

# Planning for the Future and other changes, including Government White Paper reforms

Account of Forum Zoom Meeting on 7th September 2020: Greater London 2020-45  
Full minute by Drummond Robson at [planninginlondon.com](https://planninginlondon.com) > LP&DF

Minutes of the meeting held as a zoom session on Monday 7th September 2020 between 2.30pm and 5.00pm (BST) Brian Waters acted as convener in Spain.

## Introductions and Apologies.

Apologies were given by Riette Oosthuizen, Brian Whiteley, Max Farrell, Andy Rogers and Hugh Ellis.

## DISCUSSION TOPICS on the agenda:

a Planning for the Future and other changes including Government White Paper Reforms. The consequences of Zoning for Planning. Simon Ricketts (Partner, Town Legal) has confirmed his attendance to introduce the item.

Michael Edwards (Hon Prof, Bartlett School of Planning, at UCL and his colleagues, notably Ben Clifford) also provided contrast to the government's proposals as a compendium of quick reactions from a dozen university planners in a paper entitled "The wrong answers to the wrong questions".

b The London Plan Reviewed. See Rethinking The

Planning System for the 21st Century by Jack Airey and Chris Doughty of The Policy Exchange.

A Policy Exchange representative has been invited but no-one was available. Their report A Planning System for the 21st Century with its advocacy of Zoning is nevertheless finding favour in government and will form part of wide ranging reforms. Its vivid cover of dense urban development is certainly unmistakable, (though I wouldn't want anyone to live or work there, certainly post COVID DR):

One of its key tenets is that "Land should be zoned either as development land where there is a presumption in favour of new development, or non-development land, where there is not a presumption and minor development is only possible in more restricted circumstances. Land zoned as development land will include existing urban areas and urban extensions made possible by improved infrastructure."

c Reconsidered purposes of the High Street following the Pandemic

d Launch of Suburban Task Force introduced by Jonathan Manns and Dimitrios Panayotopoulos.

e Account of the Lockdown Meeting held on

Monday 1st June 2020, Chaired by Brian Waters and set out in PiL on July 12th.

f Expected Next Meeting planning update seminar hosted by Dentons and administered by the Cambridge University Land Society on 2nd December 2020 starting at 2 pm.

Brian Waters welcomed participants saying that there had been a Tsunami of papers from government associated with the White Paper reforms – some appearing to be disconnected in their present form.

He introduced **Simon Ricketts, Partner at planning law firm, Town Legal LLP** who has provided clear interpretations and assessments of the proposed changes and has given advice at Webinars organised by Landmark Chambers. He introduced the topic for discussion.

*See also <https://simonicity.com/2020/08/07/for-the-future/> from which the following is an extract:*

The Government "proposes a revised standard method for calculating local housing need which will be used as the basis for plans created prior to any changes outlined in Planning for the Future

## Meeting held on Monday 7th September 2020 on Zoom

Brian Waters (Chairman)

Alix De Nercy: Deloitte's Manager FA Real Estate

Ben Clifford: UCL

Dimitrios Panayotopoulos: UCL

Duncan Bowie:

Ian Butcher:

Janice Morphet: UCL

Jessica Ferm: UCL

Judith Ryser: Ugb/Cityscope Europe

Karen McCormick: Senior Development Manager at U+I

Lisa Fairmaner: Head of London Plan GLA

Mark Willingale:

Michael Bach:

Michael Coupe

Michael Edwards: UCL

Nick Belsten: WSP Professional Services

Nigel Bidwell:

Nigel Abbott: UCL

Paul Finch: Editorial Director of AJ and AR and jt publishing editor of Planning in London

Peter Eversden: London Forum

Ron Heath: Living Architects

Sarah Bevan: London First

Simon Ricketts:

Stefanos Koryzis:

Tim Wachter: RICS

Drummond Robson: Honorary Secretary



being introduced.”

