

LONDON PLAN: GROWTH AND COORDINATION CORRIDORS

ORIGINS, INTENTIONS AND SITUATION

The present London Plan defines five development corridors outwards from central London through outer London into the wider south-east. Their purpose is set out in Policies 2.2 and 2.3 of the Plan and they are shown on the Key Diagram. Two are referred to as 'Growth Areas', being a legacy of the pre-2010 Government's 2003 Sustainable Communities Growth Plan: Thames Gateway and London-Stansted-Cambridge. Three are referred to as 'Coordination Corridors': the Western Wedge, Wandle Valley extending southwards and London-Luton-Bedford to the north-west. This note sets out the position on these five Corridors as I interpret it.

Thames Gateway

Extending from London Docklands through outer east and south-east London across south Essex to Southend and north Kent to the Medway area, this has a long history dating back to SERPLAN's 1990 Advice to Government (when it was called the East Thames Corridor) and Government's 1995 sub-regional strategic planning guidance. It featured in Government's 2001 Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (RPG 9) and then the original 2004 London Plan and its subsequent versions. From 2000 realisation of its large development potential (identified in the 1995 guidance) was put in the hands of the London, South East and East Regional Development Agencies, who conducted various promotional activities but without any meaningful overall coordination; nor did a designated Government Minister seem to achieve that. However considerable regeneration has occurred at specific locations, most notably with the 2012 Olympics and its Stratford legacy. The demise of the RDAs has left a delivery vacuum, although London Mayors have sought to advance its potential and the Government has retained a notional interest.

The present position is that the two largest remaining development opportunities, Ebbsfleet (north Kent) and Barking Reach ('London Riverside') are at last moving forward, the former under a Development Corporation established in 2015, the latter on new commitments to access improvements. In 2016 the Government established a 'Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission' under Lord Heseltine, aimed at coordinating development with an emphasis in economic renewal (which was the original SERPLAN intention); this is due to produce a 'vision document' this Spring and an 'implementation plan' in the Autumn. Now that Heseltine is no longer in charge, it is not clear how this will be driven forward: it is a Government rather than a Mayoral initiative, so the role of the London Plan in the matter seems likely to be reactive in support of the east London part, but it will be important to keep an eye on how the situation evolves.

London-Stansted-Cambridge

This was proposed conceptually by LPAC and SERPLAN and taken up in the Government's 2001 RPG 9 and in its 2003 Sustainable Communities Plan as a Growth Area. It was reflected in the 2004

London Plan and subsequent versions. The original concept was to link areas in need of economic regeneration and deprivation in north-east London with growth drivers at Stansted Airport and Cambridge. The 2003 SCP expanded its role, focusing on housing growth and extending it spatially, to Peterborough (growing under the New Towns Act) and wider in Hertfordshire.

The present position is that while the 2003 SCP Growth Area is now defunct (dying with the abolition of Regional Planning Strategies), the concept survives in the London Plan and, crucially, is being advanced and promoted by a vibrant formal (if unofficial) consortium bringing together the Mayor, local authorities in north-east London and beyond up to the Cambridge area and Peterborough, the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority, business interests including the relevant LEPs, Stansted Airport and key developer interests, together with an all-party Parliamentary Group led by David Lammy MP. This meets regularly, holds symposia, is represented at MIPIM and issues a frequent online newsletter. It is a coordinating vehicle for progressing development opportunities along the Corridor and lobbying for transport infrastructure investment, notably Crossrail 2, extra tracking to enhance capacity on the West Anglia main line, improving rail access to Stansted Airport (from both directions) and on the A14 between Felixstowe and Huntingdon/A1(M). The momentum now existing means that this Corridor leads in coordination between its London part (including growth points at Tottenham Hale and in the Enfield part of the Lee Valley) and those beyond. It can now be expected to embrace, firstly, the Government-proposed new 'garden city' north of Harlow ('Harlow-Gilston') on land included in the late 1970's Hertfordshire Structure Plan extension to the Metropolitan Green Belt but now not considered important to its purposes as set out on paragraph 80 of the NPPF, and secondly the Government's recent devolution agreement with the Greater Cambridge area.

The Western Wedge

This was originally conceived by LPAC in its winding-up 2000 'Endowment to the Mayor' advice for his new Spatial Development Strategy, urging a 'broader London-regional approach' not constrained by the Greater London boundary. It was taken up in the preparation of the first London Plan, informed by a consultancy report by Arup Planning in 2002 which examined the development situation between west London, Heathrow Airport (where Terminal 5 had recently been approved) and the economically buoyant corridors out to Reading and Newbury, High Wycombe and Basingstoke along main transport spines. Arup reported positively and the Western Wedge was included in 2004 London Plan policy and subsequent versions.

The inter-regional concept was not actively pursued by the GLA, although some attempt at coordination took place around the preparation of the South East Regional Plan, which included a 'Western Corridor and Blackwater Valley' sub-regional policy section for a similar area to that envisaged in London Plan policies linking London with the wider metropolitan region. This did not however result in positive action; the South East Plan was abolished following the return of a Conservative-led government hostile to regional planning outside London.

