

'Place' is the client

Government needs to recognise that if new towns, urban extensions, whatever, are to get built, they may have to be delivered at the larger scale by non-democratic agencies that can move quickly

Planning in London has been published and edited by Brian Waters, Lee Mallett and Paul Finch since 1992

Why is it few of us feel confident the Government's new towns will deliver the housing we need? There is an enormous deficit between current targets, in London and nationally, and delivery. There is little evidence of what will be done to ensure delivery.

This has been a problem in planning in London, particularly around affordable housing policy, for two decades. The setting of unrealistic targets, which may be what people wish to hear, braced with complex and disputatious mechanisms for establishing viability, has removed a swathe of smaller builders or developers from the supply side, made sites much harder to develop, squeezed the developer's equation so that quality is the usual victim – often after planning is granted – and sites remain undeveloped when there is what economists might term obvious 'excess' demand, boosted by overseas investors who think Sterling cheap.

And, in the meantime, the viability of London has been undermined as the cost of living here has soared. To the point where schools close because of falling roles, young people move out, the age of the population rises, and businesses start to suffer, complain, and take themselves elsewhere. London is not the only city in the UK with an ageing population, but it is bucking the trend of other large UK cities where populations have been getting younger. Baby bust, not baby boom.

The private sector, unless paid directly, will never deliver what the public wants, or needs in affordable housing. The quantum will always be determined under current policy not by need but by what the developer is forced to 'afford'. This tax does not deliver what is needed. Do we have to wait another 20 years for this to be further demonstrated?

Sir Terry Farrell put his finger on the core of the problem eloquently in a special edition of *Architectural Review* in 2007, titled *London Calling*: "There has been an inexorable shift from the late 1940s Welfare State vision of town planning...to a culture of 'non-plan' with development control the primary operating force at town and city level – a kind of built-environment-traffic-warden culture that relies on others doing the actual planning." ie, largely the private sector in today's marketplace.

What was needed he argued are planners that were 'advocates', whose role it is to put forward propositions, advocate them, debate them, consult on them, and let communities decide. The nature of London is a collage of places, but these are overlaid by arbitrary boundaries that militate against 'place' as the foremost 'client'. And we can see, they are also disadvantaged by a planning system that prioritises policy and control rather than planning as a flexible enabling framework.

The whole edifice of planning in London is forced through the keyhole of affordable housing policy. And now on the commercial side, affordable workspace. Hence a startling decline in delivery. Fewer things are being delivered that have anything 'affordable' in them, because they are not 'affordable' by those delivering them.

The Mayor of London, Government, Boroughs, all need to recognise that if new towns, urban extensions, whatever, are to get built – with alacrity – they may have to be delivered, at the larger scale, by non-democratic agencies that can move quickly. This does not mean an absence of democracy or engagement. It means we need agencies that marry private and public sector skills, resources and responsibilities, that have power and funding to deliver. But working to visions that are not 'owned' or driven solely by one stakeholder, public or private.

Place is the client, as Farrell argued. Planning and delivery in London needs perestroika if we are to get the housing we need.

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Trump: right and wrong about Mayor Khan

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The problem with our mayor is his consistent failure in key areas which affect Londoners as a whole

Sadiq Khan has been a terrible mayor for London, but not for the reasons given by the blow-hard president of the United States following his recent visit to the capital, where once again he insulted his ambassador by failing to visit his country's fine embassy at Nine Elms.

The charge sheet against Mayor Khan has nothing to do with crime statistics, which mask deep underlying causes. He doesn't like the police but that is because he makes a simple-minded calculation that his 'constituency' of ethnic minorities doesn't like them either. Nor is it anything to do with Sharia law, despite Trumpian nonsense, though there are plenty of zealots who would dearly love it to operate, and occasionally get support from opportunist Labour politicians.

No, the problem with our mayor is his consistent failure in key areas which affect Londoners as a whole, rather than woke initiatives where he doles out money to the few which he should be spending to improve the capital for the many.

His record on delivery of housing, public, private and anything in between is risible. We all had a laugh when he turned up in Cannes for the Mipim property event, supposedly banging the drum for investment and development in London. Why had it taken him nine years? What housing development has happened as a result? Zilch.

On transport, his major recent initiative was to pay off striking Tube drivers and then say nothing when they went on strike again even more recently.

His crazed road traffic initiatives have brought London to a grinding halt, achieving levels of speed which were hitherto the province of third-world cities we used to jeer at. His own armour-plated limo is a symbol of what we are reduced to. The mixture of malice and incompetence that has characterised Transport for London's surface traffic management, under his mayoralty has become increasingly malicious, and competent only in the sense that TfL is very good at making things worse. A symptom of all this is the fact that the mayor cannot sort out Hammersmith Bridge – or more likely he does not want to.

On planning, the latest draft London Plan shows signs of improvement – but that is only because even Khan can see that his general opposition to development of any sort is sending housing delivery, in particular, into a doom loop.

The latest rumours that he will cut the percentage of affordable homes required from private housebuilders, if they come to pass, will not be evidence of a pragmatic and successful mayor, but a disastrous failure who has realised far too late that his hopeless policies are killing the capital.

With such a failure of both vision and delivery, it was probably inevitable that he would seek a fourth term as mayor – how the Labour government which instigated the London mayoralty allowed such a governance absurdity can only be guessed at.

At least Trump only gets two terms.