

Just Space Economy and Planning

FALP working meeting Thursday 20 March 2014 6pm, Pearson Building, UCL

Present

Myfanwy Taylor, UCL
Elena Bessussi, UCL
Roy Tindle, London Thames Gateway
Forum
Tom Bolton, UCL
Robin Brown, Hayes Community Forum
Michael Edwards, UCL
Ana McMillin, UCL
Richard Lee, Just Space
Charlie Clemoes, UCL
Michael Ball, Waterloo Community
Development Group

Jessica Ferm, UCL
George Turner, Communities and Homes in
London

Apologies

Ed Jones, UCL
Eileen Conn, Peckham Vision
Patria Roman, Independent researcher
Elizabeth Cox, nef

1. Introduction

Myfanwy explained that Just Space Economy and Planning (JSEP) had come together to support Just Space in developing its capacity to engage in planning policy on economic issues, particularly in relation to the London Plan. The group had been meeting every other month for regular seminars since the previous summer to develop this work, focussing on affordable workspace and business involvement in planning. This specific meeting was being held in order to consider the economic aspects of the Further Alterations to the London Plan (FALP), which were out to consultation by the Mayor of London until 10 April. JSEP could either make a collective response, or produce a template response which individuals and groups could draw on in developing their own responses. It was felt that the latter would be best [NB the JSEP response was ultimately submitted in its own right].

2. Economic aspects of the FALP

Myfanwy explained that packs had been prepared that brought together the analysis of the economic aspects of the FALP done so far. This included summaries by UCL students of the various Chapters of the London Plan; a summary prepared by MT of the economic aspects of Chapter 1, 2 and 4 for the economy workshop at the Just Space conference; and summaries of the office review and industrial land review which formed part of the FALP economic evidence base prepared by Ed Jones and Ana McMillin.

3. Industrial land demand and release benchmarks

Ana introduced the summary she had done of the industrial land demand and release benchmarks. The highest pressure to release industrial land was in the east of London. Boroughs were releasing 36.6 hectares per year, relying on their own employment studies in order to guide their decisions. They tended to release more in the early years and release too much overall. Ana highlighted the conflict between releasing industrial land for high-density housing at locations where that land was also needed to expand transport infrastructure. She also suggested that there seemed to be no consideration of how the transport/housing/industry split of land use would vary with economic change – how much space would new economic activities need, and where would it need to be located?

In discussion, the following points were raised:

- On the issue of the conflict between land for housing and transport, Michael Ball confirmed this was the case in Waterloo, where there was too much pressure on bus services locally. Roy Tindle also confirmed that development in Greenwich was proceeding with no consideration of the very narrow road that connected up housing developments with no room for expansion.

- Tom Bolton reported that Laura Vaughan's research on town centres highlighted that they tended to be defined too narrowly, missing related business nearby. Town Centres were adaptable and provided the sort of space that could be used for new industry. Michael Edwards highlighted that all the signs were that the focus was on delivering housing numbers through high density housing at town centres. Relatedly, as town centres were projected to decline due to the rise of multi-channel shopping, industrial land used for warehousing would be released. Ana suggested this could end up outside London, near Heathrow. However, Michael Ball suggested this out of town model was based on old-style distribution models and would lead to higher transport usage.
- On how land use split would vary under economic change, Michael Edwards suggested it would be useful to hear more about Ana's research and how it related to Jurgen Essletzbichler's helpful work on evolutionary economics. We needed to get a better understanding of how London's industries were interconnected, showing the flows of goods and services between sectors and moving beyond sectoral divisions. The London Plan was compartmentalised; interdependence needed to be highlighted to avoid disaster, Roy suggested. Jessica Ferm said it was striking that there was no acknowledgement of the tensions and conflicts between different policies and no guidance on how to manage these.

4. The London Office Policy Review

Jessica introduced the summary of the London Office Policy Review prepared by Ed Jones, as he couldn't attend the meeting. She highlighted that it was concerned with the relationship between supply and demand. Overall, office space could be released, with an over-supply being identified in Outer London, but the loss of the diversity of office space was a key concern, especially in relation to small office sites. All the London Plan says is that the GLA will review the impact of the change in permitted development rules that permit change of use from office to residential without planning permission. But there is already strong evidence around the loss of affordable office space.

