

A new Masterplan for Kingston town centre

Kingston is an impressive town centre. Its custodians all know that it must keep pace to stay at the top of its game says Lisa Fairmaner



Lying beside the River Thames in south-west London, Kingston is perhaps surprisingly London's third largest retail centre. With its picturesque riverside setting, medieval marketplace, pedestrian-friendly streets and extensive retail offer, Kingston has many assets to build on.

The Royal Borough of Kingston Upon Thames have commissioned a new Masterplan for the town centre, setting out a strategy to 2035. This will draw together the many existing piecemeal studies into a single, coherent plan.

Despite some closures, Kingston has weathered well in the current climate compared to many others. The last few decades have brought more residents to the town centre and its hinterland, particularly contemporary, higher density developments along the river to the north. Investment interest remains high, with Berkeley Homes developing the Old Post Office site in the south-west quadrant, improvements to the iconic Bentall Centre including a new Curzon cinema, and commencement of a mixed use scheme on the Gough House site in Eden Street. This is needed to provide retail decant space to enable the ambitious redevelopment of the 1960's Eden Walk shopping centre, including new retail and F&B, a cinema and 385 new homes.

The new Masterplan will manage the transition

from the current retail dominance to a more diverse local economy. This objective was identified in the 2018 Economic Growth Strategy, but it needs practical measures to make it happen. The existing town centre is bi-dimensional, focussed on retail and residential, with no new office development in 26 years. Kingston University, based in the town centre, has a



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one of the best graduate start-up rates in the country, with particular strengths in Creative Industries. Yet this potential is unharnessed and very few students remain in the borough. The Old Post Office will provide an employment hub/incubator space to the council through a legal agreement, making a fantastic use of the heritage listed building. But this needs to be just the start.

The second challenge of the Masterplan is to successfully accommodate growth. The town centre is part of a new Opportunity Area designated in the emerging London Plan and predicated on the arrival of Crossrail 2 in the mid-2030's. While the new rail infrastructure increasingly looks like a distant dream rather than concrete proposal, the town must find a route-map to evolve and improve its offer with or



ABOVE: BDP scheme for Eden Walk
LEFT BELOW: Christmas market
BELOW: The old post office converted

without Crossrail.

Publication of the Mayor's 'Intend to Publish' version of the London Plan in mid-December, with lower housing targets, will reduce the pressure on overall numbers allowing a focus on exemplary design. This change to the London Plan is particularly relevant for a borough in 'tilted balance' with a significant gap between completions and the current target, and lack of available housing land supply.

The Council itself is a major landowner in the town centre. It has key sites at Cattlemarket and Ashdown Road used for carparking but earmarked for redevelopment since 2008. These have the potential to unlock many new homes as well as driving the diversification of the economy. The Council is looking to the Masterplan to support those investment decisions and ensure their sites have a transformative impact on the town centre. Other landowners must also play their part including the riverside north of Kingston Bridge, where investment by John Lewis and Fenwick is needed to optimise this valuable real estate, currently an unhospitable part of the town centre and the focus of anti-social behaviour.

The third challenge is to create a better environment and user experience. Priorities include reducing the harmful impact of Kingston's infamous one-way gyratory. The town centre has benefited from new public realm as part of the Go Cycle programme

(from the Mayor's Mini Holland funding) and the award-winning Market Place, but key pedestrianised areas such as Clarence Street are looking dated.

This challenge is also about digital. This is clearly critical to the future of any town centre: indeed Bill Grimsey dedicated a whole chapter to it in his Review 2. Kingston got free wifi in 2017, but there is huge scope to ensure technology delivers relevance rather than obsolescence for retail districts. An obvious starting point would be the rationalisation of the 13 car parks across the town centre, directing vehicles to

available spaces instead of choking up the gyratory.

Kingston is an impressive town centre, ably supported by its Business Improvement District recently voted in for a fourth term. The custodians of the town centre, the council, BID, landowners and University all know that it must keep pace to stay at the top of its game and continue to be an attractive focus for the wider catchment. This will need evolution of its land uses and spaces in a way that reflects its strong Outer London identity. I look forward to seeing the new Masterplan to deliver this. ■



The CaMKoX arc has potential for a million homes

The Oxford-Cambridge arc has potential for a million homes - but there are challenges to overcome says Roger Smith

The Oxford-Cambridge arc could deliver a million new homes and 1.1million new jobs by 2050 if the new infrastructure along the arc is delivered. Improving the corridor's connectivity and infrastructure could act as a catalyst for future growth, according to a new report by real estate advisor Savills, however there are challenges to delivering on the potential.

