

Introduction

I would like to start by welcoming the Panel of inspectors and all participants and observers this morning. Today marks the beginning of an important process and the Mayor, the team and I are pleased to be able to host the Examination here at City Hall.

The draft London Plan has now been in development for several years, and the team and I are immensely grateful to the many people who have got us to where we are today. Similarly, I am grateful to the Plan team themselves, whose work has been immense in both detail and quantity.

Developing the Plan has been a hugely complex and challenging task, but it has also been the most exciting and rewarding part of my job. The Plan will have a uniquely significant role in the development of our city over the next 20 years, and it is a privilege to be involved in its development.

The Mayor has likewise approached his role overseeing London's spatial development with care and purpose. Since he set out his vision for the capital in 'A City for all Londoners' in 2016, planning for London's growth has been a key concern for the Mayor and his team.

When we consulted Londoners then – just as when we do now – one key issue came up again and again; building the homes – particularly the genuinely affordable homes – Londoners need. And that is of course reflected in the draft Plan.

Context

The next 5 months will see in-depth discussion and debate about the draft Plan and the detail of its policies. This is welcome, and I have no doubt that it will be in itself a beneficial process for London.

As the examination takes place, I believe that it will always be important to remember the context in which this Plan has been developed, and in which it will be delivered.

The scale of the challenge our city now faces is enormous. By 2041, London's population is set to reach 10.8 million, and the number of jobs in the capital is set to rise to 6.9 million.

These are well-worn statistics, but they bear repeating here, because it should be clear to everyone that takes part in this Examination that to deal with these changes, London needs something radical.

With this level of growth on the horizon, London faces some difficult decisions. Right from the start, the Mayor was determined to find ways to not only accommodate this growth, but to use the opportunities it provides to improve the social and environmental fabric of the city, and to make London more economically inclusive.

This is what we have come to call Good Growth, and it is a concept that underpins the draft Plan, as well as the Mayor's whole approach to planning and development.

Development and approach

In applying this approach to London's spatial development strategy, we have thought about the different ways land can be used and how we interact with the wider region.

We have concluded not only that meeting the needs associated with the vast majority of London's growth within the city is possible, but that it can be done in a sustainable way. Accommodating growth within London will allow us to be consistent with the requirements of the NPPF to meet our own need, and this is therefore our preferred approach.

These conclusions are underpinned by a detailed evidence base, and the draft Plan as a whole has been developed in consultation with teams from across the GLA group, who have a range of expertise and experience.

Each detail has been examined and debated both by officers and by the Mayor's Deputies and advisers. The nature of such a wide-ranging strategy is that it has to balance conflicting demands, and many hours were spent understanding how the draft Plan could balance competing land uses, while remaining deliverable. This ensured that the full implications of all of the policy approaches set out were properly considered both in their own right, and as part of the wider Plan.

And perhaps most importantly, the draft Plan has also been shaped by consultation and engagement with a wide range of stakeholders through

every stage of its development – through stakeholder events, detailed working groups, formal consultation, the submission of statements, and now here at the Examination over the coming months. This engagement has been of vital importance to the development of the Plan, and I would like to thank everyone who has been involved.

Strategy

One of the most important lessons that this level of consultation has taught us is the need to weigh up the views of different groups of Londoners to deliver what is, on balance, best for the city overall.

One of the great opportunities associated with drafting a document of this nature is that it allows issues that have a context beyond the local to be considered at a strategic level.

For us, this means looking at things holistically and in the London-wide context, while also taking account of Government policy and the requirements of the GLA Act.

This is the only sensible approach to Plan making, and it is the only fair way to plan for all Londoners. But it can mean that the strategy adopts approaches that may be different to those that a local community, a borough or a developer might take, looking at the issues only from their own perspective.

While some responses to the consultation suggest that individual policies either do not address issues of strategic importance or are too detailed, these responses are the result of specific viewpoints that often conflict with one another. Ultimately the draft Plan reflects what the Mayor thinks is appropriate for the whole of London, taking account of the legal context and the issues the city faces.

We are of course aware that this means that some people don't agree with some elements of the Plan. But we firmly believe – and our evidence supports the fact – that we are making the right choices to ensure that the Plan can deliver the opportunities that will allow all of London's communities to share in the capital's prosperity.

The Plan must be viewed as a whole – each of the policies within it contributes not only to improving London in its own right, but to allowing London’s wider growth to occur in a way that works for everyone.

The level of growth that we are accommodating in the Plan could not be supported by the Mayor without policies that ensure:

- that development is of high quality and is suitably located;
- that development potential is optimised;
- that a range of needs are met;
- that homes meet minimum standards;
- that sufficient industrial capacity is retained;
- that employment opportunities are promoted across London; and
- that new development is safe, contributes to the reduction of carbon emissions, protects and enhances London’s open spaces and takes account of London’s distinctive heritage and character.

Perhaps most importantly, a robust approach to affordable housing is vital, given London’s high levels of need and the failure of past Plans to meet it.

