

Insight Report | January 2016

Re-inventing the London Plan:

A charrette on the
capital's future



Facilitated by

ARUP

New London Architecture is London's independent forum for discussion, debate and information about architecture, planning, development and construction in the capital. Our core mission is to bring people together to shape a better city





Peter Murray, Chairman, New London Architecture

A charrette is “an intensive planning session where citizens, designers and others collaborate on a vision for future development”. When London is preparing for a mayoral election and work on the next iteration of the London Plan is underway, it seemed to the NLA that this was a good time to organise a charrette of expert citizens who could highlight the key issues London is facing and provide innovative ideas for their solution.

The NLA charrette involved 80 or so planners, architects and those involved in the built environment, working intensely over one day, looking in detail at a range of aspects of London’s future development. The day was facilitated by Malcolm Smith of Arup who has played a similar role in the creation of effective long-term strategic plans for many areas around the globe.

The first London Plan produced under an elected mayor has operated effectively for over a decade. It was revised in 2008 and again in 2011, but many of the key policies remained in place. Following the Further Alterations of the London Plan (FALP) which brought the plan into line with the National Planning Policy Framework, the government inspector decreed that the Plan was no longer fit for purpose because of the capital’s huge population growth. The results of this charrette address those issues and provide an invaluable source of inspiration for City Hall planners as well as mayoral candidates.



Malcolm Smith, Global Masterplanning and Urban Design Leader, Arup

A city is one of the greatest manifestations of human desires, fears, economics, politics, and ambition. As Patrick Geddes said, “a city is more than a place in space, it is a drama in time”. As London embarks on a re-evaluation of the guiding strategies for its future, as directed through the parameters of the London Plan, it is right to ask what the ‘dramas of our time’ are that should be included, and those that are no longer appropriate.

The charrette process is a powerful tool to make a meaningful contribution to revealing these issues. While the history of the charrette is in the physical design of places, the process can be expanded to address the physical and the non-physical, including the policy tools that need to work together in the London Plan. It also creates an environment where new ways of asking and thinking can be examined, like the digital platforms for gathering collective opinion that were used at this charrette. The contemporary charrette is a process being increasingly deployed around the world to enable a truly meaningful input into the making of plans that guide city growth. The London Plan charrette was an exciting and meaningful exploration of a future way of finding our future ‘dramas’ that will shape the London of tomorrow.

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Overview

London is facing the challenge of unprecedented growth, with the city set to accommodate a million more people inside a decade. This is game-changing. It places unprecedented pressures and priorities on space, services and infrastructure. Responding to this requires us to take a fresh look at how we accommodate growth, go back to first principles and challenge long-held views including on the boundary of London and the role of the Green Belt.

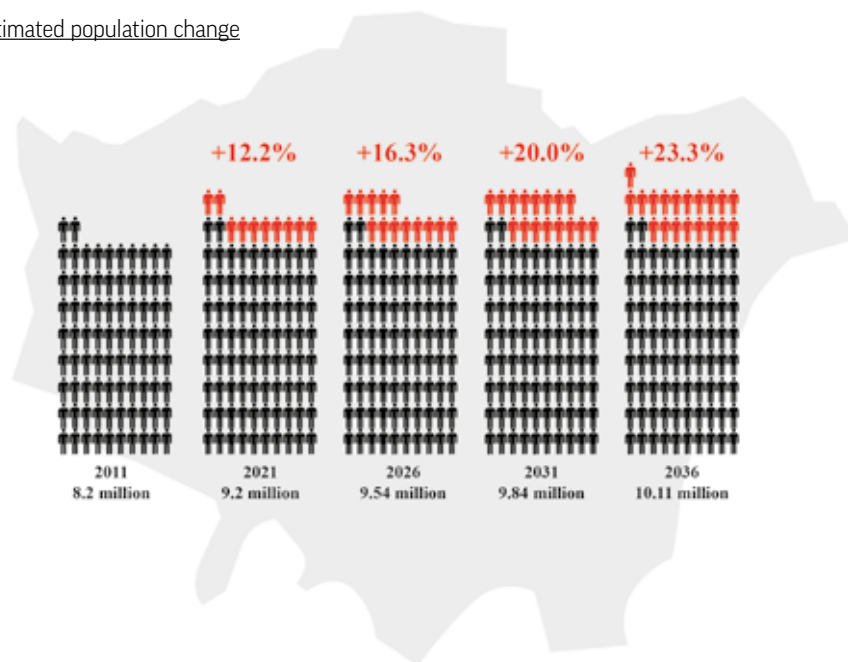
It will be the job of the next, crucial, iteration of the London Plan to help steer a course for the city through this growth-inspired maze, capitalising on the positives of that steep rise, and minimising any negatives. So what might a future London look like? And what do we need to do to get there?