The National Infrastructure Commission found that the main risk to the success of the area is 'lack of sufficient and suitable housing' and without a joined-up plan for housing, jobs and infrastructure across the corridor the area will be left behind by its UK competitors. In our new research paper, *The Oxford-Cambridge Innovation Arc*, we consider some of the challenges to successful delivery of the strategy.

Joined up planning

If the government's ambition for one million new homes across the arc by 2050 is to be reached a coordinated response from local authorities is key. The area defined in the report's analysis covers 26 district and unitary authorities, four county councils, and one combined authority -Green Belt constraints in certain places along the arc present an additional challenge.

Re-examining the role of the Green Belt, particularly around Oxford, Cambridge and the southern fringe of the arc will inevitably be part of the wider spatial planning. What's needed is a coordinated approach across neighbouring districts. A key challenge for the area will be combining the localism embedded in the NPPF with a strategic, joined up

vision for the whole corridor.

Delivery needs to rise by 13,000 homes annually against what is currently being planned for – an additional 47 per cent of the current delivery rate - and would mean building at a rate of 3.1 per cent of the corridor's 2018 stock every year – a level not currently being achieved anywhere in England.

Future Growth

The main opportunity unlocked by new infrastructure and the pattern of future growth will be concentrated in the centre of the arc, around Milton Keynes and Bedford, according to the report. The area benefits from a relative lack of constraints and existing infrastructure crossing it from London and Birmingham.

There are two key ways in which the impact of new infrastructure can be maximised – firstly where it aligns with existing growth areas to unlock more land and allow development at higher densities, for instance at Cambourne.

The second way is to create new transport hubs where new infrastructure connects with existing road and rail. Greatest potential for delivery is the middle of the arc, where land is less constrained, and the intersections of old infrastructure will have the greatest impact on connectivity. Areas such as Milton Keynes and Bedford already have the highest forecast household growth – there are also the more affordable markets with land values that are more able to support the diversity of mix and tenure needed to enable the high rates of absorption needed to build homes at three per cent of existing stock.

Roger Smith is Savills head of Planning, Oxford



Strategic Land

The report also highlights a significant requirement for more strategic land. The challenge is that to meet the ambition of delivering one million homes by 2050, land with capacity for 680,000 homes – equivalent to over 23,000 hectares – still needs to be identified. And while the four new garden villages with the arc will support delivery, these are not the silver bullet to increasing delivery to the level needed.

Market absorption & affordability

The rate at which houses can be sold – market absorption – is another challenge. Innovative approaches will be needed as open market capacity to absorb new homes will be limited. To improve absorption rates developers will need to provide a range of housing types tenures. The problem is particularly acute in both Oxford and Cambridge where the proportion of people able to access home ownership is so limited the private rented sector now accounts for over 30 per cent of all households (compared to 18 per cent across the arc as a whole). One solution suggested in the report is for city local authorities to continue to work with more affordable surrounding areas to accommodate their overspill of need.

A second solution may be for more schemes to deliver homes for specific needs and across a range of tenures – such as the partnership between L&G and Oxford University providing discounted homes for university staff on university land.

Building new homes is an important step towards alleviating affordability constraints, which hamper economic growth by pricing out workers – and ultimately reduce the attractiveness of an area for occupiers if they believe they will struggle to recruit. ■



Time for a review of London's Green Belt?

The Plan has largely been found sound but it only takes us so far and meanwhile the housing backlog keeps growing ever larger says Sarah Bevan

When the Draft New London Plan Inspectors Report was published in October, the attention-grabbing headline was the recommendation to review London's Green Belt. But is this likely?

Following their examination, the panel of Inspectors found the Good Growth strategy that underpins the Draft Plan to be sound, subject to 53 recommended alterations. Critically, the Inspectors were unconvinced by the small sites strategy which assumes the Plan would deliver 38 per cent of new homes on sites with a capacity of 25 units or less. They conclude that this is unrealistic and recommend reducing the target by over 50 per cent and, consequently, the overall housing target by almost 20 per cent.

This highlights the difficult choices London faces. In assessing the Plan the Inspectors have had no choice but to reduce the housing targets as the small sites policy was not effective or justified and therefore undeliverable. However, having concluded that the Plan has maximised all sources of brownfield capacity, it means that we move ever further away from meeting housing need and the backlog keeps growing.

The Inspectors also raised concerns about industrial land supply for the Class B8 (storage and distribution) sector, concluding that the need had been significantly underestimated, and many hundreds of hectares are likely to be needed in the medium and long term.

