



making planning work: briefing paper 2

national planning framework

The TCPA strongly believes in the need for a national planning framework. A cross-party commission, serviced by the Association, made the case for such a policy in a 2006 report, *Connecting England*, which was widely acclaimed across the political spectrum. In a subsequent report, *Connecting Local Economies*, published in February 2010 and supported by the Local Government Association, we took the issue further forward.¹ We welcome the Coalition Government's commitment to a 'national planning framework' covering all forms of development and setting out national economic, environmental and social priorities.

The TCPA case for a national framework is made against the background of the Government's commitment to stronger localism. As we argue, the two – a highly-focused framework and democratic localism – are mutually inclusive. This is because city-regions, counties and communities need the certainty that their strategies, plans and aspirations are reflected in – and underpinned by – a wider framework for England based on the needs of sub-regional (or city-regional) and local economies.

A new spatial framework would clearly require strong advocacy from the centre, alongside clear guidance to

inform decision-making and guide investment. It would need to integrate high-level planning guidance in Planning Policy Statements (PPSs) and National Policy Statements (NPSs). And it would be the primary framework for dealing with the national inequalities which lie at the heart of many of the economic, infrastructure and housing issues that England needs to address.

A comprehensive and coherent framework is crucial if England is to work to its full potential by making markets work better.

¹ *Connecting England. A Framework for Regional Development*. TCPA-Appointed Hetherington Commission on the Future Development Needs and Priorities of England. TCPA, May 2006. www.tcpa.org.uk/pages/connecting-england-connecting-england-76.html; and *Connecting Local Economies – The Transport Implications*. TCPA, May 2006. www.tcpa.org.uk/pages/connecting-local-economies-the-transport-implications.html

1 Prosperity and economic recovery

A new national framework would be an important mechanism for fulfilling the Government's commitment to re-balance the economy, well articulated by the Prime Minister and other ministers. It would:

- guide national infrastructure investment, setting out the indicative timing, broad location, and scale of key infrastructure projects;
- examine national (spatial) inequalities, by laying the foundations for a better economic balance between London, the Greater South East (the so-called 'golden arc of prosperity' from Hampshire, across the Thames Valley to East Anglia), and the rest of the country, from the far South West to the North East;
- address the challenges arising from population change in different parts of the country and provide strategic guidance on housing needs and demands; and
- inform investment and spending across government – the national framework should aim to deliver coherence and hence provide added value to the myriad of individual and corporate decisions and actions across government and the wider public and private sectors.

While we recognise the importance of London and the Greater South East to the national economy, it is necessary to address how London's growth relates to areas beyond its administrative boundary – in terms of housing, economic development and transport, for instance, as well as the future of the green belt – alongside issues such as climate change and wider environmental matters. The abolition of regional organisations *outside* the capital will mean that the London Mayor, his administration and agencies – such as Transport for London (TfL) – will have no regional-scale bodies to interact with. This underpins the case for a national framework; it would fill a vacuum, and it would provide a vital link between London's plans and areas surrounding the capital, as well as the rest of the country.

London is a tremendously successful city with a strong strategic vision. A national spatial framework, addressing social and economic inequalities across the country, will not only support growth outside of the capital, but will also ensure that London's continuing prosperity is underpinned by a strong and competitive England as a whole.

2 Transport

There is a clear need for a national overarching strategy to guide transport investment and to complement individual National Policy Statements (NPS) on specific

areas – ports, airports, 'national networks' (rail and road) – which as yet do not necessarily 'join-up'. Given that transport has a very strong relationship with land use and the environment, any transport strategy cannot rationally be divorced from a national framework. Key investments (in rail, for example) should be designed to reinforce national objectives (such as supporting underperforming areas and major city centres), as well as to deliver environmental objectives (such as balancing car travel with public transport usage).

In addition to the disparities between the 'golden arc' and the rest of the country, there is clearly a need to address areas of considerable deprivation (often sitting cheek by jowl with areas of great wealth) within each region. *Connecting Local Economies* argued that 'connectivity' – within and between regions and sub-regions – was one key step to realising the potential of the country as a whole. This would be done, first, through a rounded National Policy Statement embracing rail, roads, ports and airports. It would recognise that improved rail links between the major economic centres must also consider connections to surrounding underperforming cities and towns nearby, whether through bus, light or heavy rail.

3 Homes – growth and renewal

It is in the national interest to see growth and renewal supported across the nation and to reduce spatial social and economic inequalities. While we want to see continued sustainable growth in the South East of England, there is a pressing need to consider some of the restrictions and pressures that this presents, such as:

- shortcomings in physical infrastructure capacity, including transport systems that are reaching the peak of capacity, and the possibility of water shortages in housing areas of greatest demand;
- growing resistance to the major release of land for development that would be necessary for continuing growth, making the case for further development politically unacceptable; which could lead to the possibility of
- steadily rising costs of living and operating in the South East becoming an increasing 'push' factor away from what is still an economic core of the country.

Increased pressure on land for housing in the South East, putting home ownership beyond many on middle (let alone low) incomes, clearly raises questions surrounding the future population distribution of the nation. A national framework must address how we can use guided infrastructure and investment to promote housing and employment opportunities and

create resilient places where people wish to live and work, in all regions.

A national framework would also provide guidance on addressing the wider housing needs of the country, balancing the case for new homes in growth areas with housing market renewal programmes in the North and the Midlands alongside regeneration projects, urban extensions and the challenges of renewing suburbs across the country.

4 Equity, social justice and meeting local aspirations

A national framework would give certainty for local decision-making, matching local aspirations with national needs. It would guide local communities and authorities in making effective decisions, while helping them to gain support – from the private, public and third sectors – for plans to benefit a local area. This is particularly relevant to achieving a ‘Big Society’ through ‘democratic localism’, where, at some levels, decision-making runs the risk of being fragmented. As an example, the benefits of a nationally (or sub-regionally) determined transport project – improved rail, bus or road investment, for instance – guided by a national framework could cascade down to localities and communities, thus informing decision-making in the town hall and, further down, in communities themselves.

5 Climate change adaptation and mitigation

The effects of climate change will be felt particularly strongly in urban areas and, as sea levels rise, in certain coastal areas (particularly the east coast). The two most

likely effects of climate change in England will be to increase the intensity of the ‘urban heat island effect’ – the tendency of cities to be somewhat warmer than their environs – and to increase the frequency and magnitude of flooding events.

Such pressures are likely to increase in the future, as the effects of climate change become more profound. We must remember that climate change, and extreme weather, transcend local authority boundaries. This underlines the case for this issue to be addressed through a coherent national framework that explicitly acknowledges the case for a low-carbon economy.

Recommendation 1

Planning reform must embark on a comprehensive national framework which can deal with a wide range of social, economic and environmental infrastructure issues. Such a framework should have a clear legal status in the overall plan-making system.

Recommendation 2

There must be an integrated and consistent approach across the National Policy Statement (NPS) series, informing a joined-up national infrastructure framework to enable confident and sustainable local, sub-regional and national decision-making. The TCPA specifically supports a rounded NPS embracing rail, roads, ports and airports. Any improved rail connections between the major economic centres must also consider the links to surrounding underperforming cities and towns nearby, whether by improved bus and rail networks, or by road.



**Making Planning Work: Briefing Paper 2
National Planning Framework**

© TCPA. September 2010

Town and Country Planning Association, 17 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1Y 5AS
020 7930 8903 ● tcpa@tcpa.org.uk ● www.tcpa.org.uk ● www.grabs-eu.org