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# The Past in the Future: The role of planning cultures and legacies in delivering growth in the South East of England

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# THE PAST IN THE FUTURE: THE ROLE OF PLANNING CULTURES AND LEGACIES IN DELIVERING GROWTH IN THE SOUTH EAST OF ENGLAND


**Executive Summary**

**About the research**

This report explores the role of past planning decisions and established local 'planning cultures' in shaping present day approaches to planning for growth in three case study areas in the South East region, namely South Hampshire, the Gatwick Diamond and Oxford/Oxfordshire. The research has been funded by the RTPI South East region.

The research builds on a previous project, funded under the RTPI's Small Project Impact Research (SPIRe) scheme, which investigated the efficacy of governance arrangements surrounding three contemporary instances of planning for housing and employment growth in the South East region – the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH), the Gatwick Diamond Initiative (GDI) and Science Vale UK (SVUK).

The current project sought to extend the earlier analysis by examining some of the historical antecedents to these contemporary planning arrangements, guided by the view that the possibilities for present and future planning are shaped and constrained by past planning decisions and established local planning cultures.

Here, 'planning cultures' can be understood as distinct local planning rationalities, which is to say, planning practice adapts to the context in which it operates. These contexts are informed by the planning history (legacy) of the areas in question – emphasising what is sometimes called 'path dependence'. Building on the previous research, the current project incorporated focus group meetings in each of the case study areas. These focus groups considered the underlying basis and historical antecedents to present day planning challenges, and sought to facilitate a constructive dialogue between experienced and early career planners in the local government sector and also across the public-private sector divide.

**Who should read this?**

This report should be of interest to policy-makers, decision-makers and practitioners in planning in the UK and internationally, and researchers and commentators interested in planning and growth.

**Key findings**

In the first instance, discussions of local planning culture must be situated within the broader context of national political-economic trends and the longer-term dynamics of planning. This is to say, 'planning culture' more broadly has been gradually eroded from the late-1960s and government policy since the 1980s has – in varying ways – chipped away at planning's foundations and original ambitions. This can be seen in a number of dimensions over time: in relationships between planners and politicians, where the status of the profession has been seriously challenged; in legal and policy 'churn', which has undermined the coherence and legitimacy of planning policy and processes; and in the increasingly uncertain status of strategic and regional planning, not least since 2010.

Within this overall context however, the case studies in this report demonstrate that distinct sub-regional or local planning cultures can exist even where there are generally similar region-wide development pressures. Within the settlement pattern of the South East of England – with its

London focus, the absence of counterweighting large city-regions and numerous market towns – the manner in which growth pressures have tended to be dealt with differently has formed part of these sub-regional planning cultures.

This has given rise to what might be seen as distinct 'ways of seeing things' across each of the three case study areas: a culture of 'urban political dissonance' in Oxford-Oxfordshire; a culture of compliance and collaborative working in PUSH; and a culture of accepting and managing difference and uncertainty across the GDI area, as summarised below. At the same time, some of these local approaches represent entirely logical responses to how central government relates to localities – something which should be borne in mind in interpreting all of the case studies.

Planning in Oxfordshire has been marked by sustained patterns of tension, as ongoing strategic action on the part of local authorities has resulted in some incoherent policy agendas. As a result it has sometimes been difficult to find compromise or workable policy resolution. In particular, for the past 30 years or so development planning in Oxfordshire has been marked by an evolving policy dilemma regarding the growth and physical expansion of Oxford city, which has had critical implications for planning policy in the county and for the growth prospects of the city and the sub-region.

In the face of opposition amongst the surrounding districts to the physical expansion of the city, the City Deal in Oxford-Oxfordshire reflected attempts to manage sometimes contradictory policy agendas amongst the local authorities. We argue that the City Deal bid was framed around questions of innovation and economic growth in order to avoid the immediate conflict which would accompany direct engagement with housing allocations. Political dissonance thereby circumscribed the nature of the strategic response, ensuring that the key issue of housing was effectively avoided, but this resulted in an associated lack of specificity in the City Deal proposal and ongoing conflict over the wider spatial strategy for the County.

In contrast to the Oxfordshire case, South Hampshire displays a remarkable degree of consonance across a large number of local authorities in what is a complex part of the country (in terms of urban, rural and suburban interests, county and city authorities, a collection of disparate political standpoints, and a unique coastal topography). Despite the different complexions of the 12 local authorities across the PUSH area, a relatively strong measure of cooperation and joint working represents an important continuity in planning in the area, certainly amongst planning officers in the respective organisations, and perhaps to a lesser extent across the political leadership of the authorities concerned.

The foundations for this cooperation can be traced through an extensive history. South Hampshire was identified as a potential growth area as early as the 1960s, when central government identified it as the location for a possible new town, and in response to analysis that the sub-region had under-performed in economic terms. The accommodation of population growth and associated planning for housing and employment in South Hampshire has, from the onset of post-war economic recovery, been understood locally as Hampshire 'doing its bit' for the nation. At the same time, one of the main forces prompting a measure of cooperation has been the desire to pre-empt any central government attempt to dictate housing numbers or where houses should be located. Arguably the lack of a stronger coordinated strategic approach to the planning of what has become a single sub-regional economy has contributed to economic under-performance, and attempting to correct this has been central to the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire's (PUSH) sub-regional spatial strategy. However, the compromise approach persists to this day.

In the Gatwick Diamond, high levels of regional and to some extent national accessibility via road and rail, and international accessibility via the airport, make the area a focus for growth. However, the core of the Gatwick Diamond is based on locations which stand out as distinct from the remainder of the area. Historical national planning, surrounding statutory designations including the London green belt and South Downs National Park, and infrastructure decisions have effectively fractured an area which is now subject to intense development pressures.

Again, addressing economic under-performance and the need to raise skills levels have been important concerns shared by both business and local government. The Gatwick Diamond Initiative (GDI) was established in 2003 as a business-led joint venture by the then Surrey and West Sussex Economic Partnerships to drive economic growth. This would appear to be a major strength of planning for growth in this sub-region, given the general lack of interest of business representative bodies in issues of local and strategic spatial planning across the South East. However, the private sector initiative here gradually merged with on-going local authority planning efforts under the Regional Spatial Strategy process to create the public-private partnership that is GDI, and a Local Strategic Statement was produced for the area only relatively recently in 2011. Further, the significant differences between urban, suburban and rural local authorities, and combination of two county councils, means that the Gatwick Diamond area is associated with a diversity of planning policy responses, and is also seen by some as an artificial construct.

This has meant an historical lack of coordinated planning at the sub-regional scale across the area. The Gatwick Diamond as a sub-regional planning entity has had to grapple with historical and political conditions which do not lend a natural harmony to the area and which do not provide an established foundation for coordinated planning. Nonetheless, there have been very real achievements at various stages of the planning process for the area. Certainly there was evidence of real collaboration in the production of the Regional Spatial Strategy in particular.

Long-established planning cultures can therefore exert a significant influence on development. Breaking out of established planning policy legacies means appealing to a new ‘spatial imaginary’ (the areas which people relate to) and a much broader constituency. In this connection – of the possibilities for planners to play a part in generating these new spaces – there is the sense in each of these case studies that the incremental solutions adopted over the past 50 years since the last designation of new or substantially expanded towns may have reached their limits.

The loss of the former Regional Spatial Strategies and associated plans for sub-regional growth is significant in this respect. Current planning arrangements under the Localism Act (2011), the generalised streamlining of the planning system and associated nudges such as the New Homes Bonus, are unlikely to have a significant impact on strategic planning. Indeed, a more fragmentary and localised system seems destined to reinforce established and in some cases ossified local approaches, rather than encourage plans of greater scope and ambition.

Another way of putting this is that even though there has been widespread recognition of economic under-performance in each of these case study areas, rarely have business interests, politicians or planners entertained the likely connection between some of the political compromises that have characterised planning approaches in each of the areas and their economic under-performance. It remains to be seen then whether and how UK central government’s ambitions for house building will further shape what have been renewed attempts to plan for growth inherited from the era of Regional Spatial Strategies. There is the distinct possibility that these compromise agreements will be insufficient to meet government ambitions for growth and development; it is also unclear how a further dismantling of planning in pursuit of ‘growth’, understood narrowly, will help in this respect.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION: PLANNING LEGACIES AND LOCAL PLANNING CULTURES

The definition of 'planning cultures' and their implications for planning practice and planning outcomes have long been a focus of academic interest. As Othengrafer and Reimer (2013: 1271) note authors such as Burke (1967), Bolan (1973), Dror (1973) and Friedmann (1967a; 1967b) emphasised the importance of planning cultures in writings over 40 years ago. Yet this is not to suggest any settled understanding of how planning cultures might be defined or analysed. Indeed, Othengrafen and Reimer (2013: 1272) note that the basic starting points for analysis remain opaque:

> What is culture about? What are the relations between culture and planning? How does culture influence planning practices? There seems to be no consensus on the 'use' of the concept of culture; this might explain why there is no comprehensive work analysing the unconscious 'everyday' routines and underlying practices in planning so far.

For Booth (2011: 16) planning culture 'is a culture of decision-making, and the ways in which that culture is expressed in the institutions of the state and the legal system, that shapes the way in which planning is understood and put into effect'. Friedmann (2005: 184), meanwhile, has described a planning culture as 'the ways, both formal and informal, that spatial planning in a given multi-national region, country or city is conceived, institutionalised and enacted' (Friedmann, 2005: 184). For Dühr et al., 2010), planning cultures are a summation of different aspects of national and local planning systems – the norms, values and principles that underlie planning practice. These latter formulations perhaps underpin the approach of Othengrafen and Reimer, who define planning culture as:

> "…collective intelligible social practice", referring to a number of incorporated and (implicit) routinised 'recurrent regularities' about how to behave and act in specific situations… It consists of beliefs, attitudes, ideas, norms, values, and behaviours that are 'obviously valid' for members of the culture and guides the actions of members belonging to a specific culture. (2013: 1272-1273)

Despite some recognition of sub-national cultures in these frameworks, planning culture has primarily referenced the character of spatial planning systems at the *national* scale. Thus recent collections (Reimer, Getimis and Blotevogel, 2013) have emphasised the need to move beyond a reductionist comparison of different planning systems based on national legal and administrative arrangements (for example, Newman and Thornley, 1996; Sanyal, 2005).[1] In this sense the notion of planning cultures has tended to display the same methodological nationalism apparent in much of the comparative literature on planning systems (for example, Newman and Thornley, 1996; CEC, 1997). Here planning culture might reference 'the collective ethos and dominant attitudes of planners regarding the appropriate role of the state, market forces, and civil society in influencing social outcomes' (Sanyal, 2005: xxi; Faludi, 2005: 285-286) and even the wider cultural context in which planning is situated (for example the value placed on urban and rural landscapes. Yet it is also apparent that there are variable development pressures and styles of planning in Britain (Brindley et

[1] Newman and Thornley's (1997) depiction of five different planning families based on national legal and administrative systems has been particularly criticised for obscuring differences between rather different planning systems that exist within particular families but also for ignoring sub-national variations on the administration and effects of planning systems and the important ephemeral and less predictable moments of planning reform experienced by many national planning systems (Reimer, Getimis and Blotevogel, 2013).

al., 1996).[2] These have emerged and arguably become firmly established over the post-war period since the establishment of the modern town and country planning system since 1947 and in our view might be associated with distinct local planning rationalities or cultures. This is partly because planning practice adapts to the context in which it operates, or as Booth describes it (admittedly speaking to different national planning systems): 'Town planning, both as a discipline and as an administrative practice, has a curiously chameleon-like quality whose colours depend inherently on the particular social, political, and cultural context in which it is found' (Booth, 1986: 1). Additionally, the legacies of planning cultures might inhere in specific planning policies and even particular sites around which accepted understandings of development potential may emerge.

At a theoretical level the idea of cognitive frames is important in emphasising the sorts of enduring perspectives that can inform planning practice over a considerable time in a particular place. Booth (2011: 20) notes that 'If we are to take on board the extent to which spatial planning and urban policy are indeed culturally embedded …we are bound to consider the historical evolution of both place and process'. From this perspective, distinctive planning cultures can have important legacies since there is path dependence which can be defined as 'whether temporally distant events have had an effect in shaping the direction in which processes and institutions have moved' (Booth, 2011: 21). Interestingly, Othengrafen and Reimer emphasise the unconscious framing found previously in some branches of planning theory, arguing that:

> …the most intriguing aspect of culture as a concept is that it points to phenomena that are below the surface, that are powerful in their impact but invisible and to a considerable degree unconscious. (Schein, 2004: 8)

In examining the mechanisms through which planning cultures and legacies influence subsequent development forms, we focus on the notion of *strategic action*. Here, the theoretical emphasis derives from strands of social theory which emphasise distinctly different forms of action at the level of the individual actor (individual or organisation). In particular, 'teleological' or 'strategic' action occurs when one actor seeks an end or brings about a desired state in relation to one or more other actors by choosing a strategic model through which to interpret a given situation, and where a calculation is made of the success of achieving the desired end from the reactions of other actors. It also implies a concern for *framing*, or 'the ways in which social actors use competing or convergent frames to (re)construct a specific cultural orientation which favours and justifies their own policy positions' (Triandafyllidou and Fotiou, 1998: paragraph 2.11). As Triandafyllidou and Fotiou suggest, a focus on framing may contribute in understanding policy-making processes by illustrating how actors emphasise specific policy matters and offer a particular interpretation of events, and 'how competing interpretations and perspectives may lead to dramatically different policy designs' (Triandafyllidou and Fotiou, 1998, *op cit*). Such strategic action might be contrasted with 'normatively regulated action', where members of a social group conform in their actions to a set of predefined common values and each individual complies with the group's norms, and 'dramaturgical action' which describes the presentation of the self to an audience by constituting a particular behaviour or image (Phelps and Tewdwr-Jones, 2000: 116-117).

Strategic action implies that actors calculate and implement their strategies based on their perceptions of their own interests, the shifting and uneven playing field of opportunities and constraints that confront them, their monitoring of the reactions of other actors, and the anticipated and unanticipated outcomes which result. They may then revise and adapt their strategies (and

[2] Brindley et al. (1996), for example, identified six different styles of planning reflecting particular mixes of policy goals, working methods and planning identities: 'regulative', 'trend', 'popular', 'leverage', 'public investment' and 'private management'.

perhaps their identities) accordingly.[3] Particular interests act strategically in pursuit of their respective ideas, continually calculating the prospects of success or failure for specific actions in a dynamic context, the likely responses of other actors and the appropriate 'tactics' to deploy in developing circumstances – these might include all sorts of political and institutional manoeuvring which contribute in various ways to the reinforcement or disruption of local political cultures.