For these two reasons, the Inspectors recommend the Mayor should lead a comprehensive review of

London's Green Belt, as part of the next Plan review, to establish if there is any potential for sustainable development. The Inspectors concluded, "It is implausible to insist that the green belt is entirely sacrosanct without having considered what it comprises and the impact that it has on wider strategic objectives." The review should examine all land within the Green Belt to ascertain whether, and to what extent, it meets the purposes defined in the NPPF and consider potential to promote sustainable patterns of development in line with the 2019 NPPF.

The Mayor has taken a strong stance on protection of the Green Belt and campaigned on this basis when elected in 2016. But does this position have popular support? While politicians make assumptions about voters' feelings on the Green Belt, our research suggests that many Londoners are up for an intelligent conversation about whether it has the potential to deliver sustainable development to help tackle the housing crisis.

This year London First commissioned an independent Citizens' Jury to consider the issues. After hearing evidence on both sides from expert witnesses which included London MPs, Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) and town planners, the Jury voted 11–1 in favour of reviewing London's Green Belt to help build affordable homes. We need to protect London's green spaces and valuable landscapes, but this should not mean that low-quality land within the Green Belt is safeguarded at all costs. There is nothing green and pleasant about disused carwashes or derelict industrial

Sarah Bevan is programme director, planning and development at London First



sites.

The recommendation to review the Green Belt is intrinsically linked to the panel's position on the Duty to Cooperate. The current 20 per cent shortfall between forecast need and the revised housing target increases pressure on the wider South East to help meet London's housing deficit and is the source of much contention with neighbouring authorities. The report notes that an effective Green Belt review should involve joint working and positive engagement with authorities around London's boundary, along with the boroughs.

The most striking thing about the Inspectors' report is that it has already shifted the debate onto the next review. This is particularly interesting given that the next review is likely to be far from "immediate", despite the Inspector who examined the Further Alterations to the London Plan in 2014 calling for one along with former Secretary of State James Brokenshire, who requested one in July 2018.

The Inspectors declined recommending an immediate review on the basis that it may deter some boroughs from updating their local plans until the review is progressed and it may encourage developers to land bank.

Given the nature of national politics it is hard to predict whether the next Secretary of State will intervene and when adoption might take place. The general election, coupled with the Mayoral election in May, suggest that the only prediction that can be made with any certainty is that uncertainty lies ahead and consequently further delays are likely.

Regardless of the politics at play, the fact remains that, whilst this particular Plan has largely been found sound, it only takes us so far and meanwhile the housing backlog keeps growing ever larger. ■

Policy G2 London's Green Belt

G2

A. The Green Belt should be protected from inappropriate development:

1. development proposals that would harm the Green Belt should be refused
2. the enhancement of the Green Belt to provide appropriate multi-functional uses for Londoners should be supported.

B. The extension of the Green Belt will be supported, where appropriate. Its de-designation will not.

Double down on efforts to strengthen Green Belt policy

In the light of the climate emergency Green Belt protection is more important than ever before but if there is to be a review of London's Green Belt the only logical approach would be to examine the Metropolitan Green Belt as a whole argues Neil Sinden

It feels like a week doesn't pass without another attack on London's Green Belt. The source is often predictable and the line of argument well worn. But almost always the proponents fail to engage with some simple truths: the Green Belt enjoys almost universal political support, largely in response to the overwhelming public enthusiasm for the concept and the benefits it provides as the 'countryside next door' for millions of people. This is aside from its crucial, yet underappreciated role in shaping urban development which will only become more important as we strive to tackle the climate emergency.

More evidence of the depth and nature of public support for the Green Belt was provided by fresh public opinion polling carried out by CPRE in the run up to the General Election. An independent online survey revealed that, across the country, 60 per cent of people would be more likely to vote for a political party that wants to protect and enhance the countryside, including the Green Belt. Interestingly, this proportion increased to 71 per cent for people in the 25-34 age range and the survey also found that Londoners feel particularly strongly about protecting and enhancing our green spaces, with 73 per cent saying this mattered to them when deciding who to vote for.

These results show just how important Green Belt is to Londoners. They suggest there is strong support for the Mayor of London's draft London plan which seeks stronger protections for the Green Belt than are available through the simple application of Government policy. Critics of the Mayor's approach have been emboldened by the Inspectors Report, published in October, following the public examination of the draft London Plan. The Report recommends changes to policies to protect the Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land – equivalent to the Green Belt within London – which would seriously weaken their protection. Most worrying is the conclusion by Inspectors that there is a need for a London-wide review the Green Belt to find land for industrial development and housebuilding. Committing to such a review in the new London Plan is not only unjustified but would undermine one of the Plan's core objectives which is to make

better use of existing developed land through intensification of current low density land uses.