To get some answers and provoke debate, New London Architecture and Arup joined forces to stage a one-day charrette with invited guests from across the built environment sector. At the event, which forms the subject of this report, guests were charged with identifying ways to improve London's future.

To do this, guests debated eight topics: Living, Movement, Working, Form, Wellbeing, Digital, Delivery and Structure. For each topic they were encouraged to identify potential ideas and recommendations, which might provide fuel for thought for the candidates in the upcoming mayoral contest for London, as well as for the review of the London Plan. The recommendations which emerged are far ranging and in some cases extend beyond the scope of the London Plan. Crucially however, they all have a direct impact on our ability to ensure that, in the words of GLA Assistant Director for Planning Stewart Murray, London remains the 'best capital city on the planet' long into the future.

The most critical, re-occurring and cross-cutting recommendations are summarised on this page. More detailed recommendations emerging from the topic sessions are summarised on the right of this page.

GLA estimated population change



Recommendations

- 1.** What we think of as London now extends beyond its administrative boundary and therefore the remit of the London Plan. There was a call for the London Plan to consider its wider hinterland so that a lack of joined-up thinking with these neighbours does not constrain the city's and wider region's growth.
- 2.** The structure of London needs to change. To mitigate against central London overheating and to accommodate demand for housing and employment space, growth nodes in outer London should be identified. Such growth should be facilitated through a strategic dual review of transport infrastructure and development opportunities.
- 3.** There is a need to overhaul the tools we use to guide density and determine the relationship between density and transport accessibility. New guidance should provide more flexibility and encourage the use of different building typologies which better respond to local context.
- 4.** The time is right to take stock of the role of London's Green Belt and how it supports the achievement of London's growth strategy. Delegates considered that the strategic review needed to look at when and where the Green Belt could be released.
- 5.** New bespoke products are required to tackle provision of affordable housing in the capital. Delegates supported a fixed affordable housing tariff and mechanisms which ensured affordable housing remained so in perpetuity.
- 6.** The importance of engaging Londoners in the planning and delivery of London's development was re-iterated as the benefits to wellbeing are increasingly evident. Delegates were keen that the latest technologies are used to engage with Londoners to ensure more people are encouraged to participate.
- 7.** Further consideration should be given to the form of the London Plan. There were calls for a more streamlined and 'live' document which could be a way of communicating the story of London's growth and is regularly updated in response to changing requirements. It should also provide more flexibility to enable the city to respond to change, perhaps through being outcome focussed.

Charrette sessions

A. Living

Where we live, and how much new housing can be created for Londoners, remains a hot topic for the city. Delegates identified a range of issues, which will need to be addressed over the coming years if we are to increase the quantity and quality of homes for Londoners.

In terms of numbers and delivery of homes, delegates felt it is the decline in public sector house building and the resulting over-reliance on the private sector, which is the root of the problem; the private sector alone will not be able to deliver the scale of housing required to meet demand in London.

It was also felt that the various policy instruments developed to tackle rates of delivery such as Starter Homes do not work effectively in the London context and that a more bespoke approach is required. For example, it was widely agreed that the current definition of affordable housing is meaningless in the London context and that solutions for housing lower income workers (and anecdotally increasingly mid-career employees) need to be found. Delegates also identified the need to actively cater for other newly emerging needs groups including ageing populations.