There will be two steps:

Step 1 – the “baseline for the standard method should be whichever is the higher of 0.5% of existing housing stock in each local authority OR the latest projected average annual household growth over a 10-year period”

“The household projections element of the baseline will use the latest ONS national household growth projections for the local authority area (Principal projection, table 406). The projected average annual household growth over a 10-year period (10 consecutive years, with the current year being used as the starting point from which to calculate growth over that period) will be used.”

Step 2 – “We propose the standard method will include two adjustments to the baseline using the workplace-based median house price to median earnings ratio. Initially it is proposed that

the ratio for the most recent year for which data is available in order to address current affordability of homes would be used. Then how affordability has changed over the last 10 years of published data would be incorporated, using that same statistic.” The precise formula is reproduced below

The Government proposes the following transitional arrangements: “from the publication date of the revised guidance, authorities which are already at the second stage of the strategic plan consultation process (Regulation 19) are given 6 months to submit their plan to the Planning Inspectorate for examination. Authorities close to publishing their second stage consultation (Regulation 19), should be given 3 months from the publication date of the revised guidance to publish their Regulation 19 plan and a further 6 months to submit their plan to the Planning Inspectorate.”

Simon Ricketts explained that it was one

month and one day since MHCLG issued the White Paper and the shortened version which contains the measures to calculate housing need figures. These will be set by government rather than determined locally. (Lichfields have made an assessment of implications of using the formula set out above). Other papers are also being issued providing a diversity of disparate measures aimed at rewriting the planning application process.

Three new key land categories are proposed as set out in the White Paper.

- Land suitable for growth will be approved for development at the same time that plans are prepared, meaning new homes, schools, shops and business space can be built quickly and efficiently, as long as local design standards are met.
- Renewal areas will enable much quicker development where it is well-designed in a way which reflects community preferences.
- Development on Green Belt land will continue

*Adjustment Factor*

$$= \left[ \left( \left( \frac{\text{Local affordability ratio}_{t=0} - 4}{4} \right) \times 0.25 \right) + \left( \left( \text{Local affordability ratio}_{t=0} - \text{Local affordability ratio}_{t=-10} \right) \times 0.25 \right) \right] + 1$$

Where  $t = 0$  is current year and  $t = -10$  is 10 years back.

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to be restricted as it is now with policy remaining a decision for local authorities as they prepare their plans.

Simon summarised this succinctly as:

Growth Areas  
Renewal Areas  
Protected Areas

He queried how these will be made to work in practice assuming consultation is required during concurrent local plan making, with comments on the White Paper by 29th October and the short term measures paper by 1st October.

The housing assessment by Lichfields for London is set out below in plan RIGHT and tabular form on the next page.

