



ESRC sponsored Roundtable Discussion: A cross-sector approach to creating healthy cities – Delivering quality housing in post-Brexit Britain

Tuesday 1st November 2016

12.15-15.00

Agenda and Background Reading

Agenda

Our ESRC seminar series is foremost interested in the key features of governance and policies to ensure the reuniting of health and planning priorities. We are interested in your views, from your own discipline and work in related fields, on a number of recommendations made by the Building Better Places report to ensure that the *focus on quantity of housing does not work to the long-term detriment of planning for the whole of the built environment and the delivery of high quality development*. Here are the three themes we will cover in the roundtable.

1. Institutional development: The report recommended that the Government should:

- appoint a **Chief Built Environment Adviser** to lead long term coordination and integration across the multiple Government departments that effect and respond to the built environment.
- Establish a **small, strategic unit** lead by the Chief Built Environment Adviser to conduct, commission and disseminate research and guidance on architecture and design within the built environment.

Do you know of any progress made in that field? Do you think these new institutional developments are the way forward to bring evidence base into planning and urban design and help improve the quality of the built environment in England?

2. Policy integration: **To encourage proper integration between planning and health**, the report recommended that Government should:

- Within the National Planning Practice Guidance, set out a common framework of **health indicators** for local planning authorities to monitor.

- Examine ways in which **Health Impact Assessments** could be more closely integrated into development management processes.

Any progress made since the report was published in February 2016? What are your views on integrating health and planning with health indicators and health impact assessment mechanisms? Should HIA become statutory? Should Health and Wellbeing Boards have a greater role in integrating health and planning at the local level?

3. Market intervention: To support delivery of more housing, in particular to support mixed communities, the report recommended that Government should:

- Support **housing associations** in their aspiration to increase housing supply, including reviewing the impact of financial constraints.
- Identify the barriers to access now facing **SME builders** and review how access to finance for this sector could be improved.

Any new developments since the report was published? What are current initiatives supporting small builders (Housing growth partnership, Housing Development Fund...)? Are current initiatives delivering opportunities for small builders? Could small builders be encouraged and enabled by local authorities to use smaller sites?

Background on the roundtable and further reading

This roundtable is part of an ESRC sponsored seminar series on reuniting planning and health, led by the WHO Collaborating Centre for Healthy Urban Environments, UWE, Bristol with the participation of The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, University of Bristol, University of Newcastle, Liverpool University and Public Health England.

Further information: <http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/et/research/spe/seminarseries.aspx>

The overall objective of the round table is to consider how we can we can improve the quality of lives and places within the Brexit context. The discussion will be guided by some of the recommendations of the Lords Select Committee on a National Policy for the Built Environment's report [Building Better Places](#).

In February 2016 the House of Lords Select Committee on National Policy for the Built Environment published its [Building Better Places report](#) making a series of conclusions and recommendations on the development and implementation of a national policy for the built environment. The focus of their report was England. You might want to read the **summary of conclusions and recommendations** on pages 92-100 of the report.

The rationale for the enquiry of the HL Select Committee National Policy for the Built Environment is as follows:

We are concerned (...) that the focus on quantity of housing must not work to the long-term detriment of planning for the whole of the built environment and the delivery of high quality development (Para. 2 of summary on p. 92 of report)

Why does the built environment matter?

The built environment affects us all. The planning, design, management and maintenance of the built environment, and its interaction with the natural environment, has a long-term impact upon people and communities. The quality of life, prosperity, health, wellbeing and happiness of an individual is heavily influenced by the place in which they live or work and, in this way, place shapes us. Striving to develop a built environment where all people can live well and make a full contribution to society should be a key objective for decision makers.

The shape, structure, look and feel of a place is largely a result of decisions taken regarding the built environment. These decisions can be taken by a multiplicity of actors including different government departments, local authorities, infrastructure providers, executive agencies and private individuals. This is a complex picture, within which integration can be difficult.

The scale and scope of the challenge facing decision makers is also intense. The 2014 Farrell Review of Architecture and the Built Environment highlighted concerns regarding fragmentation of policy making across the field, and skills challenges facing the major professions charged with crafting and caring for our built environment. Recent months have seen an intensification in national policy initiatives intended to address the housing crisis; they have also seen widespread and devastating flooding, along with frustration over delays to major infrastructure decisions.

(chapter I, para. 1-3, p.6)

What were the key recommendations of the Committee?

