michael Bach, Michael Edwards, Michael Thornton, Robert Purton, Nicolas Bosetti, Ismail Mulla, Alan Mace, Hilary Chipping, Martin Crookston, Chloe Salisbury, John Tomaney, Christine Whitehead, Judith Ryser, Andrew Jones, Peter Eversden, Vincent Goodstadt, Nick Woolfenden, Penelope Tollitt, Tim Marshall, Nick Smith

Apologies: Catriona Riddell, Janice Morphet, Peter Studdert, Jorn Peters, Steve Barton, John Denham, Chris Lamb, Hannah Hickman, Rupert Clubb, Sue Janota, Adam Thorp, Josephine Voss, Martin Simmons, Andrew Barry-Pursell, Ian Gordon, James Stevens.

1. Introductions.

Attendees introduced themselves. Chris Tunnell and Duncan Bowie explained that the steering group appointed at the February meeting had had a number of online meetings to discuss the way forward for the network. As well as Chris and Duncan (joint network conveners) this had involved Andrew Barry-Pursell, Janice Morphet and Catriona Riddell.

2. Proposition for a new Planning Body for London and the Wider South East.

Chris Tunnell introduced his circulated paper, which had been drafted in conjunction with the network steering group. Chris referred back to the previous experience of SERPLAN and LPAC and noted the challenges presented by the Government's new algorithm-based housing target for London of 93,000 homes a year, with similarly challenging targets for many other planning authorities in the Wider South East. Duncan Bowie pointed to some of the dilemmas faced by the steering group in discussing the proposal in the paper, both in terms of whether the focus should be statutory or based on bottom up voluntary collaboration of planning bodies, whether the timescale should be medium term or longer term, and the timing of such a proposal given the delay to the Government's Devolution White Paper and the lack of clarity on the government's thinking on reorganisation of local government structures – whether we should seek to influence government thinking, or focus on responding to the government's proposals, once known.

Vincent Goodstadt (UK2070 Commission) commented that it was important to put forward a proposal now rather than wait for central government. He noted that the planning White Paper was deficient on the structures for strategic planning and noted the proposal to repeal the current 'Duty to Cooperate.' The network could offer a solution to the problem that the government had created.

Andrew Jones (AECOM) reported that at a seminar that morning with the Institute of Chartered Engineers, MHCLG officers had pointed out that the Government was open to proposals. He was of the view that our proposal was best presented as novel, rather than referring back to SEPLAN and LPAC. He considered that the proposal should not be constrained by the historic standard regions.

Tim Marshall (Oxford Brookes) felt that we should not be constrained by the Planning White Paper, noting that government's proposed framework was itself unclear, but should put forward our own

preferred option. He suggested that the paper should refer to sub-national transport bodies and the forthcoming national infrastructure strategy. He agreed with the focus on integration with other strategies. He suggested that we base the approach on the SERPLAN region rather than exclude South Hampshire. He also raised the question as to how our proposal be promoted and suggested collaboration with the Local Government Association.

Michael Thornton (Heathrow Strategic Planning Group) said that the paper should refer to LEPs as well as the Infrastructure Strategy. We needed functional sub-regions and build up a framework from these. Distribution of housing targets could only be resolved at sub-regional level.

Ian Wray (Liverpool University) referred to the value of regional governance processes, pointing to the experience in the North West region where discussion had generated agreement.

Kevin Reid (MHCLG) suggested that timing of proposal was appropriate and was best submitted in the form of a response to the Planning White Paper. More detailed proposals from the government would be informed by consultation response and he and MHCLG colleagues were open to informal discussions. He pointed out that at Ministerial level there was little enthusiasm for re-establishing the regional governance structures abolished in 2010-11, but there was also a possibility that the new administration would not necessarily be bound by decisions of its predecessors and noted the appointment of Joanna Averley as the new chief planner. It would therefore be useful to test the appetite of current Ministers for some form of sub-national planning framework.

Penelope Tollitt (Wycombe DC) questioned how CAMK0X arc would fit into a regional governance structure as it was now a spatial unit of its own. There may be a need for overlapping geographies. Vincent Goodstadt noted that UK2070 commission could contribute text on the national framework for sub-regional planning and governance.

Duncan Bowie commented that there appeared to be general agreement with the approach in the draft paper and invited further comments to be sent to himself or to Chris Tunnell. This could then be redrafted as a response to the Planning White Paper.