Like so many of the critics of Green Belt policy, these recommendations fail to recognise some important realities. Just seven per cent of the Metropolitan Green Belt lies within London's boundaries. While we strongly oppose the suggestion, if there is to be a review of London's Green Belt, given the strategic nature of the policy, the only logical approach would be to examine the Metropolitan Green Belt as a whole, including all the home counties into which it extends. Moreover, any such review should be carried out on the basis of how to maximise the public benefit that the Green Belt provides, including by providing relatively easy access to the countryside for millions of Londoners, rather than simply to find land for new development.

It is clear that the Metropolitan Green Belt has played a vital role in restricting urban sprawl, minimising traffic growth and safeguarding countryside close to where people live.

Moreover, London's Green Belt is already under major threat as a result of plan reviews being carried out by a number of outer London Boroughs, notably in Hounslow where the council is proposing to remove Green Belt protection from over 125ha of land. While housing need is the most frequently cited reason to justify this, actual housing completion data show that there is no realistic need to release Green Belt for more than a decade. CPRE London's 'Space to Build' initiative has shown how in places like Enfield, where the Borough is also contemplating major Green Belt release, there is more than enough previously developed land to meet foreseeable housing needs.

Calls to release areas of 'scrappy' land from the Green Belt around rail stations fail to appreciate the vital importance for policy effectiveness of preventing the wanton neglect of land in the hope of

Neil Sinden is director, CPRE London – the Countryside Charity



attracting planning permission. They show no recognition of the wildlife value of some of these sites. They also ignore the findings of research which show that however close they live to stations, the vast majority of commuters tend to travel by car. Our own research 'Driving in Circles' showed that development schemes in London's Green Belt would lead to an extra five million car journeys a week. With the renewed emphasis on reducing car use in the face of the climate emergency we must urgently address, this is not the right way forward.

As well as the political realities and the public support they reflect, we now need to recognise the multiple roles that Green Belt policy can play in tackling climate change. This is achieved as much, if not more, by shaping redevelopment and regeneration within the urban boundary, as by restricting development beyond it. And not just by using the policy to support measures to reduce car use and support active travel, but also by building a positive vision for use of land within the Green Belt as a core element of mitigation and adaptation strategies, including through the massive increase in tree cover that is needed.

Since the concept of a 'green girdle' around the capital was first considered by the Greater London Regional Planning Committee over 90 years ago, it is clear that the Metropolitan Green Belt has played a vital role in restricting urban sprawl, minimising traffic growth and safeguarding countryside close to where people live. In the face of unprecedented climate and nature emergencies, the role of Green Belt in managing urban growth will only become more important. We hope that the new Government, and the new Mayor of London when elected in May, will use their fresh mandates to double down on efforts to strengthen Green Belt protection and make it a central tool of environmental policy. ■

Should new housing have to pay for itself?

We should treat housing as infrastructure, ask empowered local authorities to take the lead, and let taxes and borrowing step in where the market fails says Neil Murphy

Should new housing have to pay for itself? For years, that's been the orthodoxy: housing built by private builders and sold to private buyers is supposed to cover not only its own costs, a profit to the builder and (usually) a chunky receipt to the landowner, but an element of cross-subsidy to provide for affordable housing for those unable to buy.

It's a model driven by a policy focus on home ownership as the naturally desirable tenure, with affordable housing a 'residual' in every sense. The apogee of this is Help To Buy, which has funnelled billions of pounds into the dubious strategy of tackling housing supply shortages by stoking demand. It hasn't worked: income-to-price ratios continue to widen in most parts of the UK; 'generation rent' is upon us; homelessness is on the rise and even with the mortgage subsidy provided by Help to Buy home ownership remains prohibitively costly for many, especially in London.

And it's questionable whether the housing that is being delivered, regardless of tenure, is really meeting underlying social need. A focus on brute numbers – the bane of many a planner's life – and a growing number of small but happy examples of better practice masks the fact that what we are building is generally not very good. With the exception of inner London and the cores of a few other gilded cities, the dominant mode of housing delivery in the UK remains the standard building-regs-compliant estate box built by (or modelled on) one or other member of a tight volume housebuilding oligopoly, in which housing is generally segregated from work and civic life, tenures don't mix unless forced to by planners, and car-dependence is treated as an inevitable if not in fact aspirational lifestyle 'choice'. And let's not get started on the disgrace of office-to-residential PD.