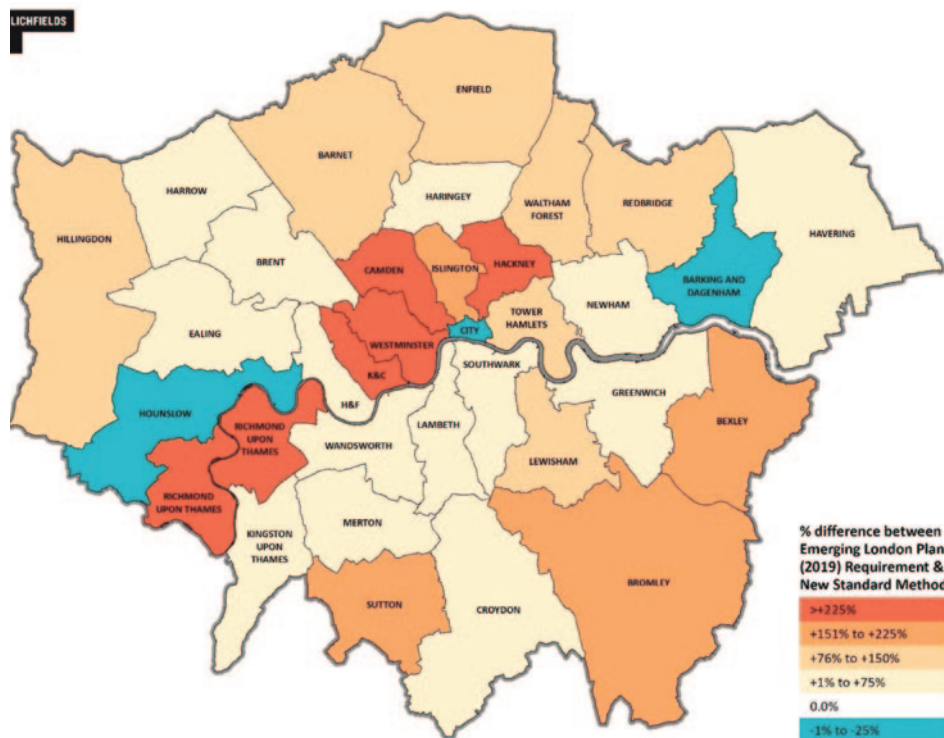
Local authorities are being required to prepare new local plans too, and to tight timetables, namely 30 months from start to finish, abolishing soundness and duty to co-operate in favour of a sustainable development test (however defined).

(Though not mentioned by Simon, if that were not enough the government commissioned PwC, also in August, to evaluate the importance of scale for the reform of local government reorganisation presaging the White Paper on Devolution and perhaps resulting in merging county and district councils to create unitary authorities with obvious cost benefits).

Simon also referred to digitisation, availability of data, and tying in the conclusions of building better using design codes and technical and local plan details in each of the newly zoned areas.

Infrastructure with replacement of the current community infrastructure levy (CIL) and s.106 system to result in the combined infrastructure levy. He explained that this meant contributions to affordable housing from a national levy based on value at the time of permission being granted, but payable before occupation.

There is no guidance on how the London Plan is supposed to fit into the White Paper (although Lichfields housing assessment perhaps offers some clues).



DR asked when the local plans should be completed by. Simon explained that it should be by the end of this Parliament which is May 2024 so legislation needs to be enacted by September 2021 to enable this to happen, hence a bill early in 2021 in Parliament.

Brian Waters thanked Simon for his clear summary and invited Simon's to be followed by **Ben Clifford of UCL**. Ben referred to the TCPA's *The Wrong Answers to the Wrong Questions* (which included many academics' reviews including those by **Michael Edwards** and himself). See <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=f53db0a4-b78d-4898-80e4-647080dad84b>

Ben Clifford was very critical of the White Paper and the short term measures paper and very questioning of many of its tenets. He specifically cited the protection of Green belt which would do nothing to relieve housing pressures on London. He preferred to defer to Michael Edwards who invited closer consideration of the *Wrong Answers to the Wrong Questions* criticisms. He encouraged everyone to read the papers.

He cast doubt on the rationale that not

enough housing was being built because of delays in the planning system. He thought that lack of supply was not the main or only drag on the system, and did not justify turning to a zoning methodology, simple or not. However the detail of this is yet to be discerned. Michael asked who should write the zoning definitions given that urban development is complex. He pointed up that evidence from other zoning systems that these don't normally make quicker or simpler decision making. (Ben Clifford made the related concern of pattern book design being facilitated by zoning).

Michael considered that merging CIL and s.106 agreement finance, based on a national rate of charge, would do nothing to ease spatial inequalities (GDV yielding more in SE and little elsewhere) and would be likely to result in less money for affordable housing. First Home will have to be met as a priority from the combined fund.

