

[Nancy Holman](#)

## The changing nature of the London Plan

### Book section

**Original citation:**

Originally published in Scanlon, K; Kochan, B., *London: coping with austerity*. London, UK : LSE London, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2010, pp. 29-40.

© 2010 The author ; Published by [LSE London](#)

This version available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/30790/>

Available in LSE Research Online: December 2010

LSE has developed LSE Research Online so that users may access research output of the School. Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article(s) in LSE Research Online to facilitate their private study or for non-commercial research. You may not engage in further distribution of the material or use it for any profit-making activities or any commercial gain. You may freely distribute the URL (<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk>) of the LSE Research Online website.

This document is the author's submitted version of the book section. There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

### 3. The Changing Nature of the London Plan

#### *Nancy Holman*

London is in many ways a chaotic place. Its boundaries have been historically hard to define and its governing structure has proved ineffectual, unloved and at times non-existent. So drawing up a strategic spatial planning document for a place such as London is clearly no easy task. The first Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) for London under its new governmental arrangement was published in 2004 - only the third such plan covering the wider London region and only the second to have statutory weight. Gordon (2003) analysed its predecessors in terms of the level of personal vision and identity seen in each. The iconic 1944 Abercrombie Plan was clearly the work of a professional planner charged with delivering the foundations of Greater London's postwar reconstruction. Visionary for its time, and certainly associated strongly with its author, but the plan itself did not offer a particularly personal insight into the future of the capital and its surroundings and carried no statutory weight. The 1969 Greater London Development Plan was the first statutory strategic plan for the city region and reflected a far drier, more technocratic approach to planning in London. It is pragmatic and obviously the product of compromise, and is almost devoid of personal authorial vision. Mayor Ken Livingstone's 2004 London Plan that was revised in 2008 is a different animal altogether. It is partly a strategic spatial plan and partly the mayor's personal vision for London's development. Now Mayor Boris Johnson, elected in 2008, is bringing out his own plan. This chapter aims to examine the current draft London Plan (2009) in the context of its historical lineage, and to ask if, like Livingstone's plan, it represents the mayor's vision, or rather can be seen as a retreat to a less unified view of the city's development.

#### **Plans in search of a strategic vision - The Livingstone London Plan**

Creating a strong strategic vision in a plan that must co-ordinate and shape an area of 1,572 sq km with an estimated population of 7.56 million is no easy task. In 1969 the Greater London Council (GLC) produced its first attempt, The Greater London

Development Plan. It was criticised in the Layfield Report<sup>1</sup>, which stated that “the GLC had only managed ;... with the greatest difficulty, and after extensions of time, (to) produce a plan containing relatively little information, diffuse aims and vague policies” (quoted in Foster & Whitehead, 1973, p. 443). In part this was due to the statutory nature of planning in London where local development plans are written and implemented by the 32 boroughs and the Corporation of the City of London. Producing a co-ordinating strategy that offers overall vision and direction without causing immeasurable offence to the local planning authorities is a particularly slippery political tightrope, and it has been the undoing of a number of planning efforts in London.

Ken Livingstone’s London Plan by contrast, offers a personal, centralised and strategic vision for London’s future - the first section of the document is entitled ‘My vision for London’. Gordon (2003) notes that the legislation establishing the GLA required it to balance concerns about the economy, society and the environment in a sustainable way. But he also points astutely to a meta-narrative running through the plan, which helps enable Livingstone to build up legitimacy and power. The Mayor was ‘playing the trump card’ of London’s place as a ‘world city’ and laying a legitimate claim to central government resources (Gordon 2003). For example, page 4 of the plan says “...the central message of this plan (is) that London must fulfil its potential as a world city in the national interest as well as that of Londoners” (GLA 2004). This idea of a sustainable world city is repeated throughout the plan, and appears to be synonymous with the Mayor’s vision for the city region. Through his plan, Livingstone establishes the discourse of London’s role as a primary motor in the UK economy. This affords the mayor more power through better connectivity with business-led urban regimes (Thornley et al, 2005), and gives central government a reason to allocate resources to the capital.

London’s ‘world city’ status is not the only strong strategic element running throughout the plan. Sustainability and sustainable development issues considered in chapter 2 are seen as the leading elements of the broad development strategy. It sought to promote growth that does not exceed London’s current boundaries or encroach on open spaces. Livingstone linked sustainability to an explicitly spatial strategy that involved the intensification of development in areas with good public transport access, and extending development eastwards into the Thames Gateway as part of wider regional priorities. The plan therefore contains a polycentric development strategy that seeks to relate and connect the various parts of London in a manner that efficiently uses finite resources.