Delegates were also clear that quality must not be overlooked in order to deliver quantity. There was a feeling that historically we have failed to deliver the right types of homes in the right types of places. As part of the quality debate, our approach to density also needs to be re-considered; new building typologies such as mansion blocks may provide better models to help create places where people want to live.



Recommendations:

- 1.** Consider new models, which enable the public sector to deliver at scale and effectively act as developer. This includes how it can take a long term interest in schemes e.g. retaining an interest in land.
- 2.** The Mayor should seek powers to enable him/her to direct suitable housing products for London. This includes the definition of affordable housing being amended in the London Plan to be 35% of disposable household income.
- 3.** The London Plan must give thought to whether there are planning mechanisms to enable affordable housing to be kept affordable in perpetuity. This should cover houses for rent and for sale; ideas mooted included the possibility of a 'rent' use class or more creative use of conditions and incentives.
- 4.** A priority for the London Plan is to overhaul densities and typologies, with a focus on delivering places where people want to live. This includes re-visiting the density matrices and supporting policy to ensure they promote a range of density solutions.
- 5.** Ensure that the requirements for an ageing population are understood to ensure that housing stock is responding to these needs. This could include actively planning for different housing products and improved policy on adapting stock to changing requirements over a household's lifetime.



New typologies based on mansion blocks – Ely Court by Alison Brooks Architects

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Quality must not be overlooked in order to deliver quantity

B. Movement

Keeping London moving is crucial to its on-going success. Delegates agreed that the city has a great transport system; inner London in particular has excellent public transport connections, and there has been significant growth in walking and cycling. The creation of Transport for London has been good for the city, as it has 'control' over transport infrastructure and operations.

However, delegates identified a number of areas where it was felt that further improvement is required; such improvements are required across a range of different transportation scales from strategic to local.

The existing transport network is very radial. Whilst this has supported the continued development and success of the Central Activity Zone, better orbital movement is needed to capitalise on the potential of other areas in London. Linked to this, the public transport network in outer London is much less effective and integrated; more needs to be done if such locations are to support more ambitious levels of growth.

It was felt that the way we use existing assets can be improved and made to work 'harder'. This includes streets that can still feel congested, with inappropriate vehicles occupying them including large trucks. Similarly, better use could be made of existing capacity within road and rail systems.

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Better orbital movement is needed to capitalise on the potential of areas not in the Central Activity Zone

Recommendations:

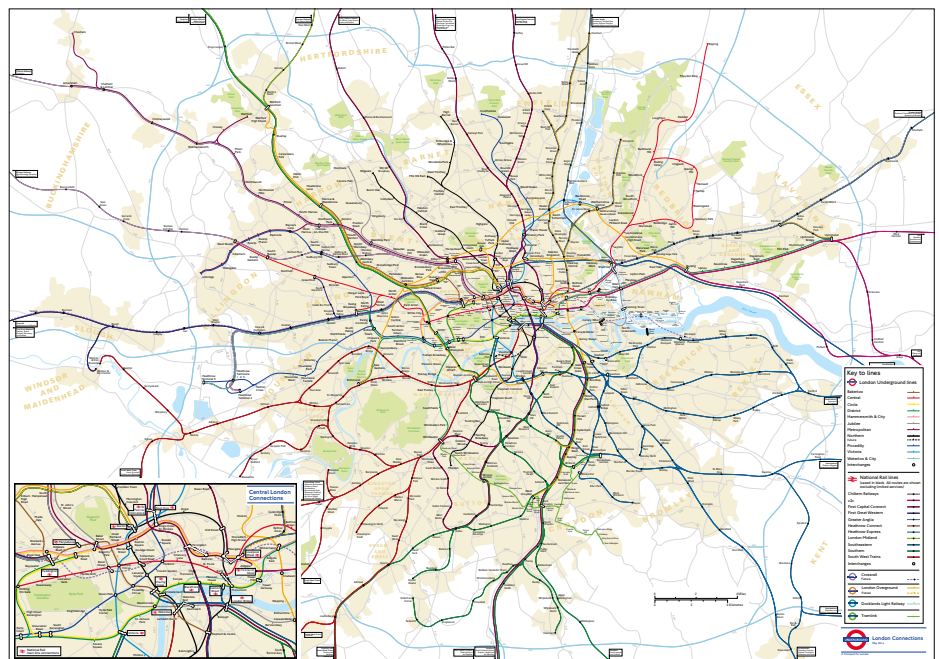
1. Create a vision for growth in outer London, led by transport which supports sympathetic higher density mixed use development. This could be supported in the London Plan through a more sophisticated approach to measuring Public Transport Accessibility Levels, taking cycling into account.