He added that the public expressions of concern are usually made much later than the front loading of consultation proposed will allow. *[But development can't be planned on the basis of being delayed simply to satisfy later concerns, can it? It's like complaining about a grocery delivery because*

LPA	Current LP Requirement	Average delivery (last 3 years)	Emerging London Plan (2019) Requirement	Current Standard Method	Proposed new Standard Method	Diff Between SM	% Diff between SM	Diff Between new SM & LP (19)	% Diff Between new SM & LP (19)
Barking and Dagenham	1,236	638	1,944	1,730	1,657	-73	0	-287	-15%
Barnet	2,349	2,072	2,364	3,289	5,744	2,455	1	3,380	143%
Bexley	446	509	685	624	1,797	1,172	2	1,112	162%
Brent	1,525	1,266	2,325	2,135	2,695	560	0	370	16%
Bromley	641	707	774	897	2,487	1,590	2	1,713	221%
Camden	1,120	993	1,038	1,568	5,604	4,036	3	4,566	440%
City of London	141	67	146	114	116	3	0	-30	-20%
Croydon	1,649	2,167	2,079	2,309	2,205	-104	0	126	6%
Ealing	1,297	1,352	2,157	1,816	2,247	432	0	90	4%
Enfield	798	595	1,246	1,117	2,213	1,095	1	967	78%
Greenwich	2,685	1,932	2,824	3,265	4,289	1,024	0	1,465	52%
Hackney	1,330	1,328	1,328	1,862	5,031	3,169	2	3,703	279%
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,031	1,184	1,609	1,286	2,289	1,004	1	680	42%
Haringey	1,320	836	1,592	1,848	2,786	938	1	1,194	75%
Harrow	593	862	802	830	1,336	506	1	534	67%
Havering	1,170	395	1,285	1,638	1,975	337	0	690	54%
Hillingdon	559	854	1,083	783	2,026	1,243	2	943	87%
Hounslow	822	857	1,782	1,151	1,338	187	0	-444	-25%
Islington	1,264	652	775	1,770	2,218	448	0	1,443	186%
Kensington and Chelsea	733	268	448	998	3,285	2,287	2	2,837	633%
Kingston upon Thames	642	330	964	899	1,526	628	1	562	58%
Lambeth	1,559	1,299	1,335	2,183	2,341	158	0	1,006	75%
Lewisham	1,385	1,253	1,667	1,939	3,735	1,796	1	2,068	124%
Merton	411	452	918	575	1,333	757	1	415	45%
Newham	2,867	2,243	3,280	3,616	3,644	28	0	364	11%
Redbridge	1,123	660	1,409	1,572	3,084	1,512	1	1,675	119%
Richmond upon Thames	315	423	411	441	2,247	1,806	4	1,836	447%
Southwark	2,736	2,146	2,355	3,299	3,547	248	0	1,192	51%
Sutton	427	642	469	598	1,233	635	1	764	163%
Tower Hamlets	3,931	2,785	3,473	4,585	6,121	1,536	0	2,648	76%
Waltham Forest	862	786	1,264	1,207	2,574	1,368	1	1,310	104%
Wandsworth	1,847	2,165	1,950	2,586	3,059	473	0	1,109	57%
Westminster	1,068	1,096	985	1,495	5,750	4,254	3	4,765	484%
<b>Total (London)</b>	<b>41,882</b>	<b>35,815</b>	<b>48,766</b>	<b>56,023</b>	<b>93,532</b>	<b>37,509</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>44,766</b>	<b>92%</b>

*the grocer's selection has earlier use by dates than you would like – you can't have it all! – DR.]*

Michael concluded that most people now have access to online data and resources which could help if used well for planning but about 15 million have no or very limited access and must not be excluded.

Brian Waters acknowledged the many uncertainties at the current stage of White Paper exploration but said that this was something for us each to influence in different ways as more is revealed.

Brian then invited **Karen McCormick Senior Development Manager at U+I** for a high level developer perspective on "all this".

