

Delivering the London Plan

A political Plan from an election mandate

On 19th March RTPI London chaired an event on *Delivering the London Plan* and hosted by AECOM, with multi-disciplinary, public and private sector speakers and panel. The discussions crystallised a number of concerns stemming from the format and content of the emerging Plan following the first airing of the plan at RTPI's annual London Planning Summit in November.

Our first speakers for the evening were Tom Kenny from the RTPI and Charlotte Morphet, RTPI London's Policy Representative and a Principal Planner at Waltham Forest. They started by setting out the role the RTPI has played in responding to the draft London Plan consultations and how it constructed its response based upon round-table events with members. They described an ambitious and aspirational plan, which asks a lot from local planning authorities and the need to secure a spatial plan for Greater London that is strategic.

RTPI's response can be found here: <http://www.rtpi.org.uk/briefing-room/news-releases/2018/march/rtpi-london-plan-sets-the-right-ambition-but-concerns-remain/>

The general consensus from the panel discussion was that this draft Plan represents a step-change from previous versions of the Plan, with Sadiq Khan's planning strategy providing much greater detail in terms of policy, comparable to Development Management policies. As the public sector struggles to retain talent, these ambitious targets from the GLA cannot all be met and local priorities are overlooked: the sentiment from the public sector is that the London Plan is stripping Local Authorities of the power to create change in their own borough. From a legal point of view it was highlighted that it is the Mayor's duty to be strategic with the Plan as highlighted by panellist Meeta Kaur from Town Legal.

This level of detail was also flagged for contradicting existing Local Plans, in particular with regards to their treatment of the Green Belt. The RTPI's view is that the London Plan should take a more strategic view on the Green Belt, including potential to invest in/protect it. At the very least local authorities should have the option for review. Furthermore, Brent Council Team Leader for Planning Policy, Paul Lewin, described opposing statements emerging from the GLA, resenting Brent's treatment of the Green Belt on the one hand but making sweeping statements on outer London's changing character on the other.

Although the emerging London Plan still aspires to further housing and employment growth in London, there appears to be a serious disconnect between need outlined in the SHMA and the need figure adopted, particularly with regards to tenure. Moreover, the loss of density matrix will allow outer London boroughs to base density on existing character, even where they have great transport, failing to provide a strategic approach. New design-led density focus is unlikely to lead to improved design, particularly while waiting for the new housing design SPG (and in spite of design review panels).

Margreet Papamichael, Director at AECOM, pointed out that the emerging London Plan fails to address new technologies, alternative ways of living and methods of constructions. Re-joining the argument previously raised of a plan that is not strategic enough, there is a need to get ahead of the game instead of constantly playing catch up.

The London Plan is in many instances open to interpretation and without a clear priority. The ambitions and rhetoric of the Mayor appear to be closely aligned, lobbying a London Plan supposedly for all Londoners.

Drinks, nibbles and networking provided by our host followed the talks. RTPi London would like to thank AECOM for sponsoring this event.

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