[3] This perspective derives from the so-called 'strategic-relational approach' (SRA) introduced by Bob Jessop and Colin Hay (Hay 2002; Hay and Jessop, 1995; Jessop 1990, 1997, 2001) specifically in the sphere of state theory to explain that the state, as a social relation, is a historically contingent strategic terrain which is more responsive to some strategies than others. In theorising the actions of societal interests such a state-theoretical account emphasises the interaction of a dynamic context which privileges certain forms of interests and activities over alternative courses of action (or is 'strategically selective'), and strategic actors who continually examine the options open to them in pursuing their various interests. Focus is directed, therefore, towards the dynamic interplay between the changing political-economic and institutional context within which particular actors operate, and the perceptions, strategic calculations and action of those actors.

## 2. METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

The current project builds on previous work funded under the RTPI's Small Project Impact Research (SPIRe) scheme, which investigated the efficacy of governance arrangements surrounding three contemporary instances of planning for housing and employment growth in the South-East region – the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH), the Gatwick Diamond Initiatve (GDI) and Science Vale UK (SVUK).[4] The current project sought to extend the earlier analysis by examining some of the historical antecedents to these contemporary planning arrangements, guided by the view that the possibilities for present and future planning are shaped and constrained by past planning decisions and established local planning cultures. One issue that immediately became apparent however was that the proposed focus on Science Vale UK would necessarily be tied into the broader planning context in Oxford and Oxfordshire and a decision was made to shift the focus here to the county scale. This scale would also relate more directly to the discussion of planning legacies through previous county-level Structure Plan arrangements and the like, and offer a closer contrast with the other two cases.

The aims and objectives were therefore slightly revised as follows:

*Aim*

To explore the role of past planning decisions and established local planning cultures in shaping present day approaches to planning for growth in three case study areas in the South-East region, namely South Hampshire, the Gatwick Diamond and Oxford/Oxfordshire.

*Objectives*

1. To revisit the historic planning arguments and decisions that have been made with regard to a limited number of key planning challenges in each of our case study areas.
2. To identify enduring planning principles and policies that appear to impact on current planning practice in our three case study areas, and the processes through which such impacts are created.
3. To consider whether these historic planning principles and policies could be said to constitute distinct local planning cultures.
4. To reflect on the lessons to be drawn from this understanding in terms of planning policy and effective governance.

Beyond the substantial body of previous research the current project also incorporated three focus group meetings in each of the case study areas. These focus groups considered the underlying basis and historical antecedents to present day planning challenges and sought to facilitate a constructive dialogue between experienced and early career planners in the local government sector but also across the public-private sector divide. Details of the focus group timings, attendance and broad agenda for discussion are provided in Appendix 1.

The study was directed at three sub-regions within the South East of England, a region that might reasonably be assumed to be subject to broadly similar development pressures and associated planning styles. Moreover it is a region that could be said to be characterised by the strongest environmental rationality or culture (as opposed to a development rationality or culture) in planning (Murdoch and Abram, 2002), providing one underlying continuity across our three sub-regions planning for significant economic growth and development. One contribution of our research is

[4] The previous SPIRE research – *Delivering Growth? Planning and growth management in the South East of England* – is available at: www.rtpi.org.uk/media/1049721/rtpi_research_report_oxford_brookes_and_ucl_full_report_6_july_2014.pdf

therefore to reveal planning cultures at a more localised level in the context of generally similar development pressures. In doing so, our findings suggest that distinct sub-regional planning cultures may be distinguished from even regionalised development pressures and associated planning styles described above. Here, while the limits of the very distinct settlement pattern of the South East of England – with its London focus, the absence of counterweight large city-regions and numerous market towns – emerge as something of a common theme, there is some evidence that the manner in which growth pressures have tended to be dealt with in relation to the existing settlement pattern has formed part of these sub-regional planning cultures.

## 3. UK PLANNING CULTURE – THE DECLINE AND FALL?

It is axiomatic that discussions of local planning cultures be set within the broader context of national political-economic trends and the longer-term dynamics of planning. In the UK, land use planning certainly enjoyed a measure of popular and political support up until the 1960s. The birth of the post-war British town planning system and its antecedents in important work of war time Royal Commissions ensured that planning was able to draw on a strong sense of the public interest built on the war time effort and 'the perpetuation of the national unity achieved in this country during the war' (Cullingworth, 1975: 6). This of course brought forward major central government initiatives to redistribute and accommodate employment through urban reconstruction and subsequently active regional policy. It also provided for population growth in the form of new towns, which although a much maligned ingredient in accommodating housing needs provided an orderly and profitable way to build settlements with the requisite infrastructure. In the South East of England at least these were enormously successful in economic terms and remain an important legacy and ingredient in one of our study areas (Gatwick Diamond).

This popular and political support, along with the position of planners as respected public servants, was short lived. It began to wane with objections to the ongoing effects of comprehensive town centre redevelopment schemes and was crystallised in critiques of the planner as 'evangelistic bureaucrat' (Davies, 1972) insulated from popular opinion and through the counterfactual of a 'non-plan' future (Banham et al., 1969). Although Davies' critique of the planner as 'the most highly developed form of the "evangelistic bureaucrat"' undoubtedly captured the *zeitgeist* of the time, it also in retrospect seems very wide of the mark in asserting the power and reputation enjoyed by planners and that the role of elected representatives in decision making 'is becoming less and less crucial' (Davies, 1972: 89). Ashworth and Voogd effectively summarised the plight of regulatory planning by this time when identifying a shift to more promotional or market-oriented planning:

> The fact that much had been achieved, that standards of quality had constantly risen in the face of increasing demands made upon the city, and that many of the expectations of the efficacy of the planning system in dealing with intractable problems were in many instances over-confident, could not detract from an ill-defined feeling of unease …that the public planning system had failed. (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990: 8)

Ambrose (1983) has since posed the question 'whatever happened to planning?' as popular and political understanding and support for the activity of planning has continued to decline despite the obvious necessity of planning interventions to ensure the basic functioning of land and property markets. A little later, Grant (1999) was able to observe how locally elected politicians had sought to take advantage of the discretion at the heart of the British planning system at those moments when planning decisions evoked popular outcry, in effect allowing planners to take the blame for decisions ultimately made by elected representatives.

Indeed, support for planning has declined further with elected politicians often unwilling to make any decisions that incur even modest opposition from their electorates. By the 1990s, Rozee (2014: 126) argued that in England at least we had 'lost sight of the need for a vision and long-term strategy to make planning a positive proactive process as opposed to a bureaucratic, reactive one.' The present context in the South East of England in particular is one in which anti-growth interests are effectively triple represented in: a greatly expanded area of environmentally protected land under statutory designation as greenbelts, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and national parks; significant organised representation through participatory channels; and as a function of the way in which nationally and locally elected politicians immediately relay particular NIMBY, BANANA

('Build absolutely nothing anywhere near anything') and NOTE ('Not over there either') interests into national and local planning decisions, rather than offering a measure of insulation from such interests in the name of any wider public interest. Understanding of and support for planning has declined to the point where there are serious issues regarding accumulated deficits in major infrastructure relating to the likes of energy and water supply but also basic local needs such as housing. The latter for some time now effectively has been treated as an externality to be planned away throughout much of the South East of England (Breheny, 1989), despite the substantial and urgent need for local affordable housing.

Underlying these changes in the reputation of planning and planners has been an ongoing project undertaken by different political parties since the 1980s to improve the 'efficiency' of planning. Here the view has been that planning represents a block on economic growth and a barrier to investment and competitiveness (Healey and Williams, 1993). In the wake of this sustained assault, Rozee complains that 'the planning system in England has become increasingly dysfunctional as successive administrations seek the "simpler, faster, fairer system" that has been the holy grail of the endless programme of reform that the system has suffered since the beginning of this century' (Rozee, 2014: 128). If planning is understood to have unintended and unanticipated consequences, then one significant irony is that the continued search for more efficiency has turned what once was a relatively simple and routine development control function within local planning authorities into an increasingly bureaucratic and costly activity. It has also undermined the 'discretion' of the planner (and ultimately local politicians) that is said to be the defining feature of the British planning system (Newman and Thornley, 1996).

Changes in planning culture can be seen in different dimensions. Here we focus on three themes which emerged very clearly across workshop meetings held for this research, namely: changing relationships between planners and politicians; legal and policy churn; and the need for cooperation across communities.

*(i) The relationship between planners and politicians*

The brief historical introduction above sets the context for understanding the by now rather vexed relationship between elected representatives and planning officers. In particular, structural changes which have accumulated over the longer term have witnessed the overall decline of the status and reputation of planning, seen perhaps most clearly in the decline in the position of the Chief Planning Officer (CPO) at local authority level. This emerged clearly as a theme in our Oxfordshire meeting:

> I think there's something about planning as a profession, and the way the profession has been watered down. I'm thinking in terms of its organisational structure… in the 'old days' there would be a Chief Planning Officer in the district councils. The Chief Planning Officer was all-powerful – the Chief Executive thought he [sic] was in charge, but actually the CPO had the ear of the Councillors and in the district councils planning was the only thing that they did that was of much importance. People would complain about their bins not being collected but actually planning was what the Councillors were interested in… As planning has changed as a profession under various governments it has become less popular. It goes through cycles of being more popular and less popular. There was a time when it became fashionable to try to water-down the influence of planning. CPOs were removed and planning services became managed by people who weren't necessarily planners but had more generic skills. You didn't need to be a planner to manage a planning service was the prevailing approach, and lots of other things got chucked into the mix – not just planning. The role of the CPO being all-powerful and saying 'these are going to be

> our policies and this is what you have to do if you want to get planning permission' was very much diluted with the Chief Officer role going. There also became less aspiration on the part of staff to progress – there was no longer a senior role in the way it used to be. It's not just about policy, it's about who's in charge and who is driving that policy and what political support they have or can get because they are persuasive characters or strong characters. I think it's about people as much as it's about policy.

The point was underlined by another attendee:

> CPOs were supported by very strong management teams. The CPO at South Oxfordshire District Council had three Assistant CPOs – really high-level experienced people who were running the service and ensuring consistency in policy and decisions taken on planning applications. That has been completely diluted and you've now got effectively just one chief officer who looks after both the Vale of the White Horse and South Oxfordshire districts, plus a Development Management officer under that, and various staff. So there isn't that kind of organisational structure in place.

Historically CPOs could call on well-resourced teams of planners within the public sector and acting on behalf of the public interest. The structure plan system, coupled with the emergence in Britain of planning degrees from the 1960s onwards, meant that County Councils provided a build-up of planning expertise and experience which diffused to local levels and the private sector. However, in many places such planning teams are much diminished and much of the planning expertise in the UK now exists in the private sector and in service of private interests. As a former senior planner and now planning inspector described:

> If I was embarking on a career now I wouldn't go into the public sector at all. All the work that I was doing when I was at East Sussex has been externalised and is being done by consultants. I'd be looking for a job with one of the big consultancies. I'm just incredibly sad about what's happening to local government.

While the amount and perhaps the quality of the forecasting and other technical work undertaken by public sector planners may have declined, it is possible that the decline of the chief planning officer and the emergence of the planner as a coordinator and reconciler of the 'evidence, argument and persuasion' (Majone, 1989) of the various interests that are found in forward planning and individual development control decisions has opened possibilities for greater autonomy and opportunity for planners at all levels within local government circles. However, few if any of our interviewees emphasised this alternative story line.

The declining status and 'clout' of planning and planning officers within local authority structures has been compounded by the tendency at national level not to re-cast the planning system through comprehensive legislative change, but gradually to revise the operation of the system through persistent managerial reform and by changing policy objectives. Over time the cumulative impacts here have diminished the culture of planning in various ways and effectively exposed rather different cultures of the officers and politicians involved in planning decisions at local level. This point was underlined by a development control officer at Horsham DC at the Gatwick-Diamond focus group who argued that:

> The constant change is really difficult. And you're always stuck between a rock and a hard place in terms of political will. It doesn't matter how much effort you put in or

> how much sway you have on one side, you've always got Councillors, who are often poorly trained. You've got such different sets of people with such different planning cultures – they all conflict so much.

In this context, the relationship between planners and politicians may be seen to have broken down in certain respects. A senior planner at the Gatwick Diamond focus group illustrated the general sentiment:

> I was in the room with Councillors at Horsham when the Mid-Sussex plan was going through its EiP [Examination in Public]. They thought 'Mid-Sussex have got away with a low number, we can do the same'. But I didn't think so. Councillors just wouldn't listen. When the inspector's letter came out completely rubbishing their plan and telling them to go back to the drawing board I kind of had a wry smile, but with some sadness too really, because the Councillors just wouldn't listen to what we were saying. They don't trust you, don't believe you, they don't trust the officers, and then they get in a consultant – who says the same thing – so then they'll get somebody else in.

If trust has been one element in the relationship between planners and politicians that has suffered over the course of the past half century or so, for another attendee at the same meeting the complaint was that there was a need for elected politicians to understand the constraints placed upon them by the planning system itself. However, there was a general reluctance of local politicians to be trained or educated on the changing obligations and contents of planning legislation and policy as outlined in the case of Councillors in Horsham:

> Horsham members refused any training! They refused to attend, more than once. They are now being forced to do it. It's almost as though if they don't understand then they won't have to make any responsible decisions.

*(ii) Legal and policy churn*

Rozee (2014) has recently pointed to the increasing – and by now extreme – policy churn that has characterised town planning in England in particular such that it is unclear what exactly it stands for to planning professionals let alone the public. As Rozee (2014: 124) describes:

> The planning system in England is a mess! There are six pieces of primary legislation governing the planning process and a further nine pieces of directly related legislation. All but one of these statutes date from 1990 onwards with six gaining Royal Assent in the last nine years creating a bewildering array of statutes. The Secretary of State focuses on the minutiae of where the bins are kept and enabling people to rent out domestic parking spaces whilst blaming planners for a lack of vision. Meanwhile, the national housing crisis continues to dominate the headlines, society gets more unequal, and our national infrastructure teeters on the edge of catastrophic breakdown.

In this context it is not surprising, perhaps, that for several of our attendees across the three workshops the distinctive element of discretion which was seen as a key attribute of the planning system had been lost. The ability to think things through – either for planners in terms of identifying technically sound options or indeed for politicians to develop appropriate visions for place shaping, are greatly curtailed. One attendee remarked:

> It started under New Labour really – Best Value, target-driven, tick-box mentality. When the Conservative Coalition got in they did away with some of this, but a bit of a culture had been established. Coming from a greenbelt authority it was very restrictive, yes, but it was also open to allowing things to take place – redevelopment of unpleasant uses in the greenbelt, being sensible about things, garden centres and the like, allowing *some* housing – you know, allowing some things to happen that wasn't strictly meeting the greenbelt requirements, but demonstrating a degree of flexibility if you want to really think things through.

