

Planning and delivery are related but not synonymous

Plans don't make things happen: they set the scene for real players to make proposals which can be delivered within the planning context created

Planning in London has been published and edited by Brian Waters, Lee Mallett and Paul Finch since 1992

Two speakers made the same point at the recent Cambridge University Land Society/ National Planning Forum planning conference: planning is not about writing documents, but about delivering necessary change. At first glance, this sounds a reasonable enough proposition. What is the point of planning if nothing subsequently happens?

There is a problem, however, in thinking that a plan as such involves delivery. Planners do not actually design things; they do not in general purchase land; they do not procure contracts; they do not oversee construction; nor are they responsible for who occupies the buildings and environments that may be created in the ways they envisaged. This is an observation, not a criticism. Architects and cost consultants are in the same boat: they may work on projects for ages and see them abandoned or replaced. They become involved in delivery as part of an overall team, but their core activities are about analysis and proposal, not actually building stuff.

Politicians, of course, like to pretend that the grand plans for which they are responsible are all about delivery. Sometimes they may be, where land is publicly owned and where the politician is able to fund what they want built on it. But in general this is not the case, as the example of the draft London Plan shows. There is no explanation as to who will in reality build all the houses envisaged, merely a belief expressed that the private sector will do everything possible to provide a sufficiency of numbers. As if by magic this will happen, complementing the activities of housing associations, and give us unprecedented numbers of additional units over the next two decades.

Nothing about construction capacity or materials supply. Nothing about where and how transformational prefabrication systems will come into being, or be given guaranteed production runs. Nothing about the shortage of skilled labour. Nothing about mortgage finance. (A cynic might describe the London Plan as little more than a wish list, based on the same mistaken belief, held by Mayors Livingstone and Johnson, that taxing housebuilders via Community Infrastructure Levy, Crossrail Levy and 40 per cent-plus 'affordable' targets will somehow generate more supply because they are such attractive incentives.) Nothing about a dirigiste public sector-led construction programme, even though Mayor Khan has sites, planning powers, compulsory purchase powers, and a big chunk of taxpayer money to get things moving. So where is the delivery plan?

One might ask the same questions of the proposed amendments to the pretty robust National Planning Policy Framework. By definition this is a strategic document: that is to say it deals with what and why, not how and when. This is quite proper and understandable, but some are describing the 'new improved' version as a magic wand which will make things happen. Plans don't make things happen: they set the scene for real players to make proposals which can be delivered within the planning context created, whether positive or negative. Good plans enable, bad plans merely create hurdles to necessary construction. Exhortation is not the same thing as starts on site. ■

>>>

Calling for the 'Golden Thread'

Our planning system has to become robust in seeing that what is built is what was permitted. This means bringing Building Regulations approvals closer to planning approvals and retaining the original designers

The Grenfell Tower fire has demonstrated that the current procurement system for consultants and contractors does not generate best safety, value or quality because of a universal focus on capital cost. The construction industry is now in agreement that this focus is flawed and must be fundamentally changed.

A number of issues have been raised by the *Hackitt Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety*. One broad area of change we can expect is in clarifying roles and responsibilities for ensuring that buildings are safe. As Judith Hackitt says in her interim report:

"There needs to be a golden thread for all complex and high-risk building projects so that the original design intent is preserved and recorded, and...any changes go through a formal review process involving people who are competent and who understand the key features of the design."

What is also now being questioned is the relevant skill and competence of those who carry out the procurement. They need to consider whether the project contracts encourage the 'Golden Thread' – are the chosen forms of contract appropriate for the nature of the project: are they adversarial or collaborative, do they encourage social value as well as economy and innovation? In future, it would seem the procurement process must integrate the security of this thread from design commencement to construction completion and thereafter in occupation.

So what else should a robust and effective procurement process achieve? To begin with, the process needs to ensure the required performance. This puts performance specification in doubt when used as a means of saving on consultants' fees because it often results in specialist contractors' design development not being adequately and independently checked for compliance. It's likely there will be a drive to raise levels of competence for design development and to enforce this through both planning and building regulation.

It may become a requirement for Building Regulations approval to be achieved before commencing site work on each element (despite the current move against pre-commencement planning conditions). This will need to be set out at the project procurement stage along with adherence to approved designs and discouragement of change during construction. Procurers will need to ensure that design changes are referred back to the original design team for acceptability of every proposed change.

Under this improved form of procurement, handover should only occur when all 'life safety' systems are complete and to ensure this, procurement will need to more clearly define 'completion' and appoint an individual or organisation with professional independence from the contractor to certify completion. This is the key to achieving the 'Golden Thread'. On traditional contracts it is the role of the architect. One consequence of the Grenfell disaster, the end of PFI and the collapse of Carillion should be to re-establish this role for all contracts however large.

To fix the failures of lowest-cost methods of procurement, the industry will have to mandate adequate quality control by all parties as part of the procurement process. This will have to be built in from the outset. ■

Acknowledgement:
Richard Harrison, Immediate
Past President of the
Association of Consultant
Architects/AJ