

Wider South East Roundtables

4 September 2015, Homerton College, Cambridge

Notes

Emerging consensus from the first three Roundtables

Following a Wider South East Summit in March 2015, Roundtable discussions were set up to progress political discussion about future co-ordination/co-operation between the Mayor of London, the South East and East of England on strategic growth and infrastructure issues. Leaders from all councils and Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) representatives in the South East and East were invited to attend small Roundtable meetings with the GLA, with the first two sessions held on 10 July and a further three in September. This note summarises the first of these three and took place in Cambridge. A second Wider South East Summit on 11 December 2015 will consider the Roundtable findings and the way forward.

Attendees at all three Roundtable sessions supported the need for political engagement, with the following emerging consensus on four broad topics of discussion as identified by the independent facilitator. Tracked changes refer to specific/additional points raised at the East of England session in Cambridge.

1. Purpose/scope

There must be a recognition of the importance of the strong mutual relationship between London, East and the South East. The focus must be on economic prosperity as well as housing, ~~and~~ planning, and environmental quality and must address transport and other strategic infrastructure in the wider sense. The purpose must relate to the strategic big picture, with mechanisms for more focused work on particular areas such as transport corridors. It will be important to prioritise, with an initial focus on housing and transport. There is a need before the September sessions to begin to refine the scope/scale of future political engagement.

2. Geography

The proposed mechanism should relate to the areas covered by London, East and South East of England. The focus should be on the area as a whole with mechanisms for more detailed work being done on specific localities. It would complement not duplicate cross-boundary relationships.

3. Political mechanisms

The mechanisms should be bureaucratically light. They should enable different voices to be heard and not be dominated by a particular place or type of council. The principles of the proposed arrangements should be:

- inclusive (possibly a summit at least once a year);
- workable (possibly a smaller steering group/executive);
- accountability of the smaller group to the wider membership (with a concerted effort on communications to enable the accountability to work);
- operates in an all-party fashion.

There is a need for a more detailed discussion on the design of these mechanisms at the September sessions. At the East of England session in Cambridge a consensus emerged that a small executive should be established to steer the work, which should be representative in a variety of ways, including geographically.

4. Support and resources

Consideration must be given to developing a shared and consistent data base, building on existing work and information. It was agreed that a short note should be produced by the final Roundtables on the actions currently in hand to possibly establish a common data base and the likely timescales. Any support mechanism must be light touch and build on existing arrangements. Discussions on this are currently underway at elected member and chief executive level. ~~More work is needed on this once the scope and scale of the future engagement have been refined.~~

Welcome

Sir Edward Lister (Deputy Mayor for Planning at the Greater London Authority) welcomed the significant interest by Council Members and LEPs. He reiterated that London could meet its own housing need focusing on building on brownfield land. However, as throughout the wider South East, delivery was not keeping up with the levels of growth and this was compounded by a capacity shortage in the construction industry. Sir Ed stressed the importance of transport improvements to support growth. Cllr Jason Ablewhite (Leader of Huntingdonshire District Council and new Chairman of the East of England Local Government Association) highlighted the diverse needs within the East of England and said that a one-size-fits-all approach may not be suitable. However, strategic collaboration was important for economic growth and approaching Government jointly with key infrastructure requirements would add weight to them being considered. Based on the encouraging outcome of the July Roundtables, the East of England LGA would continue to support this engagement process, and further work in particular on the mechanisms for co-operation and the resources is needed.

Scene Setting

Jorn Peters, Senior Strategic Planner, from the GLA gave a brief presentation (provided separately) setting the scene for the discussion.

Roundtable discussion

Phil Swann from Shared Intelligence independently facilitated the Roundtable discussion. The following key points were discussed by participants:

Purpose/Scope

- As requested at the July Roundtables, a paper had been produced by officers to provide further detail on the potential scope and scale of future engagement (see Annex 2 of Roundtable papers – provided separately).
- The multiple interdependencies between London and the wider South East were highlighted again.
- Opportunities arising from jointly making a strong case for resource and infrastructure requirements were emphasised.
- The importance of co-operation on housing need was stressed: Relevant factors influencing housing need such as migration, remain uncertain, and also the characteristics of the migrating population.
- New mechanisms could also provide opportunities to discuss other sensitive issues such as waste management.
- Environmental and landscape issues also need to be considered as part of the scope for future co-operation.

- Future discussions should to be based on a shared understanding of datasets relating to priority issues that are within the scope of future cooperation.

Geography

- Confirming the position reached at the July Roundtables, it was suggested that the new arrangements should focus on issues relevant for the wider South East as a whole with mechanisms for more detailed work being done on specific localities.

