Future Planners:

Propositions for the next age
of planning

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Authors: Peter Bradwell, Inderpaul Johar, Clara Maguire and Paul Miner

Steering Group: Melissa Mean (Demos), Neil Sinden (CPRE),
Rachel Fisher (RICS), Alan Graham (English Partnerships), Rynd Smith (RTPI)

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1 - The renaissance of place

"We all know that planning has been inflexible for years… (and needs) reforms to make planning law and procedures simpler, more efficient and more responsive to business and the long-term needs of the economy"
Gordon Brown, speaking to the CBI national conference, 2005[i]

"The planning system underpins our drive to create sustainable communities…If planning authorities perform poorly, the whole community is disadvantaged…It is vital that the planning service delivers appropriate, high-quality developments that will serve our communities now and for future generations."
Yvette Cooper, Minister for Housing and Planning, 2005[ii]

Not since the era of post-war redevelopment has the future of the built and natural environment generated such interest, or been so contested. Places, and changes to them, have taken on new political, economic and social significance for the private, public and third sector alike.

The centrality of place across these three sectors is clear. Real-estate is an increasingly essential direct and indirect economic engine; around 10% of GDP is now generated by the development sector itself[iii]. The report by economist Sir Nicholas Stern sees planning as central to combating climate change[iv]. Spatial planning as an emerging discipline taps the planning profession into the country's most compelling social and political challenges. And our understanding of the cultural value of *place*, as a generator of social capital and neighbourliness has risen from academic nicety to policy imperative[v].

So why, if planning is increasingly seen as a vital tool in delivering a range of politically live outcomes, is the *planner* now the second most difficult role to recruit for in local government?[vi] 'Place professions' from architects to urban designers are seen collectively as creative, intellectual and collaborative. By contrast, the planner is too often *perceived* as a bureaucrat, a blockage rather than a catalyst. But the new sets of relationships that direct changes to places - between the private sector, the consumer, the citizen and the public sector - demand skillful and dynamic planners.

Continuing changes in how we live, our aspirations and how we influence what happens around us, means that planning professionals potentially sit in an ideal space to enable democratically legitimate, sustainable development. We need to capitalise on current good practice in the planning system to reinvest the planner with the trust of the public, and the skills and resources for them to meet their potential.

The clash

The UK faces a pressing need to build more houses, at a time when the demands of sustainable construction and of people's quality of life in their communities hold increasing importance. Projections from the 2001 Census estimated that 179,000 new households are formed per annum in England, with the total number estimated to increase from 20.9 million in 2003 to 25.1 million by 2016[vii]. In 2005 – 06, 163,000 new houses were built[viii]. The ensuing debate, over the relationship between household formation, new housing supply, and the social and environmental impact of housing development, is exemplary in its nature of the challenges planning and its professionals face.

On the one hand sit the demands of the market and consumer choice, where planning and planners are deemed barriers to growth. The high-profile reviews commissioned by the Treasury, undertaken by economist Kate Barker, looked at the speed, efficiency and adaptability of the planning system in its facilitation of economic growth[ix]. Where the demographic trends signal a need for more houses, the emphasis here is on getting them built.

On the other hand sits the need for communities and environments that are inclusive, engaged, affordable and sustainable, where planners are recognised only as custodians of local neighbourhood value. They are tasked with enabling the voice of the community and bestowing more power to them. This is a key stated policy aim of the Local Government White Paper – following Sir Michael Lyon's interim findings[x] - which points toward the potential for greater local influence over decision making. This puts the wishes of people in their physical communities as central to development, which can sometimes risk neglecting broader public interests.

John East, Head of Planning and Transport at Southwark council, suggested to us that '…the whole planning system has shifted that way – with the Statements of Community Involvement for example – but at the same time, they tell us we need to speed up the planning process. Funnily enough they don't always go together! And this puts planners in the firing line.'

This difficulty in connecting broad strategies with local, 'lived' impact is the product of a bigger narrative of which planning is a part. The planner is caught in the middle of an ideological struggle between historic notions of private and public interest. It is marked by the kind of fervent and fraught battles between economic, social and environmental interests evident in the housing debate.