Present position: There is no apparent dialogue between West London (either through the GLA or the Boroughs) and authorities to the west. There is no regional or sub-regional body with which the

London authorities can coordinate, although LEPs exist, as does the South East Councils umbrella. This is an economically strong high housing demand area and the LPAs are struggling to meet their considerable assessed housing requirements in their local plans, with infrastructure under increasing pressure. In this situation the area is poorly placed to receive additional housing 'overspill' from London, which would seem likely to be resisted should it be pressed. However, the Government's decision to approve a Third Runway and sixth terminal at Heathrow, which proponents claim would generate 40-70 thousand new jobs, would mean a substantial additional requirement for more housing on top of that for which west London boroughs and authorities further west are planning. Options would include further intensification around transport nodes, and, further out, beyond the Green Belt, planned new communities. Significant relaxation of Green Belt boundaries does not seem an acceptable option in what is a highly sensitive part of it (notably around Slough and Windsor/Maidenhead).

Wandle Valley

This London Plan coordination Corridor was again put forward in LPAC's 2000 Endowment report (referred to as Wandle Valley-Gatwick). Its purpose was to associate regeneration of the Wandle Valley communities in south London with Croydon as outer London's largest employment centre and the Brighton line rail/M23 corridor southwards to Gatwick Airport and the Crawley-Horsham area. It has been fairly actively pursued by the inter-borough South London Partnership in association with Surrey County Council and district councils adjacent to south London (Reigate and Banstead, Tandridge) together with the 'Gatwick Diamond' business body which includes the airport. These contacts have not, however, led to any agreed development framework, although a possible protocol had been mooted.

Present position: I am not aware of any active coordination, in the absence of a decision in favour of a second runway at Gatwick, the implications of which would have been a catalyst. This Corridor does not seem to possess potential for further growth above that provided for in Local Plans, which is considerable at Croydon and notable at central area/railway hubs where the Corridor passes through the Green Belt, e.g. Redhill and the former hospital site at Cane Hill close to South Croydon station, and in the Horley area near Gatwick.

London-Luton-Bedford

This Coordination Corridor is more recent, appearing in the 2008 version of the London Plan. It materialised through discussion between the London Development Agency and the Boroughs in north-west London. The Corridors including this are set out in Policy 1.3 of the 2008 Plan, which refers to 'developing timescales and mechanisms for coordination' with the bodies along the corridors outside London. Development centres in north-west London included Brent Cross-Cricklewood, Harrow centre and the Wembley area; beyond, the preparation of the East of England regional strategy was proposing significant housing-led development at Hemel Hempstead and Luton (envisaging Green belt reviews), related to the main transport routes. Some inter-authority dialogue took place around 2008-9, including with Watford, but without any agreement on joint mechanisms or effective coordination.

Present position: The demise of the East of England regional strategy and reductions in the scale of development subsequently proposed in the corridor beyond London has led to a loss of interest in pursuing coordination in this Corridor. Efforts are now concentrated on delivering development at the strategic locations in north-west London. There does not seem to be any drive or inter-authority mechanism outside London to take it forward. It therefore appears moribund.

Conclusion

Overall, it appears that the welcome intentions of successive London Plans to set out Growth Areas and Coordination Corridors linking London with the wider city-region in development terms have not been realised by practical inter-regional action. The stated policy intentions, which refer to joint working on the management of growth along the Corridors, and to develop linkages, timescales and mechanisms to coordinate planning and investment to mutual advantage, through effective cross-border relationships leading to joint strategies, have not occurred. I put this down to a lack sub-regional scale organisation outside London, even in the era of Regional Assemblies, with which the Mayor could interact. In turn this has deterred the Mayor from giving priority to realising the inter-regional potential of the Corridors. A reduction in staff resources since 2008 may also be a factor. The only bright spot has been the interest shown in the Corridors by the Mayoral Outer London Commission in the latter part of its existence.

In saying this, a distinction has to be drawn between the Corridors referred to as Growth Areas and the others, because the Growth Areas arose from Government rather than Mayoral policy. At present, the two Growth Areas are active, but on different trajectories. Thames Gateway (now referred to as Thames Estuary) has a Government-led Commission, due to produce a 'vision' followed by an implementation plan later this year; the Mayoral role can expected to be to ensure proper coordination of the east London opportunities. London-Stansted-Cambridge is being advanced by an influential and resourced public/private consortium, and where, of wider spatial interest, it will link at its northern end with the Oxford-Milton Keynes- Cambridge 'arc' being pursued by the National Infrastructure Commission.

As regards the three Coordination Corridors which have been London Plan initiatives, their continuing significance is unclear. It should be for the new Plan preparation process to reconsider from first principles what ongoing validity they may have for the 2020s and 30s. As I see it, the Western Wedge warrants a specific rethink of its purpose, bound up with the urbanisation implications of the future development of Heathrow Airport and functional economic linkages westwards. As to whether the Wandle Valley-Gatwick and London-Luton-Bedford Corridors have future value, I am doubtful, but they do require review. There is no point in these Corridors continuing to appear in London Plan policy unless there are realistic prospects of creating effective cross-border mechanisms for preparing and implementing joint strategies. At present it is hard to see these materialising; it may be that the formation of combined authorities with devolved powers is a necessary pre-condition. This seems a distant prospect, but could in the future be conceivable in the area westwards from London, perhaps centred on Reading.

Martin Simmons

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