Karen spoke of the large mixed use develop-

ments of their business which dominate their portfolio. Even though they have site specific allocations it still takes a long time to work through the detail of a scheme with a Council. Looking at the White Paper the Company's interest is in whether it will speed up the process of Masterplans in spite of the large consultant teams spending millions of pounds getting the detail right. Whether the new processes will assist remains uncertain as yet. Jonathan Manns concurred with this and wondered how the White Paper will affect London. Perhaps no change? (Duncan Bowie indicated disagreement with this). Picking up from Michael Bach Jonathan wondered if Housing numbers might be "smudged" across London giving anxieties about the future charac-

ter of places, notably in Outer London – and which Dimitrios Panayotopoulos plans to study.

Duncan Bowie suggested that the intended new authorities both inside and outside London will be impacted by the proposals just as much as elsewhere, certainly implying significant change to the Capital. He thought a particular weakness of the proposals is to provide new accommodation where capacity is currently limited and where infrastructure affects a larger number of areas. He doubted whether the White Paper, having removed the duty to co-operate, will provide any mechanism for inter authority co-operation, irrespective of size. The Devolution White Paper may assume that all local authorities become a unitary authority with strategic planning powers, though >>>

>>> not necessarily dealing with some of the strategic powers which currently concern us.

**Michael Bach** was concerned with Housing need, not in a demographic sense - for London – the 93,000 of the 300,000 – which is far more than any other target we have ever had. This has no relation to the capacity for London to provide that. Lichfields data indicates that some Boroughs will have huge targets which are impossible to meet. No-one has a distribution or redistribution role to overcome this problem.

Michael Bach also reiterated Michael Edwards concerns in relation to community engagement. He thought that neighbourhood planning was Cuckoo-land in London. People should continue to be able to tailor local plans to local communities and local circumstances.

**Mark Willingale** responded to Michael Edwards' last point, on the substantial growth of planning data sets, by noting how the planning reforms, accompanied by the new use classes orders, PD extensions and proposals for local government reorganisation, share an ambition to create open-access, interactive planning data sets supported by "PropTech", a term found peppered throughout the WP. A standardised, rules-based, 3D digital planning data set for each LPA would enable the formation of a 3D digital planning data



The White Paper "pillar 3" building beautiful sustainable places has within it a number of images which are presumably intended as expressions of good design, but perhaps beauty may also be in the eye of the beholder and are these places we should want to live in? A selection follows

model for the whole of England that everyone could share and refer to. (The MoD is using a similar system for a war games program). The ambition promises a much more accessible and democratic process than the current system. Brian sought to reconcile this high level thinking with the practical aspiration of "Build, build and build".

*Defra's <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/> is exactly the kind of open-access, rules-based, interactive mapping technology that is behind the ambition of the planning reforms. It is available to everyone. It contains nothing, absolutely nothing, however about the Green Belt since this has no con-*

ceivable definition.

Brian then invited **Lisa Fairmaner, Head of the London Plan** to say how this was being seen in the GLA, and the aims to try and get a London Plan adopted before the next National election. Lisa spoke of the need for certainty, in spite of some necessary delay. 24th December 2019 GLA request has taken until 13th March 2020 for a Direction but in September 2020 we still do not have an agreed Plan. Holding up a decision on 93,000 homes – a large proportion of the national total – is causing delay not just in London but much of England.

She believes there is some reference in the documents for London still to have a role in the allocation of targets. Chris Pincher made reference to local authorities applying the identified constraints, even though it is expected that the government will issue binding government targets. Raising affordable housing thresholds to 40 or 50 would be horrendous for London where many sites are smaller than that. GLA would expect growth in poorer areas – 15 minute cities with people living their lives more locally. She feared growth of inequalities in London. She was concerned too about problems arising from new zoning ideas, having regard to her own experience of using zoning which could lead to mismatches between the rules and what developers want to do.

