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Report Launch and Key Findings: A Values-Based Approach to Planning Reform

In this blog we talk about the launch of our policy report “Planning with Purpose: A Values-Based Approach to Planning Reform”. We explain the meaning of a Values-Based Approach and how a values lens allowed us to untangle the tensions surrounding the planning system and its governance.

Last month we hosted an evening launch event for our policy report, *Planning with Purpose: A Values-Based Approach to Planning Reform*. The event gathered 40 planning professionals and policymakers at the LSE to share key findings and to continue the conversation about what really matters for planning reform going forward.

Nicola Mathers, Chief Executive at Future of London, kicked off the evening by highlighting the importance of effectively engaging with communities, asking everyday people how they want to live, and unleashing local authority entrepreneurship to produce tangible social value in the built environment. This was followed by a presentation by the Oram fellows (Liz Williams, Meg Hennessy and Olexiy Pedosenko) to share the key messages of the report and advocate for a Values-Based Approach to planning policy and practice.

In the report, we promote the planning system as an integral mechanism that shapes the places where we live and work. However, we do not shy away from the fact that the system is not delivering as it should and that trust in the planning system is at an extreme low.

Central to our argument is the fact that the planning system’s complexity stems not only from its bureaucratic procedures, but from the differing interests and motivations of actors that pull planning in different directions, creating delays and limiting its ability to address long-term challenges. We suggest that holistic reform must address the values that influence planning culture and governance. Understanding what matters to key actors and getting them on board is therefore crucial for successful reform.

Through three workshops and interviews with 89 stakeholders - across London and the Wider South East – we explored what matters most to key actors and how to bring them on board for effective reform. We zoomed in on three central aspects of planning – Community Participation, Land Use and Housing Delivery – to determine what a new generation of planning might look like and how we get there. The key findings and recommendations of the report can be found [here](#).

Why a Values-Based Approach?

Our Values-Based Approach embraces the complexity and politics of planning, aiming to untangle key tensions. It provides a framework to uncover competing interests and bring trade-offs to the fore. While recognising that certain values are irreconcilable, a conscious focus on values can generate a more empathetic understanding of the compromises that must be made to drive institutional change. Indeed, during our multisectoral workshops, we witnessed participants appreciate that they could “take their hats off today” and recognize that “we all want the same stuff”.

Designing the Workshops Around a Values-Based Approach Enabled Us To:

1. Show how language shapes debates: language frames policy conversations, determines priorities and defines the framework within which we operate (including who has access to the planning arena). Indeed, the way language is used and understood affects planning outcomes. Ambiguous terms such as “housing affordability” or “sustainable development” often obscure diverse values and beliefs. This results in people gathering around the same concept, but with very different interpretations of what it actually means.
2. Identify and unpack different types of “value”: getting to the root of why something is valued and what type of value (e.g., social value) is produced by an initiative should be at the core of decision-making. Making explicit what is at stake for various actors is necessary to ensure more equitable outcomes for value distribution.
3. Recentre people and politics in the decision-making process: politics as a whole has been conflated with party politics, associated with short-termism and political footballs. While party politics are inevitable, a Values-Based Approach moves away from this mindset and focuses, instead, on politics as an integral mechanism through which people can engage in collective decision-making to achieve shared societal goals.
4. Create space to talk about the reality of implementation: within a discretionary planning system, there needs to be greater ability to connect policy to the realities of the political and economic world that it is seeking to shape. This approach examines the creation of policy gaps by illuminating

how different actors interpret and implement policy, according to their varied interests and understandings.

5. Map out the complexity of the planning system: painting a systemic picture of different governance areas across the planning system and untangling the competing values influencing their effective management is an important first step in planning for targeted reform.

Lessons for the Planning System:

Situating the planning system as a mechanism to achieve broader, integrated place-based solutions is a key opportunity for national renewal. We found a shared desire to work towards a common vision. However, participants cited a lack of clarity, co-ordination, funding and trust as key obstacles to securing positive outcomes for the planning system.

We proposed that the Government:

- **Establish a renewed sense of purpose for the planning system** through open and deliberate conversation about its remit. A national forum for regional land commissions could also provide an inclusive space to develop a shared vision of the next steps for broad-reaching planning reform.
- **Provide sufficient resourcing for the planning system by loosening constraints for local government borrowing**, expanding their revenue-raising powers to equip them with the capacity to adopt long-term entrepreneurial approaches.
- **Reimagine the strategic planning process to foster a culture of continuous and “negotiated collaboration”** by engaging key actors in conversation about their roles and responsibilities, and the inevitable trade-offs needed to work towards a shared vision.
- **Build trust and legitimacy in the planning system** by ensuring that planning processes are easy to navigate for all stakeholders and strengthening evaluation mechanisms through citizen juries – centring future evaluation metrics on social outcomes.

For findings in our three key domains, please to see our [website](#). Additionally, we are excited to announce that the work continues. We will be diving deeper into a Values-Based Approach through academic research and partnerships with leading organisations.

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About the author

Liz Willaims is an Oram Policy Research Fellow at the London School of Economics investigating a Values-Based Approach to planning reform. She holds an MSc in Regional and Urban Planning Studies and has previously worked in International Workshop Facilitation at Alnylam Pharmaceuticals. She is passionate about sustainability, strategic planning, social justice, community participation and evidence-based policy.

Meg Hennessy

Meg Hennessy is an Oram Policy Research Fellow at the London School of Economics. She has previously worked at the OECD's Public Governance Directorate and the Governance and Strategic Planning Unit at the Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities. She is passionate about inclusive planning, social justice, sustainability, and strategic planning for better citizen outcomes.

Olexiy Pedosenko

Olexiy Pedosenko is an Oram Policy and Research Fellow at the LSE working on the Values-Based Approach to Urban Planning and Policy project. He is a graduate of the MSc in Regional and Urban Planning Studies and has worked as Strategic Communications Manager at the House of Europe – EU-funded programme fostering professional and creative exchange between Ukrainians and their colleagues in EU countries and the UK.

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