The Livingstone plan further elaborated on the concept of sustainable development with a list of sustainability criteria (Policy 2A.1) against which Sub-Regional Development Frameworks and Unitary Development Plans (UDPs now Local Development Frameworks - LDFs) were to be judged. It is important here to stress that the London Plan is the Spatial Development Strategy for London and provides a framework for development decisions, and boroughs must take account of its guidance in drawing up their own local plans. These sustainability criteria, which are set out in full later in this chapter, turn the loose and somewhat protean concept of sustainability into a more defined and concrete set of concepts with specific definitions. In summary, the criteria :

- favour the use of previously developed land;
- favour polycentric development in areas with good access to public transport, employment, shops, housing and infrastructure;
- emphasise avoidance and mitigation of risk (primarily flooding);
- require assessment of the impact of development impacts on natural, cultural and human resources;
- emphasise the contribution mixed-use developments might make in community building.

By incorporating these criteria in the statutory plan, Livingstone ensured that boroughs took them into consideration when reflecting on the locational suitability and nature of development in their areas.

This direction to boroughs to take sustainability into account when drawing up their LDFs and considering development proposals was the final way in which the London Plan was used to co-ordinate and create a centralised, ‘shared’ sense of vision for the capital’s development. Through this mechanism, the Mayor could not only control and shape policy in London on a ‘grand’ scale but also at individual borough level. The Mayor sought to do this through prescriptive policies such as the sustainable development criteria and also very specific housing affordability and density targets, parking regulations and a tall-buildings policy — all of which upset the boroughs either collectively or individually. The 2008 version of the plan includes 300 instructive phrases to the boroughs, saying they ‘should’, ‘will’ or ‘must’, giving central direction on everything from urban regeneration, to housing supply targets, to parking standards and the provision of combined heat and power hook-ups in new development.

History tells us that attempting central control in London is however a dangerous task. Gerald Kaufman, a junior Department of the Environment Minister in 1975, gave a vivid account of the tensions between the centre (the GLC) and the boroughs: “I discovered that the normal, or at any rate expected, party antagonism between Labour and Conservative...was as nothing to the hostility verging on loathing that could exist - not of course on a personal basis - between the London boroughs and the Greater London Council” (quoted in Pilgrim, 2006:226). This tension was certainly present in the relationship between Mayor Livingstone and the London boroughs. Some pundits described their relations as combative and adversarial, and said local council leaders welcomed the more conciliatory tones of Livingstone’s successor Boris Johnson (Cooper and Dowler 2008).

Livingstone’s London Plan was clearly a document written to emphasise London’s place on the world stage. It highlighted London’s role as a world city and stressed its importance for the UK as a whole. The Mayor was able to use this argument to garner support from business as well as investment from central government. For example, he secured from the Treasury a subsidy for London buses, support for the 2012 Olympics and the likely support of Crossrail. This helped propel him to a position of strength beyond the mayoral powers defined under the 1999 Greater London Authority Act. Secondly, the Mayor integrated the concept of sustainability and sustainable development into the London Plan (2004, 2008) for the London Boroughs to implement. The plan left no doubt as to the central role of the Mayor, and unabashedly presented his own personal vision for the capital.

We now turn to Mayor Boris Johnson’s Draft Replacement London Plan, and ask whether it continues to represent a strong personal strategic vision for the capital, or rather reverts to being a collection of diffuse aims and vague policies like its 1969 predecessor, the Greater London Development Plan.

### **Boris Johnson’s London Plan - A continuation of vision and strategic direction?**

Mayor Johnson’s approach to the London Plan is set out in the opening pages where he states that the new plan will be “...shorter, more clearly strategic and user-friendly” than its predecessor (GLA, 2009: 10). With respect to LDF preparations, his advice falls into two categories. First, “...areas of *flexibility*, where authorities may want to consider how its particular circumstances might differ from those of London overall” and second, areas where greater analysis is required to determine local policies (ibid - emphasis added). This introduces the Mayor’s new and more conciliatory

approach to both the London Plan and the boroughs. Does this new approach represent a departure from Mayor Livingstone’s personal and strategic vision for London’s development? This section examines three key issues:

- the way London’s status as a world city is used in the plan and the ‘vision’ embodied within this;
- the treatment of sustainability as an overarching policy direction; and
- the Mayor’s relationship with the boroughs.

### **Focusing on London - the role of ‘vision’ in Johnson’s Plan**

In the Livingstone plan, London’s role as a world city was a key element of the Mayor’s overall vision for the capital. Mayor Johnson’s plan is far less focused on this element and in fact references London’s ‘world city’ status only nine times as opposed to the 44 times it is mentioned in the 2008 London Plan. The draft replacement plan treats the concept much more lightly and integrates it far less into its policies. The phrase ‘world city’ is mentioned not as a core element of strategic policy and vision, but rather as an adjunct to other elements of the plan. For example, the plan’s Economic Sectors and Workplaces strategy notes that world-city status is important to central London’s office market provision and also to the night-time economy of Covent Garden and Soho. This represents a strong shift in direction from Livingstone’s assertion that his “...vision, which guides all my strategies, is to develop London as an exemplary, sustainable world city” (GLA, 2008: xii).