**Nick Belsten** thought that the Mayor would be given responsibility to allocate targets in London but that local authorities lack the resources and skills to fulfil this role. He also





thought that cpo powers would be needed for adequate land assembly to achieve White Paper aspirations, and that again the skills are lacking to deliver the prospective growth areas. He thought that local minority groups which are currently ignored will need to have a wider role in consultation and engagement, going well beyond the technological solutions suggested.

**Duncan Bowie**, endorsing Nick Belsten's view of cpo said that local authorities will need powers to acquire at existing use value. He thought that SHLAAs will be needed on a City Region basis and queried the value to the proposed algorithm to assess housing need. He also considered that a review of Green Belt is absolutely essential for the whole region in considering housing capacity.

**Peter Eversden** repeated criticism of housing need numbers and referred to the MHCLG writing to the Mayor in March seeking a joint review with the wider south east. He elaborated with other criticisms of the irreconcilability of the proposals and policy.

**Judith Ryser** asked what purpose the London Plan was supposed to fulfil and the purpose of a two tier system. This provocative question invited a wide range of responses. Mark Willingale however responded as a professional saying that frequently the planners ask him to tell them what the megabytes of data which the authority has asked for mean in terms of their policies! He concludes that the system has

failed in terms of overload of information. He suggested that the new unitary authorities should provide a new data model based on the data model they already have, so that the decision becomes more self evident. He suggested that the London Plan has no role in this and would just disappear.

DR asked why we are all so very good at criticising the various plans that are proposed and yet we have a very large range of extraordinary people in this zoom session who are very capable in suggesting what should be done rather than spending all our time criticising what is not being done. Instead we have sophistications in skills we ought to be using. It is what we are capable of providing.

**Michael Edwards** supported this case, as the academics' report backs up. Brian Waters followed this by inviting people to read Michael Edwards precis in the next PiL and saying there should be more emphasis in visionary planning and less on development management – engage more in plan making and less of the NIMBY attitude of trying to stop housing being built. Instead people need to be encouraged to engage at the planmaking or zoning stage.

Interestingly Peter Eversden interposed in this to say, not what he was doing, but his interpretation of what Ealing, Hounslow and other policy making Councils were doing with large numbers of policies – thus acting as policy amplifier and interpreter to a wider public rather than being concerned with the plan itself and making it work.

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>>> **Paul Finch** said that the tone of much of the present meeting explains why the government has introduced the White Paper. You can't use the technology because it doesn't work and wipes out what people can actually see in what is proposed for their areas, drawings they can understand with 3D models. He considered that the White Paper is the most radical reform since 1947 and also the Community Land Act 1975 were trying to do. These defined where we should actually be building – in other words it is plan led: actually have to have a plan. The next objection is that you cannot produce a plan in that amount of time because you need environmental assessments etc. – you can't do this, you can't do that, whereas in fact of course you can. It is what people around this table should do to make this happen using the huge opportunities which are possible. He urged moving away from a party of gloomsters.

He therefore supported the radical measures which are exactly what is being proposed.

Brian Waters at this point suggested that we should turn to two subsequent items, (passing over the London Plan already considered) since both will have effects on the lasting impacts of the pandemic on spatial planning in the suburbs (Town centres and High Streets) and where people gather. This has been succinctly expressed (by Philip Aldrick Economics Editor of *The Times* and *Sunday Times*) as

**“off line to on-line, office to home, mass business to zoom, central to local, efficiency to resilience”**

BW asked **Jonathan Manns** and then fleshed out by **Dimitrios Panayotopoulos** “what is the Suburban

Task Force?” Jonathan explained that it was voted on by a cross party group of MPs in March 2020 since suburbs have become a hot topic: The Red Wall has become the Blue Wall, suburbs have been neglected. It is where many of us live and so require more considered appraisal – character, challenges and opportunities etc. both quantitative and qualitative. (Also in answer to a later question by Jessica Ferm) It raised was prior to the pandemic. It is currently making a call for evidence, with a view to publication midway through 2021. It is been largely led by UCL and **Dr Lucy Natarajan**.

