

CROSS-BOUNDARY COOPERATION ON STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR LONDON AND THE WIDER METROPOLITAN AREA

A DISCUSSION PAPER

INTRODUCTION

- 1 This paper has been prepared on behalf of the Mayor of London as a basis for discussion with planning authorities in London and adjoining counties about the future approach to cooperation across the Greater London boundary on strategic planning.
- 2 Policy 2.2 of the London Plan deals with planning for the sustainable development and management of growth in the wider metropolitan area beyond the boundaries of Greater London, and in the greater south-east of England. It states the Mayor's commitment to work with planning authorities in the South East and the East of England regions through the Inter-Regional Forum and any successor body, and through suitable arrangements to be established with local authorities and other appropriate partners, to:

"...broadly align approaches (and, where appropriate, planning policy frameworks) and to lobby for timely and sufficient investment to realise the potential of, and address the challenges facing, the city region as a whole and areas within it (particularly the growth areas and corridors referred to in Policy 2.3), especially those dealing with population and economic growth, infrastructure and climate change"
- 3 The Policy sets out a number of objectives set by the Mayor for this activity; to seek to ensure that:
 - a appropriate resources, particularly for transport (including ports and logistics) and other infrastructure (including open space, health, education and other services) are made available to secure the optimum development of the growth areas and corridors as a whole and those parts which lie within London
 - b common policies and procedures are followed to ensure that there is, so far as possible, a 'level playing field' particularly adjacent to London's boundaries. This will help to promote spatially balanced and sustainable economic growth, and to meet housing, energy and sustainability targets, and standards such as those for parking
 - c integrated policies are developed for adaptation to and mitigation of climate change, logistics provision and the adaptation of shared infrastructure
 - d jointly owned policies are developed to help rationalise commuting patterns, both at different times of the day and to encourage reverse commuting where appropriate, including the promotion of public transport improvements to enhance access to key destinations
 - e integration is achieved with other strategies to ensure that appropriate skills training is available and other barriers to work are overcome
 - f common monitoring data are collected, reviewed and assessed on a regular basis with neighbouring local authorities, as appropriate
 - g reviews of the London Plan have regard to relevant plans and strategies of neighbouring local authorities
- 4 Until 2010, the Advisory Forum on Regional Planning for London, the South East and East of England (widely known as the Inter-Regional Forum), which brought together the Mayor and the regional planning bodies for the East and South-East of England, enabled engagement

with planning authorities in neighbouring regions. In June 2010 representatives of the Mayor and of South East England Councils (SEEC) and the East of England Local Government Association (EELGA) met to discuss the future of inter-regional work following the dissolution of the former regional planning bodies. It was agreed then that subject to decisions to follow in SEEC and EELGA, inter-regional cooperation should continue supported by officers from the Greater London Authority and local authorities outside London. The Mayor has yet to hear from SEEC and EELGA; given this he has decided to investigate how inter-regional cooperation can best be taken forward.

The duty to cooperate

- 5 This work has been given added urgency by the coming into force of the new statutory duty to co-operate in relation to planning of sustainable development¹ introduced through the Localism Act 2011. In short, this requires planning authorities to “engage constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis” in carrying out certain defined strategic planning activities (including preparation of development plan documents and local development documents) relating to “sustainable development or use of land that has or would have a significant impact on at least two planning areas including (in particular) sustainable development or use of land in connection with infrastructure that is strategic and has or would have a significant impact on at least two planning areas.

- 6 While preparation of the London Plan is not covered by the duty, the Mayor (and Transport for London) are required to cooperate with planning authorities inside and outside London in the preparation of their local plans (and they are required to cooperate with the Mayor). Where appropriate, London boroughs and local planning authorities outside London are required to cooperate.

Mapping strategic planning outside London

- 7 Against this background, the Mayor has decided to explore options for future cross-boundary work on strategic planning. As a first step, following publication of the London Plan in 2011 he commissioned Lee Searles (who has carried out an earlier review of the Inter-Regional Forum) to conduct a mapping exercise to look at the strategic planning activity and players beyond London. This identified spatial and land use planning activities being undertaken at cross-district, county and sub-regional scales in Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, Essex, Kent, Surrey, Berkshire and Bedfordshire, and was based on a survey of local authority planning policy managers. At the same time respondents were asked for their informal views about engagement with the Mayor and emerging thinking about how the duty to cooperate might apply to relationships with the London boroughs and the Mayor. The results of this exercise have informed the proposals in this paper.

¹ See section 33A of the Town and Country Planning Act 2004 (as amended)

OPTIONS FOR ENGAGEMENT WITH COUNTIES AND DISTRICTS

8 In most of the area under consideration, county councils continue to exist and provide a degree of strategic coordination across their area (there are no county councils in Bedfordshire or Berkshire). The mapping exercise showed that in common with London colleagues, county councils have limited resources, and that this coordination is carried out by facilitation of networks of district and unitary council planning officers. These networks are commonly developing shared approaches to implementation of the Community Infrastructure Levy; some are also working on county-wide housing strategies to provide an evidence base and coordination mechanism for local plan-making.

9 The mapping exercise suggested that many district councils would prefer to engage with London bodies through these county-based (and organised) forums and networks, which exist in well-organised forms in Kent, Surrey, Hertfordshire and Essex, on a less organised basis in Berkshire and Buckinghamshire – but not at all in Bedfordshire. In general, these arrangements are well-supported by districts. They are already established, and using them as a means of engagement would avoid the need to invent wholly new structures. They would be likely to provide an effective means of reaching as wide a number of relevant officers as possible.

