



RTPI

mediation of space · making of place

Royal Town Planning Institute
41 Botolph Lane
London EC3R 8DL
Tel +44(0)20 7929 9494
Fax +44(0)20 7929 9490

Email online@rtpi.org.uk
Website: www.rtpi.org.uk

Registered Charity Numbers
England 262865
Scotland SC 037841

Patron HRH The Prince of Wales KG KT PC GCB

Mayoral Policy Team
Communities and Local Government
Zone 3/J1
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

Response emailed to: MayorsConsultation@communities.gsi.gov.uk

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Dear Sir/Madam,

Consultation: What can a mayor do for your city?

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) is the largest professional institute for planners in Europe, representing some 23,000 spatial planners. The Institute seeks to advance the science and art of spatial planning for the benefit of the public. As well as promoting spatial planning, the RTPI develops and shapes policy affecting the built environment, works to raise professional standards and supports members through continuous education, training and development. As this Consultation applies to specific parts of England we have involved our RTPI Regions in considering our response.

The RTPI supports the principle of elected mayors in towns and cities outside of London, and the principle that this should be a matter for local referendum.

We believe that a mayor could play a useful role, involving a significant outward facing, ambassadorial function, ensuring that the new 'duty to co-operate' on planning works as effectively as possible and ensuring the essential connectivity between a city and its hinterlands on which its sustainability relies. A mayor would also have an important responsibility to communicate to central government the needs of his or her area and press for the appropriate resources and local devolution in meeting those needs.

Whilst we support the idea of elected Mayors for single cities, **we do not consider that in single cities they should have planning powers.** Whilst the Mayor of London has powers over the strategic plan for London (the Spatial Development Strategy) and over a limited number of planning applications, otherwise it is the London Borough Councils who control planning decisions. Outside the *specific strategic planning context* where a Mayor covers a variety of authorities, and the powers are limited to strategic matters, we do not consider that planning decisions should be vested in a single individual.

The Localism Act and the draft National Planning Policy Framework were both predicated on giving power back to local people who will then rise to the challenges of expansion and renewal. It would therefore seem contradictory if a role was to be etched out for a single individual, however charismatic. As the Consultation paper notes, Government has legislated to “allow communities to trigger change, for example through a community right to challenge and a community right to build. We will expect mayors to be in the vanguard of this new approach, encouraging the communities they represent to use these powers”.

We note that the current proposal is solely for individual cities to adopt. It does not relate to groups of local authorities in the manner operated in Greater London. This is an unfortunate limitation on the powers granted by the Localism Act, and we consider that it should have been open to groups of metropolitan authorities to choose to have a single Mayor between them instead of one just for a single authority if they so wish.

The RTPI considers that the GLA and the London Assembly under the Mayor of London would provide a good model to form a basis for other city-region governance structures. We believe that there is in future still a case for exploring the extent to which, should a group of local authorities so wish, supported by the positive outcome of a referendum, a directly-elected Mayor for a city-region could offer significant economic, social and environmental benefits for the area. In appropriate cases, supported by referendums for example, such Mayors could also be given similar statutory planning powers to the London Mayor, including where appropriate MDCs.

Yours faithfully

Richard Blyth
Head of Policy and Practice