

Housing and Sustainable Communities

Housing need, too, is a global phenomenon. In 2007, for the first time in human history, more of us live in cities than in rural areas. In the developing world the process of industrialisation draws more and more people into cities, the townships and shanty towns. In developed countries high levels of wealth and the pursuit of a high added value labour force means the flow of housing development is as much into the small towns and rural areas as into the cities.

Demand for housing currently outstrips supply, particularly in prosperous parts of the UK. This is something that the 2003 Sustainable Communities Plan is seeking to address, together with the need for urban renewal in parts of northern England. Housing and planning policy will have to take more account of the needs of the growing number of elderly households (reflecting past birth rates and low fertility), in terms of access to services, mobility and domiciliary support. The elderly are likely to add pressure on housing in small towns, villages and coastal areas. Many families will continue to be headed by single parents with implications for the demand for affordable housing.



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Governance and Participation

Communities are increasingly demanding provision of high quality local services, such as planning, health, waste collection and education. But decision-making and the 'power-base' has become increasingly centralised, making it difficult to take

local action. A debate is currently on-going between communities, central and local government as to how to return power to the local level.

Recent proposals to create elected regional government in England failed. However, the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales are providing distinctive policies suited to local

circumstances, needs and wishes. In England many local authorities are acting with increased confidence and effectiveness and there are a growing number of examples of effective action at community level. Much of this is in the voluntary sector – itself growing in size and influence, though often critically dependent on public funding.

Conclusion

Planning has come a long way in 60 years and remains highly relevant to the challenges of today. Whether planning can effectively achieve what is demanded of it in an ever-changing world, without either refocusing or undergoing an overhaul, is a crucial question. This should be the subject of continual and positive debate. But it remains the UK's most powerful mechanism for delivering sustainable development and, as in 1947, if a planning system did not exist, we would have to invent one.



Louise Burston



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60 years of planning challenges, then and now

challenges 1947

The turn of the 20th century saw the UK leading the world as an industrial nation. But its cities bore the grimy marks of more than 100 years of industrialisation and rapid growth. Much of the population was experiencing bad housing and unhealthy conditions. Increasingly, links were being made between health and quality of housing and the built environment. The following challenges existed during the early to mid 20th century and led to the creation of the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act.

Inequalities and Welfare

Following the Second World War there was a shift in political inspiration away from the capitalist ideals of Adam Smith and Samuel Smiles and also from philanthropy, both of which had dominated the 19th and early part of the 20th centuries. A determination to tackle the massive inequalities of the time and improve public health and quality of life resulted in the adoption of the economic ideas of John Maynard Keynes and a political commitment to use planning to address problems caused by a poor built environment. This was supported by the 1942 Beveridge Report which led to the creation of the Welfare State.

Employment

A divide between north and south was already apparent in the early part of the 20th century. Employment grew by 44% in the south east of England between 1923 and 1944, while it fell in the north east. A similar picture

emerged for unemployment. Thoughts turned to how excessive growth in the south east could be limited while boosting the economies of the north. For a country wedded to market capitalism, this was cutting-edge thinking. Successive reports in the 1930s urged direct planning intervention, but it was not until the 1940 Barlow Report that new ground was broken in calling for a fresh regime of national planning.



R. P. Gossett, 1927



T&CP Journal 1947

Environmental Concern

Environmental concerns began to play a larger part many people's lives. Two general strands of environmentalism existed:

- Broad environmental improvement, particularly in urban areas, intimately interwoven with the wider movement to tackle slums, over-crowding and growth. The Garden Cities movement and the National Housing Reform Council were products of this.
- Following the Second World War great importance was attached to national agricultural self-sufficiency. A movement for countryside recreation and conservation also existed, which came together with the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949. Organisations active in the movement at this time include the Council for the Preservation of (now Campaign to Protect) Rural England and the Nature Conservancy Council.

PLANNING BRITAIN'S LAND

A summary of the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, in a form which any layman can understand, has been prepared by the Information Department of the Town and Country Planning Association, and is now on sale price 1s. (or by post 1s. 2d.)

THE PLANNING BOOKSHOP
28 King Street, Covent Garden, WC2

T&CP Journal 1947

Citizenship

The first half of the 20th century saw the means of securing social improvement primarily resting on the parliamentary process. The aim was to seek maximum equality between individuals as part of a free society. During the early years of the 20th century a planning system began to develop, but progress was fragmented.

