



RTPI

Royal Town Planning Institute

RTPI evidence to the UK2070 Commission

November 2018

Foreword

1. The idea of looking at spatial issues within the UK is long overdue. Our *Map for England* work in 2012 drew attention to how numerous, and often unacknowledged, UK government policies have differential spatial impacts. Moreover, such impacts can work against each other, as in the case of MHCLG policies designed to bring about housing growth in regions which have up to now received the fastest growth, and DEFRA policy to prevent growth in places which are subject to water stress and flood risk. It is not acceptable for central government to expect localities to resolve such contradictions, especially in an exceptionally centralised state.
2. We wish however to draw attention to the challenges inherent in the “UK2070” concept. Nearly all the issues which require improved spatial coordination and awareness are matters which have been the responsibility of the National governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. We would therefore maintain that any initiative of this kind be directed towards England only. There are many issues which require discussion between the UK Nations, but these should be handled by properly constituted frameworks for negotiation between the UK Government and the other Nations. There is an Interministerial Council for this purpose, but leaving the EU may require further institutions. The RTPI (and others) have called for a single environmental governance body to hold all UK governments to account in future.
3. The Scottish Government is working on the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) which will shape development in Scotland from 2020, looking forward 20-30 years. The RTPI Scotland annual conference in 2018 looked at what this plan needs to contain, and the RTPI will be engaging in the evolving NPF4 over the coming year.
4. The Welsh Government is currently preparing the National Development Framework which will form part of the development plan for Wales, giving a strategic approach to planning at the national level. These processes in Wales and Scotland could suitably form the counterpart to any such work in England, and for that reasons we would urge the UK Government to interact fully with them (and with parallel processes covering spatial planning of the seas around the UK Nations). However, we would sound a note of warning: the coordination of policy within a nation of the size of England - which is also exceptionally centralised - is a much more complex challenge than in a smaller nation, and models which work in one context may not be easily transferable. Any future for England must take on board the issue of devolution to cities and counties, which may be a more suitable context in which to tackle many of the big challenges of the century.



5. The rest of this submission is a compilation of research carried out by the RTPI which can shed light on the matters of concern to the UK2070 initiative. Given the constitutional position, this relates mostly to England.

The role of planning in improving the productivity of underperforming regions and nations

6. The RTPI has published a body of research which describes how planning can enhance economic growth and productivity by shaping, regulating and stimulating markets while at the same time ensuring a longer-term perspective on environmental sustainability, social wellbeing, equality and democracy. Key publications include *Delivering the Value of Planning*¹ and *Fostering Growth*². These are accompanied by studies into the economic value generated by planning in London, Scotland, Wales, Germany, France, the Netherlands and China³. These show a critical role for planning in providing clarity and confidence for investments by markets which enables the delivery of good development, for example by improving the quantity and quality of land for development, helping to prepare land for construction, resolving ownership constraints, and bringing forward investment by ensuring that the right infrastructure is in place.
7. However, in the UK, these benefits are not being consistently realised. This is partly due to decades of almost continual changes to planning policy and regulation, and partly due to a lack of resourcing for local authority planning departments⁴.

The impact of unaffordable housing

8. Our paper on *Better Planning for Housing Affordability*⁵ describes the negative impacts of high house prices on economic productivity and social wellbeing. Interventions to improve the affordability and sustainability of housing will therefore have a positive impact on productivity in underperforming regions and nations. The RTPI has campaigned for measures to tackle the housing crisis, including greater diversification in the housing market, reform of the land market, and a greater focus on the relationship between location and affordability.
9. Our 2017 study on local authority direct provision of housing⁶ shows that 65% of authorities now report being directly engaged in housing delivery. This reflects a growing appetite and capacity in local authorities to increase their role in providing housing as a core function, in order to address issues of unaffordability. It also describes barriers which need to be addressed to facilitate this role, including funding, land availability, and the availability of skills and expertise.

¹ RTPI. 2016. *Delivering the Value of Planning*. Available from: bit.ly/2OIZbsJ

² RTPI. 2014. *Fostering Growth*. Available from: bit.ly/2PvMPJR

³ See our research on this topic at: rtpi.org.uk/valueofplanning

⁴ See our research on this topic at: rtpi.org.uk/investingindelivery

⁵ RTPI. 2017. *Better Planning for Housing Affordability*. Available from: bit.ly/2B9o0un

⁶ RTPI & NPF. 2017. *Local authority direct provision of housing*. Available from: bit.ly/2TflrxV



10. Through our role in the Rural Coalition we have made specific recommendations for improving housing affordability and rural economic productivity, which include better digital connectivity⁷.

