

**South East Strategic Leaders
Comments on the draft London Plan
March, 2018
Neil Border**

SESL's overall comments

1. The South East Strategic Leaders (SESL) thank the Mayor for inviting us to comment on the draft London Plan. We recognise the role and importance of the emerging Plan in guiding and shaping how London grows. As the Leaders of strategic authorities across the wider South East, we hope to be fully engaged as the Plan evolves, to ensure the delivery of new housing, employment and required services and infrastructure across the Plan period.
2. The wider South East has delivered some of the highest housing completion rates in the country. However, this growth has far outpaced the delivery of the infrastructure that is needed to sustain it. Parts of the wider South East are at breaking point with, for example, severe congestion on the roads, overcrowded trains and lengthening waiting times for health facilities, all of which are ever increasing challenges to businesses and quality of life.
3. Nonetheless, as the home to strategic gateways, with links to Europe and beyond, and routes to the rest of the UK, as well as its contribution to the capital's workforce, the wider South East remains critically important to national productivity.
4. Infrastructure and housing requirements need to be considered over a wide strategic geography. In the case of the wider South East, proximity to London is increasing housing demand and impacting upon the region's growth, infrastructure and demographics. With a further forecast population increase in the coming years and issues around house price affordability, Greater London will continue to have growing impacts across the wider South East.
5. The challenges for the wider South East of additional inward population flows include pressure on already stretched infrastructure provision and service capacity, and finding suitable sites to deliver growth sustainably.
6. These comments set out the views of the South East Strategic Leaders on the draft London Plan. Individual strategic authorities across the wider South East will make their own representations on the draft Plan.
7. The South East Strategic Leaders look forward to the opportunity to work with you as work on the London Plan continues, particularly around the drafting and progression of policies relating to the wider South East.
8. SESL comprises the Leaders of 16 upper tier authorities across the wider South East. SESL regards the wider South East as the area managing the development and growth pressures associated with being the UK's

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economic powerhouse, including the unique challenges created by strong influences from London and its growth pressures. SESL's membership represents:

Bracknell Forest Council
Buckinghamshire County Council
Central Bedfordshire Council
Essex County Council
Hampshire County Council
Hertfordshire County Council
Kent County Council
Oxfordshire County Council
Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead
Reading Borough Council
Slough Borough Council
Surrey County Council
Swindon Borough Council
West Berkshire Council
West Sussex County Council
Wokingham Borough Council

Good Growth policies

Comment: The South East Strategic Leaders (SESL) support the preparation of a new London Plan, planning for London's growth and providing for community and economic growth. The Leaders also support the inclusion of the six core policies seeking Good Growth.

Housing - assessment methodology

Comment: The use of a separate assessment methodology creates ambiguity and puts Local Plans in adjoining areas and beyond at risk to challenges where developers seek to apply London's housing need assessment methodology. Greater clarity is needed re the implications of London's migration patterns, to ensure that there is no double counting.

Housing - scale of provision

Comment: Whilst the draft Plan's commitment to meet the majority of identified housing needs appears to be very challenging in the light of persistent delivery failure, it is welcome that Mayor is seeking to meet the majority of London's housing needs within the capital.

Housing provision up to 2028/9

Comment: The GLA has to explain how the additional 1,000 homes per year could be provided in order to meet London's needs, rather than allow that need to translate into pressure on parts of the wider South East.

Housing provision between 2028/9 and 2041

Comment: The draft Plan's focus on the first ten years leaves uncertainty over the remainder of the Plan period to 2041. The Plan needs to be clear about London's intentions for that period and the role, if any, for areas outside London in meeting the capital's needs post-2029. More certainty and further explanatory detail is required, particularly around priorities and delivery for the latter part of the Plan period, 2028/9-2041.

Although a plan, monitor and manage approach is understood, it requires a robust monitoring framework. The London Plan should also set out some evidence-based thinking about provision post-2028/9 provision, including scenarios re possible housing need and strategic options to 2041. This includes publishing the details of any work done to establish whether London can accommodate all or some of its housing needs post-2029.