Housing is what economists term a merit good: something that's likely to be under-consumed, in quantity and quality, if left to the market to provide, and therefore warrants subsidy so that consumption doesn't depend on ability or willingness to pay – think schooling and healthcare. In theory, an affordable housing programme should address this problem, but if that programme is largely reliant on, in effect, capturing what surplus can be generated from a market that is itself reliant on probably unsustainable financial doping then its impact is likely to be

limited. Policymakers are cottoning on to the viability assessment scam and the case for capping landowners' returns closer to existing use value, but it's still a system that's mainly related to what the market can provide rather than what society needs. Compared with the even the current resource-constrained state of the NHS and education systems, in policy terms housing is the wild west. Or, perhaps better, compare housing with roads; that quintessential form of "infrastructure" in the public mind, without sufficient "capacity" in which new housing is simply forbidden from existing – and which of course never has to 'pay for itself'.

The rub in all this is that the provision of housing, new and existing, is has to get even harder if we're going to avert climate crisis and make our cities livable as the climate changes. We have to reduce drastically the level of operational and embodied greenhouse gas emissions in the built environment. We have to build new and retrofit old in ways that stop us overheating in increasingly hot summers as well as freezing in the winter, without radically increasing energy use. And if you think, as I do, that the isolating land use patterns of the last few decades have contributed to everything from dire urban air quality to the social fragmentation that gave us Brexit and record levels of loneliness and mental ill-health, you might agree we ought to be shaping and reshaping our cities and towns as walkable and cyclable, socially and economically integrated places – something that simply can't be left to the market, and will require, well, planning.

Two recent projects illustrate both what is possible and the scale of the problem. The Stirling Prize-winning Goldsmith Street in Norwich is certified Passivhaus, cost about £1,900 per square metre to build and is 100 per cent social rented Council housing. It 'worked' because of the very low cost of capital available to Norwich City Council as client, which can be paid down from social rent over 40 years or so. My

Neil Murphy is co-founding director of developer TOWN (www.wearetown.co.uk)



company TOWN's own Marmalade Lane Cohousing project in Cambridge is all for market sale, cost about the same to build, performs at close-to-Passivhaus standard, and returned a substantial land receipt to Cambridge City Council to invest in its own social housing programme across the city. It 'worked' because house prices in Cambridge are astronomical.

Both are, I humbly submit, terrific pieces of urbanism and models for a more humane and environmentally aware model of housing. Both had an enlightened local authority in the vanguard. Both 'paid for themselves', on different financial models. But, if and as those build costs head rapidly north, which model could reliably get brilliant mixed tenure housing built across the country, from Surbiton to Stockton? The truth is that both have a role to play as part of a mixed-economy, but that only a battalion of Goldsmith Streets, backed by councils taking a similar predict-and-provide approach to housing as many do to road-building, has the capacity to reconcile tackling the housing crisis while meeting the environmental and social imperative.

We should treat housing as infrastructure, ask empowered local authorities to take the lead, and let taxes and borrowing step in where the market fails. ■



Marmalade Lane, RIBA national award winner 2019

Solving the crisis is not just a matter of building more houses

Despite best intentions, the major political parties are continuing to ignore the real crux of the issues facing our housing market says John Nettleton

When the snap general election was looming, political parties made many sweeping promises of how they will solve the UK housebuilding targets that by far exceed the reality of what has been achieved over recent years.

Housing targets are being missed, and the likelihood of drastic increases in affordable housing and an improved market outlook for those wishing to get onto the housing ladder is still far from the reality. In short, the gulf between demand for housing and its availability is widening.

Yet government after government continues to make the same promises that won't be kept: to build more, and more quickly.

As manifestos are published and debated, parties need to take another look at the alternative options on the table that could create enough homes. It is surely time for politicians to consider the larger properties that could be freed up if more specialist housing was built for older generations, and those older people who would love to downsize.

With 1.1 million households on waiting lists for affordable homes[1] and the volume of residential building work dropping in each month since June[2] the need for suitable properties for older people is greater than ever. Our own recent research found that 27 per cent of over 55s who downsized really struggled to find a suitable property. What a waste

that is when those family homes would go a long way to creating movement in the housing market and avoiding the need to build over huge swathes of UK.

To use London as the primary example, around 7,500 older people live in a retirement community which provides care and support. If, say, two thirds of older Londoners own their own home, this means that less than 0.2 per cent of older homeowners are living in such accommodation.

If we are to truly grasp the housing nettle, we need our policy makers to look and think beyond the numbers and start focusing on the right kinds of buildings and investing for long term change. And for London specifically, the lack of retirement housing can at least partially be explained by the fact it is incredibly competitive market. Affordable housing policies and community infrastructure tax levies are applied to retirement housebuilders, making it increasingly difficult to compete with housebuilders. A more level playing field would help.