Political mechanisms

- It was proposed to establish a small Executive Group to steer future collaboration and to ensure that things get done. This should be a politically proportionate group with for example four representatives from London, the East and the South East of England each. Due to the diverse nature of the wider South East (urban/rural, varying proximity to London) such a Group would need a geographical spread of representatives, but it would be up to the individual former regions to identify their representatives individually.
- The Executive Group would report to wider group of all local authorities by e-mail, etc and once a year for example something like the wider South East Summit would be held. The Group would need to focus on very few strategic issues. Housing and transport should initially be prioritised.
- Geographical sub-groups and task-and-finish groups for specific locations/issues would be useful. There would be opportunities to use existing Duty-to-Co-operate groups/arrangements and potentially Local Enterprise Partnership arrangements for this. The three National Parks within the wider South East (The Broads, the South Downs and the New Forest) provide strategic benefits for the whole area. Tapping into the network of National Parks would be another example of using existing arrangements to explore specific issues.
- Slight caution was raised about setting new mechanisms in stone, but perhaps a start could be made with a sort of 'shadow arrangement'.

Support and resources

- It was confirmed that new arrangements would need to be light on bureaucracy and cost effective.
- Future discussions would need to be based on shared/consistent datasets. Officers need to make rapid progress with investigating strategic data requirements across the wider South East, building on the work underway by the wider South East officer group (Strategic Spatial Planning Officer Liaison Group – SSPOLG), which is already sharing data, e.g. on demography. It was agreed that a short note should be produced by officers for the final Roundtables on the actions to establish a common data base and the likely timescales. This should be circulated to all local authorities and LEPs (i.e. not only those attending the final Roundtables) to provide an overview for Council members in particular. This would also help to identify additional research needed to address for example data inconsistencies and strategic data gaps.
- This additional research was considered important and should not be done 'on the cheap', as it would be used for discussions with Government about needs of the wider South East. Costs would have to be determined soon to be taken into account when Councils consider their next Budget. London would also make a proportionate contribution.

- Concerns were raised about the limited resources and expertise currently available in local authorities for this strategic engagement work. Different timescales between the development of the London Plan and between individual Local Plans could also present practical difficulties.

Emerging consensus and next steps

At all three sessions so far there was support for better engagement arrangements. The summary on page 1 of this note represents the emerging consensus as identified by the independent facilitator from these first three Roundtable sessions. These will inform the final Roundtable discussions with South East of England representatives on 18 Sept 2015 as well as the Outer London Commission's consideration of the wider South East relations. The Chair of the Outer London Commission will attend these two sessions.

List of Attendees

Council Members		
Dave Hodgson	Elected Mayor and Management Committee of the East of England LGA	Bedford Borough Council
Graham Butland	Leader	Braintree District Council
Jacque Burgess	Chair	Broads Authority
Lewis Herbert	Leader	Cambridge City Council
James Jamieson	Leader	Central Bedfordshire Council
Richard Stay	Elected Member and Chairman of the East of England LGA Improvement Panel	Central Bedfordshire Council
Paul Smith	Leader	Colchester Borough Council
Linda Haysey	Leader	East Hertfordshire District Council
Lance Stanbury	Councillor	Forest Heath District Council
Sir Edward Lister	Deputy Mayor of London	Greater London Authority
Jason Ablewhite	Leader and Chairman of the East of England LGA	Huntingdonshire District Council
Dave Taylor	Mayor	Luton Borough Council
Roy Davis	Elected Member and Management Committee of the East of England LGA	Luton Borough Council
Lynda Needham	Leader	North Hertfordshire District Council
Alan Waters	Leader	Norwich City Council
Sara Mildmay White	Deputy Leader	St Edmundsbury Borough Council
John Gardner	Deputy Leader - Environment and Economy	Stevenage Borough Council
Richard Smith MVO	Cabinet Member for Finance	Suffolk County Council
Neil Stock	Leader	Tendring District Council

Susan Barker	Cabinet Member	Uttlesford District Council
Mandy Perkins	Executive Member for Planning, Housing and Community	Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council
Officers		
John Williamson	Manager	Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Joint Planning Unit
Richard Carr	Chief Executive	Central Bedfordshire Council
Claire Stuckey	Senior Planning Officer (Planning Policy)	Chelmsford City Council
Cecilia Tredget	Managing Director	East of England LGA
Mark Reeve	Chairman	Greater Cambridge & Greater Peterborough LEP
Jorn Peters	Senior Strategic Planner	Greater London Authority
Richard Linton	Strategic Planning Manager	Greater London Authority
Paul Donovan	Team Leader, Strategic Planning	Hertfordshire County Council
John McGill	Director	London Stansted Cambridge Consortium
Phil Morris	Principal Planner, Infrastructure and Economic Growth	Norfolk County Council
David Scholes	Chief Executive	North Hertfordshire District Council
James Cutting	Planning Strategy Manager	Suffolk County Council
Harvey McGrath	Deputy Chair	London Enterprise Panel
Richard Hatter	Strategic Planning Manager ¹	Thurrock Council
Martin Tedder	Transport Economist	Transport for London
Andrew Taylor	Assistant Director Planning and Building Control	Uttlesford District Council
Steven Wood	Head of Planning and Growth	West Suffolk Council

¹ Chairman of the East of England SSPOLG