

## **RTPI Summit 28 November**

### **Introduction**

This year's summit upped sticks and moved to the suburbs in recognition that outer London has a central role to play in accommodating London's future growth. Dramatic increases in housing targets for outer London boroughs outlined in the draft London Plan has placed the suburbs front and centre for London's future growth.

### **Plenary 1 – Good Growth in the Suburbs**

After a very warm welcome and introduction to Croydon from Councillor Toni Letts, our speakers got down to the business of explaining how they are meeting the challenge of delivering a step change in the number of homes being built in a way that balances the competing needs of the city while still creating great places for people to live, work and play.

Heather Cheeseborough, Director of Planning and Strategic Transport at Croydon, set out how a pro- growth borough like hers was planning positively for more homes whilst also ensuring that any increased densities bring benefits to local communities. The publication of Croydon's ['SPD2'](#) sets out, in a highly accessible and visual way, Croydon's strategy for delivering 10,000 homes in the suburban areas of the borough. The document plots the historic change in the suburbs and argues that the character of the suburbs must evolve. The introduction of new housing typologies can be achieved whilst preserving the local character of an area. Her team are working hard to identify ways to maximise the delivery of affordable homes in any strategy to densify the suburbs. The message to the Mayor was "if you want us to deliver growth we need the investment in transport infrastructure". The presentation was a powerful example of a borough that has tackled head-on how to build the homes required and still create great places.

Jane Custane explained how next year's London Borough of Culture, Waltham Forrest, was responding to a potential doubling of their future housing target from 862 to 1794 per annum. Jane explained how higher housing target provides an opportunity for Waltham Forrest to rejuvenate their town centres. The Council has been proactive in using their own property assets to build their own homes. We learnt how Walthamstow's "Stalinist-style" Town Hall is being transformed to provide homes, (half affordable). Waltham Forrest are also looking at ways they can boost housing delivery through the publication of a Housing Delivery Action Plan. This plans looks to understand why housing sites have stalled with a view to understating what the Council can do to get these sites moving.

Rob Krzyszowski set out a now familiar set of challenges facing Brent with a potential increase in housing from 1500 to 3000 homes per annum. His presentation demonstrated innovative approaches to employment land intensification, including a scheme for a multi storey industrial building. As with previous speakers he emphasised the need for growth to be properly planned with the benefits of development being felt by existing communities. Brent have been contracting the boundaries of the town centres to make way for new uses, using tech to identify development opportunities and have consulted on a new strategy for tall buildings as part of their Local Plan Review.

Holly from 'We Made That' reflected on the dangers of a planning for housing numbers. She argued for the importance of industrial land having noted that it is being converted at three times the rate that was planned for in the London Plan. It is important to understand how industrial places work, think about design, alternative viability models and recognised vibrancy industrial land and its importance to the way London functions.

Inevitably the discussion began with whether or not the draft London Plan Housing Target can be met. The consensus amongst the speakers was that it can in theory but that the timescale of the Mayor's strategy is unrealistic. The target for homes on small sites is both controversial and must be backed up by evidence. There is no one silver bullet and all strategies including the intensification of the suburbs and industrial land must be explored along with green belt review to address the challenge London faces. However, in a rush for homes we must not lose sight of the value of our high streets, industrial land and commercial spaces.

## **Plenary 2 – Housing and Delivery**

James Clark, Head of Housing from the GLA framed the debate when he stated that "It is not whether the suburbs will grow but how best to grow them". For James, the positive choice not to plan in outer London boroughs has had negative consequences. Londoners have been forced to live in homes that do not meet their needs. Overcrowding and beds in sheds a particularly acute symptom of a wider failure to build sufficient homes. The GLA's alternative is to plan for growth and to be positive and proactive. The small sites policy gives lots of scope for an increase in small and medium house builders. The Mayor is providing £1 billion for affordable housing grants to local authorities and he was glad to see Council building homes again. The Examination of the Mayor's Plan next year promises to be a key forum for debate on these issues.

Kevin Logan's (Maccreanor Lavington) the message to the Summit was that built environmental professionals and communities must work together to deliver homes that London needs. Kevin's argued for denser nodes in the suburbs. Traditional suburban typologies need rethinking "who wants to be SUB-Urban? Let's all be Urbane!". The semi-detached house is the most prevalent typology in the suburbs. However, two semi-detached homes deliver eight flats. It is possible to maintain the character whilst realising the numbers.

Chloe Phelps, Head of Design at Croydon's in-house developer Brick by Brick explained how 500 new homes are being delivered every year on land owned by Croydon. Working on approximately 50 sites made up of car parks, garages, community centres, in-fill sites on housing estates they not only delivered the homes but the profits have been returned to the Council. Half of the homes built have been affordable. Chloe explained that Brick by Brick and the Planners at Croydon had been on a journey. Following on from Heather's presentation in Plenary 1, she explained that interpretation of local character was key and the publication of SPD2 has been very helpful moving the conversation towards a getting more homes built.