Michael Edwards offered the reference to a report Peter Hall. Drummond Robson and he wrote in 1999 just before the formation of the GLA: *London's Spatial Economy: the dynamics of change London*, London Development Partnership (LDP) and Royal Town Planning Institute. Eprint





free at <http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/1369585/>

This led in practice in the Overground.

Jonathan and Brian invited Dimitrios Panayotopoulos to speak with a slide presentation of *Towards a Suburban Renaissance*. He may be contacted at [d.panayotopoulos@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:d.panayotopoulos@ucl.ac.uk) / [@dimitris\\_pan](https://twitter.com/dimitris_pan)

An Inquiry into the Future of the Suburbs. This was set out as a largely methodological catalogue of what the group intends to do and so it is premature as responding to the questions of the previous intense debate.

Brian Waters and Peter Eversden also raised the seven year work of the Outer London Commission which the present administration did not want to pursue. Also the July-September 2020 edition of PiL – issue 114 - is also very relevant in our present context.

Dimitrios as a final comment said that the issue of scale should be made more prominent.

The goals and aims of the research are

- 1 To unpack the nature of socio-economic activity in the suburbs.
- 2 To illustrate the potential differences between suburban areas and those which are either more central or more rural.
- 3 To identify policy mechanisms and interventions which may assist in supporting the long-

term sustainability of suburban areas.

Phasing

Phase One is intended to establish key considerations. It will focus specifically on the Outer Boroughs of London.

Phase Two is intended to expand upon initial conclusions and assess whether it is possible to expand the geographic focus of the research

Key considerations and questions

- 1 The Nature of Suburbs
- 2 The Circumstances facing Suburbs
- 3 The Policy Framework

### 1. The Nature of Suburbs

What are the unique characteristics of suburban areas?

How might we define suburban areas, and differentiate them from urban / rural areas, in terms of their social, environmental, economic, and other dimensions?

### 2. The Circumstances Facing Suburbs

What unique challenges and opportunities face suburban areas?

What are the concerns and aspirations of suburban communities for their places?

Are there any dimensions of spatial equality, which are unique, or of particular relevance to

suburban areas?

How might the nature of suburbs affect issues of social, environmental, economic, or other types of disadvantage?

### 3. The Policy Framework

What are the governance implications arising from these challenges and opportunities?

How can policies, policy-thinking, or policy networks adapt to the needs and goals of suburbs?

What existing policies or policy 'silences' have the most significant impact on the suburbs?

What new policy reforms or new policy initiatives could be deployed?

### Call for Evidence

Aim to compile a dataset that allow us to reflect on the existing relations between selected suburbs and London.

Socio-economic characteristics

Transport

The commercial link between suburbs and London

Spatial characteristics

Environmental characteristics

Investment and development patterns and history

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>>> Plus Open Questions.

Summarising the meeting Brian emphasised the need to embrace the need for change. He reminded us of the information lists produced by Arups as checklists of what should be provided as part of all planning applications.


Government said that local authorities would use only what they need, but since this discretion has been ignored, using the fear of judicial review as the pretext so requiring lorry loads of (digital) reports, hundreds of consultants and huge expense to the applicant.

PiP will become the new outline planning application as a counter to this. He also invited more consideration of the value of time as part of the planning process.

Next meeting is planned for 2nd December at Dentons and will be administrated by the Cambridge University Land Society (CULS), either face to face or on zoom or both. The agenda is likely to flow from White Paper outcomes but much can change in the interim. SEE back cover for details of how to book.

It replaces the annual planning update event postponed from March – flyer BELOW.









**Cambridge University Land Society**

**Annual Planning Update**  
 Wednesday 18th March 2020  
 Hosted by Dentons at One Fleet Place London EC4M 7RA  
 1.30 FOR 2.00pm followed by drinks

- **The White Paper**
- **Beauty and planning**
- **The London Plan**



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# In short, let planners free!

