

# New growth outside London and the NPPF and the boroughs

Hon. Secretary Drummond Robson minuted the September Forum which discussed new towns and new growth outside London and the impact of the NPPF on Borough Plans.

Full illustrated minutes at [planninginlondon.com](http://planninginlondon.com) >LP&DF

## New Towns and New Growth Outside London

**Andy von Bradsky** entitled his introduction new housing growth outside London. He contrasted the situation with London which is investment led as a separate market to UK, continued buoyancy relative to rest of UK. House prices continue to rise, 10 per cent above the 2007 peak.

Outside of London – improvements in the market on a year ago but patchy, location sensitive, house prices on average 5 per cent below peak. Savills reporting a ripple effect of house price growth outside London.

He gave a market view of the situation. It is characterised by

- Slow recovery with a slow rate of building
- Issues of Viability
- Location sensitive – A2 vs A3: A2 offering low value but high growth potential and A3 offering the opposite.
- Providing predominantly for a niche of Equity rich customers
- Typologies – flats and houses
- Rate of Sale
- Housebuilder drivers – margins
- AvB saw planning as a maze with little that is straightforward.

Examples of active areas – all private sector led – currently include Aylesbury, Buckingham, Bicester and Cambridge (Northstowe South East, South, North West and Clay Farm). He asked if Harlow would be next. Work is more at the margins than delivery of high volumes of new accommodation.

Politics in London is different to Home Counties with greater voter turn out in the latter so planning and politics intertwine to a greater degree. London has a strategic plan – Home Counties do not, so issues are dealt with Council by Council. He saw no great change yet due to NPPF – more appeals (in favour of NPPF), upheaval of the planning system has impacted on speed of determination. Neighbourhood planning:

- Plans are being prepared to counter new development (Tony Pidgley of Berkeley Homes).
- Local Plans being either written or recycling existing Core Strategies leading to the cut off date of March 2013 when challenges to out of date plans

are to be expected. Former Growth Areas that straddle political boundaries eg Bedfordshire and Luton – the latter disagreeing with the old strategy and the former being happy with it. We are yet to see impact of New Homes Bonus to motivate Councils.

- Eco-towns have mostly stalled. Bicester has seen a watering down of standards.
- Providing employment uses and work spaces within homes. Layouts for solar access.
- Achieving an optimum social mix.

Section 106 / CIL working together challenge viability. Affordable Housing threshold requirement dropping from 15 to surplus of one unit affects viability. Affordable housing obligations being compromised so shortage of social housing. The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) is private sector led using HCA land, government land, defence and health. AvB was concerned that infrastructure costs cannot be carried by schemes.

Greenbelt contention – much greenbelt land is former agricultural land of little value or brown-field. Here at present politics and planning do not align. Progress on urban extensions is slow although it is interesting that Ebbsfleet seems to be proceeding.

Availability of land is the other constraint on development (setting aside development finance and mortgage availability).

He queried the role of PFI or PPP in kick starting large scale development on public land.

Summarising prospects AvB, focusing on the need for volume, asked: "how can we kick start large scale development?" What are the barriers and challenges? Will Garden Cities work? Do we need a new generation of New Towns? NPPF refers to 'locally supported large scale development' based on Garden City principles.

He thought garden suburbs were better precedents than Garden Cities. Bedford Park and Hampstead Garden Suburb are better precedents. Extensions to existing conurbations rather than stand alone developments.

Critical is where these should be sited and the associated planning issues which surround this. There are Challenges for delivery in terms of vision, leadership and governance, financing social and

physical infrastructure and achieving a balanced community.

He referred to the TCPA publication with Crest Nicholson and Lady Margaret Patterson Osborne Trust "Creating Garden Cities and Suburbs today"

**Duncan Bowie** who had provided the Comments by the Highbury group on housing delivery on issues raised in the TCPA Report: spoke of the issues he thought should be followed up, substantially reprising the Highbury Group case. (The group comprises some 30-40 academics including DB who have written some 30 policy papers). He contrasted today's issues with those confronting Howard and Unwin with what he saw as different government and labour concerns.

The Highbury Group's conclusions are noted in the full minutes. **Sir Peter Hall** responded, saying he was not a member of TCPA but an endorser of creating garden cities and garden suburbs. His case was entitled "The Garden City: Enduring Vision, Alternative Interpretations – Response to the Highbury Group".

He began by outlining what Howard's vision in fact was which appears to have been partly lost. It was not for low densities but for settlements of some 30,000 at an average of 90ppa. or 60 to the hectare, not the 30 attributed to his proposals. Also the garden cities were designed as an integrated group with an intermunicipal railway/light rail. This evolved into the Milton Keynes settlement for 250,000. It could be extended without limit. Hertfordshire models of his social city were towns set against a backdrop of open country.

There is no land value problem. The whole venture paid for itself, borrowing from a capitalist. This is described in Howard's thesis as "the Vanishing Landlord's Rent".