Housing on small sites

Comment: This emphasis is supported in so far as it will help to increase the delivery of new homes. There is, however, a risk that, in some locations, the level of delivery on small sites may be unachievable due to the lack of availability. This would further increase the gap between assessed need and housing delivery. It would be beneficial to undertake further collaboration with local boroughs to encourage delivery on a variety of small sites based on local opportunities.

The development of small sites can hamper the ability to provide comprehensive infrastructure to support communities. The Plan will need mechanisms to prevent knock-on impacts, particularly places abutting London as services and infrastructure capacity are already stretched.

Affordable homes

Comment: The London Plan must ensure that the required range and mix of private and affordable housing is delivered within London. London boroughs should be required to deliver affordable homes within their area to avoid the significant relocation of people into the wider South East and to prevent inevitable additional strains on resources from already stretched public services.

Housing - outer London

Comment: There is a potential risk that, with the ambitious housing targets for London's outer boroughs and the refusal to assess the functioning of the inner boundary of the Green Belt, London may not be able to meet all of its needs within its boundaries. This could result in unmet needs.

It is highly questionable whether the housing markets outside London will have the capacity to deliver not just a boost in supply to meet their own needs, but also additional housing to help meet London's needs. This is a concern not just in terms of the availability of deliverable sites – taking account of constraints such as the Green Belt and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty – but also in terms of what the local markets can realistically support.

Housing delivery failure

Comment: There would be a range of potentially serious consequences if housing delivery within London does not increase above current levels and fails to deliver the requirements set out by the draft Plan. Beyond the capital, these consequences could include increased commuting, increased trends towards migration and pressure for increased housing land and development.

The Plan should set out what would be the Mayor's response if housing delivery rates fail to increase and whether the situation would be managed within London or whether the Mayor would seek support from further afield.

Without greater clarity on how London would manage its own housing pressures, policies and delivery rates, local planning authorities outside London could be pressurised by some parties, and perhaps asked by Inspectors, to explain how they propose to address housing delivery shortfalls within London.

Housing delivery shortfalls within the capital should be a matter for London to deal with, perhaps by means of a review of the Plan or alterations to it. There may also be merit in the Plan identifying a trigger point for such a review or alterations – a specific number of years of failure, for example.

Opportunity areas (OAs)

Comment: Some of the proposed OAs close to London's boundary are likely to have significant implications for adjoining areas across the boundary. The London Plan (Policy SD1) should recognise the potential cross-border impacts of the OAs and the need for the Mayor's agencies and London boroughs to engage on these matters with relevant local authorities outside London, including strategic councils as key infrastructure providers, in order to deliver sustainable growth.

Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land

Comment: Areas outside London are under pressure to commit to, and undertake, Green Belt reviews in order to accommodate high levels of growth; this approach should be consistent across all Green Belt authorities including the GLA and London Boroughs.

Large parts of the wider South East are subject to environmental and other constraints, some of which cover significant areas. These include, for example, Green Belt, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and land at risk of flooding. Such designations, whilst valuable in their own right, restrict the ability of local areas to meet their own identified housing needs. This will limit, if not eliminate, the potential for many areas to accommodate London's growth.

The significance of paragraph 84 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), and in particular the need to "promote sustainable patterns of development" when reviewing Green Belt boundaries, should not be under-

estimated; it has been a key issue in a number of local plan examinations¹. It is not clear how the draft Plan accords with the NPPF on Green Belt.

Working across the wider South East

Comment: The draft Plan's awareness of London's setting, its neighbours and relationships is acknowledged and supported.

As the Plan progresses, it would be useful for the wider South East to continue working with the Mayor to make any necessary improvements to this proactive and positive policy and the narrative around it.

There is, however, a need for much more positive inter-regional planning, where London is seen as an integral part of the wider South East. This will better address cross-boundary issues and help relieve pressure on the wider South East. Whilst references to partnership work are encouraging, in reality there have been limited examples of cross-boundary working or investment to help meet business and communities in London and the wider South East, such as extending transport routes and services beyond London's boundaries. Without evidence of this commitment, it is not clear how the Mayor intends to work with the wider South East partners on regional challenges and shared strategic concerns.