We have let the rhetoric of this perceived dichotomy between market and state dominate how we think about planning and its limits. Through this lens, the public sector is primarily seen as responsible for the delivery of environmental and social justice, and the private sector for economic development and productivity. As a result, ideological silos have emerged. It is no surprise to see seemingly conflicting public policy and attitudes to planning.

At central Government level, these silos have institutional expression. The Treasury pursues economic development objectives, the DCLG advocates a community-centred approach and DEFRA seeks to address environmental challenges. The responses from all sides tend, as a consequence, to be framed too narrowly by their own terms of reference.

The results converge on the local authority department responsible for managing built and natural environment change: planning. Within the terms of this struggle, its professionals are at one and the same time fighting for their right to exist, and being asked to fulfill tasks they lack sufficient tools, systems or public legitimacy to deliver.

Milton Keynes Partnership

We visited Milton Keynes' where the population is growing by 4,000 people each year; it is projected to double in size to around 360,000 people by 2031. It will have 28,100 new homes by 2011, and 71,000 homes by 2031. Having faced constant expansion the growth it now faces, as part of a designated 'Growth Area', is on one level nothing new for the city.

But the growth is fast, significant, and, most importantly, the context within which it is taking place has changed. As a 'Growth Area', Milton Keynes has been assigned a role in managing the growth of the South East of England and in helping provide enough houses to meet future need. However, the consequences of Growth Area status will be felt by residents in living communities with their own aspirations for their area.

Milton Keynes Partnership Committee (MKPC) was created as a Local Delivery Vehicle to co-ordinate the approach to the planning and delivery of growth, development and investment. The MKPC brings together Milton Keynes Council, the national regeneration agency English Partnerships, and the Local Strategic Partnership.

Given that the MKPC brings together bodies with different remits and channels of democratic legitimacy, there has been a risk of tension between the bodies involved – but not through any fault of the bodies involved. There is a clearly identified need for rapid housing growth, qualified in terms of public interest and designed in a sustainable manner. In bringing together nationally accountable bodies and a locally elected council, the key is still addressing both broad national interests and local aspirations. The root of this challenge is managing the potential disconnect between the processes of designating a Growth Area and implementing strategies to accommodate that growth.

2 - The right battle?

"Planners are implementing the same system they have always implemented; but it wasn't designed for a globalising world. For example, restaurants used to be unique establishments; now those buildings are frequently taken on by global chains leading to a feeling of sameness. I think the future role of the planning profession…has to change quite radically, because people aren't happy with what's being delivered."

Seema Manchanda, Head of Physical Regeneration and Development, Newham, interview for Future Planners research

Planners have traditionally seen themselves as the marshals or custodians of the built and natural environment. But society *beyond* planning has changed, with important consequences.

The 'public value' of a place emerges from a diverse range of interactions, from the choices individuals make in the high street, their informal relationships with neighbours and the people they live near, through to the investment and development decisions of businesses and developers. Change to the built and natural environment is not determined solely by the state – it is a product of these interactions. But that hasn't negated the need for an expression of *collective* or *public* interest. It is the changes to the economy and society more broadly that has led to crucial shifts in how collective interest in a place can be expressed, legitimated and delivered.

To date, we have been too keen to respond to the former point – that the state can no longer *control* change – and not good enough at understanding and addressing the latter – how collective interests in that change can be articulated.

Our research found that planners' problems are the result of a failure to recognise how the planning system and its professionals are part of this broader network of interaction not captured in formal planning legislation. There are signs that policy makers and practitioners alike are not quite as polarised as our initial picture suggests – for example, the Lyons inquiry has been extended to consider the implications of the Barker review. But the tendency to separate the economic and the social or environmental prevents us articulating the bigger story of change that planning is firmly a part of. That has led to a critical gap between the regulatory and legal framework planners work from, and the wider context they must operate within.

What is 'Public Value'?

