

Outer London Commission Minutes

Full Review of the London Plan

Croydon 22nd July 2015

Attendance:

OLC Members

Will Mckee	Chair	WM
Stephen Alambritis	Leader LB of Merton	SA
Steven Carr	Leader LB of Bromley	SCr
Tony Pidgley	Berkley Homes	TP
Peter Eversden	London Forum	PE
Ian Gordon	London School of Economics	IG
Corrine Swaine	Arup	CS
Lucinda Turner	TfL	LT
Keith Mitchell	Peter Brett Associates	KM

Non-OLC Members

Richard Linton	GLA	RL
Rachael Rooney	GLA	RR
Andrew Russell	GLA	AR
Ian Smith	South London Partnership	IS
Tara Bulter	LB of Merton	TB
Charlene Williams	LB of Merton	CW
Neil Milligan	LB of Merton	NM
Diana Sterck	Merton Chambers of Commerce	DS
Cllr Alison Butler	Leader LB of Croydon	Cllr AB
Jo Negrini	LB of Croydon	JN
Paul Scott	LB of Croydon	PSc
Pete Smith	LB of Croydon	PSm
Steve Dennington	LB of Croydon	SD
Beverley Nomafo	LB of Croydon	BN
Shelagh Hair	LB of Croydon	SH
Niall Bolger	LB of Sutton	NB
Eleanor Purser	LB of Sutton	EP
Mandy Skinner	LB of Richmond	MS
Paul Bradbury	LB of Richmond	PB
Joanne Capper	LB of Richmond	JC
Andrew Lynch	LB of Kingston	AL
Roy Thompson	LB of Kingston	RT
Viv Evans	LB of Kingston	VE
Darren Welsh	LB of Kingston	DW
Cllr David Cunningham	LB of Kingston	Cllr DC
Sue Morgan	Wandle Valley Regional Park	SM
Ian Parkes	Coast to Capital	IP
Toby Fox	3 Fox International Limited	TB
Mary Manuel	LB of Bromley	MM
David Goymour	Words for Business	DG
Lyondel Bell	Cheam Neighbourhood Development	LB

Bob Beaumont
Katherine Fletcher
David Jowsey

Affinity Sutton
Historic England
TfL

BB
KF
DJ

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Cllr Alison Bulter, Leader of Croydon then welcomed everyone to Croydon.

2. Growth Options and Barriers to Housing Delivery

JN (Croydon) presented the SLP presentation on Growth Options and RT (Kingston) presented the SLP presentation of Barriers to Housing Delivery – see attachment slides.

RR presented the OLC Presentation on Growth Options and Barriers to Housing Delivery – see attachment slides.

The floor was opened for discussion.

It was highlighted that both Gatwick and Heathrow will get huge at some point; there is therefore an inherent need to plan for growth.

A Greenbelt review would need to come from central government or the GLA – there would be too much opposition locally.

The main barriers in this sub region is transport infrastructure – difficult to travel east / west. There is a fundamental question as to who pays for it. Developers don't want to / can't pay for it all.

One borough pointed out that work has been undertaken to understand infrastructure costs in their borough which show around £300m gap in funding. The local authority can borrow but the Government needs to step in and help pay for the interest on those loans. The big question is how to deliver/unlock the huge growth potential of the area.

It was suggested that local authorities should be more up for delivering development themselves – they can also borrow cheaper – instead of the 20% developers profit going to developers – it could be reinvested into affordable housing if it was undertaken by the public sector.

One borough said that they didn't have many big sites – most of their sites were small. Small sites tend to be self-build, medium sites – RSLs, and larger sites – the large house builders.

In terms of small sites, low volume, low risks / low value – not worth spending huge amount of time as won't deliver the numbers needed.

In terms of solutions from the public sector – these could range from:

- Increasing supply
- Improving efficiency through the planning system
- Improving site understanding and analysis
- Increasing support / guidance for self-build
- Improve pre-consent mechanisms
- Bungle up services
- Improve skills
- Package up site – parcels of land
- Develop service models
- Expand housing zone model
- Central underwriting of risk profile

It was felt by some that the viability appraisal system was broken.

Another issue impacting local authorities was the 'rent cap' of local authorities stock – this was having a massive impact of authorities' business plans.

PD rights of office to residential were raised as an issue. One borough said that they had lost around 2m sq ft of offices because of the types of floor plates they had and the result was the provision of sub-standard housing.