The strategic approach set out in the draft Plan enables the Mayor to exert real, effective and timely influence in matters of great importance to London, including in development decisions – which is crucial, given the challenges London now faces.

And some of the pan-London policies that have been developed through the Plan are already bearing fruit.

The Mayor’s ambitious affordable housing policies, including the threshold approach, are already increasing affordable housing levels in schemes that are coming across the Mayor’s desk. And the environmental policies he has adopted are now putting us at the forefront of tackling climate change issues.

Influence

While the Plan is a powerful document, and the draft is already having an impact on London’s development, it is important to acknowledge that the Mayor can only – and only has the mandate to – make decisions for London.

There is no formal mechanism for the Plan to have direct influence across the wider south east, and any expectation that we could be responsible for resolving planning issues that extend beyond London's boundaries could only be fulfilled through a change in the Government's approach to regional planning.

Nevertheless, collaboration with our partners in the wider south east has been an important part of the Plan's development, and we have taken the 'willing partners' approach promoted in the draft. Working in this way has allowed us to develop a Plan that does all it can to support Good Growth in a way that works for the wider region, within the planning framework we have available to us.

Delivery approach

While we have done as much as we can to support the success of the wider south east, we are of course largely focussed on how the Plan can deliver for our city.

And through careful planning, consultation and collaboration, we have developed a strategy that really can deliver for Londoners.

In focussing on this delivery, it has been of vital importance that we have been able to account for the expected impact of the new policies set out in the Plan.

A strategy that has its ambition thwarted because it can only plan for levels of growth that have been delivered in the past would never be able to meet the demands of a growing population, or reflect the potential opportunities of new policies, interventions and investment. And it would not be able to plan to meet need, as is required by the NPPF.

So by planning for the future, we have been able to develop a draft Plan that will meet the needs of future Londoners.

This is not to say, though, that we have been neglecting the urgent needs of Londoners today – one of the most pressing being the need for more genuinely affordable homes across the city.

In fact, using the practical measures set out in the London Housing Strategy and elsewhere, the Mayor is already working to increase affordable housing delivery.

The Mayor's affordable homes programme is investing directly in new genuinely affordable housing. The Building Council Homes programme is supporting local authorities to do the same. The Homebuilding Capacity Fund is helping councils to equip themselves for delivery. Through our wider interventions we are diversifying delivery, bringing forward public sector sites and introducing a more interventionist approach to the land market. And we are working on pilot projects that will put the draft Plan's policies into action, such as our industrial intensification pilots.

All of this and more will be required to deliver on a scale that meets the needs of Londoners. All stakeholders need to play their part, from communities, boroughs and developers through to national Government. Importantly, this will require additional central funding – and if the Government is serious about its housing ambitions, it needs to work with us constructively to provide that.

But we are clear that the adoption of this Plan is absolutely fundamental to making this delivery happen – there is no realistic way that we can meet the needs of the growing number of Londoners without it.

Change

However it is planned for, with this growth will come change. London has always been developing and evolving, and will continue to do so, but we recognise that having difficult discussions about how to plan for this change brings the challenges of the future into focus. This can be a difficult discussion.

But we know that growth and change are coming, and it is better to be prepared. Without this preparation, homelessness would rise, overcrowding would worsen, and London could become uncompetitive.

By planning for change now, we can control and shape it, so that it works for everyone. And we can be clear – as we are in the draft Plan – that we will take the right approach to culture, heritage and the built environment to ensure that what makes London London is not lost.

Summing up

The development of the London Plan – and this Examination – involves considering some of the most fundamental aspects of our lives; how London develops, how and where we live, how we interact with our communities, how we secure future prosperity, how we protect London's unique culture and character, how we treat our environment, and how we get around. As I have said, planning for London's future requires us to make difficult decisions.

It is inevitable that there will be some disagreement about whether we have made the right calls on each one of these decisions. Some may feel that the Plan goes too far, others that it has not gone far enough.

But I want to finish by reiterating two important points that I hope will help to frame the balancing of these concerns – the two things that I hope all participants will keep in their minds throughout the Examination.

Firstly, we must remember that every detail in the Plan is intended to contribute to a whole – a strategic plan that will address many of London's issues and allow London's inevitable growth to be shaped into Good Growth, that works for all Londoners. Discussions on individual policies should consider how they contribute to this overarching aim.

Secondly, we must be clear that London needs a strong and ambitious London Plan to manage the growth that is coming our way. The challenges facing London in these uncertain times are too great – and the consequences of allowing growth to go unmanaged are too dire – to not have a strong London Plan in place to oversee development.

I believe that this is that London Plan.

Thank you

I would like to thank the Panel for conducting this examination and to all the participants for their input. The Mayor, my fellow Deputy Mayors and I will be paying close attention to the discussion over the coming months.

The Mayor will be represented in the Chamber by our London Plan team, so I would like to introduce Jennifer Peters and her deputy

Rachael Rooney, who lead the team and who will be here throughout the Examination.

And finally I would like to wish the Panel and everyone who will be taking part well for what I am confident will be a productive examination.

Thank you.