Perhaps the key element of churn being referred to here relates to the recent work involved in the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) process only for this to be scrapped overnight, as recounted by one attendee at the Gatwick Diamond focus group:

> Change every five years doesn't help. We just got regional planning in place, just got it operating, and in comes the Coalition and scraps it. We'd just got to grips with LDFs [Local Development Frameworks] and Core Strategies, and they scrapped them. Whatever imperfect system you have in place, at least if you could have it in place for maybe 10 years you might have actually got somewhere.

In this regard another attendee – a planning inspector – at the same focus group was clearer how changes in the legal and policy environment emanating from central government greatly hampered the ability to plan effectively at the local and sub-regional scale:

> The Government has been completely disingenuous. There are totally mixed messages 'It's localism, you can decide… but by the way, you can't' It's disingenuous of national politicians, and then to throw the ball to local members – you're absolutely asking them to fall on their swords. I'm not surprised they won't do it.

For two attendees at the South Hampshire workshop with experience of working in local authorities and the Home Builders' Federation, the thought was that:

> I think there is a government agenda working that says that planning is an obstacle. So let's circumvent it. …Let's make it incredibly difficult for them to get their plans approved by putting all sorts of really onerous duties on them and if they don't and they don't have a five year land supply that's alright because planning inspectors will sort it out for us, they will allow them anyway. I think there is an agenda undermining planning. I would like to be able to get back to the big picture stuff – what is our vision for South Hampshire? How can we deliver it? – but I fear that government is quite happy to dismantle planning structures because it is not delivering housing and housing is all they care about.
>
> I think the future will be driven by political dogma and the government that just wants to get rid of planning altogether and let's take as much power out of planning as possible. The government is not interested in planning it is only interested in housing. …Which is a pretty depressing view of the future.'

*(iii) The culture of local community – real or imagined – and the need for a statutory supra-local planning tier to drive cooperation*

Across the three case study areas planners raised the importance of having a statutory supra-local tier of planning. A regional tier of planning has existed on and off in England since the 1960s and has

been an important means of dealing with the often unpalatable planning dilemmas in a region such as the South East which has experienced more or less continued growth in population and associated need to provide land for housing and employment. The regional tier has not always been understood or valued by elected politicians – at times being considered top-down central government-led planning. Thus, speaking at the Gatwick Diamond focus group one attendee commented in relation to the RSS system:

> Politicians didn't understand how regional planning worked. They assumed it was top-down, but in fact we all worked at sub-regional levels and fed up from that level to the region, to SEERA and to the South East Plan and then it was fed back down. Yes, it was a capacity-led approach, it wasn't perfect, but it wasn't top-down. They never understood this.

However, this tier has provided mediation between what in the English system has been a sometimes conflictual relationship between central and local government:

> At least there was a process under regionalism – we all sat round the table, we agreed among the counties, we agreed the capacity. It was fed up the system and it went to the SEP examination. You had developers turning up and challenging against the housing numbers, and the panel looked at it, raised some numbers, reduced others, spread it around. That was one of the things – it was spread around so that areas of constraint were limited in what they got and areas of growth took more. The system wasn't perfect, but it wasn't broken.

In particular, what this statement alerts us to is the role of a supra-local planning tier in diffusing conflict over housing numbers. Such supra-local planning has historically been provided either via the Counties which continue to resonate with the public to some degree, or through administrative regions. Both the county and the regional solution however have arguably served England's cities very poorly over much of the history of the post-war planning system. Thus, each of our forum discussions were clear about the deleterious effects of local government reorganisation in 1974 and its effects on planning while there was some discussion of the merits of the Redcliffe-Maude Report proposals for local government areas that were based on functional city-region economic areas (as also discussed by Rozee, 2014).

For one attendee at the South Hampshire workshop, planning approaches or cultures have been a function of longer standing societal culture in which there remains a strong attachment to place. In this regard the Redcliffe-Maude report of 1969:

> …was probably one of the greatest missed opportunities. I think that local government geographies are a major problem now in terms of delivering the housing growth. Put very simply our histories and our cultures do not encourage cooperation. And if cooperation almost on a voluntary basis is the way forward I don't think it will happen. And that leads me on to …if local government fails to deliver the amount of housing because it can't cooperate then planning suffers and effectively gets dismantled. I don't think it will happen.

Across the three case study areas a key argument emerged quite strongly – that we were at a moment when the limits of the existing settlement pattern to accommodate population and housing and employment land use allocations had been reached. This does not mean of course that solutions and approaches going forward in each of our there study areas will be the same. For example, the existence of Crawley new town in the Gatwick Diamond area to some extent demonstrates that the

possibility of entirely new settlements as a solution to housing and other land use needs of the sub-region – new market towns, for example – is one that has not entirely been ruled out. This much was acknowledged in our previous RTPI SPIRe research by the County Planning officer and indeed the sub-region has been subject to proposals for a new development along these lines. In contrast, in South Hampshire and South Oxfordshire the possibility of delivering growth through an entirely new and distinct settlement of almost any size is anathema. In South Hampshire historic threat of a new town in the 1960s is a key part of the planning culture that emerged there. In South Oxfordshire the significant expansion of Didcot within rural south Oxfordshire has been sufficiently controversial as presumably to rule out any serious consideration of entirely new settlements even of market town scale.

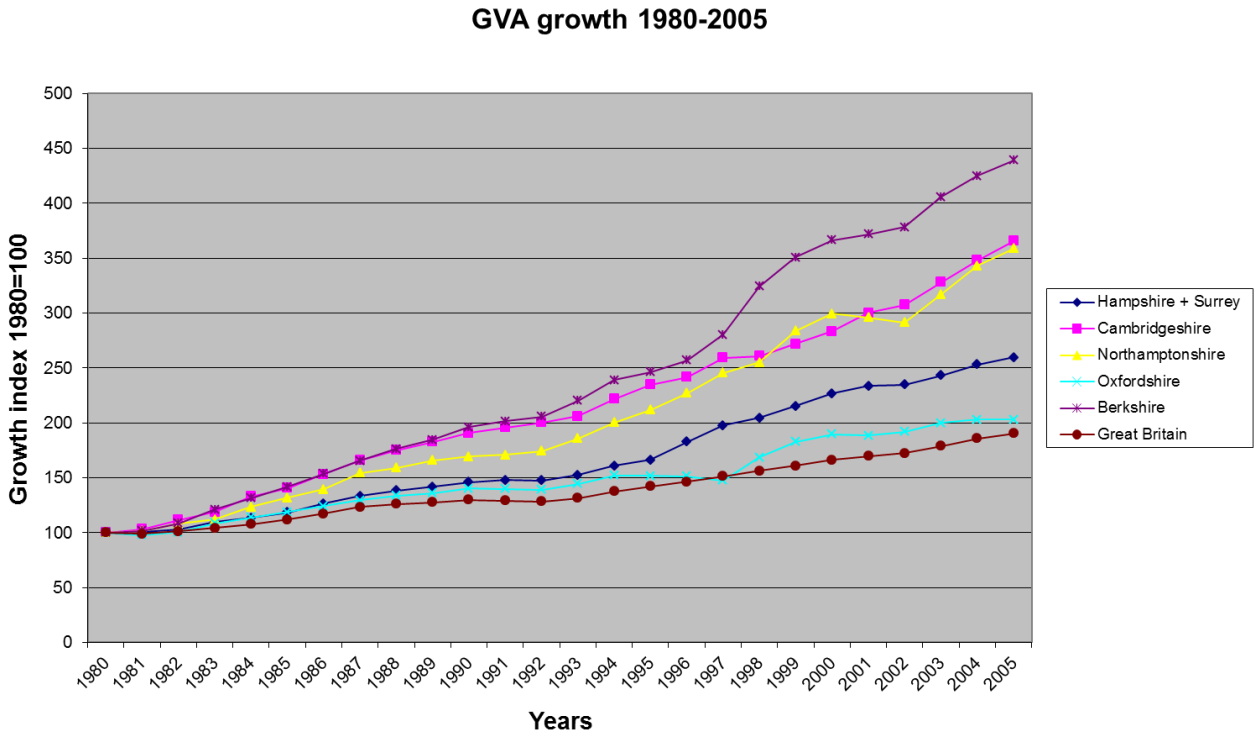
## 4. OXFORD/OXFORDSHIRE – A POLITICS OF DISSONANCE

*(i) The growth context in Oxford and Oxfordshire*

The city of Oxford is an international brand, as a global seat of education, learning and research and an iconic tourist destination. Situated about 60 miles to the north-west of London, Oxford is a northern outpost of the South-East region of England and a dynamic hub of the UK knowledge-based economy (KBE). With a population of around 152,000 the city is a strong sub-regional centre which contributes £4.7 billion annually to the UK economy (Oxford Strategic Partnership, 2013: 3) and has the highest levels of business growth in the county of Oxfordshire. Together with the wider county, the area is a centre of engineering and scientific excellence, with one of the most substantial, distinctive and important collections of research-based, high-value business activities in Europe (SQW, 2013). It is at the heart of the science and knowledge-based economy that the UK Government identifies as the centrepiece of national economic recovery. The leading clusters in the Oxfordshire KBE include high-growth sectors such as biosciences and medical research, space and satellite technologies, cryogenics, and advanced automotive engineering. There are additional strengths in digital information management, cyber-security, publishing, green construction, professional and business services, and culture/creative industries. In many respects the area has rich potential for growth, with world-leading research institutions backed by significant public-sector investment, dynamic and varied KBE clusters, strong spin-out activities, and good links to London and Heathrow Airport.

Over recent decades however, Oxfordshire as a whole has grown rather less than might be anticipated in comparison with other high-tech areas in the UK. Between 1980 and 2006, for example, Oxfordshire's GVA per capita grew in line with the national average, while Cambridgeshire's figure grew at 2½ times the national rate. Comparisons with some other areas in the South-East region over this period are even more notable, as Figure 1 illustrates.

**Figure 1: Gross Value Added (GVA) Estimates for NUTS 3 Areas (million euros, 2000 prices)**




Source: Cambridge Econometrics estimates.

The reasons for this are complex. While high-tech spin-out activity in Oxfordshire compares very well against other leading areas (Lawton Smith and Ho, 2006), the subsequent consolidation of medium-sized and particularly larger-scale enterprises is less apparent. There is some concern here that despite the proximity of London, venture capital funding is conservative and short-termist, with insufficient institutional backing (SQW, 2013). Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into Oxfordshire has also been comparatively low, with only 3% of South East region FDI jobs locating in Oxfordshire between 1999 and 2010. This compares with 13% in Berkshire, 16% in Surrey, 13% in Hampshire and 15% in Buckinghamshire (South East England Development Agency, 2012). In terms of the leading global standards, the Oxfordshire high-tech cluster remains relatively small-scale and rather disparate, with concomitant implications for the profile and performance of the constituent sectors. Additionally, there are structural constraints; for historical reasons (for example, location on former military bases and UK Atomic Energy Authority sites) key elements of the Oxfordshire KBE are scattered across the county in a largely semi-rural context, resulting in demonstrable infrastructural shortfall and a lack of integrated planning. The growth prospects of the Oxfordshire KBE therefore face significant challenges in terms of infrastructure provision, but there are also major issues of housing availability and affordability, the variety and location of property for employment use, and skills shortages.

Housing availability and affordability in Oxford city in particular is a key structural challenge. Oxford city is the least affordable housing location nationally outside of London based on the ratio of average incomes to house prices, a factor almost universally highlighted by employers and stakeholders during the development of Oxford City Council's current Economic Growth Strategy (Oxford Strategic Partnership, 2013). The rate of house-building in the County fell year-on-year after 2006, so that in 2010/11 a total of 1,600 houses were built in Oxfordshire, the lowest annual level of house building since 1971 (from when records are available). Based on extant local plans in 2012, household growth at Oxford city (2011-31) was projected at 9% (5,200 households), while planned household growth in smaller towns about 15 miles outside of the city is much higher, with Bicester to the north of the county projected at 52% (6,600) and Science Vale/Didcot to the south at 63% (13,000). These proposed housing figures are unlikely to have any material impact on problems of availability and affordability in the city, and housing supply is seen as a potentially very significant barrier to the operation of the labour market, with associated implications for travel-to-work patterns and infrastructure pressures given that over half of Oxford's workforce is drawn from outside of the city mainly from the adjacent districts and the rest of the county.

*(ii) The roots of political dissonance*

The argument we set out here is that planning in Oxfordshire has been marked by an established culture of what we might term 'urban political dissonance': sustained patterns of conflict and tension; strategic action on the part of local authorities resulting in areas of contradiction and policy incoherence; and difficulties in finding compromises or workable policy resolutions. In particular, for the past 30 years or so development planning in Oxfordshire has been marked by an evolving policy dilemma regarding the growth and physical expansion of Oxford city, which has had critical implications for planning policy in the county and for the growth prospects of the city and the sub-region. The roots of this dilemma are historical, reaching back at least to Greenbelt designation around the city in 1955 and particularly to the conservationist stance of Oxfordshire County Council (OxonCC) planning policy in the 'Structure Plan' era from the late 1970s. The structure and local plan system was introduced in the early 1970s, with a formal requirement for district-wide local plans from 1991. In 'shire' (non-metropolitan) counties the development plan consisted of the county structure plan together with district-wide local plans (and local plans for minerals and waste, either

separately or combined). In Oxfordshire, eight versions of the Structure Plan were produced, starting with the original adopted in 1979, with the last alteration being adopted in 2005.