The shift from a rather singular view of pursuing and maintaining world city status is not necessarily bad in and of itself. In some respects it reflects the odd paradox that Johnson, a Tory, appears to be less pro-business and development than Livingstone, who was once famously seen as part of the ‘looney left’. But it is not our purpose here to debate the merits of a vision that embraces London’s role on the world stage—rather we seek to determine whether the new plan contains a central vision. If Johnson’s vision is not to “develop London as an exemplary, sustainable world city” then what, if anything, is it?

The “...high level, over-arching vision” in Johnson’s draft replacement plan is that “**London should: excel among global cities - expanding opportunities** for all its people and enterprises, **achieving the highest environmental standards and quality of life** and **leading the world** in its approach to tackling the urban challenges of the 21st century, particularly that of climate change” (GLA, 2009: 26, emphasis in original). This rather more diffuse set of aims focuses on economic opportunity, quality of

life and environmental challenges, and contrasts sharply with Livingstone’s more myopic vision of the world city. Johnson’s plan thus is not particularly driven by a vision of how London as a whole should develop in the future or market itself to the outside world.

To flesh out his high level vision, Johnson gives us six detailed objectives, which he says embody the concept of sustainable development (a point which will be taken up in the next section) - see Table 1. Even with these six detailed objectives, Johnson’s draft plan has a softer and more widely dispersed vision, incorporating elements from economic competitiveness to quality of life and from climate change to delightful architecture. This contrasts with the clarity of purpose in Livingstone’s plan.

<b>Table 1 Mayor Boris Johnson’s Objectives for London</b>	
•	A city that meets the challenges of economic and population growth in ways that ensure a sustainable, good and improving quality of life for all Londoners and helps tackle the huge issue of inequality among Londoners, including inequality in health outcomes;
•	An internationally competitive and successful city with a strong and diverse economy and an entrepreneurial spirit that benefits all Londoners and all parts of London; a city which is at the leading edge of innovation and research and which is comfortable with - and makes the most of - its rich heritage and cultural resources.
•	A city of diverse, strong, secure and accessible neighbourhoods to which Londoners feel attached, which provide all of its residents, workers, visitors and students - whatever their origin, background, age or status - with opportunities to realise and express their potential and a high quality environment for individuals to enjoy, live together and thrive.
•	A city that delights the senses and takes care over its buildings and streets, having the best of modern architecture while also making the most of London’s built heritage and which makes the most of and extends its wealth of open and green spaces and waterways, realising its potential for improving Londoners’ health, welfare and development.
•	A city that becomes a world leader in improving the environment locally and globally, taking the lead in tackling climate change, reducing pollution, developing a low carbon economy and consuming fewer resources and using them more effectively.
•	A city where it is easy, safe and convenient for everyone to access jobs, opportunities and facilities with an efficient and effective transport system which actively encourages more walking and cycling and makes better use of the Thames, and supports delivery of all the objectives of this Plan (GLA, 2009: 27 emphasis in original).

**Sustainability - a movement towards *quality of life*?**

Sustainability was an integral part of the structure of the Livingstone plan, which made sustainable development for London a strategic planning priority. This accords with the European Spatial Development Perspective, other European Directives and the enabling legislation for the GLA, which makes the balancing of economy, society, and environment in a sustainable way a statutory duty. In addition, Policy 2A.1 contained a set of sustainability criteria that were to be used to evaluate development and plans at both the regional and local level. How does the Johnson plan address this issue?

The two plans use very different language to treat sustainability. The wording of the Livingstone plan emphasised the concepts of sustainability and sustainable development, while the Johnson plan stresses ‘quality of life’. Table 2 demonstrates the shift.

<b>Table 2 Frequency of use of sustainability terms</b>		
<b>Term</b>	<b>London Plan (2008)</b>	<b>Draft Replacement Plan</b>
Quality of Life	36	50
Sustainable Development	45	16
Sustainability	44	15

Johnson’s draft plan includes a section entitled ‘A new focus on quality of life’, with ten bullet points that make the concept more concrete, listed in Table 3. These points do not, however, give any guidance as to how these quality-of-life issues relate to the economy, the environment, and social equity at a more macro level, nor do they give any sense that sustainability might conflict with other priorities in the economy, the environment and social equity at a more macro level. The language of sustainability, by contrast, implies (however vaguely) that some sort of compromise between ‘the three Es’ must be played out within both temporal and spatial limits. Johnson’s quality-of-life descriptors, which omit this recognition, are a rather flaccid instrument on which to base our assumptions about the future of London. Unfortunately, quality of life as described here offers us nothing more than a warm and fuzzy view of the future with little recognition of the political struggles and compromise that are necessary to bring these aspirations about.

We turn now to the mayors’ differing criteria on sustainable development. Mayor Livingstone set out a series of thirteen sustainability criteria against which Sub-Regional Development Frameworks and Unitary Development Plans (UDPs now Local Development Frameworks - LDFs) would be judged which are listed in Table 4.