## The Forum discussion provoked Paul Finch to write this postscript

I neither expected nor intended to be the last speaker in what was a fascinating discussion about the White Paper, particularly in respect of the implications for the London Plan, which I must say I had not previously thought as being threatened. One to watch.

I agreed with many of the points made in the discussion; I have some serious criticisms of the WP in respect of its genuflection to the BBBBC's notions about aesthetics – they cannot define 'beauty' in planning terms, which is a problem to put it mildly.

However, as a very occasional attendee at Forum discussions, my observation was that the overarching tone is one of relentless negativity. It is rather as though the Forum reviews any proposal rather like a planning committee which has fallen prey to the idea that is there to promote development control.

What I like about the White Paper is that it takes planning seriously as a proactive and constructive activity, in respect of spatial development and the future of our towns and cities. What is wrong with trying to identify areas in each planning authority that are suitable for growth, reinforcement or protection? It requires the sort of thought and analysis which made British town planning the envy of much of the world before the system became a Sergeant Hodges 'you can't do that here' issuer of rationing coupons.

There has been no real attempt to address the issue of development land potential since the Community Land Act introduced by Anthony Crosland in the early 1970s. Although not properly thought through, the question it addressed is extant – and I believe the White Paper is tackling it head on. The motives of its proponents may well be different from those of Crosland et al, but they are the same issues.

### Three other strands presented during discussion seem worrying:

1 Technology is the enemy of democracy and communities. This strikes me as bizarre, and a reflection of the age of most forum representatives, even though they themselves are perfectly capable of deploying the tech. You posit a problem for people without technology, who you then assume will be the most active consultees (really?), and then condemn the bulk of the community to struggling with conventional drawings and zero data, even though it is readily available.

2 The fantasy that London cannot house itself within its own boundaries. This is a hangover from GLC days, including the Location of Offices Bureau, which had a death wish about the capital and advised anyone with any sense to leave it. We created overspill locations, compromising decent market towns like Ashford, as a result of a complete lack of confidence in London itself. As was subsequently proved by the repopulation

Paul Finch is editorial director of Architects' Journal and AR and joint publishing editor of Planning in London



of London from the late 1970s, we didn't have a problem at all. As the LSE's Tony Travers has pointed out, were we to develop out London (the developable bits that is, not everything), to the same density as Kensington & Chelsea, we could accommodate twice our current population. (No doubt the development control fraction will give a hundred reasons why this is impossible!) And as stated in the discussion, London has accommodated 2 million net incomers without expanding its boundaries in the last 25 years.

3 This of course would affect the suburbs, the second part of the discussion. After more than 50 years as part of London, some of the outer London boroughs (eg Bromley) are in denial about being part of London at all. In considering London-wide housing requirements, they absolutely are, whether they like it or not. The ridiculed target of 90k-plus new homes per year for London is far from ridiculous if you regard it as 3,000 homes per borough, most of which are the size of provincial towns. What is the problem? If the London Plan is to be believed, we need housing for an additional 1 million people over the next decade. One million divided by ten is . . .

My final general point relates to politics rather than spatial planning. I do not believe, along with probably all Forum members, that it is possible (or desirable) to generate the required level of affordable housing in London by relying on/penalising house-builders, a failed strategy under three mayors. It is an absurdity. London (sort of) housed itself for a century in a mixed-mode way, prior to government restrictions on public house-building in the early '80s. There is no reason why a public sector-led housing construction programme should not be re-introduced at scale, if the political class is prepared to support the idea.

Isn't it time to recognize that spatial planning and economic planning, while related, are not synonymous? Nor is spatial planning and the minutiae of environmental control, which should be left to people equipped to assess it.

In short, let planners free!

And in a best Michael Edwards sense, view problems and challenges in the round, always looking for desired outcomes rather than outputs. I feel that is the decent aspiration of the White Paper, despite some detailed drawbacks. ■