A return to place-based interventions for tackling poverty

11. RTPI research into *Poverty, Place and Inequality*⁸ describes how local environments are the missing link in tackling poverty. Things that contribute to improved quality of life and productivity - such as jobs, schools, public services, safe streets, green spaces, leisure and entertainment, and shared cultural and language communities - are most accessible in particular locations. The ability to access the above is determined in part by where people can afford to live, and therefore by household income. This means that government could do much to reduce poverty and inequality by improving the areas in which less advantaged people live, since they lack the private means to move to better areas. For instance, we believe that efforts to improve labour market opportunities needs to consider place-based barriers to work, such as the availability of jobs nearby and the provision of affordable and reliable transport options. We recognise that earlier place-based approaches to tackling poverty suffered from issues with design, impact and value for money, but can show through UK-wide case studies that changes in physical and social environments can have a positive impact on people.

Addressing regional inequalities through national infrastructure

12. The productivity of underperforming regions and nations should also be addressed through a more strategic approach to national infrastructure decision-making and investment. In our response to the National Infrastructure Commission's *National Infrastructure Assessment* (NIA), the RTPI noted that historic infrastructure choices in the UK have been sub-optimal due to the ad hoc nature of project justification, a lack of mechanisms for considering the cumulative impact of infrastructure decisions, and a failure to properly consider the transformative nature of infrastructure investment. We emphasised the need for any national infrastructure strategy to employ a dynamic approach to assessing infrastructure 'need' – one which captures the ability of infrastructure to reduce regional inequalities by directing investment to the places where it could have the most transformative impact, for example by stimulating markets and unlocking areas for sustainable development⁹. Similarly, we have commented that the government's approach to calculating housing need in England, based on past trends, risks concentrating future growth in the South.
13. A more forward-looking strategy, which considers future growth aspirations and is linked to infrastructure provision, is needed to address regional inequalities¹⁰. This should be accompanied by better and more equitable mechanisms for land value capture, so that land value uplifts are more evenly shared between landowners and the community, and help to finance the infrastructure needed to address regional inequality¹¹.

⁷ Rural Coalition. 2017. *The Rural Coalition 2017 Statement*. Available from: bit.ly/2qJgoZE

⁸ RTPI. 2016. *Poverty, Place and Inequality*. Available from: bit.ly/2PXQ0Jz

⁹ RTPI. 2018. *Response to the consultation on the interim NIA*. Available from: bit.ly/2DFqN0J

¹⁰ RTPI. 2017. *Planning for the right homes in the right places*. Available from: bit.ly/2DnlkuF

¹¹ RTPI. 2018. *Response to HCLG committee enquiry on land value capture*. Available from: bit.ly/2zTblof



Addressing regional inequalities through devolution to city-regions

14. We see a better approach to strategic infrastructure planning emerging in the discussions for growth within the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Corridor, by Transport for the North, and in the proposed changes to the Planning Bill in Scotland (which include measures to support an ‘infrastructure-first’ approach). But this is also reflected in the increased autonomy being granted to city-regions in England, Wales and Scotland, where a mixture of strategic planning powers and infrastructure funding are being devolved to certain functional economic areas. This creates the potential for a resurgence in strategic planning across geographical and sectoral boundaries, allowing for a more integrated approach to issues like economic development, regeneration, skills, housing, transport and health. Our paper on *Strategic Planning*¹² describes how this can help to address the problem of unintended spatial consequences which stem from a lack of integration between the strategies and policies of central government departments, such as those demonstrated in our *Map for England* project¹³.
15. However, while there is a strong case for devolution, government must also exercise redistributive functions at a national level in order to avoid exacerbating existing patterns of inequality. Our paper on *Smart City-Regions*¹⁴ described how the fallout from the 2008 financial crisis exacerbated existing patterns of inequality in the UK, derived from earlier economic restructuring within the UK towards a service and knowledge-based economy. As such, while the post-2008 recession led to an overall decrease in productivity, public spending and wage growth, London and the South East recovered fairly quickly, assisted by the bailout of London’s financial sector and continued investment in major transport and regeneration projects. Subsequent austerity measures imposed by government disproportionately affected already poor communities. This has resulted in an increasing divide between large cities with agglomeration economies and devolution deals, and those areas without devolved powers, with lower land values and property markets, or a legacy of skills shortages.
16. Any successful national strategy must therefore be able to demonstrate that it works for all parts of the country, including rural areas and places outside the combined authorities, in order to tackle regional disparities. This needs to address the fact that different parts of the country have very different infrastructure baselines (with some places still missing quite fundamental economic infrastructure) and be accompanied with incentives to encourage the development of joint spatial frameworks and facilitate effective cross-boundary cooperation.