2. Given the transformational benefits of improved transport infrastructure to delivering growth, consideration should be given to the GLA taking the lead on the planning of strategic transport infrastructure, with TfL as the executive/delivery agency. This model would promote better coordination between the two agencies and maximise the benefits arising from strategic infrastructure investment.

3. The next iteration of the London Plan should seek to better integrate transport planning with land use planning, particularly around transport nodes (transit oriented development), so that investment and a long-term plan for transport create the conditions to maximise development potential.

4. Explore ways to spread the transport successes of inner London further out. This could include extending TfL's influence over rail and bus services in outer London or creating an east-west, north-south 'braid' of transport services, which enable travel between outer London locations without going through central London. These interventions could be supported by 'softer' measures, such as pricing cheaper fares in outer London or encouraging spreading of peak demand.

5. The London Plan should place more focus on accommodating and managing freight and reflect best practice exemplars (such as the Crown Estate, or freight consolidation at 22 Bishopsgate). In doing so, it should acknowledge the different requirements for servicing, deliveries, waste and construction.



Current London transport network

C. Working

The future of work is rapidly evolving, influenced by changing lifestyle patterns, locational decisions, and technology. The key challenge for the London Plan will be how it responds to this uncertainty in planning for employment space.

Delegates were clear that London will continue to require workspaces that provide and facilitate face-to-face engagement. Industrial land is essential for all those uses that 'supply' and 'feed' London. Increasingly there are risks to industrial land being displaced further away, which could result in London potentially choking its own supply chain. Linked to this, the types of modern industrial uses and spaces that London has and will need are not the same old 'dirty' industries; delegates stressed the need to consider the potential for industry to work alongside certain commercial and residential uses.

A direct challenge to start-ups and SMEs is the contraction in the supply of affordable workspace, which was seen as a result of permitted development rights allowing the conversion of office space to residential. This is a non-reversible process and delegates believe more needs to be done to prevent the loss of secondary and affordable workspace across London.

It was felt that London's town centres are important, irrespective of their place in the hierarchy. Whilst the future of their retail use is less certain, high streets represent the centre of economic life; it is important that we maintain economic opportunities close to where Londoners live and that they continue to provide a place for community congregation and to access public services.

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More needs to be done to prevent the loss of secondary and affordable workspace across London

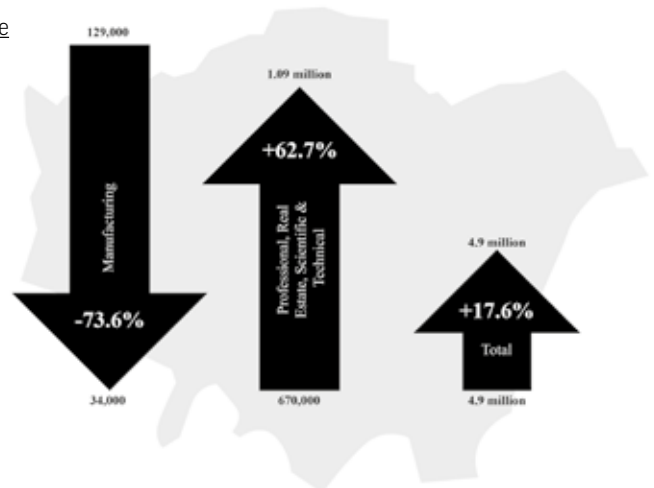


The future of work is evolving - Henry Wood House by The Office Group

Recommendations:

1. The London Plan should explore ways to create flexible employment designations to enable employment land to evolve to meet future demands. This should consider flexibility in relation to the design, size and type of activity that can be accommodated.
2. The approach to industrial land should be reviewed. A more proactive evaluation against performance criteria should be adopted which considers the contribution of industrial land to affordability, economic value, employment numbers and alignment with a strategy for the distribution of core city functions and essential service activities.
3. Where densification of industrial land is proposed through accommodating mixed use development, further guidance should be provided in the London Plan on appropriate combinations of uses.
4. Ensure that policy is keeping pace with the changing role of high streets. For example, the economic function of high streets should be protected whilst providing greater flexibility between employment and retail uses.
5. Consider policies to support the provision of cheap, flexible, equipped space for SMEs. This could include introducing the concept of affordable employment space (akin to affordable housing) and maximising meanwhile use opportunities of land and buildings.

GLA Estimated Jobs Change
Growth 2011–2036



D. Form

The form that development takes fundamentally influences how we engage with place and space. With London set to grow significantly over the coming decade, any new development should make a positive contribution to the city's urban fabric.

Delegates identified a range of issues which will affect the form of London. Whilst perhaps outside the scope of the London Plan, it was felt that there is significant latent capacity within the existing stock and that more needs to be done to look at how this capacity can be released.

London has an inherently mixed and layered context. Delegates felt that the guidance in the London Plan needs to better reflect this and promote other responses, which assist in moving away from the current trend of high density development on small plots of land. Whilst there was support for further development in outer London (and indeed that this may present one part of the solution to London's housing challenge), it was felt that such development should be targeted and could only be achieved with investment in supporting transport infrastructure and new schools, doctors etc.

More generally, delegates stressed that tall buildings and more dense development in and of itself is not 'the problem'. Rather it is a lack of supporting infrastructure and the overall quality of place, which we need to continue to improve.

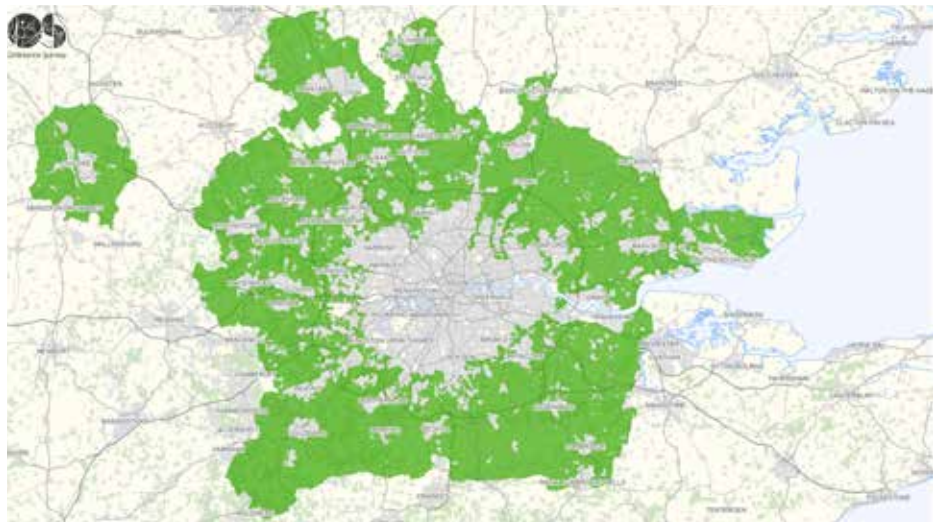
There was some consensus that although boroughs remain best placed to have responsibility for open spaces/public realm, there is not appropriate funding available. Constraints were identified with other ownership models including community and private provision, with the feeling that engendering more civic responsibility and therefore ownership of these spaces might provide the way forward.