The tenor of County policy regarding growth may be judged from the Oxfordshire Structure Plan in 1996, where the emphasis on restraint was explicit:

> Policy G1 (General): The general strategy is to protect the environment, character and agricultural resources of the County by restraining the overall level of development. The country towns of Banbury, Bicester, Didcot and Witney will be the preferred locations for new development. Elsewhere in the County, development, and consequent expansion of population, will be limited. (Oxfordshire County Council, 1996)

This was allied with specific policies on employment locations and housing which reinforced the focus on the country towns and the policy of general restraint elsewhere, including in Oxford city. Indeed, despite a gradual acknowledgement of the city's primary function in the sub-region, the final version of the Structure Plan in 2005 clearly reflects the legacy of the established country-towns strategy:

> 2.7 The Plan reflects Oxford's central role in the life of the County. The County Council wants to see Oxford thrive as a first class vibrant city, modern in outlook with a diverse economy. The Plan promotes Oxford's role as a sub-regional centre for shopping, leisure and cultural activities. Oxford will continue to build on its strengths – education, health and related research and development activities…
>
> 2.8 This does not mean that Oxford should grow unchecked, so as to damage its heritage and landscape setting and increase pressure on transport and other services. Because of the substantial imbalance between jobs and workforce in Oxford, the overall growth of employment in the city will continue to be limited. Land is available within the city to support the development of employment sectors that need to be located there. Other activities will be encouraged to continue to locate outside Oxford. Support is given for small-scale development which helps to maintain the diversity of the Oxford economy. (Oxfordshire County Council 2005)

However, in spite of the very clear policy stance set out in the Structure Plan, Oxford City Council had long opposed the country-towns strategy, arguing in favour of an alternative 'central Oxfordshire' focus directed towards the planned expansion of the city. The Planning Services Business Manager noted in a report to the City Council's Executive Board in 2004, for example:

> Members will recall that Oxford City Council has supported a Central Oxfordshire approach to development for over 20 years. It had been argued that it is more logical to put development in and around Oxford, which forms the hub of the County and would reduce the need to travel. The City Council has never formally supported the structure plan's 'country towns strategy', which says most development should be located in Banbury, Bicester, Didcot and Witney. (Oxford City Council 2004)

It is also important at this point to note that the policy conflict here is overlain by major political differences across the five county districts – Oxford City Council (OCC), South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC), Vale of the White Horse District Council (VOWH), West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) and Cherwell District Council (CDC), as well as with Oxfordshire County Council (OxonCC) (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Oxfordshire County and Districts**


Source: Oxfordshire County Council, www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/public-site/direct-access-equipment-map

Since the early 1970s OCC has been predominantly Labour-led, with majority control throughout from 1980-2000 and a mix of majority and minority leadership throughout most of the remaining years. In recent years there have been no elected Conservatives on the City Council at all, although two Liberal Democrat councillors briefly sat as Conservatives during 2007-8. SODC, WODC, VOWH and CDC, meanwhile, have been predominantly Conservative controlled since their initial elections in 1973, though VOWH was controlled by the Liberal-Democratic party for a significant period from 1995-2011 and CDC was briefly controlled by Labour, between 1996-98. OxonCC also has been largely Conservative-led, albeit under no overall control from 1985-2005. Generally then, the political context is highly differentiated between the city and the surrounding districts and County, a position which has undoubtedly sharpened the character of policy debate, not least over the central question of city growth and expansion.

The central dilemma over the growth of the city has by now marked planning policy in Oxfordshire for at least three decades. This is despite the fact that the Labour Government's Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 brought to an end the structure plan era, to be replaced by regional planning and an emerging regional spatial strategy – the South East Plan (SEP) – developed by the South East England Regional Assembly, which was subsequently adopted in 2009 (SEERA, 2009). This adopted a central Oxfordshire focus and called for sustainable urban extensions to a number of county urban areas including Oxford, as well as a selective review of the Oxford green belt. It was absolutely explicit in setting a new policy direction, stating in Paragraph 22.5 that:

> The settlement pattern of the sub-region will change over the Plan period. Oxford itself will be allowed to grow physically and economically in order to accommodate its own needs, contribute to those in the wider region and help maintain its world-class status. (SEERA, 2009)

However, in the event the 2009 SEP was very quickly removed with the revocation of regional spatial strategies under the Coalition Government from 2010, to be replaced by district-level Local Plans under the rubric of 'localism'. The nascent settlement over the city expansion that might have followed the adoption of the SEP was effectively undermined.

*(iii) Urban Political Dissonance I: Planning for housing at the urban edge*

A clear example of the difficulties associated with such divergent strategies and patterns of political leadership is the case of housing development at Grenoble Road on the south-east fringe of the city (see Figure 3). The area south of Grenoble Road is owned by the City Council and Magdalen College (one of the constituent colleges of the University of Oxford) and has been identified by OCC for many years as a potential urban extension to meet the city's pressing requirement for housing and employment land, accommodating possibly in excess of 4,000 homes. Development here has been framed explicitly by OCC in terms of a response to the housing crisis; in a submission to the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy Examination, 12th May 2011, for example, OCC argued in favour of Grenoble Road as the 'South of Oxford Special Development Area' (SOSDA):

> The City Council has consistently argued the sustainability benefits of locating housing close to Oxford and the very significant contribution that this could make to meeting the pressing housing needs of Oxford and the wider sub-region. Oxford is an inherently sustainable location for housing, because of its well established public transport and cycle networks, its employment opportunities and its social infrastructure made up of extensive retail, health, leisure, cultural and community provision. The City Council has therefore supported SOSDA and the potential contribution that a further 4,000 new homes could make in the longer-term to the pressing housing need in Oxford, which cannot be accommodated within its tight administrative boundaries.

However, the site is located within the SODC administrative boundary and SODC has consistently opposed the principle of development at the site, which is designated green belt. In March 2006 SEERA published the draft SEP, which incorporated two alternatives for housing growth in central Oxfordshire, namely: (i) growth at Didcot, Wantage/Grove, Bicester and within the built up area of Oxford; or (ii) an urban extension to Oxford with a review of the green belt. The draft plan proposed keeping the Oxford green belt unchanged and rejected the urban extension option. However, the associated Examination in Public (EiP) for the SEP did include consideration of an urban extension to Oxford, which SODC opposed on the grounds of incursion into the Oxford green belt, a point reflected in its subsequent 'South of Oxford Urban Extension' public consultation document in July 2008: '…we oppose this proposal for an urban extension into the greenbelt and will continue to oppose it if the modifications to the South East Plan retain the proposal'. In 2007 the EiP Panel's report was published, recommending that both options were pursued and including a Strategic Development Area (SDA) with a notional allowance of 4,000 dwellings to the south of Oxford. The Panel recommended that the additional 4,000 homes be split between OCC and SODC based on more detailed work. It also recommended that the implications of the urban extension should be tested through a Sustainability Appraisal and an Environmental Impact Assessment, though in the event these were not undertaken by SODC. Nonetheless, the SEP, published in May 2009, included

multiple references to the south of Oxford SDA and was subsequently legally challenged by SODC, where Councillor Angie Paterson, cabinet member for Planning, argued:

> We're totally opposed to development on this green belt land in South Oxfordshire. Oxford City Council, backed by the Government, wants to expand the city into South Oxfordshire without justification. The city should use underdeveloped land within its own boundaries to build housing, instead of trying to commandeer a large area of greenbelt, that provides the unique setting for Oxford and contains some beautiful South Oxfordshire villages. (Oxford Mail, 15th June 2009)

**Figure 3: Grenoble Road area**


Source: South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 Refined options Stage 2, February 2015, p.43 (SODC, 2015).

The challenge resulted in the withdrawal of the SDA from the SEP (though the additional 4000 houses remained as part of the overall housing target for the South-East region). However, the issue became moot following the revocation of regional spatial strategies into 2010.

Alongside the developing debate over the regional strategy, OCC's Core Strategy was submitted to the UK Government in November 2008 and inspectors reported on it in December 2010. The inspectors took the view that the lack of resolution of the Grenoble Road issue should not delay progress on the Core Strategy and all references to the SDA were removed. They accepted that the loss of the 4,000 dwellings originally planned for the SDA was outside the scope of the City's core strategy. Meanwhile, SODC did not include the SDA in the preparation of the SODC Core Strategy between 2008-11, or make provision for any of the proposed 4,000 homes. However, despite the loss of the SDA in 2010, the issue has continued to cause controversy. The OCC Economic Growth Strategy (OSP, 2012) and the 'Oxfordshire Innovation Engine' report (SQW, 2013) both identified Grenoble Road as a location to meet the city's chronic need for housing and employment growth. Most recently the publication of a new Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA, GL Hearn, 2014) identified a need for some 30,000 new homes for the city in the period to 2031, while the existing capacity within the city boundary was assessed at around 7-8,000 homes. In light of this the SODC Local Plan is subject to review to reflect this latest assessment of housing need. The City

Council continues to promote the Grenoble Road site for development and to argue in favour of overall green belt review in light of the strategic planning context. Additionally, in summer 2014, OCC sought a potential partnership with adjoining landowners at Grenoble Road who confirmed in principle that they wish to progress an urban extension in the area, and suggested that they may submit a planning application to SODC for the development of the site. OCC have also submitted a consultation response to SODC's renewed Local Plan consultation process setting out their case for building at least 4,000 new homes close to Oxford (Oxford Mail, 2014).

The experience at Grenoble Road is redolent with the notion of urban political dissonance. The conflict between OCC and SODC over the future of this site reflects different policy agendas and an inability to find a compromise or workable resolution over a sustained period of time. The question of urban extension has been framed in contrasting terms by OCC and SODC as, respectively, a response to structural housing crisis or as protection of the green belt. It is noteworthy that even when the SEP had been effectively revoked and the UK Government's Treasury Solicitor indicated that there was nothing for legal challenges to quash or remit, SODC did not withdraw its legal challenge to the SDA, the issue remains unresolved. The proposed Sustainability Appraisal and Environmental Impact Assessment have also not been carried out. Altogether, the experience in this case is suggestive of strategic action on the part of SODC to reduce prospects for agreement, whether or not the case for development at this site is seen as appropriate. The result, perhaps unsurprisingly, is a sense of tension and political strain played out regularly in the local press regarding the potential expansion of the city, and little sense of any serious and convincing engagement with the housing affordability crisis that is clearly evident.

*(iv) Urban Political Dissonance II: The Oxford-Oxfordshire City Deal*

In 2011-12 a programme of 'City Deals' was introduced by the UK Coalition Government to extend decentralisation to the eight largest English cities outside of London, with the aim to foster long-term economic prosperity and growth (see Core Cities, 2011). Bespoke City Deals were agreed between UK central government (Cabinet Office and DCLG) and the respective cities and their wider economic areas in 2012, incorporating a variety of enhanced powers, resources, financial instruments and organisational forms, including in some cases new combined authorities (see Cabinet Office, 2012). This first wave of City Deals was finalised in September 2012 and was followed in October by a government invitation to a further 20 cities and their wider areas to negotiate for a second wave. Oxford-Oxfordshire was the 11$^{th}$ area in Wave 2 to agree a City Deal, finally signed by the Deputy Prime Minister on January 30$^{th}$ 2014.

From the outset it was apparent that the central focus of the Oxford-Oxfordshire City Deal bid would be on enhancing the performance of the KBE in Oxfordshire, and especially responding to the need for improved connectivity across the county. This was particularly the case given the perceived importance of proximity and networking in innovation and commercialisation processes, and the geographical dispersion of the high-tech clusters, with publishing concentrated predominantly in Oxford; motorsport/advanced engineering across north and west Oxfordshire and into Northamptonshire; biosciences in and around Oxford and in southern Oxfordshire; and space science and cryogenics focused mainly around Harwell and Culham in the 'Science Vale' area. There was also increasing recognition of the potential for cross-cluster working as the basis for ongoing dynamism and innovation. Hence, transportation and digital infrastructure improvements were seen as critical, particularly in the light of existing capacity issues and areas of network stress in the road transportation system. The central theme of the City Deal bid became a 'knowledge-spine' connecting Harwell and Culham in the south, Oxford in the centre and Begbroke Science Park and Bicester to the north, via a package of transportation improvements and four new innovation hubs. Additionally, the Deal incorporated ambitious claims of nearly 19,000 new high-value jobs, a further

31,400 in construction, the delivery of over 500 new apprenticeships along with increased funding for skills training, and the 'accelerated construction' of houses. Here, the City Deal document states that a more strategic and ambitious approach towards housing growth is 'essential to the future of the knowledge economy in the County'. It therefore included a commitment to accelerate the delivery of 7,500 homes through a combined Oxfordshire Housing Programme by 2018. This represented, it was claimed, a 72% increase in the number of homes delivered by 2018 against the previous forecast, with 36% of this housing planned to be affordable (Oxford Strategic Partnership, 2014). The Deal also incorporated an explicit commitment to deliver the necessary sites to meet the housing needs that would be outlined in the emerging SHMA. However, despite the general acknowledgement of the importance of housing provision to future growth the City Deal did not set out to address the scale of the housing crisis in Oxfordshire or to face the intractable problems of housing allocations. The 'accelerated delivery' incorporated no previously unallocated sites or housing numbers, and the scale of delivery under consideration here was very limited in the face of structural housing shortage.

The focus on improved connectivity as the foundation for high-tech expansion clearly reflected moves to foreground the twin themes of innovation and economic growth in framing the future development of the county. Key County Council officers leading the City Deal bid process were explicit in framing discussions in these terms, rather than introducing housing questions directly into a discussion about 'economic' growth. Some sense of the approach here may be gleaned from the summary of a senior County Council officer in November 2013, who argued:

> The overarching objective is around economic growth and innovation… Once this overall direction is in place, then housing, transport and skills become enablers rather than significant in themselves. The significance of that is that if I come to you and say 'do you want 500 houses built next to you?' the answer will be 'no, why would I?' But if you say 'do you want your kids in the next generation to have a future here and have somewhere to live because it's so unaffordable right now?', then that's a different conversation. So the innovation-economic growth is the vision of what you want to do, and the housing, which is where all the arguments are between the various districts and the county, become the support. It's like being back to World War I trenches if you jump straight into Grenoble Road and you slug it out saying 'yes' or 'no way' and all that – but you have no context for the discussion. It's just: 'We don't want houses. Go away.' Whereas if it's about the future, how are we going to build houses and how are you going to be able to afford to live there and your kids get a job there, then having the vision is really, really important. It's a huge breakthrough, to focus on innovation and growth. (Senior Officer, OxonCC, 5th November 2013)

However, the corollary of this is that the structural challenge of housing was effectively sidelined. Indeed, interview evidence revealed that OCC viewed the City Deal process as a vehicle through which to promote its overall growth agenda, and thereby to force a comprehensive response to the city's housing crisis as a whole, while the surrounding districts, on the other hand, saw potential benefits for their own respective territories from a successful City Deal bid, but would not countenance significant debate over existing housing allocations. The outcome, influenced considerably it would appear by officers at OxonCC, was a diversion away from the question of housing *per se*, effectively redefining the housing issue into one of economic growth, and resulting in a lack of coherence between the overall ambition of the City Deal proposals and the existing scale of housing allocations. A senior County Council officer summarised the position in interview, as follows:

> I can't give you a housing number – housing is still tentative. Because it's been moving so fast we haven't been able to get clearance on this from the politicians. The City will say they're getting towards an agreement for more housing, then the districts will say something different. What happens is that you have to get it so far down the line, and then the pressure builds, Government says 'we'll do this and this for you', and it starts to develop a credibility which means that the surrounding districts will then find it difficult to say no. Again, it's partly because it derives from that overall vision – I mean, who doesn't want a prosperous economy? (5th November 2013)

