

A CITY FOR ALL LONDONERS

Accommodating Growth Workshop

2nd November 2016, 9.30 – 13.00

Spatial approach to Good Growth

Facilitator in bold

Respondents in regular text

These notes are a summary of the conversation

Session 1, Table 2

Jennifer Peters, Greater London Authority (Facilitator)

Heather Cheesbrough, London Borough of Croydon

Claire Loops, London Borough of Bexley

Peter Eversden, London Forum of Amenity Societies

Chris Kenneford, Oxfordshire County Council

What are the appropriate uses for central London?

Current big focus on development – also a lot of housing. Can commercial and housing use coexist? Is there a specific type of housing that should be in central London? What need? Etc.

There needs to be housing, otherwise an increased travel problem. We've lost housing we could have had because of Canary Wharf. Does the GLA think business should dominate? The Isle of Dogs, Hackney, Tower Hamlets etc. should be mixed. There's a trend of the City of London buying up land for commercial use specifically.

We need accommodation for key workers in central London – we can't expect them to travel from St Albans etc., and this is becoming a big trend. We need to protect land for key workers.

We need a mix in central London – but we have to have a mix? Affordable, commercial etc.

It gets confused – SK says accommodation at 30% of local wage, but the average wage would be large.

Actually in central London, it's mixed. Though wages are high for working in central London, those who live there don't necessarily earn those wages.

Our key workers live in a mixed place – greater tendency to be in Outer London, increasingly in the East, which is why we are emphasising Bexley, Thamesmead, Barking etc. We're worried that we might get a Parisian situation with a series of satellites around central London, and you

end up with isolated pockets of relative poverty. How can we maintain the broader social mix, perhaps not right into the centre of London, but certainly into inner London? SK wants to hang on to what BJ used to call the un-jumbification.

London has always been a city where people live, but there's a central growth thing, and then affordability which is a different issue, and requires a more nuanced approach, not necessarily a spatial approach. We need to carry on ensuring there's housing in central London. SK's emphasising affordability and we need to continue this. The charm of London is the schools, parks, families etc. It would be a real loss if we lose that character in central London.

We are trying to retain that. Affordable housing is increasingly unviable there, even with S106. You get much bigger bang for your buck if you spend 106 out in Barking e.g.

Yes, but nuance issue. We need a clear message e.g. 30%, and this can be factored into the land value stuff. It needs to be clear: 'This is what you have to deliver' – non-negotiable.

We also have a problem of lifetime affordable housing – people stay in affordable housing when they don't need it anymore and that's a problem because it limits the resource and who can have it.

Similarly with key worker housing – it's not defined. It's probably the intermediate housing. We need guidance on that.

It is difficult to define, and there were some debates under Ken, and you get difficult decisions designating some people as key and some not. So income is probably better here, which we're trying to do with London living rent.

There may be some opportunities for decking – reclamation can be costly, and decking can be costly, but the end result may be positive, especially as the Mayor can control the whole process. How much evaluation is going into that. If you can deck over a lot of disused rail, you have land you can use for housing, totally under the Mayor's control.

That was done in Bishopsgate and it was proposed in Victoria, which is down as an OA. There's a bit of decking already and we're looking at extending that down towards the river, ending down in Nine Elms/Vauxhall so you'd have a quadrant in the CAZ. But the commercial appetite is limited.

Also the cost of the decking and the development and the affordable housing is difficult as a package is difficult. The cost is huge.

I appreciate that. It's probably going to be evaluated at Old Oak as a methodology. But it's important as it is the TfL land that the Mayor can hold and stop from being commercial price.

But you do need TfL to pay for some of the land improvements, which they're working through at the moment.

I was surprised that we're talking about metropolitan centres, but there's a whole band across South London with no metropolitan centres. There's a stretch of town centres where they're not being made the most of. We know the dispersal of growth hasn't happened, so why aren't we adding to or relocating the metropolitan town centres to the south.

We've increased it by 1. There's a lot of aspiration by boroughs to do this, where it doesn't make economical sense. You can get housing in there but you can't get the commercial, and it's the commercial that drives the categorisations. It just so happens that places like Lewisham, like Peckham are facing the pinch at the moment. Peckham is robust, but at a very specialist level, catering for a culturally diverse group in inner London. Lewisham is more broadly based but the office sector has contracted with vacant back offices for a number of year. Bexley is the same, where they've taken down offices. The greatest hope for reform is the use of higher value and more productive users.

But bearing in mind town centres are more than retail

Well they ought to be, and historically they were, but now it's more difficult than that.

Old Street has been very successful, it's almost as successful to the point that it's a victim of its success, but we can replicate this media communications etc. work to exist elsewhere. Are we planning for employment in a too old fashioned a way. If we can concentrate the effort around place-making with transport and housing, making areas more attractive for smaller businesses, start-ups etc., that could work better.