In order to address the challenges it was necessary to create a more comprehensive national planning system. The result was the 1947 Town & Country Planning Act (supported by the Distribution of Industry Act, the National Parks & Access to the Countryside Act, New Towns Act and the Town Development Act). This brought most development under the control of county councils and introduced forward planning, through a system of development plans.

challenges 2007

60 years on from the first Town & Country Planning Act and the UK is a very different place. In general, people are wealthier, better housed, better educated, healthier and have more leisure time. Cross-party political commitment and subsequent responses to addressing the problems highlighted above have played a large part in this.

But the UK now faces different pressures for change which demand similar innovation: a globalised economy and a changing climate as well as an unparalleled demand for homes because we are living longer, forming family units later, and frequently returning to 'single' person living later in life. These factors are strongly interdependent; they are also subject to great uncertainty, both individually and in the way they may interact with one another.

Global Trends and Employment

Driven by relatively liberal trading conditions and advances in communications technology, the UK economy has been expanding strongly and becoming ever more inter-connected. Investment, know-how and jobs now move fairly freely around the globe in search of locations which offer the best returns. The ability of national governments to influence the nature and location of economic activity can be limited. However, real scope remains to create environments to which businesses and people are attracted through planning and investment decisions. The successful regeneration of redundant factories and dockyards around the country illustrates this.

The scale of individual movement nationally and beyond in pursuit of higher education, jobs, second and retirement homes and tourism is likely to increase despite environmental and social concerns. Managing this process will call for stronger collaboration between planning and other government departments and agencies; for example, in the fields of regulation, climate change, dispute resolution and anti-poverty programmes.

Science and technology are creating new goods and services and, in the case of information and communications technology (ICT), changing the way that they are delivered. New businesses tend to require a higher level of skills, to be small and to be locationally mobile. Knowledge-based industries show a preference for locations where there are concentrations of highly



Thurrock Council

skilled workers and scientific research institutions, often linked to universities. This tends to favour parts of the UK which are already prosperous and thereby tends to widen income differentials.

There is risk that the marginalisation of workers with poor education and skill levels will continue, compounding existing problems of regional and local disadvantage. On the other hand, ICT can help to overcome the economic disadvantages of remoteness for rural areas. It enables home working which impacts on where people choose to live, their involvement with their local communities, and their carbon footprint. Although by no means the only mechanism, planning has a vital role to play in bringing these challenges together and developing solutions.



Woking Borough Council

Climate Change and Other Environmental Challenges

It is now almost universally accepted that climate change is the single greatest threat to our way of life. It is a cross-cutting threat – not simply environmental, but economic and social too. Action on climate change is increasingly a prime international, national, regional and local government policy objective.

Whether or not we react to the call to slow the rate of climate change, for some time at least we will have no choice but to adapt to more frequent rainfall and more violent storms, and perhaps most significantly we will need to adapt to living in significantly hotter cities. Planning has a major role to play in meeting these objectives by encouraging development which reduces greenhouse gas emissions and helps communities adapt. The TCPA is at the forefront of these debates.

Planning will need to consider

- Changes in the location of development due to new physical constraints and changing personal preferences in response to drought, temperature change, and so on.
- Changes in the design of buildings to mitigate environmental impacts and adapt to higher temperatures, scarcer water, more direct sunlight etc.
- The strong impetus to develop new, more environmentally friendly forms of transport. Success in this will affect how much private travel needs to be restricted, with consequences for the location of housing and industrial development; but some restrictions are inevitable to deal with congestion.
- The impact on tourism patterns, either due to reduced air travel or because climate change alters the relative attractiveness of destinations within the UK.
- The viability of some designated areas, such as National Parks or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which may be threatened by climate change. New protected areas appropriate to changing flora and fauna may be called for. Management of protected areas may need to change and possibly become more resource intensive.
- Issues like more radical traffic management, the location and type of new energy generators, and decisions about coastal and flood protection. These are likely to fuel intense debate and greater public interest in planning.



R. Shaw, TCPA

“The challenge for planning today is how to deliver development which now begins to enhance both our planet and our society for tomorrow”

**Gideon Amos,
Chief Executive TCPA**