Alongside the tendency to divert away from the housing issue, signs of political tension were evident more generally throughout the policy process. Though the City Deal bid was eventually successful, not least, it would appear, because of the perception on the part of central government of the potential for knowledge-based growth in the county, several respondents were perfectly candid regarding underlying difficulties in working relationships between the various authorities. A senior district council officer remarked, for example:

> The City Deal was a debacle. The Government representatives – one from BIS, one from Cabinet Office – well, I've never known Government [representatives] be as honest as they were. After a few meetings where they just listened to us and watched the dynamics and the way we made decisions, they finally came out and said: "You've got to come up with your draft soon. We're telling you now, don't waste time on the draft that you've got here, because Government believes that Oxfordshire doesn't work together. All six of you authorities don't get on. None of you are volunteering any money, any resources. You've been told that the only rule about City Deals is that you can't simply ask Government for more money, and all you are doing is asking for money. What part of this don't you understand?!" I was saying 'yes, you're absolutely right' and I was getting kicked under the table, but basically the County and the districts don't all get on. Even when the Government arrives and says "we can really make Oxfordshire fly, we're here to help you, because if Oxfordshire flies then the whole country flies. Ask us for something exciting". But we couldn't because we didn't get on. That was the only reason. There were visionaries in the room, but they were thinking of their own organisation first, and not the whole region. (13th March 2014)

Lastly here, it is noteworthy that the governance arrangements which have emerged to take forward the City Deal programme effectively further embed the existing institutional framework in Oxfordshire, rather than providing a mechanism to transcend the established policy impasse. City Deals were introduced with the explicit intent to strengthen governance across functional economic areas, to facilitate effective leadership and to remove existing blockages. In some cases they have generated or extended significant governance change with new combined authorities taking responsibility for economic development, regeneration and transportation policies. However, Oxfordshire proposed a Joint Committee of the City Deal partners to act as a 'City Deal Board'. The local authorities would invest powers in the City Deal Board by virtue of representative membership, the Board comprising six local authority and six private sector representatives drawn from the wider Local Enterprise Partnership Board membership including the LEP chair, the University of Oxford, research institutions and business interests. The Board would be chaired on a rotational basis by a local authority leader and was constituted explicitly to 'ensure that decisions relating to the implementation of this proposal are binding on all parties, thereby bringing confidence to Government and the business community more widely that its ambitions will be delivered.' However, some sense of the limits of joint working here may be gauged from OCC's response to

Cherwell District Council's (CDC) Local Plan submission on 31st January 2014, which criticised CDC's housing allocations made shortly prior to the SHMA recommendations which emerged in March:

> In failing to address the delivery of the objectively assessed [housing] need identified by the Oxfordshire SHMA, the Local Plan fails in its agreement with Government to meet the objectively assessed need set out in the Oxfordshire SHMA. This in turn fails to acknowledge the national interests and local requirements for economic growth as given in the City Deal, approved in January 2014 by CDC and all the Oxfordshire authorities, the LEP and Government Ministers.

In summary then, the experience of the City Deal in Oxford-Oxfordshire reflected strategic action on the part of key actors to manage different policy agendas amongst the local authorities. In the face of opposition amongst the districts to the physical expansion of the city, Oxfordshire County Council officers sought to find a way forward. The City Deal bid was therefore framed explicitly around questions of innovation and economic growth in order to avoid the immediate conflict which would accompany any direct engagement with housing allocations. Political dissonance circumscribed the nature of the strategic response, ensuring that the key issue of housing was effectively avoided, but resulting in an associated lack of specificity in the City Deal proposal and ongoing conflict over the wider spatial strategy for the County. It was also the source of palpable tension in the policy process and in the limited scope of associated changes in governance forms.

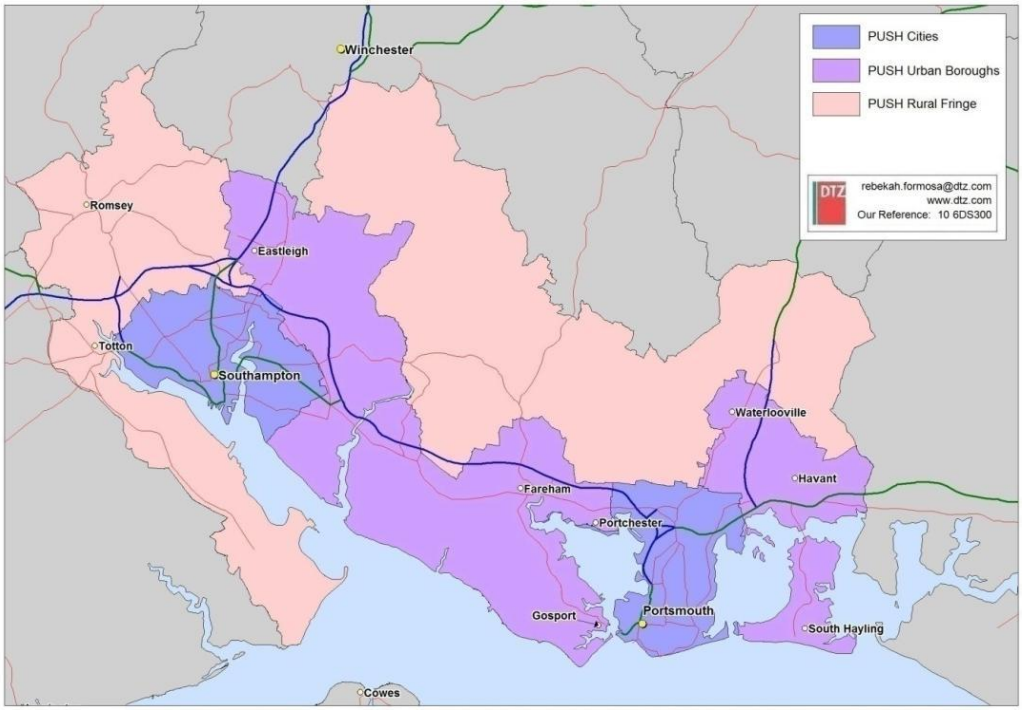
## 5. SOUTH HAMPSHIRE – RECONCILING WITH GROWTH

*(i) Introduction to South Hampshire*

South Hampshire was identified as a potential growth spot as early as the 1960s, when central government identified it as the location for a possible new town (Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 1964). Far enough from London to represent a distinctly separate sub-regional economy within the South East of England, it was clear to a further study by Colin Buchanan and Partners (1966) that the sub-region had under-performed in economic terms. Despite recent claims that the sub-region is an 'internationally-recognised economic hub' (Solent LEP, 2014) it continues to underperform in relation to the rest of the South East of England economy, partly due to the lower value added nature of activities of the port-industrial economic bases of the two cities. The sub-region's maritime heritage represents something of a double-edged sword regarding economic strategy-making.

The new town solution to accommodating population and employment growth in South Hampshire was rejected at the time but so were other potential solutions such as the single metropolitan authority favoured in the South Hampshire Study. Arguably the lack of a stronger coordinated strategic approach to the planning of what has become a single sub-regional economy has contributed to economic under-performance. The recognition of economic under-performance is one that has been central to the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire's (PUSH) submission to the South East Plan under the scrapped RSS system and remains in further iterations of PUSH's sub-regional spatial strategy.

**Figure 4. The PUSH area**




Source: DTZ/Oxford Economics (2010, p.2).

With a population of around 1.3 million and 50,000 businesses, South Hampshire is a sizeable sub-region but continues to pose real challenges to the planning imagination, given its mixed urban, suburban and rural complexion and the fragmentation created by its coastal location. Across

business cycles and major economic crises affecting the UK as a whole, it has been a region that has experienced an underlying growth of population. The recent SHMA indicates that this population growth and associated housing needs is likely to continue to be strong. The preferred projections of the SHMA suggest the growth of an additional 91,729 households in the sub-region to 2036 (GL Hearn, 2014). The same SHMA noted the constraints on housing supply in the sub-region and that there was a substantial unmet need for affordable housing.

*(ii) Doing our bit, reluctantly*

In contrast to the Oxfordshire case, the key theme to emerge from work on South Hampshire is a remarkable degree of consonance across a large number of local authorities in what is a complex part of the country (in terms of urban, rural and suburban interests, county and city authorities, a collection of disparate political standpoints, and a unique coastal topography). Despite the different complexions of the 12 local authorities across the PUSH area, a relatively strong measure of cooperation and joint working is an important continuity in planning in the area, certainly amongst planning officers in the respective organisations and perhaps to a lesser extent across the political leadership of the authorities concerned. The foundations for this cooperative context may be traced through an extensive history.

The accommodation of population growth and associated planning for housing and employment in South Hampshire has, from the onset of post-war economic recovery, been constructed locally as Hampshire 'doing its bit' for the nation. A strong measure of coordination and cooperation across South Hampshire authorities can be traced to at least the 1960s and the pressure local authorities in the sub-region were then facing to accommodate significant population growth. Proposals in 1964 by central government had suggested the sub-region was suitable for a substantial new town at Horton Heath (Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 1964) while a South Hampshire Study of 1966 by Colin Buchanan and Partners suggested rather more growth could be accommodated if the sub-region were planned as a comprehensive whole (Colin Buchanan and Partners, 1966). The latter in particular was felt at the time to be overdone with too great an expectation regarding possible population increase. Nevertheless the sorts of population and employment growth that these proposals sought to accommodate or stimulate in the sub-region were taken forward into the emergent structure planning system and process from the late 1960s onwards. In fact, so strong were the existing growth pressures at that time that interim land allocations were hastily brought forward in two slim SHIPP (South Hampshire Interim Planning Policy) documents in 1970 ahead of the structure plan which was not adopted until 1977. These SHIPP documents (and indeed the structure plan that was to follow) were highly pragmatic, reflecting existing sewerage capacity across the sub-region. However, they also effectively made provision for the development of a rather different, suburban, housing stock than found in the two cities – itself a factor fuelling further growth in the sub-region.

At this time then, a measure of cooperation was forged out of fending off the perceived worst excesses of these proposals and indeed the threat to the status of the cities and county authorities posed by a new town corporation or a single metropolitan authority. The then Chief Planner of Hampshire County Council remembered this time, for example, as one in which there was a measure of rapprochement between the two city authorities of Portsmouth and Southampton (see Phelps, 2012). Indeed, at a later date the two unitary authorities set up a contract with HCC to supply planning research and development, keeping intact the technical unit built up to produce the South Hampshire Structure Plan.

The prevailing ethos of cooperation was reflected in comments at the Hampshire workshop. One attendee who had previously worked in Oxfordshire and then at Eastleigh within the South Hampshire area noted for example:

> That was one of the things that impressed me about Hampshire when I came here – the amount of inter-authority work that was going on here. I had absolutely no experience of that in Oxfordshire … but the organisation in Hampshire seemed to be much better established. There was a chief planning officers group …and the planning officers' group had subsidiary groups.

For another attendee with many years' experience of working for Cheshire County Council before becoming Chief Planning Officer at Hampshire County Council, good inter-authority working relations in Hampshire also gave rise to greater spatial detail regarding land allocations and associated housing numbers than was typically the case in structure planning in Cheshire:

> One difference that struck me when I came to Hampshire from Cheshire was the greater specificity of the South Hampshire structure plan compared to the Cheshire one.

Others noted in particular enduring elements of party and personal political discord between the leaders of different authorities. Nevertheless, as another attendee noted and as we confirmed in our previous RTPI SPIRe research:

> Notwithstanding the no love lost between Liberal Democrats and Conservatives and what have you, there is nevertheless a track record of positive cooperation on strategic planning in South Hampshire than in other areas even at members level.

This ethos among local authority planners and politicians remains and arguably was strengthened under the PUSH banner from 2003-4 as local authorities came together to plan for housing and employment growth in the sub-region under the Regional Spatial Strategy process up to 2010. Indeed, the broad contours of the initial growth agenda mapped out by PUSH as part of the RSS process remained in place, have been reconfirmed in a subsequent update and act as something of a benchmark for demonstrating present requirements for a duty to cooperate. As in the 1960s, one of the main forces prompting a measure of cooperation amongst both elected representatives and officers was the desire to pre-empt any central government attempt to dictate housing numbers or the format of provision (see Phelps, 2012).

'Doing our bit' as an approach has contained contradictions at its heart, however. In between these two episodes of strong direction from central government which were perceived as something of a threat to authorities in South Hampshire, the growth targets carried forward from the 1960s into a planning approach presided over by Hampshire County Council in the structure planning years brought something of an anti-growth backlash. Previous research (Phelps, 2012) revealed how in South Hampshire the erosion of the status and regard for planners and planning among elected politicians, civic and environmental groups and, to some extent, the public could be traced to the level of population and employment growth catered to and the planning approach of the structure planning years. Something of this sentiment persisted among political leaders across the PUSH authorities, presenting an underlying sense of unease among several local authority members of the PUSH and a sense of fragility to the whole enterprise.

While the historic overall desire for South Hampshire to 'do its bit' has resurfaced under PUSH then, there has also been a reluctance of the authorities involved to plan positively for population and

employment growth in the sub-region. Notwithstanding the highly commendable performance of individual authorities in preparing plans quickly in the PUSH era, the approach could still, at the level of South Hampshire as a whole, be described as one of 'walking slowly towards growth'. One of the reasons for this is that the PUSH strategy does in its detail – especially its spatial detail – represent a somewhat lowest common denominator approach, one that is a basic compromise solution agreed by all parties, including those rural authorities quite opposed to any further growth at all. Arguably, as a result the economic under-performance of a sub-region distinct enough and far enough away from London to represent a separate sub-regional economy (first noted by Buchanan in the 1960s) remains today. The stated objective of PUSH has been to narrow the gap in GVA per capita with the rest of the South East region. Yet, with the creation of the Local Economic Partnership (LEP) it may be that a stronger and genuinely growth centred approach can come to the fore for the first time in the sub-region. A £2.9 billion investment plan is being developed by Solent LEP which in its recent *Tranforming Solent* strategic economic plan (2014-2020) outlined the need for the 'transformational change' needed to deliver targets of generating 15,000 new jobs, 1,000 new business start-ups and 24,000 new homes by 2020.

Some participants in our South Hampshire focus group meeting questioned whether the partnership working would in reality deliver the housing numbers and employment growth anticipated in the PUSH Spatial Strategy. Thus for some there are enduring underlying sensitivities about the level of growth planned for under PUSH as a result of how previous growth had been accommodated in the structure planning years:

> New Forest DC was experiencing massive growth in the late 1980s and early 1990s. We were building more private houses than most of the big cities and that came out of south Hampshire structure plan allocations. And I arrived there as the political mood was changing. The planning culture was changing to "we have got to stop this growth at all costs". …And I am not sure we are through that phase yet. …I think the next year or so is going to be very interesting to see how the new reality of planning with us having to do our own objectively assessed needs fits with a culture of "development can go somewhere else".