Recommendations:

- 1.** Identify mechanisms which facilitate working the existing building stock harder. Opportunities to enhance or reconfigure existing stock should be prioritised (rather demolition) to ensure we make best use of our existing assets.
- 2.** Densification should be targeted and context-sensitive. The London Plan should consider how it can provide greater guidance to ensure the form including building typologies used to achieve densification are appropriate. New tools for considering density may need to be employed.
- 3.** Locations for suburban densification should be focused around existing and improved infrastructure and supported by employment space and new social infrastructure.
- 4.** Quality of place should be put first. The London Plan should ensure more dense development reflects transport connectivity and is not to the detriment of the quality of place.
- 5.** Development should share a civic responsibility. All developments have a civic responsibility to deliver and maintain accessible public realm. The London Plan should help to structure the management and maintenance of these spaces.



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The form that development takes in London fundamentally influences how we engage with place and space



London's Green Belt (c) Ordnance Survey

E. Wellbeing

With issues like London's poor air quality coming under increasing public scrutiny, health and wellbeing could serve as a strong, unifying vision for the next London Plan. Universal wins in adopting such an approach are many: bold moves to ensure better streetscapes, pedestrian-friendly environments and cycling infrastructure can increase activity and improve public health whilst reducing air pollution and alleviating pressure on overburdened public transport networks.

Discussions focused on the need to measure the impacts of wellbeing in the built environment. Linked to this, there was a call for greater collaboration between public health and planning teams to help inform and prioritise interventions, such as the encouragement of active travel to combat obesity and sedentary lifestyles. Delegates felt that planning could become an agent for public health that helps drive positive change.

The need for continued effective community engagement, consultation and co-design was identified. This would help build social capital, and foster a greater sense of pride, belonging and identity. Delegates also considered there was a need for greater diversification of products and services to support different lifestyles.

Inequality remains a contemporary challenge. Delegates believe more can be done to reduce the extremes of rich and poor. London needs to promote true cohesion between generations, ethnicities and socio-demographic profiles so that it remains an exemplar of successful integration of people from diverse backgrounds.

Parks and green infrastructure can help with both mental health and physical health while physical activity is central to combating young and old against serious obesity issues. Given the benefits of such spaces, many delegates were frustrated about lack of appropriate mechanisms to ensure their maintenance.



Stairs encourage healthier lifestyles – William Perkin School (c) Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios

Recommendations:

- 1.** The London Plan should place wellbeing high on its agenda. When evaluating its success, the improved health of London residents, families and workers should be considered and measured.
- 2.** When making planning decisions, more weight should be given to wellbeing. This could include measuring boroughs by social indicators/'happiness index', requiring developers to submit evidence of social return on investment as part of planning applications or fast-tracking proposals that directly respond to local health issues.
- 3.** Emphasis should continue to be provided on the importance of community engagement and bottom-up planning in the

development of places and spaces given the wellbeing benefits associated with community involvement.

- 4.** Continue to support the creation of mixed communities across the capital and ensure that where possible they reflect the different profile of Londoners.

- 5.** Continue to support development of green infrastructure networks within London. Further consideration should also be given to new models for maintaining green infrastructure including the potential for community ownership.

- 6.** The London Plan should encourage active travel, walking, cycling and public transport, to combat obesity and sedentary lifestyles.



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Planning could become
an agent for public
health that helps drive
positive change