One participant said there were risks associated with conflicting policies. PD rights were having a massive impact on local jobs in the area – creating the wrong balance between housing and employment.

One of the boroughs said that there needed to be political will to unlock growth. In this sub regional a joint committee of the boroughs has been set up to show how serious they all are about growth – it included a cross party mix.

A comment was made of the quality of the residential units coming forward under PD rights. In terms of intensification of outer London, it was suggested that a lot more work needs to be done on design quality. These are challenging densities - developers of these sites need to uplift their game to improve design. Also need to reflect the wider place making issues before people will feel more comfortable. PD also affects sustainable communities as they are stuck with 60s infrastructure (residential harder to subsequently develop than commercial).

One borough said that whilst no-one doubts the pressure of housing – wanted to know why we only look at supply issues (capacity), need to focus on housing demand. Need to distinguish between housing wants rather than what they demand.

Another borough responded saying that it was interesting point about demand – that when they say they are concerned their children can't afford new homes – they are taking about

'children' being in the late 30 / 40 before they can begin to think about buying their first home – rents are too high to enable people to save for deposits.

Huge problems – many inner London residents are moving into outer London – pushing up house prices / rents further – so outer London residents are being pushed out of London.

Need innovative solutions – potential around availability of mortgages – GLA could have a London wide scheme to assist people access mortgages.

One borough pointed out the low density doesn't support services. Need to support the development of suburbs to enable them become more densified. This will help to improve bus services and facilitate walking/cycling to stations - key in intensifying suburbs.

Would also need to encourage appropriate tall buildings and gradual change so that people feel more comfortable with change.

Need to accept and embrace mixed uses – there maybe opportunities for light industrial uses to co-locate with housing and potential for outer edges for mixed uses – 3 to 4 stories upto 8 stories.

One borough highlighted the importance of social infrastructure to support growth. In their borough they need around 52Ha of additional open space to support the growth predicted. There is also an issue of how to protect existing green space and enhance its quality.

The Chair asked whether the balance of land allocation was right. A consistent theme is density. There is a feeling amongst outer London boroughs that truly suburban areas should be preserved and other areas such as town centres should be for higher density mixed use. There was also a view that new settlements should have supporting infrastructure – not just an unconditional acceptance.

One of the Commissioners asked about the 1st OLC report – the idea of Strategic Development Centres and whether there are examples in this sub region.

The response was that there were 5 original centres but that they didn't receive much profile and hadn't got much further.

The Chair said that one idea from a previous meeting was that there needed to be a distinction between those areas which want to expand their local economies with associated growth in housing.

One borough said that they wanted to break the mould of being dormitory suburbs and create clusters of economic activity rather than exporting people back to central London.

Another borough reiterated the point about the lack of east / west connections in terms of transport infrastructure and this was a major concern with development and growth.

The Chair highlighted that in 2009 the case was put forward for orbital routes around outer London – however TfL had said there was no economic case to support that. The Chair then

wondered if there would be small parts of a potential orbital route that could be more viable.

One of the Commissioners then asked what message the Commission should take back in terms of the Greenbelt / MOL and how to reconcile the point about leadership from the Mayor with the latter point about not imposing on boroughs and being able to take people with you.

One participant said the issue isn't about the release of greenbelt per se, although that needs to be locally led, but the message is that it shouldn't be done to you.

A Commissioner then asked whether there could be a strategic assessment done to try and reconcile this issue.

A participant stated that it is an interesting dynamic to reconcile the issue of growth and the concept of taking people with you. Generally most residents don't want intensification on their own land – although they recognise it might need to happen elsewhere. The conversation therefore needs to change – London has a housing crisis and things need to happen to not only support existing communities but also new communities. Very difficult political conversations – that's why you have regional intervention as every resident will say no. The greenbelt, in particular, is very political.

The Chair reconfirmed that at the other meetings Greenbelt was put into the choices and considerations the Commission should explore.

One borough said that incremental release of the greenbelt might work but it had to be led by individual boroughs. Again recognise it is very politically difficult - however tall buildings are also politically sensitive but not as much as going outwards. Has to come from the GLA and be a centralised position.

The Chair said that he proposed two ways of looking at the greenbelt. One to look at the greenbelt boundaries and the other way to look at greenbelt structurally and whether there is potential to release along these corridors.

