

**Subject: Further alterations to the London Plan**  
Dr Laura Vaughan UCL

--

I am writing in response to the Public Consultation regarding the Draft Further Alterations to the London Plan January 2014 (FALP) to offer my opinion with regard to the proposals laid out at <http://www.london.gov.uk/priorities/planning/london-plan/draft-further-alterations-to-the-london-plan>.

I have for the past six years led two research projects with expertise in Urban Design/space syntax, GIS, Anthropology, Geography and History funded by UK research council Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) - to look into the long-term sustainability of smaller town centres (District and Local) in general and London's outer London in particular. We have met with the Outer London Commission and Design for London to feed through our findings. Here I would like to focus on a few brief points:

1. Whilst I applaud the intention behind policy 4.1ac to "support and promote outer London as an attractive location for national government as well businesses, giving access to the highly-skilled London workforce, relatively affordable work space and the competitive advantages of the wider London economy" it is not clear how the planning system as it stands can provide the necessary infrastructure to do so. Our research has shown that it is essential that that smaller centres play a vital role in providing sustainable economic growth. I would urge for tools to be given to local authorities to withstand the pressures to intensify residential activity in town centres where it comes at the expense of non-domestic land uses. It is vital that the rich variety of uses, from workshops, offices, professional and non-professional services to shops, collectively create places that people will choose to visit on a daily basis, so long as there are sufficient reasons for them to do so and - as our space syntax analysis has shown - so long as they are situated on people's everyday routes from home to school/train/bus and so on. This economic sustainability is directly linked to social sustainability (as lively town centres provide for the casual patterns of interaction that build up into community ties) and environmental sustainability (as more trips are done on foot/cycle or short trips by car - thus feeding into the aims for a low carbon future. Moreover, the typical setting of older warehouses, workshops and small industrial buildings behind or alongside high streets, that are at first glance likely candidates for residential conversion, actually serve a vital need in providing space for businesses to start up at low risk. Businesses situated in such locations also benefit from adjacency to the functions and footfall that the high street provides. They themselves provide additional footfall as well as, in the long run, local employment and skills training for young people who might otherwise not find employment.
2. We agree with the importance of increased connectivity through all means of transport, including walking and cycling, laid out in Chapter Six: Transport. Our research has shown that of the 26 outer London town centres we have studied, those that have an overlapping array of network connectivity, including good public transport links, road traffic links as well as local pathways for walking, have weathered the past 130 years of London's growth the best. Smaller centres in particular benefit from this and in themselves contribute to creating a network of linked up smaller and larger centres that collectively provide for the range of needs for the city's population. Removing links and allowing centres to decline is a risky venture, that may create unforeseen knock-on effects to the connectivity of a wide area around them. Walkable centres are those that provide safe, pleasant and - importantly - connected pathways through neighbourhoods.
3. Chapter Six also mentions the need to influence "the location, scale, density, design and mix of land uses" to reduce trip length. We would suggest the obverse of this: the pattern of the street network itself has to be shaped first of all in order to ensure that the natural patterns of movement flows create the potential for the ability of the various non-domestic land uses to thrive. Moreover, providing an array of smaller and larger premises that don't dictate the precise mix of land uses and rather - allow these to evolve themselves in response to the needs of the local market and in response to its change over time, are much more likely to shape the success of smaller centres. In policy terms, this translates to a need for flexibility in land class uses alongside careful attention to nurturing - through reduced business rates and other support - the sort of businesses and activities that might not necessarily be viewed as a typical high street presence (such as an art gallery or craft workshop).

#### **Links:**

**Towards Successful Suburban Town Centres:** a study of the relationship between morphology, sociability, economics and accessibility [http://www.sstc.ucl.ac.uk/sstc\\_index.html](http://www.sstc.ucl.ac.uk/sstc_index.html)

**Adaptable Suburbs:** a study of the relationship between networks of human activity and the changing form of urban and suburban centres through time <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/adaptablesuburbs>

---

Professor Laura Vaughan  
**Professor of Urban Form and Society**  
Departmental Graduate Tutor  
The Bartlett School of Graduate Studies / UCL

**Publications**  
[twitter](#)  
[blog](#)

---