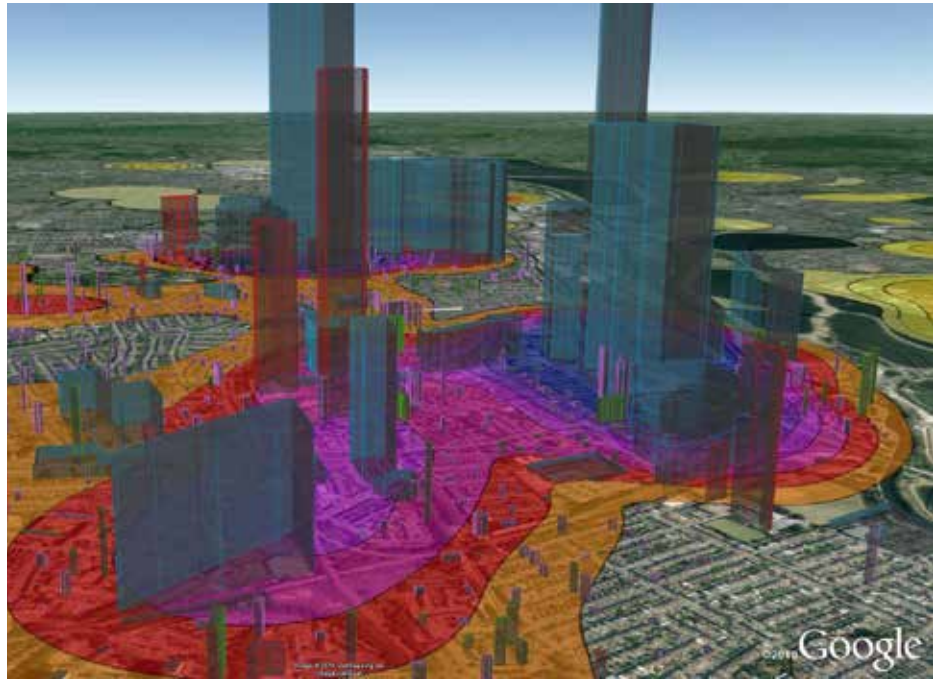
F. Digital

The digital dimension could prove to be a pervasive force in the new iteration of the London Plan. While at one time digital encouraged people to think of working from home and the 'death' of the city, the reality has been the exact opposite; digital is facilitating more connections and encouraging ever more face-to-face meetings.

In order to reap the potential benefits of digital we need to ensure we keep pace with infrastructure needs. Delegates confirmed this in relation to the provision of new infrastructure and the management of London's data.

As we continue to use technology more day-to-day, how individuals engage with the planning process and the way we access the London Plan needs to keep pace. Further consideration should be given to how we use digital to enable people to engage in plan making.

Digital is also offering up greater flexibility in living, working and playing. This encourages a different conversation about design and encourages us to reconsider what are we planning and designing for. However, as we become more dependent on technology in all aspects of our life, delegates emphasised the need to ensure that all in society can access and use these systems.



Engaging in plan making through digital - Haringey Council Energy Masterplan (c) WSP Parsons Brinckerhoff

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Digital is facilitating more connections and encouraging ever more face-to-face meetings

Recommendations:

1. There is a need to plan and build better digital infrastructure for London (internet and mobile coverage are our fourth utility); given the pace of change it should not be over-engineered to avoid redundancy (e.g. digging up roads).
2. A dedicated body (Data for London) should be created to oversee the use of digital technology and data at the city scale. It could manage opportunities (e.g. electronic pricing to reduce congestion; crowd-funding local infrastructure/services) and challenges (e.g. displacement of labour, data privacy) and assist boroughs to increase their capacity to use and share data.
3. Explore how we can better utilise digital to improve how we plan. This includes improving accessibility to planning within communities (e.g. pop-up alerts to show new plans in your area), and providing more detailed information on people/users to inform planning (e.g. use of mobile phone data).
4. Consider how digital creates and removes space and what this means for how we plan. For example, how does the planning system respond to concepts of 'hyper-malleable' space and, as it causes institutions to localise and fragment, checking whether conventional ways of planning social infrastructure remain relevant.
5. Continue to improve access to and education on utilising digital technologies. Such support should be offered to Londoners and London businesses.

G. Delivery

If the London Plan is to be successfully implemented the 'right' delivery and governance mechanisms must be in place. Whilst, this topic may be strictly outside the remit of the London Plan, it was felt this was an important area to consider since it effects our ability to implement the Plan's aspirations and policies.

Delegates agreed that 35 local planning authorities (33 boroughs plus two Mayoral Development Corporations) in London is 'too many' particularly when compared to other global cities such as New York which has far fewer. Delegates favoured some sort of sub-regional planning based on four or five London areas.

There was discussion that most of the big Opportunity Areas (Thames Gateway, Brent Cross, Lee Valley) cross borough boundaries. Delegates perceived that this had slowed down planning and delivery and that more needs to be done to expedite it. Linked to this,

delegates highlighted that planning on such a scale requires a different skillset and that local planning authorities may not have the capacity to service such requirements.

There was some consensus that more stakeholders – Londoners – need a voice in the development of a shared vision for London. There was a call for the next iteration of the London Plan to try to engage more widely than the 'usual suspects'.