A Commissioner said that the NPPF allows for boroughs to look at the reviewing their greenbelt. Although the Government message is 'thou shalt not' - almost as if Government had regulated devolution.

In terms of industrial land, one participant said that they thought London was releasing twice as much as it should be. Often housing and industrial is now cheek to jowl in a piecemeal fashion without being properly planned creates amenity issues, air quality, etc.

A Commissioner pointed out that there are many issues in relation to this – vacant land credit, amount of affordable housing provision, etc.

A participant raised a question in relation to one of the scenarios presented saying that in terms of suburban intensification (likely to be around PTALs 3 and 4) – much of South

London is actually PTALs 1 and 2 – therefore not much opportunity for increasing density. This is down to poor connectivity – particularly the rail network. Very engaged with TfL to try and improve connectivity to unlock growth.

TfL responded saying there were clear about the fact that transport is fundamental. TfL has changed the way they think about connections to unlock growth / homes. However inevitably funding is finite and it is a balance being different areas. Intensification helps to drive the case for prioritisation of projects.

The Chair then stopped the meeting for a break.

3. Regional Co-ordination

RL presented the OLC on regional co-ordination.

IP from Coast to Capital set out their perspective on regional co-ordination. CtC is a cross regional network from Croydon down to West Sussex. There are many common issues and shared interests. It is a growth corridor – has a strong focus in creativity / digital sector. The 2nd runway at Gatwick is of major interest. Infrastructure is a fundamental issue as well as shortage of industrial space. Similar issues to outer London around resistance to development. They had recently carried out a survey on attitudes to development.

The floor was then opened for the discussion.

One participant pointed out that in discussions of strategic co-ordination and the context of growth/ intensification – shouldn't lose sight of green infrastructure and its importance for whole range of reasons – reducing pollution, health /wellbeing, connectivity, etc. Interested in exploring how the regional park can help in delivering growth. MOL might have a role to play. London Plan policy needs to be strengthened to reflect the importance of green infrastructure – sign posting.

A comment was then made of the reach of the GLA and about commuter flows - whether it is reasonable to engage across such a large area – too broad. Should maybe reflect the LEPs – in this case – Croydon down to Brighton.

In terms of the SLP - London into Surrey – meaningful engagement to inform people and to work in partnership.

In terms of principles – form to follow function – shouldn't be one mechanism. There is an issue of unbalance governance. The geography of the SE is too broad. Sub regions are the right granularity – LEP (around functional economic geography).

The Chair then asked what people thought might be concrete outcomes. For example one outcome could be the Mayor taking over the rail networks long commuter lines.

One participant reiterated that it had to be the 'coalition of the willing' - people are interested in what gets things done – has to be a something for something deal.

A question was then asked about what other issues there should be – shouldn't just be about housing.

There is a need to look in terms of geography beyond London – often forget parts different places play – for example housing markets are not on London / Surrey boundaries – need to look at housing and transport together.

Need to recognise that some places look inwards and some outwards – practical points around where affordable housing goes. Share health / economy with neighbours.

Waste is a cross boarder issue. There is a South London waste partnership which is self-sufficient.

Difficult to know what issues should be dealt with at what level. For example – in Sutton there is a project to develop an energy recovery plant. Many feel it's the wrong place to put an incinerator – might work at the sub regional level but not as a resident.

A response was – isn't that what we have a Mayor for – rather than trying to sort these things out at a local issues with lots of opposition.

The Chair also responded saying that one point made in the last meeting about waste was that it was a cross boarder issue – interesting whether other issues enable boroughs to come together.

One borough suggested that an important ingredient was the prioritisation of funding for hard and soft infrastructure. All partners need to be transparent about taking their fair share of the 'pain'. Those areas that can take more growth should get investment.

One of the boroughs said that they had been working with leaders of South London / Surrey to test the appetite for that kind of working with a growth agenda.

The Chair said that a consistent theme is that an agreement on infrastructure would help to lead to an agreement on other issues.

The Chair asked whether anyone else wanted to add anything to the discussion and then closed the discussion.

4. Date of next meeting

RR confirmed the date of the next sub regional meeting was on 29th July in Bexley.

RR then explained that the deadline for Submissions was 11th September and that the first part of the report of Regional Co-ordination would be published in November 2015 and the second part of the report on Growth Options and Barriers to Housing Delivery would be published in Feb/March 2016.