3. The Planning White Paper and Strategic Planning.

Duncan Bowie commented that the new housing targets issued by the Government together with the limited residential development capacity identified in the London Plan presented new challenges for planning in London and the Wider South East, noting that the Planning White Paper proposals would in fact weaken strategic planning. Michael Bach (London Forum) commented that the new housing need formula had little relationship to indicators of housing need. Peter Eversden referred back to the Minister's post London Plan EiP letter to the Mayor requiring the Mayor to establish a framework for strategic planning in the Wider South East. Kevin Reid noted that this recommendation was not a formal Ministerial direction. He noted that MHCLG was not actively pursuing this recommendation until the Ministerial directions on the Plan had resulted in an agreement on the final text of the plan for publication. Discussions between MHCLG and the Mayor were ongoing. Peter Eversden (London Form) commented that the London Plan was now out of date and that planning decisions were no longer being made on a sound basis.

Penelope Tollitt was concerned that the Planning White Paper was diverting attention from getting planning policy delivered. She noted that the proposals required legislation and that there was likely

to be a long transition period. Michael Bach noted the gap between the new targets and identified capacity in both London and the Home Counties district and that the deficit could not be met in its entirety in the CAMKOX arc. Duncan Bowie referred to the current vacuum in planning policy at both London and national level and pointed to the need to take into account the spatial implications of the current pandemic in forward planning. Nick Falk (URBED) pointed to the importance of other factors such as delivery mechanisms, funding and land, referring to URBED's *Capital Gains* report for the GLA. There was a need to identify strategic opportunities and not just focus on housing numbers. Development Corporations could have a role. Mechanisms for land value capture needed to be improved, though this would have limited impact in low value areas.

4. Devolution White Paper - The Debate on Options.

Noted that the publication of the Devolution White Paper had been delayed. There had been considerable public debate on the potential focus on unitary authorities. Kevin Reid stated that the WP would probably slip several months as the government as still working up proposals. It was also noted that there remained some uncertainty on the future UK economy and regional impacts post BREXIT.

Vincent Goodstadt commented that financial devolution was critical, an approach the Prime Minister had supported when Mayor of London. He noted that local government reform and devolution should be considered as separate issues. We needed a wider strategic planning framework irrespective of what approach the Government decided to take on devolution. Authorities need financial incentives to collaborate.

Ian Wray commented that central government was becoming more centralised and authoritarian. The Planning White Paper was dirigiste. He also noted that Sir Peter Hendy was now chairing a national transport review. Duncan Bowie commented that given the central Government's current position of high spending and reduced revenue as a result of the pandemic, that devolution of tax raising powers to regions or local authorities seemed unlikely in the medium term.

5. The London Plan Review – Update

It was noted that there was as yet no clear timescale for publication of a new London Plan.

Peter Eversden noted that the Government was seeking a simpler Local Plan process, but if the London Plan was weakened, local Plans in fact became more complex. A regional strategic approach to planning remained important.

Ismail Mulla (Enfield) noted that the current impasse was having local ramifications, pointing to the experience of the EiP on the Brent Local Plan in relation to housing numbers and strategic Industrial Locations, where the Inspector was asking questions which the Local authority was unable to answer, given the uncertainty over the content of the final London Plan.

6. Martin Simmon's Papers

Noted Martin's earlier paper on HS2. Discussion focused on Martin's most recent paper in implications of COVID19 which had been circulated.

Duncan Bowie noted this raised issues about densification, residential and employment location, public transport capacity and viability and the case for a more polycentric approach to development in contrast to the current compact city focus. Penelope Tollitt said that there would be no return to normal and that we needed to plan for the likelihood of future pandemics. Tim Marshall noted that our understanding of impacts of COVID19 was still evolving and suggested the group had a fuller discussion on spatial geographies at its next meeting, noting that there were short and medium term timescales. We also needed to consider the forthcoming National Infrastructure Strategy. Judith Ryser (INURA) was interested in the evidence behind Martin's argument and offered to circulate a paper she was writing on COVID19 implications for planning. There were implications for the economy of central London, inter-sectional effects and changes in people's behaviour.

Peter Eversden noted the new focus on local shopping. However recent changes to the Use Classes Order limited the ability of planning authorities to protect local shops – special planning zones for town centres could be helpful if they allowed more control of the use of premises

Vincent Goodstadt suggested changes in spatial economic geography needed discussion. There had already been changes in supply chains pre COVID19. There was a case for increasing the domestic manufacturing base to reduce international dependency. Chris Tunnell questioned whether was a structural shift. Nick Falk argued that a change in the taxation system, including local taxation, was critical to economic recovery.

7. Matters outstanding from last meeting.

Agreed to defer discussion of planning of waste

8. Updates from members

Vincent Goodstadt referred to publication of a further UK2070 Report – *Go Big, Go Local* - and to publication of various papers. Commission focus was now on delivery.

<http://uk2070.org.uk/publications/>

Nick Falk referred to a new URBED report on the Oxford METRO region.

9. Next meeting

Agreed 17 November at 11am

Spatial geographies and post COVID19 planning
National Infrastructure Strategy
Economic Recovery in Wider South East

