

Dr Tim Marshall – Written Evidence (LUE0040)

1 I am making a submission to this Committee, if a relatively brief one, in order to register how important I think this exercise could turn out to be. The timing of the appointment of the Committee appears to be excellent, because it is becoming clear that the government is unlikely to be undertaking fundamental reforms of the planning system, but has been making basic reforms in a host of fields which impact directly on land use and on planning matters. This is likely to leave an even bigger chasm between the changes in policy fields, and the capacity of the planning system to respond to these changes, and of course to respond to the deeply challenging substantive issues in England. So something needs to be done, to create new processes through some appropriate institutional innovations. Many planners argue that this must include new strategic planning capacity well above the local level (and I would certainly see this as an essential complement to what is argued for here). In the rest of this note, the focus is on the need for some high level strategising to steer the big picture of land use changes.

2 I am a planner by training, and have taught and researched planning for many years, now being an emeritus professor at Oxford Brookes University. In the last thirty years, I have worked primarily on environmental, regional and infrastructure planning, both in Britain and through international comparative work, mainly drawing on experience in other Western European countries. This has included writing books on all of these areas, including a book with John Glasson on *Regional Planning* in 2007, and one on *Planning Major Infrastructure* in 2012.

3 This work has always meant confronting the issue of integrating the impacts of change in different sectors – the essence of planning, but especially important at strategic levels. This Committee inquiry necessarily confronts this issue of integration. Recent UK governments have largely turned their faces against integrated approaches to planning, at all scales but especially above the very local. Exceptions exist, in some continuing work on water planning, and in the practice of the National Infrastructure Commission. But the idea that the dynamics of changes to land need to be explicitly understood in an integrated way has largely been absent from most government drives. This results in uninformed decision making, with little chance of decisions being optimal, in balancing up competing demands – for food, for housing land, for energy generating facilities and so on.

4 Therefore, I concentrate on questions 10, 11 and 12, although I could well say much on several other sections.

Land use planning

10. What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of the existing land use planning system and associated frameworks in England? How effectively does the system manage competing demands on land, including the Government's housing and development objectives? What would be the merits of introducing a formal spatial planning framework or frameworks, and how might it be implemented?

5 I am a long way from being the first to say that land use planning stopped working nearly as well as it should in England some years ago (the 2018 Raynsford Review was perhaps the fullest justification of that in recent years). Very little done by the UK governments since about 2008 has improved the functioning of land use planning. This applies across key dimensions of strategic and regional planning, of making plans at Local and Neighbourhood levels, and of the working of decisions on development, with in particular worsening of processes by large scale extension of permitted development rights. This is in marked contrast to the often good work done in Scotland and Wales during the same period, where the attempts to integrate land use, sustainable development and "ordinary" planning processes have generally had much to commend them and could well be brought in to practice in England, in all sorts of ways.

6 There has been no considered judgement of competing land use demands, no mechanism for how these could be considered at any level above the Local Plan (outside London), and hence rule by complete silo governance at central government level, and simply no effective governance at all between central government and district or unitary authorities, in most of the country.

7 There is therefore an urgent need for someone, somehow, to formulate some integrating governing process for either England as a whole, or for large regions of England. The latter was suggested in a 2018 IPPR sponsored report on economic justice, suggesting four mega regions as the best scales for land use / infrastructure / economy integrating strategies. There are of course other alternatives for sub-national carving

up, including the nine Standard Regions used up to 2010. But there may be simplicity in deciding to make just one strategic process for England.

8 The case for a spatial strategy for England (or the UK as a whole) has been made often enough since the 1990s (the 2070 Commission has brought together much of this case, with all the relevant references, in its work over the last three years and I would refer the inquiry to their extensive website documentation). The issue then is whether this would best take the form of separate strategies as in Scotland, which has a National Spatial Strategy, now on its fourth iteration, and a Land Use Strategy, or whether these would be best combined in one. It must be remembered that the National Infrastructure Strategy, whose first iteration dates to December 2020, does some highly valuable integrating work on the sectors it is responsible for. The NIC is the one body in government with some of the mindset needed to do this kind of integrating work. However the NIC itself has argued that a national spatial strategy is needed to provide a context within which its infrastructure work can sit.

9 My view is that the combining of land use and spatial strategy in one process and one strategy document as output would be an efficient way to proceed in England, given the continuous and deep interweaving of all the issues involved. Almost any dimension one considers, rural or urban, has direct implications for sectoral policies (how to manage food production, how to increase biodiversity, how to protect heritage) as much as for more strictly planning and development issues. Land use is unavoidably multi-sectoral, layered and spatial, as the 2010 Foresight work made abundantly clear.

11. What lessons may be learned from land use planning frameworks in the devolved nations and abroad, and how might these lessons apply to England?

10 As mentioned above, the experience in Wales and Scotland is highly relevant to this inquiry. Equally valuable would be for the Committee to go back to experience in some European cases, particularly the rightly famous plans produced at national level in the Netherlands for many decades. I gave some treatment of these in my 2012 book on *Planning Major Infrastructure*, showing how valuable it can be to have such a national plan for making big infrastructure decisions, on matters like airport and ports planning, flooding and water supply, as well as thinking about big scale green infrastructure. That Dutch experience could be updated for this inquiry, by finding a Dutch expert able to comment on

recent changes to such work. But whatever the most recent experience there, I think the general shape of the historic Dutch approach is the key message to grasp.

Conclusion

12. Which organisations would be best placed to plan and decide on the allocation of land for the various competing agendas for land use in England, and how should they set about doing so?

11 The Levelling Up White Paper made the welcome announcement that a Spatial Data Unit was being set up in DLUHC. The White Paper had discovered the often very deficient state of the evidence base, and insisted that in order to provide good foundations for analysis and particularly to ensure that monitoring of the levelling up missions was possible, such a Unit was essential. In my view this could become one part of a very greatly increased capacity in that Department to undertake the sort of analysis which would be needed to lead work on a Land Use and Spatial Strategy for England.

12 So I would suggest that a unit in DLUHC should lead this work, in tight collaboration with the NIC, who could advise on setting up this capacity, and would be a sort of fraternal unit, gaining from their Treasury location. Clearly the work on such a Strategy would have to be a cross governmental effort with DEFRA, DfT and BEIS having especially key roles, including key Agencies. The model of the National Infrastructure Strategy could be adopted, with the requirement to adopt a revised Strategy every five years, on roughly the same time scale as the NIS (or a little ahead).

13 The great advantage of basing such a Strategy in DLUHC would be that the links to the planning system would be internal so that if say certain requirements on flooding or on energy generation appeared in the Strategy, the direct implications for planning policy could be fed across more easily. At the same time the experience of managing the planning system (NPPF, NSIPs processes, NPSs, the Planning Inspectorate and so on) could most easily inform the making of the Strategy. There is a great deal of experience in such areas of planning government, including at local and strategic levels. There would be gains in both directions if that experience could inform, and be informed by, work on such a Strategy.

14 Of course a national Strategy would set broad requirements and would need "translation" into many different instruments – planning ones, but also a range of fiscal and regulatory ones, in different parts of central

government. Local governments would be in the front line of deciding and implementing their own land use strategies (Local Plans and associated policy tools). So they would need to have clear guidance emanating from the Strategy. These translation issues are well understood in multi-level government systems, and careful design of central-local relations will be essential. In particular there will be resourcing issues and learning processes, at all government levels, in order to develop the capacity to make new processes work effectively to hit the several goals desired – net zero, domestic food and energy production, land released for housing and so on.

Dr Tim Marshall

April 2022