**Table 3: Johnson's Quality of Life objectives**

- ensuring there are enough homes meeting the needs of Londoners at all stages of their lives and whatever their circumstances, and designed so they actively enhance the quality of the neighbourhoods in which they are located
- tackling the unacceptable health inequalities that exist in one of the wealthiest cities in the world
- protecting and improving environmental quality at both local and Londonwide levels (and recognising the links between the two), with action to target problems of air quality and other forms of pollution
- ensuring a network of vibrant and exciting town centres with a range of shops and other facilities
- making sure all Londoners can have access to good quality healthy food
- making sure Londoners in all parts of the city have adequate efficient transport networks and services, and the support for cycling and walking, to enable them to access job, social and other life opportunities, while minimising any adverse impacts on the environment or quality of life
- recognising and actively realising the whole range of benefits which networks of green and open spaces and waterways bring
- the importance of a range of readily accessible community facilities meeting the needs of a growing and increasingly diverse population
- taking effective steps to ensure Londoners feel safe in their city and their local neighbourhoods, and to not have to feel constrained in going about their lives by crime and fears about their safety
- protecting and enhancing what is distinctive about the city and its neighbourhoods, securing a sense of place and belonging through high quality architecture and design that sits well with its surroundings' (Mayor of London 2009, p.23).

Mayor Johnson says that his six detailed objectives embody the concept of sustainable development and support his overall vision for London, though these are not to be used to assess development projects or plans per se. How do these lists differ, and how does this affect sustainability and strategic planning for London?

Johnson's objectives are balanced between the economic, environmental and social spheres of sustainable development. The city should strive not only to have an internationally competitive economy, but also tackle the problems of health and inequality faced by many Londoners and to position itself at the forefront of environmental improvement. The Livingstone criteria also covered multiple fields of sustainable development, stating that future plans should take account of the effects on health,

**Table 4: Livingstone's Sustainability Objectives**

- Taking account of the impact that development will have on London's natural resources, environmental and cultural assets and the health of local people and upon the objective of adapting to and mitigating the effect of climate change
- Optimising the use of previously developed land and vacant or underused buildings
- Using a design-led approach to optimise the potential of sites and improve the quality of life
- Ensuring that development occurs in locations that are currently, or will be, accessible by public transport, walking and cycling
- Ensuring that development occurs in locations set out in Policy 2A.5
- Ensuring that development takes account of the capacity of existing or planned infrastructure including public transport, utilities and community infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals
- Taking account of the physical constraints on the development of land, including, for example, flood risk, ensuring that no significant harmful impacts occur, or that such impacts are acceptably mitigated
- Ensuring that development incorporates green infrastructure that is planned, located, designed and managed as an integrated part of the wider network of open space
- Promoting corporate social responsibility
- Taking account of the objectives of promoting safety and security, preventing major accidents and limiting their consequences
- Taking account of the suitability of sites for mixed use development and the contribution that development might make to strengthening local communities and economies including opportunities for local businesses and for the training of local people .
- Policies in DPDs should clarify that, when assessing the suitability of land for development, the nature of the development and its locational requirements should be taken into account, along with the above criteria.
- All stakeholders should take a pro-active approach that engages the community in decisions about its future and builds capacity to enable the community to take a lead in addressing its own needs wherever possible" (Mayor of London 2008, pp 39-40)

local businesses and the environment. But this apparent agreement between the two plans is misleading.

The Livingstone criteria are far more specific than the Johnson objectives. For example, compare Johnson's fourth objective ('...a city that delights the senses...') with

Livingstone's eleventh criteria, that development and plans should "...take account of the suitability of sites for mixed used development and the contribution that development might make to strengthening local communities and economies including opportunities for local businesses and for the training of local people."

Here we see a real shift in gear from a very specific aim that requires planning authorities to consider the suitability of sites for mixed use developments to what is arguably a mere aspiration for London to become "a city that delights the senses".

In terms of spatiality, the vast majority of Livingstone's thirteen points have a spatial aspect. These include the notions that development should occur in specific places guided by policy (e.g. Policy 2A.5), polycentricity, the use of previously developed land and proximity of new development to sustainable transport links. The concrete particularity of the criteria is born out in a spatial vision. Mayor Livingstone provided strategic guidance to the boroughs in a way that Mayor Johnson does not. This brings us to our final point, the differing manner in which each mayor has sought to relate to the boroughs.

### **The Boroughs should - but only if they want to?**

In the current 2008 London Plan the word 'boroughs' is used 468 times and in 300 of these cases it appears as part of an instructive phrase. It is thus a fairly directive document, and reflects Livingstone's sometimes contentious relationship with the boroughs—especially the outer boroughs, who felt that the centre was dictating a policy that did not suit their circumstances. Johnson, in contrast, wanted to create an easier and more consensual connection to the 32 London boroughs and the City Corporation. His draft plan contains the word 'boroughs' 313 times, but only 143 of these instances are instructive. Moreover, Johnson stated in paragraph 1.43 of the draft replacement plan in paragraph 1.43 that he "...intends to take a new, more consensual approach to planning for London..." and that "This will focus more on delivery of agreed and shared objectives, less on process or structure."