Between 1903 and 1907 Letchworth and Hampstead Garden Suburb were realised although the first suburb was Brentham in the Brent Valley. <http://www.brentham.com/>

These ideas were extended by Sir Patrick Abercrombie in the Greater London and County of London Plans of 1943-4 with a second generation of New Towns in the 1960s (e.g. Milton Keynes, Northampton and Peterborough – an urban extension to an existing City). New towns as clusters fol-



lowed with Leyland/Chorley and growth at Canterbury and Ashford as described by Hall and Ward in 1998. Mercia, Anglian and Kent sustainable models followed in 2003. Reconcentration has taken place in Aylesbury.

The models are clusters of small garden cities with good transit systems or large scale urban extensions.

Best continental practice in Europe may be found at Freiburg in SW Germany – a compact dense and lively city of 200,000. It has a good tram and bus system. The Vauban Quarter was built on the site of a former French army barracks by the occupying community in collaboration with the Council. It consists of single access houses rather than apartments and avoids town cramming. All houses are built to a low energy consumption standard.

The second example is Ybenburg, a satellite of The Hague (*above*), where 455,000 houses have been built over the last 10 years. It too is well con-

nected by an orbital system around the Randstad.

Sir Peter asked rhetorically whether this was a Garden City, urban extension or larger compact social city to which the answer is all three, with imaginative use of water. From this he concluded that we do not have to be tied to a particular typology of form but to respond to the appropriate geographical pattern.

## Discussion

**Drummond Robson** said that his recent experience at a Council Core Strategy Examination in Public suggested that none of the visionary ideas of professional planners seems to be offered by Council policymakers – especially in Districts neighbouring London. Instead we are offered protectionism, status quo and where possible no change. The green brown field stereotypes are applied.

Beyond this a clear weakness of Town and Country Planning following Howard (with social



cities filling the gaps between settlements with abattoirs and lunatic asylums), Unwin, Abercrombie and others is that we seem unable to plan for the Countryside, and far less for both Town and Country together. This was lost when the state planning system took over from planning by landed estates as highlighted by Abercrombie who said: "If the country has been humanly modelled and planned in the past, the need for a continuance of the practice is even more obvious today. The only real change is in the personnel that does the work: there are those that think it can still safely be left to the big landowners and their descendants, the little ones – but this is a fallacy that scarcely needs exploding: somebody with as wide or wider area of control than the great landowners must step in – either the State or the Local Authorities.

Of course, where great estates still exist there is nothing to prevent them – and indeed they should – prepare their estate plans and have them incorporated in the statutory schemes". (Sir Patrick Abercrombie *Town and Country Planning* 3rd Edition 1959. Part III Chapter II).

It will be interesting to see whether the alternative model he put forward as a Masterplan to that of the Council is properly considered or even mentioned by the Inspector examining the District's plan for its soundness.

**Patrick Clarke** was concerned that sustainable development was being replaced by a tunnel vision which concentrates almost entirely on housing numbers, rather than looking at proper land use planning solutions.

**Mike Kiely** said the London itself had the London Plan itself to rely on. There are no New Town Corporations here. Part of the problem is purchase by overseas buyers making it >>>

## Attendance at the RIBA London on Monday 10th September 2012. Our host was Owen Wainhouse

Brian Waters: Chairman  
 Alastair Gaskin: Reagh Consulting and Honorary Treasurer  
 Andrew Rogers: Association of Consultant Architects  
 Andy von Bradsky: Chairman PRP Architects  
 Bob Dolata: Formerly LBs Hackney and Kingston upon Thames  
 Duncan Bowie: University of Westminster  
 Matthew Randall: LB Hackney  
 Martin Simmons: for TCPA  
 Martine Drodz: University of Lyon  
 Mike Kiely: CPO of LB Croydon and POS/ALBPO

Michael Bach: London Forum  
 Mike Coupe: London Society and Coupe Planning  
 Owen Wainhouse: RIBA  
 Patrick Clarke: URS  
 Sir Peter Hall: UCL  
 Ron Heath: RIBA  
 Tom Ball: London Forum  
 Drummond Robson: Honorary Secretary and Robson Planning.  
 Apologies were received from David Bradley, Emma Fitzgibbon, Ghislane Trahearne, Jennifer Peters, Jonathan Manns, Judith Ryser, Michael Chang, and Miranda Housden, ICE.



harder for younger age groups to afford the increasingly scarce property available.

Duncan Bowie added the burdens of tax measures, stamp duty, non domicile money, mansion tax to the list. It is estimated that the recession is reducing housing delivery in London by 15,000.

Sir Peter Hall said that the 2011 census showed an increase of over 1 million people in the last 10 years, nothing like it has happened in the last 10 years, yet where are they all?

**Brian Waters** wondered about a reversal from the declines in London's population, associated with the view that New Towns were bad for London in sucking people out. If there is a decline in London's population this could be irreversible. **Tom Ball** added that the government does not appear to recognise housing need in London.

Patrick Clarke said that even interwar growth was better than in the last 20 years. He wondered why.

Sir Peter Hall said that Richard Crossman (1964-6) had encouraged system building because of the huge problem that needed to be solved.