Moreover, some of the frailties of the PUSH spatial planning agenda are mired in debate about the creation of a suitable local government-based 'vehicle' to take ownership of the spatial strategy. The PUSH area has the advantage of being broadly coterminous with its respective LEP area. PUSH spatial planning matters have been handled to-date through a joint committee arrangement to which individual local authorities have delegated powers, however some of the political leaders have continued to seek a combined authority, taking urban South Hampshire out of the county of Hampshire. This sense of a moment of transition in planning approaches and cultures was also registered in the fact that Hampshire County Council will effectively no longer be the receptacle and conduit of planning expertise that it has been for much of the post-war era:

> I wonder whether the future is going to be influenced more now than what happened in the past. I say that because of the demise of the County Council as a strategic planning body …means there is no longer that semi-overarching view of the process …And there just seems to be so much change at the local level in terms of officers and politicians and I wonder if there is less continuity now in terms of that culture and knowledge about what happened in the past.

*(iii) South Hampshire's 'growth sectors': the end of an approach or path dependency?*

Beyond the generalities of coordination among authorities outlined above there are strong continuities in the precise form chosen to deliver much of the housing employment. The approach in South Hampshire was from the start forged in the expediency of urgent allocations of land for housing and employment by the end of the 1960s in two slim SHIPP1 and SHIPP2 documents.[5] These represented rather *ad hoc* allocations, subsequently rationalised in the 1977 Structure Plan as a 'growth sector' strategy. The preferred strategy avoided a single new town (already effectively discounted some time earlier) but also was not directed to the idea of concentrating development in the existing cities or even a mixture of extensions to the cities and other existing larger urban centres. The SHIPP documents and their rationalisation under the structure plan have had significant legacies for planning across the sub-region and for some of the local authorities, in a number of senses.

First, at the sub-regional level, the strategy – although drawing on an impeccable orthodoxy of the time – looks mistaken from today's perspective of the need for an urban focus and compact cities. The growth sectors typically involved housing land allocations for 10-20,000 population and were located adjacent to junctions along the M27/M3 and A3(M) motorways built during the 1970s. This distinctive inter-urban pattern has promoted commuting across the sub-region and has undermined the employment and skills base of the two cities of Portsmouth and Southampton. It also presented a very hospitable framework onto which a major dispersal of retail activities was grafted during the relaxation of planning controls during the 1980s and 1990s, further damaging the retail offer of the two cities but also towns such as Eastleigh. Second, these allocations have come on and off the planning agenda as growth pressures have waxed and waned and as political expediency dictated in relation to popular anti-growth sentiments. Additional uncertainty in the form of long-term resistance from significant landowners in at least two of the growth sectors (Hedge End and West of Waterlooville) and the unpredictable release of 'windfall' (notably Ministry of Defence) sites has meant that many of these growth sectors have not been planned as coherently as they might have been. The best example of this would be the Whiteley growth sector, only half of which began to be built at the instigation of developers involved with Solent Business Park and with incomplete road access to the north, poor public transport access and an inadequate local school provision since this time. The growth sector is also revealing of the politics of somewhat reluctant acceptance of growth in South Hampshire. The fact that it is located at the junction of the extremities of the two local authorities gives the impression at least of pushing growth as far from the centre of political constituencies as possible at the cost of positive planning for it, including integration with existing settlements. Whiteley was also notable for a lack of coordination between the two local authorities and the County.

For some among our focus group this particular legacy had now run its course, with the final uncompleted growth sector proposed as part of the South Hampshire structure planning exercises – the Havant/Waterlooville Major Development Area (MDA) – now being built. Interestingly, this final growth sector appears rather more attached to or integrated with existing development than most of the others. The prospect in this sense is of a blank canvass on which to plan for future population growth and housing and employment land allocations. However, it is hard to escape here a parallel with the location of Welborne, a new strategic development area of 6,000 houses and associated uses to the north of Fareham, proposed as part of PUSH's spatial plans. The intention has been to plan Welborne – including a separate mechanism for handling public input and with a former senior DCLG civil servant playing a coordinating role – as a new, if rather undefined, kind of community with a measure of self-containment. Yet in other respects Welborne seems on the surface little

[5] These two documents were little more than a descriptive list of the location and scale of sites allocated for housing and employment uses with little or no spatial planning preamble or accompanying justificatory text.

different to the growth sectors approach of the structure plan era – a point alluded to by one attendee at our South Hampshire meeting:

> It is interesting to look at Fareham. You have got Whiteley up there detached from everywhere on the other side of the M27 under a more systems approach under the structure plan. Now you move to a collaborative approach where again completely detached from the rest of the urban area on the other side of the M27… It doesn't matter what process you have got, you end up with an outcome that is essentially the same and whether Welborne is going to be any different to Whiteley remains to be seen.'

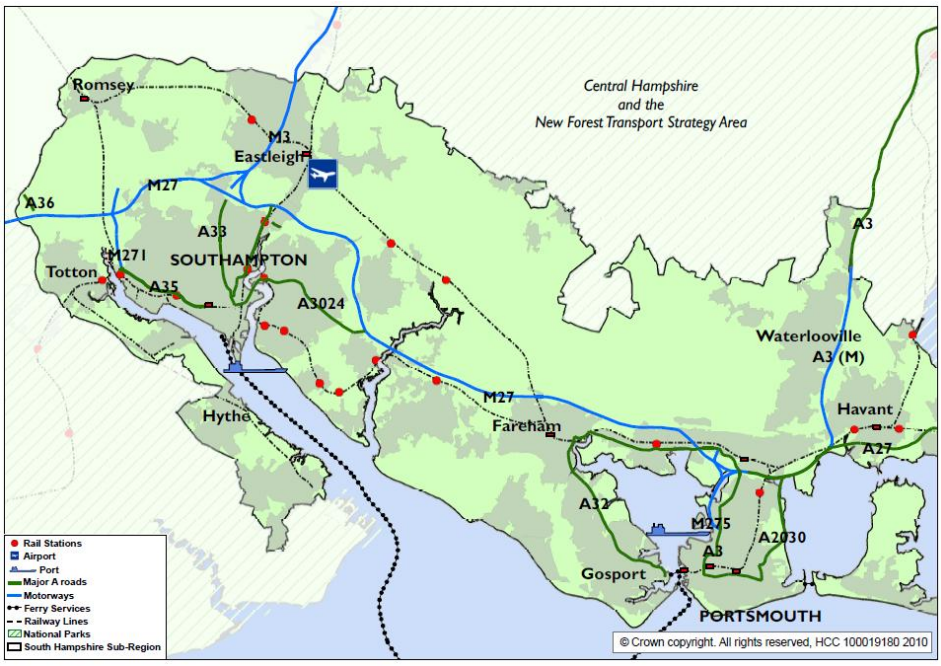
Indeed, the planning of Welborne to date already presents something of a microcosm of a South Hampshire-wide reluctance to plan as positively as possible for growth. Despite the desire to create a new type of settlement, many of the same concerns regarding the experience of growth sectors along the M27 are likely to pertain to Welborne. These include: its ability to deliver the relevant local infrastructure, given its scaling back from an initial 10,000 population to 6,000; its likely lack of self-containment and its further impact on the economic and social wellbeing of the two cities, and; a politics of local gaps being fought for not only between the planned Welborne and the historic village of Wickham but also between Welborne and Wickham and the new Knowle Village (ostensibly a commuter village fashioned over the last decade on the isolated site of a former mental hospital).

*(iv) Strategic and local gaps policies as part of sub-regional planning culture*

In South Hampshire, local and strategic gaps policies have formed part of the planning culture, some of them borne of political concerns. A Hampshire green belt was proposed in the 1960s but never materialised as events were overtaken by central government's desire for the sub-region to accommodate population and employment growth. The strategic local and gaps policies emerged under the structure planning era as something of a reaction to the political effects of the growth already accommodated in South Hampshire by the 1980s. Thus as one meeting attendee explained:

> At both member and officer level, gaps are a combination of things. They are partly simply a defence against development …mere countryside was not seen as a sufficient justification for preventing more development. So there is an anti-development philosophy to start with. But it is also a perfectly reasonable argument that settlements have an identity and that identity is best protected by defining an open and undeveloped area between the edge of one settlement and the beginning of the next one.

**Figure 5: Context map of South Hampshire illustrating strategic gaps**




Source: Hampshire County Council LTP3, 2011.

Subsequently the New Forest and South Downs National Parks have been designated (respectively in 2005 and 2010), fulfilling much of the original intention of 'bounding' urban South Hampshire originally proposed in the green belt. However, in the intervening years the inability to call upon statutory designations in order to fend off growth led to the adoption of the strategic and local gaps policies. As one attendee outlined:

> We as planners think we have got to stop villages, towns and cities merging into one another. Now whether by accident you were lucky enough to get a greenbelt which is now completely a sacred cow. Or if you weren't lucky enough to get a sacred cow you have got to invent something that imitates it – which is a green gap or wedge or whatever. …Green gaps came along to fulfil exactly the same function, in the politicians' and the planners' mind, as green belts did. Yet again it is emerging through the new South Hampshire strategy, people are saying if we are going to take significant growth …we have got to have green gaps, green wedges to prevent the formal coalescence between towns.

The strategic and local gaps policies have been controversial and at various points planning inspectors have questioned their value in the case of individual local plans and even instructed them to be removed from sub-regional plans (as with the RSS). However, politicians and planners alike remain attached to this particular tool, as explained by one meeting attendee:

> Gaps are becoming the new infrastructure. In the old days infrastructure was the condition on which we accepted growth in Hampshire. There is a view starting to emerge that we do want infrastructure by the way but the new condition of us accepting growth is that we get gaps or some mechanism to preserve the setting and preventing one settlement merging into another. Then you get into the London argument. Why should growth leapfrog London into bits of North Hampshire just because Boris doesn't want to review his greenbelt.

The comments are striking for the parallels with the 1960s situation with regard to Hampshire receiving London 'overspill'. Indeed, The Ministry of Housing and Local Government and Colin Buchanan and Partners studies at which point our story began present a notable similarity with regard to the present situation. Perhaps these similarities between the two eras more than anything else underline the continuities apparent in planning cultures at both national and sub-regional level.

## 6. GATWICK-DIAMOND – SEARCHING FOR COHESION

*(i) The growth context in the 'Gatwick Diamond'*

The Gatwick Diamond Initiative (GDI) was established in 2003 as a business-led joint venture by the then Surrey and West Sussex Economic Partnerships to stimulate and maintain strong economic growth. On the face of it this would appear to be a major strength of planning for growth in this sub-region given the generalised lack of interest of business representative bodies in issues of local and strategic spatial planning across the South East. However, the private sector initiative here gradually merged with on-going local authority planning efforts under the RSS process to create the public-private partnership that is GDI, and a Local Strategic Statement was produced for the area only relatively recently in 2011.

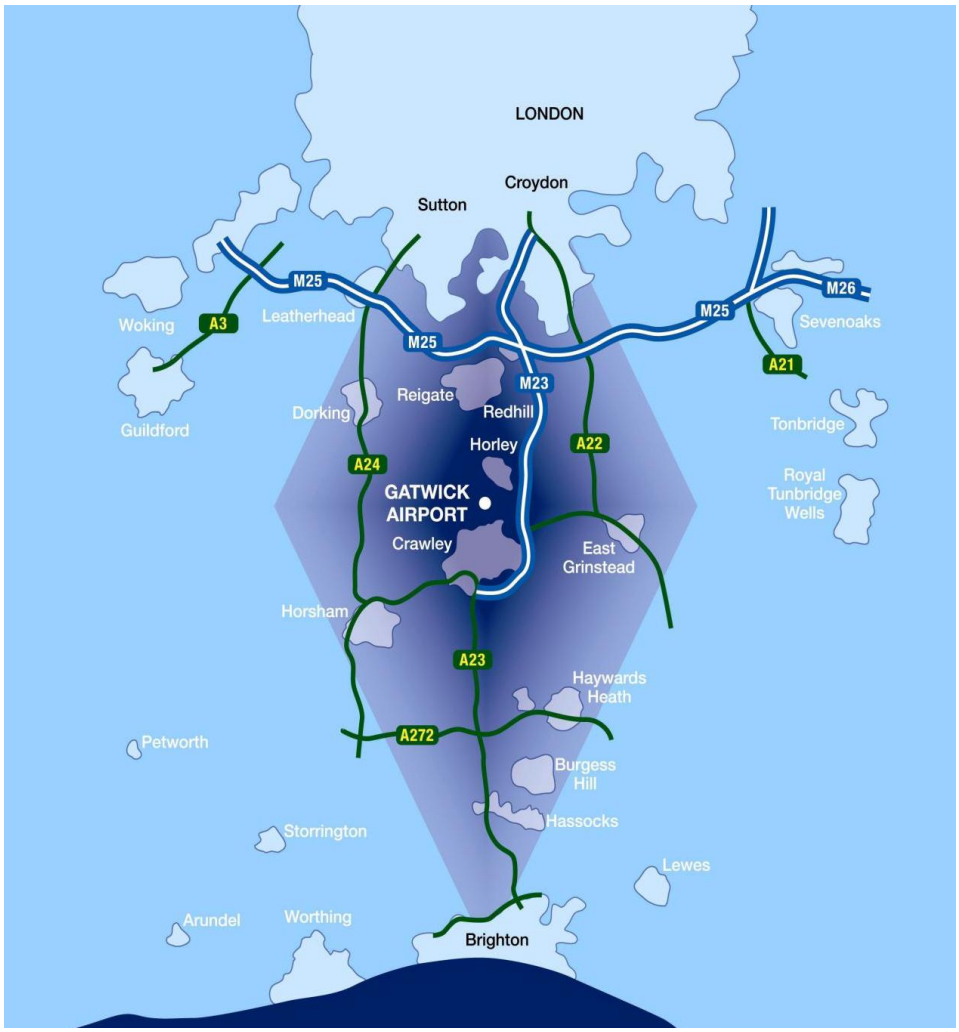
Gatwick had previously been part of the 'Western Policy Area' in the Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (RPG9), which had provided a regional framework for the preparation of local authority development plans, and subsequently the 'Gatwick Sub-Regional Strategy Area' was incorporated in the South East Plan, extending north to the edge of Redhill, east to East Grinstead, south to Burgess Hill and Haywards Heath, and west to Horsham with strong functional links with Redhill and Reigate to the north and Southwater to the west. This 'strategy area' makes up most of the current Gatwick Diamond. The GDI does not have any formal boundaries but is broadly defined by a diamond-shaped area stretching between London and Brighton and extending west to Horsham and east to East Grinstead. It includes parts of two counties, and incorporates the boroughs of Crawley, Reigate and Banstead, and large parts of Horsham, Mid Sussex, Mole Valley and Tandridge Districts.