The Mayor needs to set out how the GLA and Transport for London will, for instance, work with other transport infrastructure providers to make improvements to the network across and outside London's boundary in, for example, overground and underground lines serving London and the wider South East.

Willing partners

Comment: SESL understands the Mayor's wish to plan for longer term contingencies with regard to future growth and the Mayor's interest in working with willing partners beyond London to explore if there is potential to accommodate more growth in sustainable locations.

There has, however, been little sustained attempt to identify, establish or develop working relationships with authorities who could be potential willing partners for growth.

There are already pressures across the wider South East in providing for growth and delivering the infrastructure to support it. Authorities are facing increasing challenges to meet their own growth requirements, with the need for major infrastructure proving a significant hurdle and constraint to major growth. Any additional housing pressures from London cannot be subsumed without significant investment in strategic infrastructure.

SESL is not convinced that there are many suitable or sustainable locations in the wider South East for accommodating additional growth from London. Any locations with potential would need careful consideration by local authorities,

¹ Including Coventry, Cheshire East, Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire and the Vale of White Horse

utility and service providers and other partners. The offer being made by the Mayor, if there is one, would also need greater clarity and certainty. Authorities outside London are concerned that growth additional to that indigenous to, or moving into, their areas will not be supported by the necessary infrastructure and services. There is a risk that provision made to help London will result in dormitory settlements with working populations commuting into London, but with no local improvement in facilities.

The Plan and the Mayor should provide robust assurances as to what joint work, mutual benefit and London's support would look like, particularly given the context of still only limited meaningful cross-boundary working to date. Details on specific incentives and actions are also required to evidence how the desired employment relocation may be achieved.

Strategic infrastructure priorities

Comment: The purpose and intentions of Policy SD3 and its supporting text are unclear. The policy appears to relate to investment in strategic infrastructure to support growth where there are relationships to London. However, in the supporting text the focus seems to turn away from infrastructure and towards the delivery challenges associated with housing growth.

SESL would like:-

- a discussion within the wider South East political arrangements seeking clarification about the Mayor's intentions in relation to cross-boundary working and scenarios post-2029;
- revisions to the policy and supporting text to correctly and accurately reflect the status of the priorities for infrastructure investment; and
- removal of any suggestions that the strategic transport infrastructure priorities are growth priorities/corridors and perhaps the transfer of text relating to infrastructure priorities to the transport section of the Plan along with additional text about their purpose and how they are to be taken forward.

SESL welcomes the inclusion of some strategic infrastructure priorities across the wider South East. However, the Plan should include all the joint strategic infrastructure priorities, in their entirety, of SESL, SEEC and SEDEEPT in a revised version of Figure 2.15 and appropriate supporting text as these serve the wider South East, sea ports and airports as well as London.

The economy - substituting some of London's industrial capacity to property markets elsewhere

Comment: The desire of any local authorities and communities in the wider South East to accept some of London's industrial capacity or activities must be explored, with proper consideration of the potential impacts in both London and the communities outside London. It is not clear, at this stage, that there is any interest from communities, businesses and authorities outside London to such an approach.

Sustainable infrastructure

Comment: The London Plan should make it clear that London's waste planning authorities (WPAs) need to be more positive and strategic in facilitating delivery of the management capacity as emerging trends suggest that more waste than previously anticipated is to be exported to other WPAs. If this trend continues it could significantly impact upon or displace the capacity of other WPAs and the level to which they can achieve net self-sufficiency.

Green infrastructure and natural environment

Comment: SESL supports the draft Plan's positive approach for more sustainable development that will: reduce carbon emissions and energy demand; increase recycling; and improve the quality of life and access to green space.