Johnson also pledged a new, more flexible approach to planning, and promised to give the boroughs more scope to decide what is appropriate for them when drawing up their development plan documents (GLA 2009:10). This flexibility is especially extended to the outer London boroughs. In policy 2.6 he promises to draw up an Outer London: vision and strategy that takes into account local conditions and seeks to create locally sensitive development. Johnson's decision to move to absolute housing targets rather than percentage-based targets would also appear to also

favour the outer boroughs by placing the largest burden for housing provision on inner London boroughs (Sell, 2009).

This move towards a more decentralised metropolitan style of government is described as a more local and pragmatic approach. Some welcome this shift of power to local boroughs, saying it moves decision-making closer to the people, renews the sense of community participation, and leads to better and more locally appropriate planning decisions. However, a real examination is needed of what this could mean in practice, beyond the rosy picture of a fully engaged and informed community working with their local planning authorities. Issues of power and wealth loom large; boroughs populated by better off constituencies might be more able to resist strategic planning priorities that do not 'play well' at home. Moves toward a more consensual relationship between the mayor and the boroughs could therefore lead to piecemeal planning and a lack of a common approach for London as a whole. This does not represent a more strategic approach to planning.

### **Conclusion - stepping away from a radical strategic vision**

Is the Johnson plan just a newer version of the 1969 GLDP, with its diffuse aims and vague policies? Has Johnson's plan moved us away from passionate planning, personal vision and strategic direction? The answers are not straightforward. The Livingstone plan certainly provided a central and personal vision of what London is now and how it should be a world city in the future. This provided a goal, and enabled the city to secure support and financing that he might not otherwise have gained under our system of local government. Johnson's plan clearly does not do this. It is more laid back in style and tone and does not trumpet a single view of London.

In terms of sustainability, the Livingstone plan is clear, precise and prescriptive, while the Johnson plan is full of aspiration but lacks bite. Finally, in terms of the Mayor's relationship with the boroughs, we are unquestionably sailing out of the choppy seas of directive planning and back into the waters of consensus.

None of this really bodes well for a strategic view of the capital's development. But nor does it necessarily take us fully back to the planning landscape described by Layfield. There are innovative policies in the new draft replacement plan like space standards for new homes, Lifetime home standards, and policies on climate change mitigation. None of these items would likely have been included during the days of the Greater London Council, and in this sense the new plan is not a complete retreat. However the abandonment of a centralised strategic vision is an important change,

especially in light of the new coalition government's moves towards the decentralisation of planning, as it challenges one of the rationales for the regional tier of government (which still exists in London) – that it was needed to carry out strategic planning for local authorities.

## References

- Cooper, K. & Dowler, C (2008) "Boris Johnson's new plan for London" Inside Housing accessed on-line <http://www.insidehousing.co.uk/boris-johnsons-new-plan-for-london/1450081.article>
- Foster, C.D. & Whitehead, C.M.E (1973) "The Layfield Report on the Greater London Development Plan" *Economica* 40(160): 442-454.
- Gordon, I. (2003) Capital needs, capital growth and global city rhetoric in Mayor Livingstone's London Plan Paper presented to the Association of American Geographers Annual Meeting 7 March 2003.
- Mayor of London (2009) The Draft London Plan: draft spatial development strategy for London, London: Greater London Authority.
- Mayor of London (2008) The London Plan, London: Greater London Authority.
- Pilgrim, M. (2006) "London Regional Governance and the London Boroughs" *Local Government Studies* 32(3): 223-238.
- Sell, S (2009) "Two of the three councils being asked by the London mayor to build most new homes in the capital are inner-city boroughs" *Regeneration & Renewal* 19 October 2009.
- Thornley, A., Rydin, Y., Scanlon, K & West, K. (2005) "Business privilege and the strategic planning agenda of the Greater London Authority" *Urban Studies* 42(11) 1947-1968.

## 4. Scenarios and Planning for Alternative London Futures - or Making a Drama out of a Strategy

*Ian Gordon*

### Introduction

London's first Mayoral Plan, produced by Ken Livingstone, embodied a strong 'vision', coloured by a set of progressive values of equity, sustainability and tolerance. It was however more fundamentally shaped by a deterministic view of long-term growth in population and employment, and of the need to accommodate this growth within the bounds of Greater London (MoL, 2002). Criticism of inflated growth assumptions, a disregard for major uncertainties about this growth and the resourcing of the required infrastructure investment - and of the lack of any 'Plan B' were all effectively swept aside during the Livingstone mayoralty.