In terms of delivery models, delegates agreed that Section 106 agreements are not the best mechanism to deliver affordable housing or strategic transport infrastructure. Such payments tend to 'strangle' developments resulting in all other aspects of development being 'squeezed out', such as quality, public realm, environment. This was considered to be a false economy because developments do not then have longevity.



Recommendations:

1. Encourage more sub-regional planning and consider streamlining the number of local planning authorities (which could be distinct to boroughs). In determining the grouping of authorities, consideration should be given to whether it is a radial or orbital grouping and how to pull in functional relationships with London's hinterland.
2. Consider new delivery mechanisms to expedite cross-boundary developments. This could include a less bureaucratic form of Mayoral Development Corporation, an 'MDC Lite', which could take a variety of forms including perhaps more targeted use of Local Development Orders.
3. Review the approach to staffing and resourcing teams responsible for planning and delivering Opportunity Areas to ensure individuals with appropriate skills are being utilised.
4. Review mechanisms to facilitate greater public involvement and engagement in the development of the London Plan. Existing methods for engagement could be complemented by more innovative approaches including more prominent use of digital technology.
5. Consider replacing Section 106 Agreements with an alternative system to deliver affordable housing etc. A fixed tariff system would, for example, remove the need for complex and time consuming negotiations. Models such as special purpose vehicles could also provide a favourable mechanism to aid delivery.

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The next iteration of the London Plan needs to try to engage more widely than the 'usual suspects'

H. Structure

Getting the structure of London right is crucial since it influences and dictates locations for development and those which are protected. Delegates felt that the spatial representation of London's growth needs to change so that it moves from a doughnut to more of a pizza, with reduced Central Activity Zone influence and more polycentric development particularly in outer London. There were calls for these new developments to comprise 'meaningful centres', which are desirable places for people to live and work, facilitated by strategic transport linkages.

There was consensus that the approach to reviewing the Green Belt was no longer fit for purpose; given the scale of London's housing challenge, the purpose and role of the Green Belt needed to be re-considered. Whilst views differed across delegates there was agreement that release of parts of the Green Belt was required.

Delegates also considered the structure and form of the London Plan itself. The accessibility of the document and extent of supporting document was discussed, with delegates exploring the potential benefits of a more open and 'live' plan. Such an approach may better support the public and private sectors to deliver given the rapidly changing challenges facing the city.



Recommendations:

- 1. Identify new meaningful centres.** Where intensification is proposed, this should be to support high quality centres which provide homes and employment and support increased social wellbeing including through the provision of social infrastructure and public realm.
- 2. Connect new centres with more orbital links.** New centres with meaningful and high quality public realm, housing and employment should be connected by improved orbital links, increasing interrelation and economic links.
- 3. Undertake a strategic review of development around transport interchanges.** There are opportunities to develop at increased densities around transport interchanges. New transport systems should be coordinated and shaped by a strategic review to inform the London Plan.
- 4. Commission a strategic review of London's Green Belt.** The review should provide clarity and definition on the role of the Green Belt in the context of London's wider growth strategy and its response to meeting housing needs.
- 5. The London Plan should be a simpler and more accessible document;** it needs to better communicate a clear and useable growth strategy for the city and could learn from other cities' initiatives such as PlaNYC.



— Given the scale of London's housing challenge, the purpose and role of the Green Belt needs to be re-considered

Re-inventing the London Plan: A charrette on the capital's future

Organised by



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We are an independent firm of designers, planners, engineers, consultants and technical specialists offering a broad range of professional services. Arup brings together broad-minded individuals from a wide range of disciplines and encourages them to look beyond the constraints of their own specialisms to make a positive difference.

In a rapidly urbanising world, if cities are to be efficient, liveable, resilient and sustainable, the relatively long life-cycle of urban development means we can ill afford to get it wrong. It is a challenge that cities around the world must confront; future generations will live with how we handle it. At Arup, we have joined in this challenge - with interventions large and small - to deliver better cities in our ongoing mission to shape a better world.