The Government's 25-year Environment Plan includes proposals that seek to embed a "*net environmental gain*" principle for housing and infrastructure development. It says that current policy is for the planning system to provide net gains in biodiversity where possible, but adds that the Government: "*will explore strengthening this requirement for planning authorities to ensure environmental net gains across their areas, and will consult on making this mandatory – including any exemptions that may be necessary*".

The London Plan should be more strongly aligned with this aspiration, introducing the principle of "environmental net gain" into planning decisions where wider natural capital benefits will be assessed as part of the planning process.

The Government's 25-year Plan aims to use a natural capital approach to protecting and enhancing the environment, by recognising tangible and non-tangible economic benefits. The Government pledges to: "*... set gold standards in protecting and growing natural capital – leading the world in using this approach as a tool in decision-making. ... take into account the often hidden additional benefits in every aspect of the environment for national wellbeing, health and economic prosperity*".

The London Plan needs to give greater weight and emphasis to the natural capital approach as advocated in the Government 25-year Environment Plan with reference to the Mayor's recently published natural capital account for London

Transport – walking and cycling

Comment: SESL supports the draft Plan's overall approach for reducing travel by private car and improving the environment and public transport to encourage walking and cycling.

Transport – Aviation

Comment: SESL understands the Mayor's concerns over the possible environmental and social implications of airport expansion. However, the Government has considered these, and other matters, and decided that

additional runway capacity should be provided at Heathrow Airport subject to the necessary research, design, conditions, mitigation and legislative processes. Rather than seek to re-open the debate about where capacity should be provided, the Mayor should – through the London Plan and accompanying transport strategies – seek to support and optimise the economic and social benefits of aviation growth whilst preventing, reducing or mitigating its deleterious effects.

Waste

Comment: SESL supports Policy E4 which prioritises the retention and provision of additional industrial capacity in locations that provide capacity to support London's economy and population including waste management.

SESL also supports the general approach to reducing waste and supporting the circular economy (Policy S17). However, there are concerns about the policy's effectiveness and suggest that the Plan should:-

- set clear definitions for the term 'circular economy' and the related terms 'circular economy principles' and 'highest use';
- make it clear how 'a more circular economy' would be promoted; and
- consider whether the recycling target of 95% by 2020 for construction, demolition and excavation waste is meaningful for a Plan that is not due to be adopted until 2019 leaving little time for the policy to take effect.

SESL supports the principle of requiring Circular Economy Statements with referable applications. The information in such Statements should be available to those local authorities, including those outside London, receiving the waste and the Plan should indicate how this will be achieved in order to 'help receiving authorities plan for future needs'.

The supporting text also sets out that 'where it is intended to export waste to landfill outside of London, it will be important to show that the receiving authority has the capacity to deal with waste over the lifetime of the development'. It is important to clarify that "lifetime of the development" includes both the construction and operational phases of the development. Furthermore, to meet this requirement, it is recognised that developers may ask the receiving authority for details of their capacity but it is also important that the receiving waste authority is provided with information from the developer as to the amount of waste they can expect to receive. Further guidance on Circular Economy Statements should address these issues and cover both the construction and operational phases of development.

SESL supports the draft Plan's target for net self-sufficiency by 2026 (Policy S18) and the supporting text. However, it is unclear what volumes and types of waste London expects to import/export as part of the 'exchange' of waste between areas within and beyond London. This information is necessary in order to measure and monitor whether the target is being met and the required waste management facilities are available. Part B 3a of Policy 18 should be reworded to make it clear that it is recycling and recovery capacity at existing sites that should be optimised.

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There is extreme pressure on development land in London and if net self-sufficiency is to be achieved, waste sites should not be redeveloped for non-waste uses other than in exceptional circumstances and when compensatory capacity can be provided. Therefore, SESL strongly supports the approach to safeguarding waste sites (Policy S19). However, there are concerns that compensatory capacity will be calculated using the maximum throughput achieved over the last 3 years which could mean that no compensatory capacity is required if a site has been dormant. Compensatory capacity should equate to the maximum design capacity of a facility or maximum capacity achieved over the life of a facility. Policy S19 should make it clear that transfer capacity cannot compensate for treatment capacity.