Housing might enable a different range, thinking about new people who move in, restaurants etc., suddenly it becomes an important attractive place for people to work to and businesses will open.

BoxPark in Croydon is amazing. It's transformed what Croydon means, it's jazzy, vibrant, buzzing. It's made Croydon attractive, or started it, for young people who work in technology, media etc. And that was an easy thing to deliver and it's transformed the area. You're turbocharging regeneration on a small piece of land.

The same thing has happened in Lewisham and there's great spill-over effects, but it's in an earlier stage.

I've seen a number of first floor uses in town centres come down to ground floors recently, e.g. solicitors etc., coming down into the frontages, which can enable housing above.

Compulsory purchase is needed in intensification, but no council expects to be reflected on that policy, but it's so important in altering and reinvigorating the housing stock.

It is happening – in Croydon we regularly have 1 or 2 houses CPd, it causes outcry, but at the end of the day those residents are selling their houses to developers.

There is a policy on that in the plan, but we'll be giving in more welly. We'll be making more of a thing of it that we have in the past. E.g. you may not be in local conformity but it's happening.

It's a problem for us in the conservative areas where there's huge opportunity but they don't want it, and having the GLA back us in that would make a huge difference.

We were looking for a Dutch model, where private interests get 35% and the balance goes to the local authority, but unfortunately the neighbourhood planning bill isn't radical enough.

What else could outer London do in terms of economy?

What happened to Outer London Development Centres?

It got off the ground – second biggest place for private jets, on the golden mile we're looking at bespoke transport for them.

Fantastic.

That's what Hounslow call it.

So many boroughs are competing to be the film centre, and some are succeeding but there's not enough policy or support to make it succeed.

There will be – our cultural colleagues are looking down the Thames Gateway and they see a lot of gems down there, going down into barking, where there are great opportunities for sets etc.

We were told a lot of people in Outer London hop over into the home counties, because by going just a little bit further they can get a lot more land, more parking etc.

We're trying to deal with that and it's not going down well with our colleagues in the shires. There are some authorities who are up for it, and the main way to deal with that is to improve rail. But you take it into some towns and the drawbridges go up.

The line on the green belt isn't good for beyond London – we're doing it so why can't you?

Surely their green belt is also serving us?

If you're talking seriously about sustainable urban forms you would not have a green belt. But everyone wants it. All the focus groups put green belt right at the top of the priority list.

There's an issue because us not touching our green belt means the home counties have to use theirs.

In Greenwich we looked at our green belt and it was proposed to be released.

And as you know we're limiting release everywhere.

It's bonkers – in Hounslow we did a lot of work on it, in Croydon we've got loads of golf courses. It's a real shame, because releasing that land would allow us to plan so much better.

Unfortunately there's no way that he or any other Mayor could pull back from it.

So much of the Green belt is trash – it can't be used, it can't be accessed.

The media discourse never helps with this.

We actually slipped out 50 schools in the green belt under BJ, and then at the end of the term we added them all up and it was a bit of a shock, but that was a good use of land.

I think soon people will get increasingly disappointed with the intensification of their local areas, which will make people think again about the green belt. You've got to put it somewhere haven't you. Something's got to go – suburb, green belt etc.

And this 50,000 figure is actually probably at least 55,000, and the plan won't go through without showing how we are going to meet need, so we will need to talk to our friends in the wider south east, and that seems like the only way to do it!

There are untapped parts of London, which, if given better transport could be well used. We could double or treble housing if we had better connectivity in places left behind.

When the Outer London Commission went round some boroughs they said their people wanted gardens, so they said well where will your children live – they won't be able to afford it. Well we'll have a few tower blocks they said. There's a problem with inertia and misinformation – e.g. about empty homes, about new developments, the bank of planning permissions etc., and so many people don't believe there's a housing crisis. We need to better communicate the situation to the public. We need a message from the GLA that explains why there is this great need that a lot of people don't think there is.

Some of these planning permissions banks though take 30 years or more, such as in the Greenwich peninsula.

Intensification of some places can help you build out more – but if we're reliant on the 6 big developers we're always going to struggle with time.

In the intensification process, the GLA should create partnerships with small and medium builders, and they can support them. We can take a different approach, the GLA needs a new approach.

Transport is so vital in outer parts of Bromley and Bexley, and we need to get people out of their cars, expand the trams. In some parts of Bexley we have PTAL scores of 0.

Buses can help here too, not just heavy rail solutions.

But the cost benefit analysis of that is a lot lower.

Jules is really worried that the boroughs don't want suburban intensification, so he currently doesn't want us to have a clear direction of travel, and rather to have a lot of qualifications which could dilute the policy.

SK needs to send a very strong message about where growth is going to go.