The draft Replacement London Plan, produced by his Conservative successor, Boris Johnson, which is currently undergoing its Examination in Public (EiP), is much less deterministic in tone and less prescriptive about how the boroughs, as the local planning authorities, should ensure that growth is actually accommodated within the city (MoL, 2009). And, in relation to employment at least, its growth assumptions are rather more modest - even than in revised versions of the Livingstone Plan. Nevertheless, one strong theme in formal 'responses' to the new draft plan, was of the need to insert specific references to alternative growth 'scenarios' in the city. This was mentioned by at least 12 respondents, including: the Federation of Small Businesses; the Town and Country Planning Association and the Royal Town Planning Institute, the Just Space Network, Michael Edwards' and Transition Town Kingston Steering Group; South and West London Partnerships, London Councils and Hackney / Redbridge Borough Councils<sup>2</sup>.

The topic was discussed at the EiP's opening technical seminar, and on the first day of its hearings, when the case was actually made by two of those most closely involved in formulating Livingstone's Plan (Professor Drew Stevenson, and former Deputy Mayor/current London Assembly member Nicky Gavron) as well as independents associated with the Just Space network. Some alternative scenarios had actually been discussed in summer 2009 at a seminar organised by London Plan team



officers and GLA Economics although reference to these was eventually omitted from the draft Plan. And GLA Economics themselves (with an 'independent review' by close associate, Paul Ormerod<sup>3</sup>) produced a firm rebuttal of the case for inclusion of such alternative futures ahead of the EIP's opening sessions (GLAEc, 2010).

The strengthening of external interest in issues of uncertainty and the consideration of alternative futures since earlier versions of the London Plan, clearly owes a lot to developments since 2007 - both economically in the ramifications of a financial crisis with its origins in the City and Wall Street, and politically in the radical initiatives being pursued by the new Conservative/ Liberal coalition to cut-back public spending and direct state responsibilities. At the same time, firm resistance to addressing these uncertainties openly, together with the continuing centrality of a strong growth scenario / set of assumptions within the Johnson Replacement Plan reflect structural continuities in the politics of the Plan. As under the previous regime, this remains a strategic political document, having to serve a number of functions and interests, beyond the formal legal requirements set for it and purely technical analyses of evidence and possibilities. These other functions include management of the GLA's external relations, with central government and its regional neighbours (Gordon and Travers, 2010) as well as different interests within London.

The relevance of such 'political' considerations to the way in which 'scenarios' are formulated, debated and used is obviously not unique to the spatial planning context. In the military / defence planning contexts where scenario analysis emerged from simulation games against potential opponents (Wiki, n.d.), key elements of the process of imagining challenges and preparing responses to these naturally required secrecy. This could also be true when scenario planning was translated to a corporate business context, in companies such as Shell (Wack, 1985), even when conceived as involving 'games against nature', since rivals might seek to pre-empt the advantage that effective strategic responses could offer. In an urban planning context, the presumption is generally that such issues don't arise, and that if the scenario approach has value here also, it would be applied in an open manner that served to empower external stakeholders and facilitate rather more democratic input into strategic planning. That may be rather naive, however, since published Plans are clearly intended to influence behaviour in ways that make it more likely that their aspirations and assumptions - particularly about growth and investment - will be satisfied in practice.

But it raises some big questions about how the demographic legitimacy of strategic planning - which is about the big picture and long-run changes - can be secured, given that no-one has direct knowledge of these, unless 'the planners' can expose:

- o the range of alternative futures that may have to be confronted;
- o how they would propose responding to these; and
- o what the implications would be for various groups within a city's residential and business communities.

In this chapter we explore these issues in relation to the Replacement London Plan by: first considering how scenario analyses relate to the particular requirements of strategic planning; some particular alternative scenarios which ought to be seriously (and openly) explored within the London Plan process are then outlined; and finally discussing how far the 'plan, monitor and manage' approach emphasised in the Draft Replacement Plan does or does not obviate the need to investigate scenarios.

### The Role of Scenarios in Strategic Planning

In a spatial planning context, the language of scenarios is used ambiguously to refer to either or both the challenge or response aspects of classic scenario analyses, though with some bias toward the second of these - thinking more about alternative strategies which might be chosen than about the alternative futures they might have to deal with. For a genuinely strategic approach, the two clearly need to be integrated, but starting from consideration of the challenges (and opportunities) that the environment may present, and with a realistic appreciation of how/how far policies can be expected to modify these challenges.

In general, there are probably three key characteristics expected of a strategic approach to planning, each involving extension of scope beyond simple accommodation of directly observable trends:

- o Adoption of a wider perspective - looking further ahead, across wider contexts, and toward fundamental processes conditioning situations which may have to be faced and how planned actions could impinge on these;
- o Clarifying the goals which would / should shape actions in these different sets of potential circumstances - distinguishing so far as possible between, on the one hand, the values and priorities to which planners / leaders are committed and, on the other hand, (reality) judgements about how contexts may change and the impacts that actions may turn out to have; and
- o Analysing interactions between processes and policies across what Friend and Jessop (1976) classically referred to as 'interconnected decision areas', i.e. those

fields routinely dealt with and thought about separately by distinct groups of professionals / decision-makers, but which are indirectly linked - particularly through the ways in which private individuals and businesses respond to these separate interventions.