High levels of regional and to some extent national accessibility via road and rail, and international accessibility via the airport, make the GDI area a focus for growth. Surrounding statutory designations including the London green belt and South Downs National Park have effectively channelled growth pressures into the GDI area. Towns such as Horsham have had a long history of municipal entrepreneurialism dating back to the early 1900s, and reinvigorated significantly during the 1980s. Additionally, established large-scale developments such as Gatwick Airport and Crawley New Town have reinforced the growth trajectory, including the build-up of the business community that has driven the GDI itself. As one respondent noted in a previous interview: '…there has always been in this area a general presumption in favour of growth; there has never been any particular negativity' (Private sector representative, 10th July 2013). In broad terms the growth pressures resulting from London-related spill-overs, together with excellent road and rail access into London and internationally via Gatwick Airport, make the situation here something akin to the pressures apparent in the M4 and M11 corridors emanating from London.

With regard to the overall growth agenda for the GD area and associated strategy-making there is a widely-shared desire on the part of both business and local government communities to address the perceived issue of economic under-performance and raising skills levels. Until recently the debate has largely accepted that growth will be driven by Gatwick within its established configuration of a one runway, two terminal airport, alongside associated mitigation measures (GDI, 2012). However, the Airports Commission decision in December 2013 to include a second Gatwick runway as one of its three future options for airport capacity growth in the South East obviously had major implications (Airports Commission, 2013). There was little agreement locally regarding the second runway and the issue prompted on-going tension in local governance arrangements, spilling-over into questions regarding future development and investment priorities. The Airport Commission's decision in July 2015 to recommend that an additional runway be built at Heathrow instead of

Gatwick has very likely put a stop to these immediate challenges, though a sense of uncertainty over the future development trajectory for the area remains.

**Figure 6: The Gatwick Diamond**




Source: Gatwick Diamond Business Plan, June 2009.

*(ii) An underlying lack of cohesion? Gatwick-Crawley as external imposition*

At the heart of the Gatwick Diamond, Gatwick Airport and Crawley new town have been the twin engines of economic and housing growth for the sub-region throughout the post-war era. It is interesting therefore to note that both of these major developments have been the result of national planning decisions, with their own particular development processes and logics.

Crawley was designated a new town on January 9th 1947, as one of eight original post-war new towns around London.[6] A Development Corporation was appointed to take on the planning and construction of the town, with plans and activities subject only to ministerial approval. By 1962 the town had achieved its original target population of 60,000 located across nine distinct neighbourhoods, and the assets of the development corporation were handed over to the

[6] The others were: Basildon, Bracknell, Harlow, Hatfield, Hemel Hempstead, Stevenage, and Welwyn Garden City.

Commission for the New Towns, which was given responsibility for maintaining and running new towns following its launch in October 1961. Crawley continued to grow rapidly, however, rising to a current population of nearly 110,000 and 13 residential neighbourhoods across a significantly expanded land area, making it the largest inland town in West Sussex.

Alongside the external management of the town, certain other characteristics effectively reinforced the distinctiveness of Crawley in the wider area. Firstly, here, in line with the general approach of new towns it was conceived as a self-contained community with a balance of jobs and housing, and notably an industrial culture. The industries would be mainly situated on a separate site known originally as the 'Industrial Area', clearly detached from residential neighbourhoods, but with ready access (The Tablet, 14th November 1953). Secondly, the residential areas would be predominantly for people moving out of substandard housing in London. In 1946 the Government had stated that East and West Sussex County Councils would have to make their own provision for housing for tenants on their waiting lists. The Corporation succeeded in its aim of moving people out of London: by 1966, when the population was about 60,000, 73% of residents had moved from the city in the last 20 years. The main qualification for a Crawley Development Corporation house was proof of employment in Crawley, so the Corporation's provision of housing was closely linked with its early and rapid development of what became the Manor Royal industrial estate. As a result local people who had longstanding links with the Crawley area were disappointed with the Corporation's inability to build houses for them, a problem which continued throughout the Corporation's existence. Thirdly, as a new town planned to accommodate people relocating from the congested areas of South London Crawley had a very distinct demographic profile and pattern of social development, marking it out from the surrounding village areas. In a variety of ways therefore, Crawley is characterised by patterns of local development and local social relations which differ from other localities within the GD.

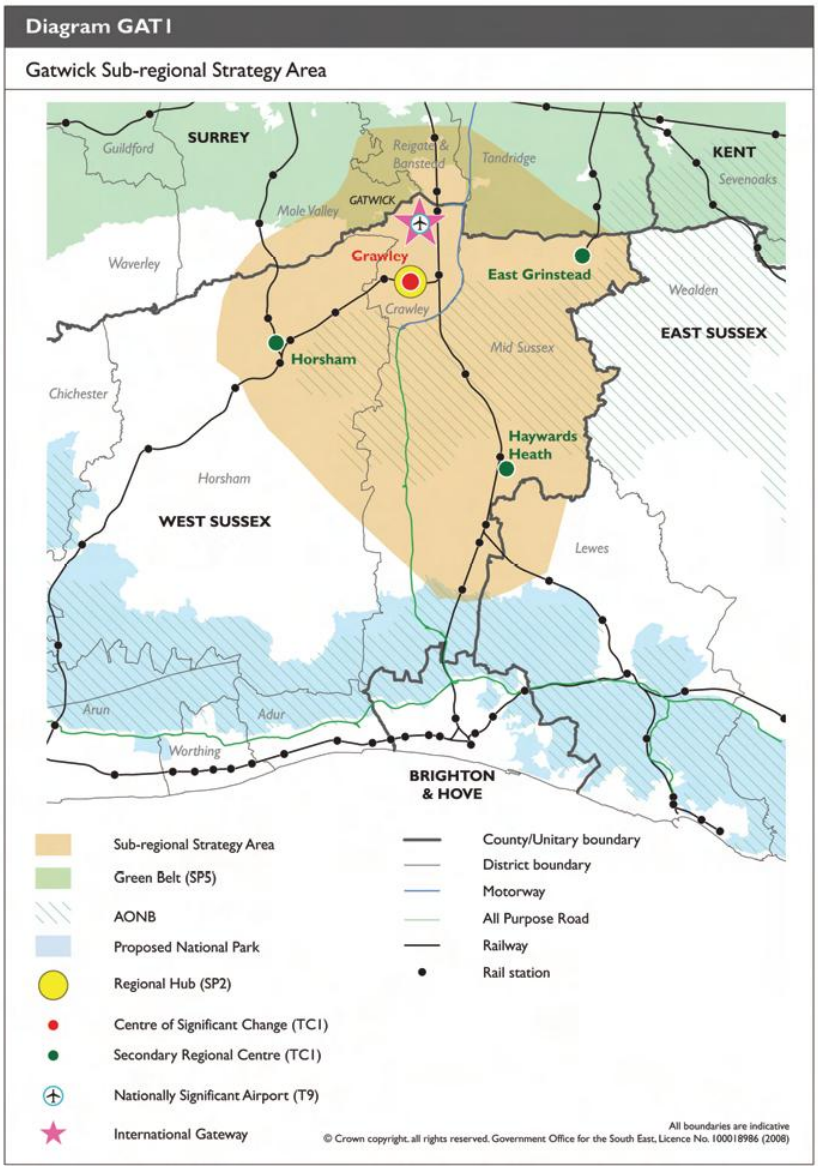
Turning to Gatwick, the decisions to develop Gatwick Airport as initially a bad weather alternate to Heathrow and subsequently as a second main civil airport for London were taken by the Cabinet in the early 1950s (Sewill, 2012). However, 'the political history of Gatwick, especially in the decade after the war, provides a fascinating study in uncertainty' (King and Tait, 1980). It operated initially with a single main runway and a single terminal, but came under increasing growth pressures in the 1960s and 1970s not least because of the difficulties of locating a third London airport. The original (now South) terminal was subsequently improved and expanded, and the British Airports Authority (BAA) sought permission for a new North Terminal from 1979. The expansion of the airport had generated considerable local opposition, however, and West Sussex County Council sought assurances from BAA that it would not pursue a second runway. A legal agreement was then signed by BAA on 14th August 1979 that prohibited any new runway for 40 years.

The development of the airport has historically been in complex relation with the industrial development at Crawley. In the 1940s and early 1950s, the Corporation expected no development to take place at the modest aerodrome, and even stated in September 1949 that it expected it to be decommissioned as an airport. In 1950, though, the government announced that it would be redeveloped as London's second airport. The Corporation retreated on its initial opposition – based principally on the effect the airport would have on local industry - and the scheme was agreed in 1954 (Hudson, 1987). The aerodrome closed between 1956 and 1958, and was extended and rebuilt as an international airport. By 1964, soon after the Development Corporation's dissolution, the industrial estate supported about 16,000 jobs: the master plan had anticipated half that number. Labour shortages were frequent. From the 1960s, these were exacerbated by competition from the reopened and greatly enlarged Gatwick Airport, which stood next to the industrial estate and which offered high wages for semi-skilled and unskilled jobs. One of the Corporation's last acts was to build hundreds of cheap houses for airport workers.

The inter-relationship between Gatwick and Crawley has been an integral aspect of planning in the sub-region. A Crawley Borough Council guide stated, for example: 'Maintaining the balance between a successful independent town and the world's second busiest airport has been fundamental to the mutual success of both centres. A large part of the reason for that success has been Gatwick's reputation as "the airport in the County"' (CBC, n.d.). The South East Plan (SEERA, 2009) noted the primacy of Gatwick Airport in the sub-regional economy, stating that:

> Gatwick Airport is the single most important element of the area's economy and is of significant economic importance to the Region as a whole. The airport has helped to foster clusters of employment in the chemicals and pharmaceutical industries, in financial services and there are a number of aviation-related industries in Crawley (Paragraph 24.1)

**Figure 7: Policy for the Gatwick Sub-regional Strategy Area**




Source: SEERA, 2009: The South East Plan.

Yet the relative detachment of the airport from the surrounding area is also apparent. Brian Sewill, a well-known critic of Gatwick expansion, highlights for example:

> Because Surrey [County Council] and Mole Valley [District Council] have applied ultra-strict planning policies, Gatwick is still bordered by open countryside on its northern and western sides. Unlike Heathrow, the airport has not become surrounded by warehouses, factories, hotels and other airport tat. (Sewill, 2012: 37)

Yet this sits in fascinating contrast with the response of Crawley, which reflected its very different historical position and political perspective:

> As a Labour-dominated New Town, Crawley was in favour of airport expansion, wanted more industry, had little care for the countryside or for preserving the heritage, and was already casting covetous eyes on the green fields around the airport for future housing sites. (Sewill, 2012: 36)

Additionally, Policy GAT1 of the SEP, setting the core strategy for the Gatwick sub-regional strategy area, was directed towards 'maximising the potential for sustainable economic growth in the sub-region while maintaining and enhancing its character, distinctiveness, sense of place and important features.' Four objectives were outlined, which clearly reflect the relative position of Gatwick within the broader context of the GD:

> i. Sustaining and enhancing the pivotal role played by Crawley-Gatwick in the sub-regional and wider economy
> ii. Recognising and sustaining the sub-region's interrelationships with London and the South Coast and the international gateway role of Gatwick Airport
> iii. Protecting and enhancing the sub-region's distinctive environmental assets, in particular the High Weald and Sussex Downs Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
> iv. Maintaining the broad extent of the Metropolitan Green Belt within the sub-region.

In summary then, the very core of Gatwick Diamond is based on locations which stand out as distinct from the remainder of the GD area. In important ways it is historical national planning and infrastructure decisions that effectively fracture an area that is now subject to quite intense development pressures, on the one hand cultivating major engines for long-term sub-regional growth, and elsewhere designating statutory environmental policy such as the London Greenbelt and the South Downs National Park. In combination with significant differences of complexion among urban, suburban and rural local authorities, and combining two county councils, it is not wholly unexpected that the Gatwick Diamond area was seen by some of our respondents as an artificial construct.

*(iii) 'Accepting difference' across the GD*

The patchwork character of the Gatwick Diamond area is associated with a diversity of planning policy responses. Indeed, there is clear recognition that the sub-region contains a mix of very different local authorities that are able to contribute to sub-regional spatial planning efforts to rather different degrees and in rather different ways. Thus as one attendee highlighted:

> I think on the part of the GD grouping there has been an acceptance that Gatwick Airport and Crawley can provide the focus for economic activity – they are the drivers. And also that different parts of the GD will provide different functions. …As

> officers we certainly accepted that there are parts of the GD that provide an attractive environment for managers and the like who might want to run a business in Crawley but live somewhere with a very high quality of life and a very high standard of living. There is an acceptance that we don't all have to be the same, even though we are all operating within the 'diamond'.

Certainly, the apparent predisposition in favour of growth reflects sentiment in particular parts of the sub-region, specifically around the airport and Crawley which have been the least constrained and most accessible areas and remain the logical locations for larger housing and employment land allocations. Additionally, Horsham has historically had an entrepreneurial style of urban planning dating back to the early 1900s, which was reignited at a more recent low point in local economic fortunes reached by the 1980s, and has accommodated significant new housing development and business relocations. Beyond these central areas, however, there is a significant culture of constraint in surrounding rural authorities, not dissimilar to our other case study areas:

> There is a culture in this area that these are very constrained places. They are very rural districts on the whole, albeit with some market towns and other towns that have potential for growth, but on the whole the initial knee-jerk reaction you get is 'thanks, but no thanks'. There is a lot of historical constraint here, like the AONB, the National Park and the green belt. In my view they have purpose, but that purpose never really seems to be reviewed very often. We also have the Ashdown Forest SSSI [Site of Special Scientific Interest] etc etc… my experience is that that's the kind of culture – they are very rural places.

One consequence of accepting such differentiation across the GD area has been an historical lack of coordinated planning at the sub-regional scale. Indeed, there is an argument to be made that the presence of a new town in the area which has provided for an orderly phased accommodation of much of the population increase over time has effectively obviated much of the need for discussion among the neighbouring local authorities regarding how to accommodate growth over the last four decades or so. This went along with a lack of any discernible planning culture or style knitting planning authorities in the area together up until the RSS process, albeit that some growth-oriented local initiatives were licensed as in the case of expansion at Horsham.

Additionally, signs of tension have been apparent between the growth-oriented areas and the more rural districts which perceive the challenges of growth in very different ways. As one attendee at the GD focus group explained:

> Also, the Gatwick Airport dimension: Tandridge always sees itself as getting all of the pain and none of the gain. Tandrgidge gets the over-flights, the noise, the traffic – but really very little economic benefit. Very few people work there from Tandridge and the economic benefits don't flow to Tandridge… So historically there has been resistance to the airport expanding, which is quite different to Crawley who see the airport as a real asset to their borough with all the growth and business that it pulls in.