If older people feel supported and able to downsize into properties suited to their needs which allow them to maintain their independence and take advantage of the many opportunities available in their retirement, this will provide a long-term stimulus in the housing market. It will free up larger properties for families and first-time buyers.



John Nettleton is group land director at the Audley Group

The reality is that despite best intentions, the major political parties are continuing to ignore the real crux of the issues facing our housing market. It is not simply a case of numbers. This is about investing correctly and bringing a precise vision for change into focus. Creating homes for older people to aspire to is the only way to ensure younger people will be able to take that all important first step onto the ladder. ■

John has worked in the property industry for over 20 years, firstly at Bidwells, DTZ (now Cushman & Wakefield) and subsequently Colliers International where he was Regional Head of Residential. Whilst at Colliers he acquired Clevedon for Audley Villages following which, in 2007, he joined Audley as Regional Land Director. In 2015 John was promoted to the Board of Audley Court Limited. His team is responsible for new site acquisitions across the Group, then working with the Planning and the Development teams to obtain optimum planning consents.

There is only one body that could manage UK land

The Crown Estate could provide a third way between our current unbalanced system and the sort of state control envisaged but abandoned by Labour via its Community Land Act suggests Paul Finch

Housebuilder Tony Pidgley has caused a stir by suggesting that a government organization should be in control of development land, and that society as a whole should benefit from the uplift in value when planning permissions are granted, at least in respect of housing development.

His point is that housebuilders should be able to make their money from doing what they do, not from hoarding land to increase its value. Actually, in respect of the two most extensive analyses of this question, the housebuilding industry was given a clean bill of health; in general, the desire is to build and sell as rapidly as the market demands (dependent of course on mortgage finance). If land is held, it is because of a slow-down in demand.

The commentator Peter Bill has covered this subject extensively, during a career that involved working as a QS for a volume housebuilder before moving into construction and property journalism. He has shown, conclusively to my mind, that it is not the planning system or building regulations that lie behind our current shortage, but the failure of the political class to support the necessary level of public sector construction that would end the madness of relying on the private sector to building out a social programme.

The huge increases in land cost that occur following housing permissions is a major issue, Bill says. The

more builders have to pay for land, the greater the pressure to reduce construction costs, because what people can afford has nothing to do with land price. Quality and space standards take a hit – not as much of a hit as in the disgusting permitted development in Haringey, where units are 21 square metres or less. (Message to architects: sometimes your duty as a professional is to tell a client that what they are doing is not acceptable and refuse the commission.)

But back to land. Just suppose a government agency had vested in it rights to land suitable for housing development, and its task in life was to dispose of the land at a price which would not cripple housebuilders, large or small, where the profit made could be put to good use, and where the quality of what was proposed would determine which builder bought at a reasonable price?

There is one body which, gargantuan task though I might be, could take on such a job. I refer to the Crown Estate. Although some of its revenues are used to support the monarchy, most are not. This public organization could provide a third way between our current unbalanced system and the sort of state control envisaged but abandoned by Labour via its Community Land Act of the 1970s.

The landowners who benefit when planners draw boundaries showing where they want housing to go



Paul Finch is editorial director of the Architects' Journal and AR and joint publishing editor of Planning in London

are not large numerically. There would be few votes sacrificed were the Pidgley proposal brought into being. ■

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Taming the tides: green-growth across the Thames Estuary

Mark Willingale shows how a policy of managed retreat may be replaced by an integrated Metrotidal Urban Orbital that protects existing assets, reduces the flood defence line and provides green growth

For the economic benefits of the Thames Estuary growth corridor to be realised, it is widely recognised that the conurbations of North Kent and South Essex need to be connected. At the same time, climate change and rising sea levels are threatening to divide them, with over 110sq.km of the lower estuary exposed to flood risk. If considered as separate infrastructure projects, improving connectivity and reducing flood risk are very costly. A single system of integrated infrastructure would save substantial costs, reduce the risks and increase the economic benefits.

London is fortunate in that the tidal range at Tower Pier is over 7m, so London is 3.5m above mean sea level, higher than Shanghai and much of New York, and not immediately at risk but only if the tides can be tamed. The Thames Estuary acts as a funnel, causing the tides to increase upstream. From Southend Pier to Tower Pier they double in height. A barrier upstream across the tideway would be shorter but requires sea walls downstream the estuary that need to be longer and higher. A barrier at Long Reach, just upstream from the Dartford Crossing, would need a 106km flood defence system. In contrast a barrier between Southend and Allhallows across the Lower Thames Estuary would be just 8km long and faces lower tides. Should sea levels rise faster than currently projected the problem would be solved by raising 8km rather than 106km of flood datum, from a lower level.