At various points within the planning process – if not necessarily or simply within formal statutory Plans - scenario thinking has a crucial role to play in securing these defining characteristics of a ‘strategic’ approach. In order to fulfil this role, however, the scenarios need to be formulated in terms going beyond simply variant assumptions about a few variables with key roles within the default version of the plan (e.g. more / less growth, in a more / less dispersed pattern). They need to involve coherent accounts of how alternative paths of development might be shaped either by significant exogenous developments or by shifting patterns of behaviour among local actors. As such they require both the exercise of imagination (with a willingness to consider how things might evolve differently from the default internal view) and an evidence-based understanding of how cause-effect relations operate in key processes – in other words a story (or at least a story-board).

One issue, of course, is whether scenario ‘exercises’ of this kind would actually impact on anyone’s established view of the direction of change and what should be done about this. In a passage quoted by GLAEC (2010a), a key player in Shell’s pioneering work with scenarios notes that initially ‘no more than a third of Shell’s critical decision centres were really acting on the insights gained through the scenarios and actively preparing for (a) family of outcomes’ judged to be the most likely, though at odds with the prevailing (expansion-oriented) world view within the company. The lesson learned was that relevant scenarios were not simply ones that seemed likely to correspond to reality, but rather ones that could change ‘the image of reality in the heads of critical decision-makers’ (Wack, 1985, 84). As GLAEC (2010a) suggest, this is a demanding criterion, which would not have been satisfied by the limited kind of scenario analyses commissioned for earlier rounds of London Plan development (see GLAEC, 2010a). But it is one which powerfully suggests why it is that more sophisticated, and committed, scenario work could be invaluable in this context, with its inbuilt biases toward consolidating the strategy around a single ‘vision’ or image of future reality.

### **Relevant Alternative Scenarios for the Replacement London Plan**

Current concerns about the apparent absence of serious consideration of alternative scenarios within the draft Replacement London Plan seem to have two aspects.

One simply embodies scepticism about the likelihood of either the scale of growth forecast for population / employment or of the implied availability of funding for large scale infrastructure investment actually being realised. Some of us (including Buck et al, 2002) had expressed similar views about previous versions of the Plan, which actually embodied more expansionist assumptions – but these have become more widespread against the recent background of macroeconomic uncertainty and political change. The issues here are whether:

- o the central forecasts / assumptions are the most appropriate ones to underpin long-term planning; and/or
- o these should be supplemented by much clearer statements of the margins of uncertainty which inevitably apply even to the best central assumption; and/or
- o whether there should be some explicit statement of a Plan B (or partially modified Plan A), indicating which elements of the Plan would need reconsideration - in what ways and at what stage - if evidence suggested that actual outcomes were likely to offer substantially less (or more) growth potential than currently assumed.

The other is more concerned about qualitative ways in which the actual pattern of development, over an uncertain future (not simply the scale of growth), might come to differ from the one embodied in the Plan, which effectively embodies and projects forwards the norms of the past 20 years or so. This is actually closer to classic notions of how scenarios should contribute to strategic planning (public or private) and involves thinking more explicitly about how cause-effect processes might operate within the metropolitan system – not just how changing some of the numbers ought to affect decisions.

In either case, a natural starting point for thinking about the contribution that explicit consideration of (some) alternative scenarios could make to strategic planning in London is to identify the baseline scenario which effectively underlies the current draft Plan. Despite the change of regime in London and the major economic shocks of the past 3 years, this seems very much the same as for the Livingstone Plan, in its original and revised forms. Specifically, it involves the continuation of patterns of growth, and underlying sources of competitive advantage, associated with the city’s economic and demographic growth since the early-mid 1980s. These would include, at an international scale, continuing promotion of liberal economic regimes, with low / diminishing barriers to trade (in services as well as goods) to factor mobility (both for capital and labour) and increasing convergence in terms of business cultures, regulatory

systems and consumer preferences. Within the UK, related conditions include continuation of light-touch regulatory regimes, out-sourcing of public service provision, and acceptance of an internationalised 'post-industrial' advanced service economy as reflecting the UK's real competitive advantage. Over this era, these factors together seem to have particularly favoured the London economy, over all other UK cities/regions and many elsewhere in Europe, because they play to its traditional strengths / first mover advantages, as a very large, flexible and diverse service economy, with strong international links, and within an Anglo-American business culture.