In broad terms therefore, the Gatwick Diamond as a sub-regional planning entity has had to grapple with historical and political conditions which do not lend a natural harmony to the area and which do not provide an established foundation for coordinated planning.

*(iv) …but resulting lack of strategy/spatial detail – exacerbated by (a) uncertainty and (b) localism*

Despite the challenging context here, the GDI was introduced from 2003 partly in response to the regional planning agenda under the New Labour Government of Tony Blair. This business-led grouping achieved a good degree of visibility in the area, as moves developed towards the RSS – the South East Plan – which detailed housing targets and employment objectives for sub-regional growth areas and would eventually be adopted in 2009. As mentioned above, the GDI gradually merged into a public-private partnership in 2006-7, which itself then went through a further restructuring and reformation around 2008-9 to give it a stronger governance structure with an overview group including members from local authorities and a management board. This new governance structure brought forward a growth plan centred on three strands: i) GROW (spatial planning, housing); ii) CONNECT (transport); iii) INSPIRE (mainly education). According to the senior planner involved in creating the Local Strategic Statement (LSS):

> That new governance created a much stronger link between business and the local authorities. And arising out of that we started to gain funding out of the Gatwick Diamond Initiative to take forward the local strategic planning work as a mechanism to support the drive of the local partnership which had developed. We then started to work on the policy framework including the Local Strategic Statement under the umbrella of the Gatwick Diamond Initiative.[7]

The LSS was subsequently adopted in 2011, by all the relevant local authorities except Tandridge District Council (which interestingly had signed up to a previous Memorandum of Understanding on the LSS process). Yet this was after the election of the Coalition Government in May 2010 and the associated abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies and the detailed commitments which had accompanied the SEP. What is clear is that the LSS was a fundamentally different document to the previous sub-regional strategy set out in the SEP, as the Senior Planner working for GDI highlighted:

> The local authorities all signed up to the LSS. It post-dates the change in legislation and so was driven in its latter stages by the emerging duty to cooperate. The very fact that five districts and two counties signed up to a Local Strategic Statement which provided a short and medium term direction but also then looked into the longer term future, I view that as a major success. There were differences, there were arguments. Things that might have been in there weren't in there. *It doesn't go into numbers. It doesn't specify locations. It doesn't go into detail*'.[8] (emphasis added)

Subsequently, the loss of detail and specific policy commitment consequent upon the shift to 'localism' has also been reflected in uneven progress on local plans amongst GD authorities (for detailed discussion see Valler and Phelps, 2014, p.17). Indeed, echoing some of the concerns expressed in the South Hampshire case regarding the effects of the localism era, a workshop attendee argued that sub-regional cooperation appears likely to diminish:

> I think the changes in the planning system have definitely resulted in GD as an entity rather slipping out of the consciousness. The SEP gave it some degree of weight and policy background as well and ever since the intention to abolish the SEP it's lost its identity somewhat. We're slipping back into a process of localism.

[7] Interview, Senior Planner, GDI, 18th June 2013.
[8] Interview, Senior Planner, GDI, 18th June 2013.

In some senses the rapprochement achieved under the SEP has given way to a reassertion of local distinctiveness and priorities under localism, reinforcing the rather fragmentary nature of planning across the GD area. Additionally here, there have been and continue to be inherent uncertainties involved with both local authority and sub-regional spatial planning created by the fact that major periodic decisions regarding expansion at Gatwick airport are handled through the public inquiry system and work to an unpredictable timetable. Certainly the ongoing public inquiry over airport expansion blighted the extent to which the LSS could be specific in terms of housing numbers and employment targets without knowing the decision regarding one of the largest drivers of the sub-regional economy. Moreover, the effects of Gatwick airport have been uneven impacts across the local authorities concerned and themselves have potentially driven wedges in the cooperation among authorities over the LSS. The lack of clarity here is probably further exacerbated given that the GD is just one of five sub-regions within a vast 'Coast to Capital LEP' that must accommodate competing priorities across a substantial territory. In this context the question is whether the identity of GD and much of its previous momentum will be dissipated.

Notwithstanding the significant difficulties here however, it is important to recognise the very real achievements that were made at various stages of the planning process for the GD area. Certainly there was evidence of real collaboration in the production of the RSS, and to some extent it was apparent that the exceptional elements of the new town and the airport nevertheless brought the respective authorities together in response to the RSS process. As one meeting attendee explained:

> It wasn't such a conscious attempt to deal with constraint. It was more accepting that Gatwick Airport and Crawley are always going to be a focus for economic activity, so how do we work together to manage that process? You might ask why would Tandridge and Mole Valley even bother with this, but I think there was a genuine desire to work together to manage the process.

A further achievement, notable given the single county status of our other two case study areas, was the manner in which cooperation among local authorities as part of the LSS worked across county lines. It was argued, for example, that:

> The GD was a ground-breaking example where they had broken down county barriers. When you think about functional areas then county boundaries they can be very poor definitions of what needs to happen…

To some degree therefore, the GD initiative and the LSS it produced, while lacking the numeric and spatial detail of the sub-regional spatial plans did galvanise local authorities in important ways. Indeed, there was some sense that although the RSS process had ceased the local authorities continued working together, while the LSS was held up as a model of how to do things in this context.

## 7. CONCLUSION

In his speech to the Conservative Party conference on 5th October 2015, the Chancellor George Osborne signalled in the clearest possible terms that the new Conservative Government would stand strongly in favour of growth and development:

> Friends, the great mistake for this country would be to stop moving forward. To fail to take the big decisions. To coast when we should be decisive. Those were the clear instructions we were given by the British people five months ago. That's the job we've been asked to do. We live in this great prosperous, peaceful, political democracy. Precisely because those who came before us did their job. Because they established factories and built cathedrals and laid railways. Because they conducted experiments and made scientific breakthroughs and conquered disease. Because they compiled encyclopaedias, wrote poetry and invented computers. Because they set sail from these lands, fought tyrants and opened Britain to the world. Now it is our turn. We have inherited their legacy but also their responsibilities. We have learned from their great deeds and also from their mistakes. We see all the things they have done. And we see all the things that are yet to be done. We now say… we accept this responsibility. We will take on these challenges. We will do our duty. Some people stand on the sidelines. Some want to knock things down. We are the builders." (Osborne, 2015)

These words have attracted a good degree of critical commentary, not least in light of historically low levels of housing delivery over recent years, and the perceived dangers of associated moves such as shifting further towards home ownership at the expense of affordable social rented housing. However, the scale of the Government's rhetoric and ambition is clear: plans were laid out by George Osborne for a new National Infrastructure Commission to hold government to account over the delivery of major infrastructure projects, the further strengthening of the 'Northern Powerhouse' ("I'm throwing everything I've got at it. I've brought new science here, promoted the arts here, backed transport links here, brought investment from places like China here"), the gradual devolution of control over billions of pounds of local business rates for local councils to invest in infrastructure, and the 'sweeping away planning rules on brownfield sites' to support the construction of more affordable homes. In spite of this though, it is evident that planning *per se* is viewed and portrayed primarily as an obstacle to growth, and there is no evidence at all that the 'hollowing-out' of planning will be slowed. The implications for the profession, as the discussion in Section 3 has demonstrated, are serious. Indeed, questions of the overall status of the profession, the position and resourcing of planning and planners, the ongoing uncertainty created by policy churn and the lack of any convincing form of greater-than-local/strategic planning present a difficult backdrop against which planners must currently operate.

The fact that each of our study areas are perceived to have been under-performing in economic terms over the long-term is the basis for the business case for growth in each area and is generally recognised by the respective planning authorities. Rarely however have business interests, politicians or planners entertained the likely connection between the political compromises that have characterised planning approaches in each of the areas and this economic under-performance. It remains to be seen then whether and how UK central government's ambition and rhetoric on building will further shape what have been renewed attempts to plan for growth inherited from the era of Regional Spatial Strategies. There is the distinct possibility that these compromise agreements will be insufficient to meet government ambitions, but equally whether a further dismantling of planning in pursuit of growth will aid in this respect is unclear.

There is a degree of irony in the UK Government's apparent antipathy towards planning given the influence that long-established planning contexts exert on current debates over development. As this report has demonstrated, the legacies of previous planning policies and decisions can be hugely instrumental in setting the context for contemporary debates, in particular through a process of 'framing' as respective actors emphasise particular policy matters and interpretations of events (Triandafyllidou and Fotiou, 1998: paragraph 2.11). This has given rise to what might be seen as distinct cultural forms or 'ways of seeing things' across each of our three cases: a culture of political dissonance in Oxford-Oxfordshire; a culture of compliance and collaborative working in PUSH; and a culture of accepting and managing difference and uncertainty across the GD area. These respective forms have very significant impact on the development of spatial strategy and consequent impacts on economic and – critically – housing development. Yet there is little sense that current planning arrangements under the Localism Act (2011), the generalised 'streamlining' of the planning system and associated nudges such as the New Homes Bonus will have a significant impact on strategic planning. Indeed, a more fragmentary and localised system seems destined to reinforce established and in some cases ossified local trajectories, rather than encourage plans of greater scope and ambition. The loss of the former Regional Spatial Strategies and associated plans for sub-regional growth is notable in this context.[9]

A related point perhaps concerns the nature of the sub-regional spaces and strategies in question here. Certainly there are senses in which these sub-regional 'soft spaces' represent alternative institutional forms in which to imagine possibilities for future place-making and thereby construct a form of spatial imaginary (Haughton and Allmendinger, 2008: 143). However, it is also clear that these 'soft spaces of governance' (Haughton and Allmendinger op cit) are somewhat limited in scope and differ significantly from 'new political spaces' where what is at stake is 'the transformation of the entire political process' (Boudreau, 2007: 2596). A focus on 'soft spaces of governance' directs the focus less towards the construction of a political space open to political interaction and contest, and more towards the construction of new 'regulatory space' (Boudreau, 2007: 2601) designed to deliver specific outcomes. Soft spaces, in this sense, are not oriented towards 'politics proper' allowing for a genuine politicisation of spatial strategy, but select for largely pre-given strategic objectives within a market-oriented framework thereby focusing on the day-to-day practicalities of planning policy and implementation (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2010: 812-13).

By way of contrast, in an examination of the creation of Toronto as a competitive global city-region, Julie-Anne Boudreau argues that the strategic production of the Toronto region as a political space 'depends on the mobilization of existing spatial imaginaries and the creation of new ones that resonate with residents and users of the city-region' (*op cit*., p.2597, emphasis added). Here:

> Spatial imaginaries are mental maps representing a space to which people relate and with which they identify. They are collectively shared internal worlds of thoughts and beliefs that structure everyday life. They are thus different from spatial discourses in that discourses are 'moments' in the social process, they are repeated and uttered punctually, but they do not necessarily alter deeply held beliefs, fantasies, and desires in the long term. When discourses alter social practices and beliefs, they are 'translated' from 'moments' to 'permanences' in the social process. They become, in other words, imaginaries. (Boudreau, 2007: 2596-2597)

The implication here being that breaking out of established planning policy legacies means appealing to a new spatial imaginary and a much broader constituency. In this connection – of the possibilities for planners to play a part in generating new spatial imaginaries – there is the sense in each of our

[9] The RTPI has put forward its own recommendations and advice for how to ensure more effective strategic planning in its policy paper (RTPI, 2015).

case study spaces that the incremental solutions adopted over the past 50 years since the last designation of new or substantially expanded towns have reached their limits. Despite the overall trend of population and employment growth during this half-century, the planning and political imaginary has in effect been one of spreading the pain by either tacking extensions onto villages and towns, or encouraging dispersal. With the attempt by previous governments to induce a number of eco-towns and more recent interest in a new generation of garden cities (for example, through the Wolfson Prize), the parallels of the present situation to that reached by the 1960s in the South East of England are striking. Whether they produce a new round of politically acceptable but second best planning solutions regarding housing, land use allocations and associated infrastructure or a distinctly new vision of planning for growth in the South East of England is less clear.

**APPENDIX 1 - FOCUS GROUPS**

The overall structure for focus group discussion was:

1. Deep-seated cultural values, planning principles
2. Historical policy frameworks
3. Oxfordshire planning under New Labour
4. Contemporary experiences

Example detailed questions/themes (Oxfordshire case)

1. Would you say there was/is a distinct culture of planning in Oxfordshire? What are the main ingredients? Has this culture changed?
2. Are there policies and or even sites that have long established understandings attached to them? Which, why?
3. Have there been established ways of working within and between planning authorities? Which, why? Any attempts to change them?
4. Are there any clear examples of how past planning decisions have come to shape or constrain future planning options? Which and why?
5. Are there any planning solutions mooted in the past that remain relevant to today's issues? Which?
6. What do current planning dilemmas tell us about past planning policies, decisions, approaches in Oxfordshire?

Deep-seated cultural values, planning principles…
In Oxfordshire, for example, the discussion sought to approach a variety of characteristics including: Rural/urban split; Rural conservatism; Landownership characteristics; University perspectives; Oxfordshire village-life; Oxford city as separate, jewel to be protected; Political histories across the county including local government reorganisation and the constitution of Oxfordshire; Historical Policy Frameworks including the introduction and formalisation of the Greenbelt, the emergence of a 'country-towns' strategy; and widespread/ongoing suspicion of city expansionism.

It also examined different eras of planning, including:

First, the introduction and subsequent evolution of the County structure plan; the role of Oxfordshire County Council as structure planning authority and associated relations with rural districts and Oxford city; Diverse views held by the County/City/Districts during the structure plan era, the developing concerns of Oxford City regarding the country-towns strategy, perceived opportunities/constraints facing the respective parties.

Second, the era of Planning under New Labour… Regionalism/South-East Plan – initial development, the introduction of a 'Central Oxfordshire' focus, in contrast to country-towns strategy, how the incoming regionalism/SEP focus was perceived to change the 'political opportunity structure' facing the respective LAs…

Third, more contemporary experiences under the Coalition Government… How was the incoming localism post-2010 perceived to change the 'political opportunity structure' facing the respective LAs? City Deal, the nature of the growth agenda… Responses of the City/County/Districts to emerging SEP? SHMA…

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## About the research

This report is based on research conducted for the RTPI by Dr Dave Valler at the School of the Built Environment at Oxford Brookes University, and Professor Nick Phelps at the Bartlett School of Planning, University College London, and was funded by the RTPI South East region.

## Further information

The report is available on the RTPI website at: www.rtpi.org.uk/spire

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