The Metrotidal Thames Orbital integrates the

next generation of London's flood defences with a rail orbital, floating solar array, data storage and distribution to provide a robust TE2200 system with substantial green-growth across the Lower Thames Estuary for a lower cost and environmental impact than the current TE2100 proposals for managed retreat. The green growth is achieved through the generation of renewable energy for the 100,000 new homes already planned around the estuary, along with improved transport connectivity and efficient data storage and distribution.

The integrated infrastructure consists of an open-throttle, formed by extending sea walls across Sea Reach, which reduces the tidal range upstream in the event of a storm surge, thereby providing all areas upstream to London with flood defences through the 21st century, while leaving the tideway open for navigation to all existing wharves and docks. The system can then become a full barrier, when required in the 22nd century, with the 8km flood datum raised as necessary to meet rising sea levels.

A tunnel formed within the sea walls links existing rail lines and cycleways to complete a twin-track rail and micro-mobility orbital of the Lower Thames Estuary. The estuary orbital with a 4sq.km floating solar array, cycle superhighway, data storage and distribution, provides sustainable connectivity for over a million households, generating green-growth across the Lower Thames Estuary into Essex and Kent. Just 12km of new rail-

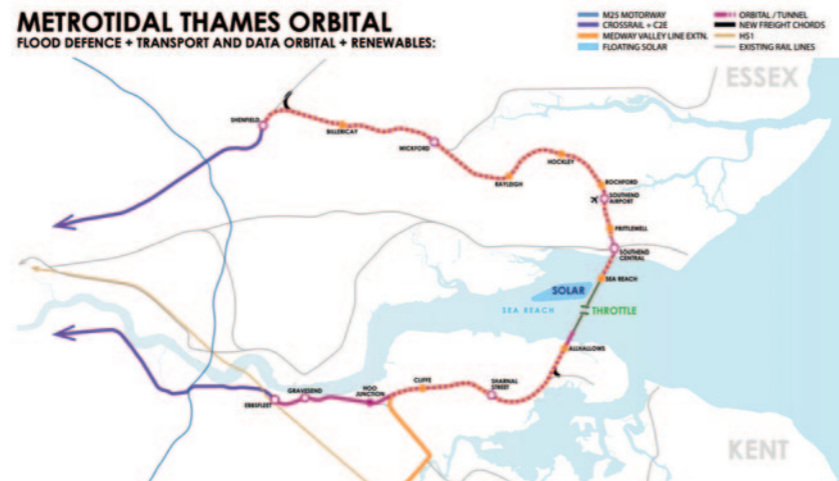
Mark Willingale is director of Metrotidal Limited



way line creates a 132km orbital of the Thames Estuary from Central London.

Construction undertaken in the tideway makes use of a rail head from concrete casting facilities at an aggregates wharf nearby on the Isle of Grain. Spoil from the tunnel excavations is reused locally for embankments and flood bunds, to minimise the embodied energy and environmental impacts of construction. The sea walls protect the estuary from tidal squeeze, preventing the loss of over 800 hectares of saltmarsh and intertidal habitat.

In summary, a policy of managed retreat that sacrifices land to the sea and increases the flood defence line is replaced by an integrated Metrotidal Urban Orbital that protects existing assets and habitats, reduces the flood defence line and provides green growth. The orbital flood defence system developed for the Thames is applicable to urban estuaries around the UK including Tyneside, Teesside, Humberside, Haven Ports, Medway, Southampton, Bristol and Glasgow. Further details of the Metrotidal Thames Orbital and other urban orbitals will be provided for the next issue of *Planning in London*.



Managed Retreat

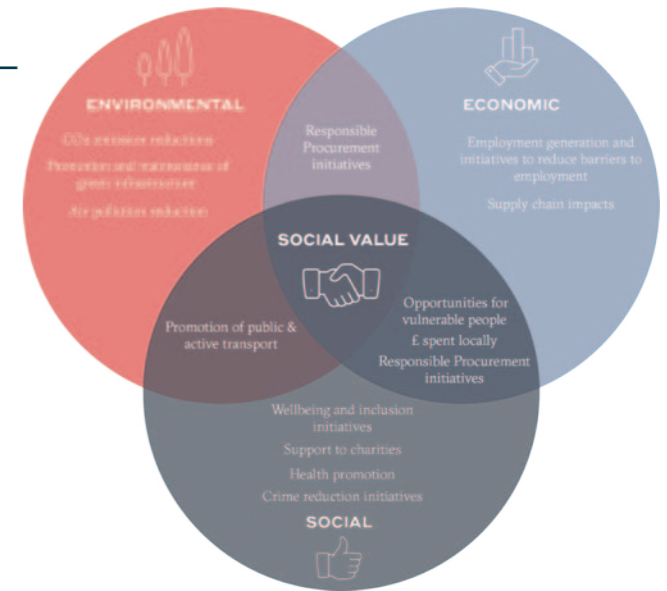
- Loss of land
- Loss of existing habitats
- Higher flood defences
- Longer flood defence line
- Isolation of coastal and riparian settlements