A side effect (at least) of the way in which these assets have affected London's development over the past quarter century has been a sequence of boom and bust episodes, of such strength (and variability) that it remains hard to pin-down what the underlying trends have been. The city has escaped much more lightly than might have been expected from the current recession, especially considering its origins within advanced financial service operations, but two intrinsic elements in a baseline scenario assuming continuation of these conditions ought to be:

- o expectation of a continuing series of further, irregular linked booms/busts; and
- o recognition that all evidence on the central long-term trend will leave large margins of uncertainty as to the actual scale of growth, in jobs particularly, that would be entailed<sup>4</sup>.

Beyond this, the obvious variant scenarios that deserve some consideration are ones involving shifts in one or more of the qualitative factors associated with strong (long-run) performance over this era. Among these, are a number previously sketched (in Gordon et al., 2009<sup>5</sup>), which hinged on the potential reversal (in the wake of the financial crisis) of one of factors favouring London. Whether involving:

- o a switch to a more sustainable macroeconomic strategy – supporting savings, production and exports;
- o financial re-regulation;
- o a halt to economic globalisation; or
- o potential anti-London revanchism on the part of communities suffering more (both directly and via corrective policy responses) from impacts of the financial crisis.

Each actually represented a down-side scenario which might simply lead to an extended period of much slower overall growth in the London economy. Each thus

bore essentially on the quantitative issue of whether the Plan's assumptions about long term growth in population, employment and (implicitly) public investment were likely to prove over-optimistic.

As such – though they could have been investigated in more qualitative terms - they actually related only to the first (more limited) aspect of how scenarios could / should be used in relation to the London Plan. For two more qualitative examples, we shall focus here on two related scenarios that seem to have become even more salient in the context of policy stances adopted (and/or intensified) by the new Conservative-led coalition government:

- o a major curtailment of international immigration into the UK; and
- o a shift in the balance of social activity and responsibility: from Big State to Big Society.

A little thought suggests that each could have important implications for London planning, though not necessarily ones that are obvious from the Plan itself or associated GLA papers.

*Closing-off international migration:* London is famously the major destination for international migration into the UK, but the presentation of population growth in each edition of the Plan underplays the significance of this factor. This is possible because there are several major components of population change in the city – a birth rate now greatly out-stripping deaths, heavy net in-migration from overseas and comparable net losses to the rest of the UK – which can be combined in different ways to show either immigration or local births as the key factor in a rate of London population growth which now matches or exceeds that in the country as a whole. Given the arithmetical options, there is a political significance (and attraction) to presenting future growth, and the housing requirements associated with it, as a consequence of London's own burgeoning birth-rate rather than of a flow of in-comers.

But it matters also to understand the causal connections among these elements in order to consider under what circumstances this rate of population growth might be liable to change. This is now a really important issue, given the new Con-Lib coalition's commitment to imposing 'an annual limit on the number of non-EU economic migrants admitted into the UK to live and work' (HMG, 2010), which Conservatives would like to see yield a net annual inflow below 100,000 (as in the 1990s), as compared with double that figure during the 2000s.

The draft Replacement Plan attributes the upsurge in London population growth since 1988 to the fact that: “more people of childbearing age have moved to the city, leading to strong natural population growth (the surplus of births over deaths).” (MoL, 2010, 14).

More specifically it is overseas migration that has been responsible for the upsurge in London births, evident particularly since 1998. The number of births to mothers from overseas increased from 32% in 1988 (about the average for the previous 20 years) to 37% in 1998 and then 55% in 2008: in numeric terms this involved a growth from 33,000 to 37,000 and then 70,000 births.

Simple comparisons of population change by broad age range (Table 1) and by UK/overseas place of (Table 2) show, however, that:

- o the really big changes in London population over the past two decades have occurred within the working age population; and
- o can be more than accounted for (in numeric terms) by increases in the foreign-born population (at least in the years since 1996).

Despite the rising birth rate, the numbers of UK-born children / youths living in London actually seem not to have grown – because of continuing out-migration by families to neighbouring regions within the greater South East. At the other end of the age distribution, among the elderly, high net losses (among the UK-born population) also reflect outward movement – which has served to lower death rates within London – another important reason why its rate of natural increase is now so strong. In this age range, growth in numbers of foreign-born reflects the ageing of London residents who arrived in earlier post-war waves of in-migration, rather than new arrivals. The overall growth – of one million, or about two thirds – in London’s overseas-born population over this recent period – is, however, evidently a direct result of contemporary flows of international migrants (heavily concentrated among those in young working age bands).

There is a more complicated story behind these data which needs to be unpicked, to understand why it is that out-migration to neighbouring regions increases as in-migration to London from overseas grows (Hatton and Tani, 2005), and how these relate to competition for constrained housing opportunities. But the simple point is that the great upsurge in overseas migration to London over the past two decades (particularly between the mid-90s and the mid-2000s) has been a crucial factor in the turnaround in London population trends. This had been the case a decade before in London’s counterpart, New York City, reflecting an earlier sharp up-turn in US immigration from