The Committee made key recommendations to improve the quality of lives and places:

- Taking better account of design impacts on work, health and the environment
- More attention on building for sustainability and resilience
- More sustainable communities through long-term rented housing
- Increased support for local planning and place-making capacity
- More dynamic and co-ordinated plan-making

So what should be the next steps?

Further reading

Please refer to the Summary of conclusions and recommendations (p.92-101) of the Building Better Places report (here is the link:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201516/ldselect/ldbuilt/100/100.pdf>)

Alternatively, here are the key paragraph in the Building Better Places report on these three themes:

1. Chief Built Environment Adviser and small strategic unit (summary of conclusions and recommendations, para. 3-7, p. 92-93 of report)

There are two critical elements currently missing in national policy for the built environment. There is an urgent need for much greater co-ordination and integration across the multiple Government departments that effect and respond to the built environment. There is also a need for a national organisation with the capacity to undertake research, develop guidance and build the networks necessary to raise standards and drive better performance. Solving the first of these problems requires access to Government, while delivering against the second objective requires a degree of independence from it.

To deliver longer-term coordination we recommend the appointment of a Chief Built Environment Adviser, a recognised expert appointed from within the sector to lead this work at an official level. The role of the Chief Built Environment Adviser would be to co-ordinate relevant policy across central Government departments, to act as a champion for higher standards and to promote good practice across and beyond Government. The status and reporting arrangements of the Chief Built Environment Adviser should be broadly equivalent to those of the Government Chief Scientific Adviser.

In addition, we believe that some of the key functions carried out by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment have been lost. This is to the long-term detriment of the built environment. We recommend that the Government should establish and fund a small, strategic unit to conduct, commission and disseminate research and guidance on architecture and design within the built environment. This new unit should be led by the Chief Built Environment Adviser, and should have access to expertise, research and insight from across and beyond Government.

2. Health indicators and Health Impact Assessments (see summary of conclusions and recommendations, para. 11-13, p. 93 of report)

It is important that planners and all policy makers, including those working in housing, take account of the health impacts of their decisions; failure to do so will lead to significant long-term costs. We welcome the inclusion of specific health policies within the National Planning Policy Framework, but there is much work still to be done to encourage proper integration between planning and health. Health and Wellbeing Boards need to play a more proactive role in developing links, across different local authority structures, to encourage greater integration.

If built environment policies are to take account of health impacts it is essential that they are informed by a robust evidence base. Local authorities should be proactive in undertaking monitoring of the health outcomes and impacts of planning decisions. We recommend that the Government should, within the National Planning Practice Guidance, set out a common framework of health indicators for local planning authorities to monitor.

We welcome recent moves towards the adoption and use of health impact assessments in decision making on major planning applications. We call

upon the Government to support such initiatives, and to examine ways in which health impact assessments could be more closely integrated into development management processes.

3. Housing associations and small builders (see summary of conclusions and recommendations, para. 38-43, p. 97-98 of report)

We believe that, in addition to measures to support increased private sector housing development, and to encourage home ownership, there should be renewed focus on how built environment policy can support mixed communities including through the provision of long-term affordable rented housing.

This should include supporting housing associations in their aspiration to increase housing supply, including reviewing the impact of financial constraints and changes to Government policy.

Local authorities can play an important role in meeting the need for housing, but in recent decades have largely lost their ability to contribute to new supply. While there has been a minor revival of council housebuilding in recent years, borrowing restrictions limit their development capacity, and proposed social rent cuts may threaten the viability of new schemes altogether.

In recognition that housing need has rarely been met in England without a significant direct contribution from councils, the Government should take steps to ensure that local authorities are able to fulfil their potential as direct builders of new mixed tenure housing. This should include reviewing the impact of borrowing restrictions and proposed social rent reductions.

We believe that smaller housebuilding companies can play a bigger part in addressing the housing shortage. The Government should review the NPPF and NPPG with a view to encouraging local authorities to identify and facilitate development on smaller sites. The Government and local authorities should encourage and enable SME builders to use these sites where appropriate, in order to support diversity in the housebuilding market and to help increase housing supply.

We recommend that the Government should identify the barriers to access now facing SME builders and review how access to finance for this sector could be improved. The Government should also continue to review the progress of existing initiatives to support small builders, including the Housing Growth Partnership and Housing Development Fund.