In discussion the following points were raised:

- Myfanwy reported that Stuart Robinson, the Chair of the London Office Review Panel, had spoken at the FALP business engagement event hosted by CBRE and London First. Canary Wharf and King's Cross had been referred to as examples of the kinds of development wanted elsewhere. Jess confirmed there seemed to be a much greater interest in mega office development schemes.
- Tom Bolton was concerned that the suggestion that office space could be lost from outer London town centres risked damaging the interconnections between retail and other economic activities in town centres that made them vibrant and lively. The evidence gathered through Centre for Cities and Adaptable Suburbs work could be used by JSEP in its response to the FALP; Tom would provide this.
- Michael Edwards highlighted that the two main issues seemed to be that high levels of residential values were squeezing out emerging sectors and that there was a loss of office space around transport nodes.

5. Consumer Expenditure and Comparison Goods Floorspace Need in London ('the Experian retail review')

Michael Ball introduced the Experian retail review, which he had studied in detail. He suggested that the results of the review were being used to using retail space to deliver high density housing in well-connected town centres that therefore wouldn't need additional transport investment. He couldn't see the evidence locally to support the projected decline in retail, suggesting that retail in Camberwell, Brixton and Waterloo appeared to be strengthening, if anything. Some centres were declining, such as the Harrow Road and the Old Kent Road, but units in these areas weren't vacant, they just weren't gentrifying. Michael suggested the Experian retail report relied on many assumptions, and that he would be comparing it in detail to Lambeth's own employment surveys, to try to identify the discrepancies.

In discussion, the following points were raised:

- Michael Edwards said that both the analysis of retail and office space were consistent with the GLA and LPAC addressing these issues from the perspective of property development. Office and retail space are seen as standardised commodities, with low-quality office and retail space being disregarded and discounted. He referred to the PhD research of Susanna McGuire whose estimates of office space derived from Valuation Office Agency (VOA) data had been double those of property developers, who don't count small office spaces as they're not seen as offering any development opportunity. The user perspective was missing from the GLA's approach.
- Robin Brown mentioned the Town Centre Health Checks, and suggested we look for discrepancies with the Experian retail report. It was not clear what (if any) rationale was being used to downgrade the status of town centres from A to B
- Leisure and retail uses seem to have been integrated in the FALP, as cafes and restaurants are seen to be thriving. Data seemed to be at a very general level, rather than looking at individual case studies or areas.

6. Just Space Conference: Economy Workshop Key Points

Myfanwy suggested that we move on to consider how to link JSEP's analysis with the views and evidence that was raised in the economy workshop within the Just Space community conference on the FALP. The key concerns were 1) to highlight concerns about the implications of the FALP for sustainable development; 2) to challenge the idea that town centres are in decline; and 3) to challenge the undervaluing of existing economic activities.

7. JSEP model response to the FALP

Through detailed discussion, the group agreed the following process for producing a model response to the FALP that could be used by Just Space as a whole and by other groups and individuals in developing their own responses:

- A Research Store would be created on Google Drive, into which people could save relevant research reports so that these could be drawn on in the model response. Myfanwy would set this up.
- Suzi Hall (LSE) and Laura Vaughan (UCL) had already confirmed they would provide summaries of their research for the JSEP model response. JSEP would also try to secure input from Jurgen Essletzbichler (Ana would ask him) and Sue Terpilowski (Myfanwy would ask her).
- Inputs from community groups and others with case studies to contribute would need to be obtained, potentially through short interviews if that would be easiest. Elena, Roy, Michael Edwards, Ana, Richard, George, Jess and Myfanwy volunteered to help with this. Myfanwy would follow up with people to coordinate this.
- Myfanwy would prepare a framework into which the evidence from research and community groups could be inserted. This would need to be focussed on the FALP changes themselves, plus any other 'hooks' that were identified. Robin had looked at this in relation to the National Planning Policy Framework; Race on the Agenda had made a strong challenge previously using the Integrated Impact Assessment. Robin would add these points once we had a draft.
- Myfanwy would follow-up with detailed instructions to enable all to feed in to the process to produce the JSEP model response.

Myfanwy Taylor
June 2014