

PLANNING FOR A BETTER LONDON – WHERE IS BORIS GOING?

THE POLICY DIRECTION

Sasha White

Section 1 – Introduction

1. As a result of significant changes to the planning regime over the past decade the Mayor of London now finds himself armed with substantial powers over the planning regime in the city in terms of both law and policy.
2. In terms of Policy we find ourselves in a period of significant change with the beginnings of the process to fundamentally revise the London Plan.
3. The new Mayor, Boris Johnson, is just coming up to a year in office. His year in office has been characterised, in planning terms by a concentration of new policy initiatives.
4. As a result of the statutory powers which now fall to the Mayor of London the approach taken on matters of planning policy have enormous consequences for the city and the developments which are likely to come forward in the years to come.
5. The structure of this lecture is to focus on the following critical elements of the Mayor's latest policy position namely;
 - a. **Policy theme 1** – The overall aims - Planning for a better London which provides the framework for the emerging revised London Plan.
 - b. **Policy theme 2** - The draft London Housing Strategy.
 - c. **Policy theme 3** - Use of planning obligations in the funding of Crossrail.
 - d. **Policy theme 4** – the future – what future policy Statements that will be issued by the Mayor.

Section 2 - Policy theme 1 – The overall aims - Planning for a better London which provides the framework for the emerging revised London Plan.

6. This new planning policy approach of the new Mayor was commenced by the publication last July of *Planning for a Better London* which sets out the Mayor's approach to planning issues and gives guidance as to the likely direction in which the London Plan will take under the current administration.

Planning for a Better London – The Timetable

7. This document was published in July 2008 and sets out the key themes which the Mayor intends to take forward into the new London Plan which is hoped to be completed by 2012. [*Planning for a better London – response*]
8. The period for consultation ended in November 2008 and it is planned to publish the final document soon this year.

Planning for a Better London – The Key Themes

9. As is stated within the document "*This short report set out the key areas I want to address in revising the London Plan*"¹
10. It is however important to note that the document "*is not a comprehensive statement of planning policy, but rather it sets out a 'direction of travel' that will characterise my term as mayor*"²
11. In summary the Key themes identified in policy terms by the Mayor are as follows:
 - a. More emphasis needs to be given to issues affecting Outer London and ways of realising untapped potential there.³

¹ *Planning for a Better London* - Foreword, paragraph 4.

² *Ibid*, Foreword, paragraph 4.

³ *Ibid*, page 9.

- b. The Mayor will establish an Outer London Commission to identify ways of realising the potential of Outer London. The Mayor is concerned that the Outer Boroughs are disconnected from the London Plan and will promote their regeneration through a forum promoting the unique needs of London's suburbs.
- c. The Mayor will strongly support the protection of the Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land and London's other precious green and open spaces.
- d. In future the Mayor will focus on genuinely strategic issues and areas where the GLA and its related organisations can really help.
- e. The Mayor intends to use his power to determine applications of potentially strategic importance "*carefully and sparingly*" only taking over those which do not have genuinely strategic implications for the planning of London. It is likely that he will use these powers only in the *most exceptional circumstances*.
- f. The Mayor intends to ensure London's continued economic success.
- g. To support tall buildings in appropriate locations (in places where there are existing clusters of tall buildings like the Isle of Dogs, the City and Croydon) and will work with the boroughs to identify and designate those places.
- h. To support delivery of affordable housing. The Mayor has made a commitment to 50,000 new homes between 2008-2011.
- i. To make real progress in meeting the challenge of climate change. The Mayor will continue to use the planning system to its full extent to make sure London copes with the consequences of the changes to its climate and to take steps to mitigate the future extent of that change.
- j. As a priority looking at ways of using the planning system to seek a contribution towards the cost of the Crossrail from development.

- k. To oppose the third runway at Heathrow. The Mayor intends to lead a thorough review of long term options for London's airports, including the scope for a new airport in the Thames Estuary.
- l. To ensure a strategic planning policy framework supportive of cycling and walking in particular a bicycle hire scheme similar to those in Paris.
- m. To support the use of the River Thames and other London Waterways for transportation of goods and people.
- n. To continue to promote the development of East London and the Thames Gateway as priority areas for development and regeneration.
- o. To ensure that realistic plans are in place to make the most of the legacy from the 2012 Olympics.
- p. The support of small independent shops and therefore to encourage boroughs to use Section 106 agreements to secure affordable retail space.
- q. Amend London Plan to encourage co-operation in Thames Gateway boroughs in order to ensure adequate coordination of development takes place in the Thames Gateway area.
- r. Discourage development on back gardens and a consequent amendment to the London Plan.
- s. Revise the London Plan to ensure large developments include a certain ratio of street trees.
- t. Clarify the Housing Strategy to call for all new homes to meet Level 3 of the Code for sustainable Homes by 2010 and Level 6 by 2016.

Section 3 - Policy theme 2 - The draft London Housing Strategy.