Ed Thomas presented The Collective's innovative housing offer which aims to solve both the high cost of housing and loneliness in the city. Their model of co-living invites residents to become part of a wider community. By applying the philosophy of technology giants such as Netflix and Spotify, which offers an access to ownership the model, they are able to offer value for money and flexibility. A 'member' of The Collective enjoys convenience and a flexible contract with generous communal spaces, gym facilities and community events programme. It is a good example of innovation in housing products to meets the diverse needs of Londoners.

Caroline Halper introduced Be First which is the urban regeneration vehicle for Barking and Dagenham Council. Be first is the developer, planning consultancy and statutory authority wrapped up all in one. With 400 hectares of development land, Be First will provide 50,000 new homes and 20,000 new jobs over 20 years. The financial return from the venture will be reinvested into council services. Caroline's view of planning is that it is a development tool

that needs to flex to deliver good places. It is important that deliverability doesn't get lost in planning policy requirements. Planning is about turning policy words into good places. It is ok to depart from the plan provided it delivers 'good development'. Planning should be delivery focussed.

The debate began with the question of whether planning is a help or a hindrance? Speakers agreed that planning should be a hindrance to poor quality development that failed to deliver public benefits. It is important to convert the strategy into new places. Croydon's SPD2 was an example of proactive planning that sought to deliver the homes required.

### **Plenary 3 Summary – RTPI London Summit 28<sup>th</sup> November 2018**

Plenary 3 focused on the future of London's suburbs and the opportunities and challenges that "Good Growth" presents. It asked "What ingredients will make our suburbs flourish in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?"

Sarah Elliot from AECOM opened to session as chair, drawing links to the questions and themes which arose in the day's earlier sessions and workshops. She noted that reference to the suburbs is sparse in the draft London Plan, and contrasted this with the draft Plan's expectation that Outer London boroughs will have to deliver a 214% increase in housing numbers compared with last year's numbers. This is far from the "incremental change" in Outer London which is alluded to in the draft Plan.

Euan Mills from Future Cities Catapult spoke about technology's growing influence on cities, touching specifically on five trends: "Space is Fluid", "Experience is Augmented", "Infrastructure is Responsive", "Behaviour is Predictable", and "Power is Distributed". Euan concluded that planners should "plan places for people, not technology", as mistakes have been made in the past when planners have ignored this mantra.

Paul Hunter from The Smith Institute spoke about the outward shift of poverty in London, which is concurrent with an inward employment shift - 62% of jobs are now located in Inner London. Low pay is more prevalent in Outer London, with affordable Housing harder to access. There is concern in Outer London communities at the lack of good jobs nearby, and pressure on housing markets from population influx. While the positives of regeneration are acknowledged, there is a cynicism regarding who it is intended for. Paul's conclusions suggest that a more inclusive approach to regeneration is required.

Chris Paddock from Hatch Regeneris focused on strategic planning for the wider metropolitan area, noting that the public perception of London is significantly different to political boundaries. He touched on emerging cross-boundary initiatives such as the London-Stansted-Cambridge Corridor and the Thames Estuary, and argued that London's suburbs are a central part of the future London City Region. Chris applauded Barking and Dagenham's "Participatory City" initiative, which looks at long-term process of community engagement enabling people to take greater responsibility for the future of their local economy

Jon Manns from Rockwell Property spoke about the Metropolitan Green Belt, noting the emotive nature of the subject matter, but countered this with the need for nuance and facts to be applied in the debate. Jon covered the history which led to the creation of the Green Belt, which now covers an area 3.5 times the size of London, such that 1 million homes at low density would cover only 2% of its area. Jon concluded with the assertion that how we deal with Green Belt is a key component for London's future growth, and questioned the

sustainability of the status quo where London's growth is forced to effectively leapfrog over the Green Belt.

The question and answer session covered the challenges of cross-boundary collaboration in the Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge corridor, and the difficulties of Green Belt development outside the Greater London boundary. As a final question, Sarah Elliot asked what the panellists would charge planners to take away from the day's proceedings. In response, Euan Mills emphasised the importance of considering the pace at how different urban elements change, and the need to plan for different timescales. Jon Manns encouraged practitioners to make planning more intelligible, and Chris Paddock encouraged constructive conversations between neighbouring authorities. Paul Hunter emphasised the importance of considering a wider range of affordability factors, not just the numbers.

### **Chair's Conclusion - RTPI London Summit 28<sup>th</sup> November 2018**

RTPI London Chair Max Laverack summarised the day's proceedings, noting that Outer London boroughs face familiar challenges, in particular with regard to housing numbers. However, many boroughs are responding to these challenges in ways specific to their respective contexts. He also emphasised the importance of considering employment uses, and understanding their co-existence with residential. Max also declared that planning needs to be adaptive and ensure that London can evolve and change over time. In addition, Max encouraged the public sector as a whole to do more, following the inspiration of BeFirst in Barking and Dagenham, and Brick by Brick in Croydon. London also needs to think beyond its boundaries, in terms of its wider functional and economic areas. Max recalled the final session's discussion that Green Belt debate is too emotive and needs to be more objective. He recalled Euan Mills' quote regarding the "need to plan for people" during the previous plenary session, and stated that planners always need to return to this mission statement. In conclusion, Max thanked the speakers, sponsors, organisers, partners and hosts.

RTPI President John Acres took the space and made a brief speech, before presenting Jon Manns with his Fellowship of the RTPI.