Integrating housing and transport to improve productivity

17. Our research on *Settlement Patterns, Urban Form and Sustainability*¹⁵ describes how larger, compact, dense and public-transport oriented settlements deliver agglomeration which improves productivity. With many local authorities currently under pressure to meet ambitious housing targets, it is important that planners can continue to influence

¹² RTPI. 2015. *Strategic Planning*. Available from: bit.ly/2K83WLK

¹³ RTPI. 2012. *A Map for England*. Available from: bit.ly/2B7U3L6

¹⁴ RTPI. 2017. *Better Planning: Smart City-Regions*. Available from: bit.ly/2Ti4aUC

¹⁵ RTPI. 2018. *Settlement Patterns, Urban Form and Sustainability*. Available from: bit.ly/2F1fxbO



location, density and accessibility accordingly. However, some parts of the UK suffer from a legacy of sprawling, dispersed and car-dependent patterns of development which are undermining productivity and urban regeneration efforts, and generating significant negative externalities such as air pollution.

18. Furthermore, our *Location of Development* study¹⁶ shows that in twelve fast-growing English city-regions, the majority of permissions for new housing are not within easy walking or cycling distance of a railway station. It cautioned that a lack of integration between transport and land use planning risked locking residents into long and unhealthy commutes, and exacerbating the environmental and health impacts of the transport sector. The *Transport for New Homes* project¹⁷, which the RTPI was on the steering group of, found similar results in their study of sustainable transport in new housing developments.
19. However, there are few easy solutions for accommodating further growth in a sustainable way. Urban intensification creates housing close to jobs and supports public transport, but tends to be complex and more expensive. The extension of urban areas into surrounding green belt or greenfield land raises environmental concerns. New settlements require long-term support and commitment from central government. Faced with barriers to the delivery of large-scale housing, many areas are now at risk from incremental development in locations far from jobs and poorly served by public transport. Our research shows a need for interventions to support densification and compact patterns of growth coupled with measures to mitigate negative externalities from densification which include higher rents, increased air pollution and congestion, and lower levels of subjective wellbeing. These measures include the provision of housing at sub-market rates, high quality and accessible green space, policies to support renters and first-time buyers, and subsidised public transport, and the management of traffic demand through road pricing and other traffic removal initiatives.

Adaptable frameworks for long-term spatial planning

20. The long-time frame considered by this Commission highlights numerous long-term issues which require a much greater degree of urgency and spatial coordination in terms of government policy and strategy. This relates most clearly to the challenge of climate change. There is an urgent need to decarbonise all sectors of the economy in accordance with the legally binding carbon budgets of the 2008 Climate Change Act, and adapt to the likely consequences of extreme weather, in a way that is equitable. This will entail national action to increase the energy efficiency of the existing building stock, relocate communities in landscapes at risk from sea-level rise, increase the resilience of the built environment (and vulnerable groups within it) to increased heatwaves and flash flooding, and prepare for the spatial implications of an energy system powered almost entirely by decentralised and renewable energy. Another example is the need to prepare for the spatial impacts of greater automation in the manufacturing, service and transport sectors.
21. Through its work on a Blueprint for a Great North Plan, in partnership with IPPR North, the RTPI has demonstrated how diverse stakeholders can be assembled into a flexible,

¹⁶ See our research at: rtpi.org.uk/locationofdevelopment

¹⁷ Foundation for Integrated Transport. 2018. *Transport for New Homes*. Available from: bit.ly/2BccCxQ



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adaptive and informal model of regional governance, able to support a more coordinated response to long-term and complex processes of change related to the economy, transport, natural assets and demography¹⁸.

¹⁸ See our project website: rtpi.org.uk/greatnorthplan