Metrotidal Urban Orbital

- Protects landward areas
- Protects existing habitats
- Lower flood defences
- Shorter flood defence line
- Creates a single estuary economy
- Provides green-growth

Social Value: invisible worth

The social value of a scheme represents a source of significant untapped potential for new development say Martyn Jenkins and Ailish Ryan



Planners need no convincing of the links between the built environment and its potential to positively influence society. Whilst the benefits to society of well-designed places are widely understood, they are seldom measured. What if the extent of this impact could be assessed?

There is increasing recognition amongst local authorities, investors and developers that we need better ways to measure and account for the social value that results from development. In this article Ailish Ryan and Martyn Jenkins of WSP | Indigo shine a light on what we mean by social value, the benefits and difficulties arising when assessing it and, crucially, how a better understanding of social value can help make a compelling case for development.

What is social value?

Social value is not simply a way of measuring the impact of an activity on people but rather, a holistic method for assessing works or services and the worth that they generate to society overall. Social value seeks to measure initiatives implemented to promote social, environmental and economic sustainability, translating this assessment into relative monetary terms in order to demonstrate the true value of a development.

Recognition has been growing...

While the concept of social value is not new, awareness and appreciation has come into greater prominence following the enactment of the Social Value Act in 2013. The Act, which is used in the procurement of public services, requires social value to be evaluated for major government procurements.

In its current format, the Act fails to explicitly incorporate considerations of town planning. Despite this, the growing enlightenment of local authorities to the benefits of social value has resulted in a shift in thinking to its application beyond the procurement of public services. This change in perspective extends to developers who are recognising the value that responsible business activities can bring back to their organisation, thereby mutually reinforcing the need for strong social, economic and environmental consideration. Indeed, developments are now having

to be both financially beneficial to the investor, as well as generating long term societal benefit for those who live, work and experience the development.

The relevance of social value to the built environment sector is also reinforced by the 2018 Civil Society Strategy which recognises that social value flows from communities that have strong connections between people along with robust financial, physical and natural resources. The potential of the planning system to influence the spaces and places required to generate this flow should not be underestimated.

The challenge

Whilst the benefits of assessing the social value of a development are clear, undertaking such analysis is not entirely straightforward.

The difficulties lie in quantifying an impact which does not necessarily have a monetary value or an explicit market price. While there is a well-defined and recognised methodology for quantifying the economic impact of developments (e.g. employment or expenditure effects), there is no common methodology for measuring the social impact of projects. For instance, attempting to quantify the impact of a new community centre on the local population's health.

Moreover, there is a lack of consistency in approach and statutory guidance on how such analysis should be undertaken, further muddying the waters. While significant work has been undertaken by organisations such as the Social Value Portal, HACT, and the UK Green Building Council to develop mechanisms and tools that demonstrate and quantify the social value of a development, the challenge now lies in the application of these.

To reach its potential, social value needs consistent consideration. Advocacy of social value will mean more schemes are assessed, helping to benchmark and subsequently drive improvements in this space, ultimately delivering better schemes which generate greater value to communities.

Not just another sustainable buzz-word

Despite the challenges outlined, undertaking a social value assessment is beneficial in appreciating



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what is already being implemented by projects. By not calculating social value, millions of pounds worth of value is currently going unmeasured.

One example of this is the improvements to building fabric for energy efficiency. While commonplace, the long-term value of implementation to society is not actively captured or realised, meaning that an articulation of wider benefits is not accounted for.

Understanding social value can also aid in recognising the materiality of initiatives by promoting a standardised approach for measurement. Consequently, areas of concern can be readily identified, and efforts can be streamlined accordingly. This ultimately assists local authorities in recognising the impacts of developments on their residents, assisting governments in their ability to make positive impacts within the wider community.

Measuring social value is an inherently difficult task with even the most progressive organisations in the built environment industry feeling like they are at the beginning of their social value journeys. Despite this, the articulation of the social value of a scheme represents a source of significant untapped potential in demonstrating the positive and far-reaching impacts of new development. Revealing this previously invisible worth will undoubtedly continue to be a valuable exercise for local authorities, investors and developers for many years to come.