10 Engagement with networks may not be sufficient on its own – the new

duty applies to individual authorities, who may need to engage with the Mayor or individual boroughs separately. There may be a need for higher-level engagement focussing on cooperation between key organisations beyond the counties whose work has a bearing on issues underlying strategic planning. These might include officer groups working on relevant issues such as:

- East of England Directors of Environment and Transport Strategic Planning Group
- Enfield, Essex and Hertfordshire Border Liaison group
- South East and East of England Waste Planning Advisory Groups
- South East and East of England Aggregates Working Parties

There may be a need to develop links with the respective Local Economic Partnerships as well.

11 This cooperation may have to be taken further to involve more senior figures (including elected representatives) to discuss and take forward issues of Greater South-East England or sub-regional issues where there will be shared interests – a current example might be future options for funding strategic infrastructure of the kind being considered by the Mayor's London Finance Commission.

12 The nature of cooperation required is unlikely to be fixed. Given the new duty, and the current level of change in the planning system, it may take time for authorities to decide what level of engagement on what issues is most appropriate to their needs. This is compounded by nervousness about the possible implications of joint work on issues

like housing and employment distribution for local plans.

A proposed approach

- 13 These considerations suggest that the best way forward would be one that enables the organic development of engagement, allowing all those concerned to meet their respective needs, responding to circumstances, and developing engagement structures and processes over time to maximise their effectiveness.
- 14 Experience suggests this is an approach more likely to be effective than setting up extensive formal arrangements along the lines of the former Inter-Regional Forum (IRF). The IRF failed to create a shared understanding of key employment, housing, transport and waste trends and assumptions, or to agree suitable responses to them in regional strategies. In practice none of the bodies involved dedicated resources to its work on a continuous basis, and activity tended to peak at times of preparing for meetings. If formalised machinery of this kind did not function well at the apogee of regional planning, it may be that an approach that allows cross-border working to find its own appropriate level would be better. Such an approach may also be more realistic given the resource constraints faced by all concerned.
- 15 Such an organic approach could be based around use of information technology to provide, through a "Linked In"-type **online forum**, a means for regular interchange of information, for consultation and engagement, to share new projections and research and informal discussion of issues of general interest and concern.
- 16 This could be supplemented by **periodic seminars** either around particular subjects of general concern, particular policy areas, or propose plans (the Mayor could organise a seminar on London Plan alterations, for example). These are envisaged as being interactive, allowing stakeholders to inform and influence our approaches to particular issues.
- 17 Any approach of this kind could be underpinned by **regular meetings between GLA officers on behalf of the Mayor, and their counterparts in county-based networks** (and perhaps other organisations dealing with issues relevant to strategic planning). The Mayor would also propose to invite London Councils to attend meetings of this kind on behalf of the London boroughs and, perhaps, a representative or representatives of the London sub-regional partnerships. Representation by Local Economic Partnerships may be considered.
- 18 The Mayor would be prepared to host meetings of this kind on, perhaps, a six monthly basis. These meetings could provide an opportunity to swap information on matters of common concern and discuss how, practically, a shared approach can be developed where necessary. This mechanism could also be used to identify issues on which it would be useful to involve elected members.
- 19 Given the existence of the statutory duty, and the fact that inspectors examining local plans will be considering the extent to which it has been complied with by authorities, there will be a need to evidence any new arrangements. The London/county network meetings could be used to develop

a **cooperation strategy**, perhaps identifying the policy areas where cooperation is required, and a description of the kind of engagement and the level of resourcing that will be used to address each. Use of an IT-based forum would also provide an easy means of recording the engagement that takes place, which would help those concerned evidence the cooperation that takes place at examinations in public and elsewhere.

powers to address local infrastructure deficits, for example) are not lost.

20 Arrangements of this kind could be used initially to discuss the kind of issues identified in Policy 2.2 of the London Plan. They could also be used to deal with specific infrastructure projects (like Crossrail 2), and over time could be extended to deal with issues that are of both spatial planning and economic development concern such as employment and training initiatives.

21 Another role that arrangements of this kind could explore is the scope for joint approaches to **monitoring** trends in housing and employment, and in areas like waste and minerals.

23 These ideas are mutually-reinforcing, in that adoption of one could help the effectiveness of another. They would provide the basis for exchange of information and building of trust that could over time lead to stronger and more formal arrangements, and perhaps greater engagement at political level.

Conclusion

22 This paper outlines a number of elements that could be used to enable the organic development of arrangements for cooperation across the Greater London boundary. These are intended both to enable planning authorities on either side of the boundary to show that they have met the statutory duty to cooperate, and to help those of us concerned with planning for an area of the country crucial to the sustainable growth and future prosperity of the United Kingdom ensure that opportunities for effective joint action (to secure new

HOW TO GIVE YOUR VIEWS

24 The Mayor is putting these proposals forward for comment by London boroughs, planning authorities in the counties adjoining London, other relevant organisations of which we are aware, London Councils and the London sub-regional partnerships. Others are welcome to comment if they wish. Comments should be sent by email to Andrew Barry-Purssell and Richard Linton at the GLA to reach us by the end of December 2012 – please email:

andrew.barry-purssell@london.gov.uk

richard.linton@london.gov.uk

25 Should the response be positive, the Mayor would propose holding a meeting in January/February 2013 – perhaps involving the county-based planning networks referred to earlier – to agree on ways forward. A meeting of this kind could discuss engagement machinery, and start to scope out the kinds of issues that it would be mutually useful to deal with using it.