12. The Mayor has now published the draft London Housing Strategy. The DLHS was subject to consultation between November and January.
13. The Mayor is now considering his responses. Statutory consultation with the public will commence in the summer of 2009 with adoption in the autumn of 2009.
14. The key points of the DLHS are:
- a. The scrapping of the 50% affordable housing target as currently set out in the London Plan. *[As an aside it is noteworthy that the Mayor accepts that figure has never been achieved!]*
 - b. The Mayor will agree housing investment targets with each borough.
 - c. Individual borough-based housing investment targets will be agreed with the aim of delivering 50,000 affordable homes between 2008 and 2011.
 - d. 30,000 of those will be social rented with the aim to reduce homelessness and overcrowding.
 - e. The Government's requirements for meeting the needs of Travellers and Gypsies will be provided.
 - f. To get a better mix of family sized homes with 42 percent of social rented and 16 percent of intermediate homes having 3 bedrooms or more.
 - g. More homes to meet the requirements of the disabled and elderly.
 - h. London's new housing developments will contain a mix of tenures, encompassing the market, intermediate and social sectors.
 - i. To promote high quality housing design.
 - j. Their will be the publication of a London Housing Design Guide.

- k. London's carbon emissions should reduce by 60 per cent by 2025.

Section 4 - Policy theme 3 - Use of planning obligations in the funding of Crossrail.

15. The Mayor has announced his intention to alter the London Plan to allow for contributions towards the funding of Crossrail to be raised by developments through Section 106 obligations. That policy aspiration was identified in *Planning for a better London*.
16. The Mayor has now issued at December 2008 a Draft SPG entitled *Use of planning obligations in the funding of Crossrail*.
17. The intention of the Mayor is to effectively charge £19.80 per square foot or £213.30 per square metre on all new office space above 500 square metres or less, within an area which is to known as the Central Activities Zone (CAZ). It is said that a higher level of contribution will be sought at the Northern part of the Isle of Dogs. [see SPG para 4.9]
18. The Mayor's intention is to raise £200 million towards the current £15.9 million cost of the scheme.
19. This part of policy is already being implemented with 3 developments being told that their schemes were liable for a charge including the scheme next door to Landmark – Great Portland Estates are being asked to contribute £1.4 million as a result of their 140,000 sq ft office scheme at New Fetter Lane.
20. It is important to stress that the policy will be subject to scrutiny through the examination in public of the London Plan which is likely to take place later this year.
21. It is intended that this policy will be implemented by the Mayor on those applications he has power over and he will expect the Boroughs to include the Crossrail standard charge in planning obligations they negotiate with Boroughs. Contributions will be payable at the point at which the development commences.

22. It is also worth noting that the DSPG also deals with the proposed community infrastructure Levy. It is said that the Mayor will have the power to set a CIL charge to deliver key infrastructure needed to support the implementation of the London Plan.

Section 5 - Policy theme 4 – the future – what future policy statements that will be issued by the Mayor.

23. *Planning for a better London* helpfully sets out what future policy pronouncements are to emerge from the Mayor in the next 3 years. However this list must be viewed with the rider set out in the *Mayors response to consultation* when he states that the programme of SPG will be very substantially reduced to those areas where there is an urgent need.

24. The clear intention is to focus on the London Plan and its revision.

25. In addition to the London Plan, it is the intention of the Mayor to produce over the next 3 years the following Supplementary Planning Guidance and Better Practice Guides:

a. In the next 12 months:

- i. A new SPG relating to Housing.
- ii. Revised SPG on sustainable design and construction and renewable energy.
- iii. Revised SPG on accessibility and ensuring inclusive environments.
- iv. BPG on open space strategies.
- v. An IR on London's geodiversity.

b. In 2009/10:

- i. SPG on town centres, retail need and leisure.
- ii. A planning framework for the development of the Central Activities Zone.
- iii. An SPG on green infrastructure.
- iv. An SPG on encouraging Cycling and Walking.
- v. An BPG on designing out crime and anti-social behaviour.

c. In 2010/11:

- i. SPG on trees and woodlands.

- ii. SPG on waterways.
- iii. SPG on Outer London (which will take account of the recommendations of the commission that will be set up to examine policies for Outer London).
- iv. BPG on London's Sports Facilities.

Section 6 – Summary and Conclusion

26. The next two to three years are going to be a busy time for those involved in the planning system within London.

27. Policy pronouncements are emerging thick and fast – last week the Mayor committed to achieve at least 100,000 electric cars in London by 2015 with the addition of 25,000 charging spaces.

[Press release – 8 April 2009]

Key Documents

- Planning for a better London – July 2008.
- Planning for a better London – Response of Mayor – November 2008.
- Draft Supplementary Planning Guidance – Use of Planning Obligations in the Funding of Crossrail – December 2008.
- Proposed London Plan Alterations – Use of planning obligations in the funding of Crossrail – December 2008.
- The London Housing Strategy – Draft for consultation – November 2008.
- London Housing Strategy – The Mayors response to the London Assembly's submission – March 2009.

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Sasha White
Landmark Chambers
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