AvB was concerned that public/private sector partnerships were needed to provide large scale investment vehicles. The present policy appears to be to build to rent. Local authorities should play their land assets. A precondition of delivery however is adequate infrastructure and whether there is a sustainable infrastructure plan to meet the proposals for say a new town.

**Alastair Gaskin** and **Matthew Randall** said that Camden has recently published its assets worth billions of pounds. Hackney is leading the way on this by bringing in architects and planners to realise the opportunities from this. Haringey is also moving in this direction.

A general concern was expressed as "How to unblock the system". Brian Waters contrasted the demolition of the Aylesbury Estate with the survival of cheaper Laing Homes built at the same time.

**Michael Bach** was concerned that the government is receding from guidance and suggested that the last worthwhile strategic guidance for London came from LPAC.

Tom Ball recalled the value of Westminster Town Clerk's Parker Morris Standards which should be reintroduced. (*The London Plan* of July 2011 incorporates min. housing space standards – DR).

**Martin Simmons** returned to the need to grow beyond its boundaries with very different policy perspectives between London and the Home Counties, with a lack of dialogue between them, in spite of section 348 of the Greater London Act. DR added that the duty to co-operate with neighbouring authorities meaningfully is now a clear obligation under paragraph 178 of the NPPF. The GLA following the results of the census is con-

cerned that insufficient housing provision is being made relative to London's needs.

Duncan Bowie said there is a 3,000/year capacity shortage of dwellings in London.

**Brian Whiteley** said there was no realistic mechanism to engage with Counties outside London over matters relating to waste disposal for example. Who is one to consult with?

Patrick Clarke was concerned if planning is being conducted with little regard for the principles of character, layout and density of the existing environment.

The Leasehold Reform Act offers a serious obstacle to using private money. However this does not, as Sir Peter Hall said, apply in cases such as Hampstead Garden Suburb's Trust form of management.

#### National Planning Policy Framework

**Mike Kiely** introduced. He said the NPPF was closer to the previous framework and overall was in his terms business as usual. He said it helps being a succinct document. He thought the system now deters "cherry picking".

The NPPF is written to maintain the primacy of law. (Since it is a policy framework expressing new interpretations only with no changes to the law it can hardly be otherwise. DR).

The 12 core planning principles are welcomed as is the continuation of a plan led system. Decisions need to take account of the different character of different areas.

The presumption in favour of sustainable development is not new but a repeat of PPS3. The section on Design is welcome.

Housing policies, the economy and protection of open land need to be evidence based. Housing was supply based and is now needs based. The requirement to provide a 6 year (of 15) land supply is based on law not numbers. It has been identified to allow a buffer.

MK queried how to judge between a 5 per cent buffer of deliverable sites and the 20 per cent buffer for local authorities who have persistently delivered below their target, and thought this could be clearer. (paragraph 47). **Mike Coupe** reminded the Forum that the percentage related to completions, not starts and wondered how this would be measured. Windfalls may now be acknowledged.

In relation to industrial land, MK thought that it would be released. The change from B1-C3 would result in the more profitable housing use being preferred. Imposition of article 4 directions to circumvent this would result in a risk of compensation and so would encourage a "free for all".

In relation to Protection of Open Land MK asked how should one deal with institutional uses and he thought that PPG2 policies "could find

their way back". He thought the policy could be more selective given the myriad of local green spaces. He suggested restrictions on development of Private Open Space. Brian Waters wondered if this might be a weak policy but MK disagreed. The green space wording within settlements is quite strong (e.g. paragraph 76).

On procedure it is clear that authorities need to get their plans in place. MK was concerned about decisions going in favour of proposals where plan policies were absent, silent or out of date. Absent and out of date: yes. Silent: no.

The transition arrangements were MK thought a fuss about nothing.

Clarification of energy policies and their weight will be considered in relation to the soundness of core strategies.

There is now a sharper emphasis on viability and deliverability in planning for objectively assessed housing needs. MK commended the work of RICS on this.

The duty to co-operate between authorities (already mentioned above) is now made strong and more defined (paragraphs 178-181). MK asked what sanctions there would be if they did not. (In the case of Core Strategies the issue will be one of soundness).

#### Discussion

Michael Bach was concerned that NPPF "maintains the silos" and lacks a proper spatial dimension. London is largely resolved in relation to this but elsewhere this is not the case.

Top down planning will shake out those sites which are never going to happen. Paragraph 51 (residential use of empty property) is likely to result in the best going for housing and the worst staying empty. In Soho creative industries are at risk of being wiped out. MK said that the Croydon local plans offers safeguards on this.

Brian Waters wondered how controls operated in Europe. Sir Peter Hall said the methods varied widely from country to country but in general planning is more prescriptive (extensive use of zoning). In control of buildings however we are more prescriptive than many continental states.

In Florida the State manages the allocation of infrastructure and gives access to these resources only if you take up your building permit quickly. Otherwise you lose it.

#### Next Meeting

is to be held at Town and Country Planning Association, 17 Carlton House Terrace London SW1Y 5AS on Monday 10th December, 2.30 pm. Our Host will be Kate Henderson. ■