Key points:

- 1. We need a mix of uses across London, and transport and connectivity is one of the best way of diversifying outer London and unlocking sites.**
 - 2. South East London has a lot more to give – The Bakerloo line extension is good but it's not enough. To do 55K per annum we can't just be incremental, we need to do something massive, and I think that stems from transport development. And we don't have brownfield land etc. anymore. There's not much you can do without more transport infrastructure (Lewisham, Bexley, Bromley).**
 - 3. Important leadership role of the London Plan in delivering intensification in Outer London.**
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Session 2, Table 2

Finn Williams, Greater London Authority (Facilitator)

How should the density and characteristics of inner London develop?

Residential versus commercial. It's acknowledged that land value has favoured residential development over commercial in recent years. But is this a problem? Do we need SPG identifying where residential is ok and where not, to ensure we add value to the London economy?

There has been a recent impact of housing in the CAZ, with more land being given over to that use over commercial, but over the long-term the area is fluid – it has changed before and changed back. Very mixed use is the most desired situation, but the question is how to allow diversity to flourish there.

Can we take advantage of things like the 24 hr tube to intensify use in central London?

Should outer London take the character of inner London, and where?

One of the strengths of outer London is that it's a nice place to live. Orbital links that would improve connectivity for commercial use do not make sense in terms of cost benefit analysis. This all adds up to a justification for not doing a great deal to densify these areas.

Are there drivers that might help locate industry in London? Policentricity has been favoured in the past to use outer London centres. There have been some ideas about how to make this happen, but not enough. The suburban office market has been disappointingly flat – there is little occupier interest.

Changing uses. We need a strategy around night life and social life with more emphasis on culture and how we manage that. Should it cluster or spread? We need to do better where it clashes with residential use, and strongly use the agent of change principle where whoever makes the change pays to mitigate the impacts. This will cover issues seen already such as with the Ministry of Sound, Curzon cinema and Portobello market and that are ongoing in large parts of Dalston and Brixton.

There is a practical issue with getting rid of rows and rows of semis. Do we need to incentivise to turn semis into four-storey blocks and have these below the affordable threshold, or as starter homes? This wouldn't necessarily create good lifetime homes (although the ground floor is ok) but this exception is the trade-off.

Engaging the public. The connection between developers and communities is very poor, and campaigns are growing all the time – any big changes like this would need major backing from

communities. For these groups it's not about not wanting change, it's about reflecting their needs. Such development must clearly give them an opportunity.

The affordable housing term is calculated in confidential viability studies by developers, who then claim they can't afford to deliver it. The Mayor needs to appoint more skilled viability personal to ensure he can reach his target of 40% affordable homes.

Siting of development. The first place to go is the town centres. The viability of these is distinct and they can deliver affordable housing, regenerate commerce with a growing local population, and enhance the environment of these often run-down areas. Boris Johnson took the route of Town Centre and Opportunity Area development, rather than suburban densification.

What is the role of outer London growth and economic development?

Geographic typology. The inner/outer split is too simplistic. The London plan's principles around strategic transport used to boost town centres and open up opportunity areas are the key driver for outer London growth. Being more specific about what is where and therefore what will work where is the best approach.

The role of greenbelt. Should we look at the Green belt? South East Authorities need to look at their green belt, and if they will commit to building there, London should too. There are areas of green belt that don't fulfil that function because they are poor quality. This is to an extent held hostage by NIMBYism, but it depends on the Local Authority – politicians recognise difficult decisions need to be made.

Heathrow. How does the Heathrow extension relate to the London Plan? How will the Mayor work to address Air Quality and noise concerns and how will he handle the distribution of employment and the impact of this on the suburban West?

Places of opportunity. Wimbledon and Croydon brownbelt remain good opportunities, as does using the Bakerloo line extension. What is the role of emerging areas such as Plaistow seeing the gains of Stratford, or Canning Town, benefitting from the forthcoming Crossrail? How does the new development there affect the people already there, particularly young people and how do we ensure their future?

Focusing on need. Opportunity areas need to be about more than just housing and jobs. Quality of place should be a factor in good growth. Ground floor commercial space is key – dead frontage is not good. How do we integrate a mix when pushing up density, and given that residential development is more profitable?

Maintaining a family focus is important otherwise there will be a continuance of the trend of families moving out. The 50s and 60s council estates were built for all life stages. The change in housing policy changed that.

What can the Mayor do for specialist housing in opportunity areas, for example for older people, particularly given concern for under-occupancy of that group which estimates put at 700,000 under-occupying. Boroughs need to lead on this – the incentive is there for smaller flats, and older people can live more efficiently near to health facilities.

Quality and character. How do we ensure individuality in opportunity areas – 60s development was then just knocked down. A challenge is making sure that that development that would get knocked down doesn't get built in the first place.

Three points to summarise - Need to move beyond the three typologies to more specifics on place to identify what can be achieved best where. Quality of space is important – taking into account life-stage and amenity needs of densification. Where public transport exists don't be too precious about the green belt – it is better to be smart about growth corridors.