Public value in the built and natural environment is more than the aggregate of private and state interests. It describes collective interests that are determined by people's attitudes to and decisions regarding a place. The way we understand public value starts with the idea that public services cannot take the underlying purpose of their institution, its legitimacy, or the value it creates for citizens to be self-evident, simply because they are public institutions whose mandate has been supplied by democratically elected governments[xi].

We take 'public value' to be the achievement of democratically legitimate sustainable development. In working towards it, public bodies need to increasingly, and constantly, engage across sectors and move out of their 'silo'. The definition we are taking, in integrating environmental sustainability and social justice with economic growth, builds on the definition of sustainable development in the UK Sustainable Development Strategy (March 2005). This requires all to take a long term view. It demands a reassertion of the idea, long enshrined in Government policy that the planning system aims to pursue the public interest.

3 - Change and the planner

To understand how the planner can once again become, and be recognised as, an agent of public value we need to look at this wider context. We need to understand the drivers that are defining the 21st century, from the changing nature of democratic legitimacy and the dynamics of global markets, to rising social diversity and the increasingly urgent questions of environmental sustainability.

a] Democratic change

"The question of 'whose place is it anyway' is incredibly important; the question of culture, and who has a right to have a say in what the place should be like."
Dr Richard Simmons, Chief Executive, CABE, interview for Future Planners research

More than voting

The electoral process is no longer the only forum for asserting democratic influence. We express values and collective organisation in a multitude of new ways, from 'PledgeBank' and tea parties to our purchasing habits and blogging[xii] .

But planning derives most of its legitimacy from voting. Access to these different channels of democratic expression varies, and consequently local democracy faces a significant challenge in reconciling, and taking notice of, these different experiences. Our research suggested that often those who are heard through both the traditional and more recent means for democratic expression are those with the capacity, knowledge and resources to shout loudest.

More than residency

The people we feel close to, beyond our families, is increasingly not limited to our neighbours. People identify, associate with and help produce communities and identities that don't 'belong' to a single definable space. For example, 'globalised' identities, of communities in the UK that strongly identify with their roots, perforate the geographic boundaries of belonging. As we become connected to more and different groups of people our social networks increasingly stretch across the world, meaning a place is often a container for diverse cultural identities and values.

At the same time, people are increasingly living and working in different areas. The value that planners help to create can no longer be put into neat boxes or easily prioritised in specific places. For example, Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 6 focuses on town centres and PPS 3 on housing; the two address different needs and embody different priorities. But in many places the two can't be separated.

Economic, social and environmental values often co-exist within a town or neighbourhood. People have significant interests in the places where they socialise, work and live. Yet still the *residential* based democratic model is given far more legitimacy in relation to the future of our cities and neighbourhoods than other forms of democratic expression. This tends to exclude a variety of groups and individuals who have legitimate interest in places other than where their homes are located; employees and businesses, to take one example.

These changes mean that planners now face three significant challenges;

i.   A continuing proliferation of the ways to express values and opinions

ii. The fluid mix of people and cultural identities who have significant links beyond where they live

iii. The complex relationships people now have with places and spaces

As a result, **many people struggle to keep faith with the formal channels of residential democracy, finding it difficult to make their voices heard**.

b] A networked world

"We have a mandate to transform the borough. But if we end up having devolved decision-making power to many communities on a very local level, we might end up frustrating some of our wider objectives."
John East, Head of Planning and Transport, Southwark Council, interview for Future Planners research

Rising levels of interconnectedness pose such a challenge to planning because they complicate how we connect individuals to a commonly held idea of public value. This is a central tension in a globalising world; between the empowerment of individuals and the building of *shared* projects and contexts where states, governments and institutions potentially hold less influence.

We're being asked to make sense of increasingly complex relationships and connections, making it more difficult to understand the consequences of our actions. The result is that local and public values don't coincide in the same way as they used to, as it becomes more difficult to connect the immediate experience of our built and natural environment to wider interests.

As we look towards making peoples' aspirations central to the development of an area, and giving communities a more direct say over local decision making, it is crucial that we consider how to re-connect aspirations and everyday decisions to broader contexts. By doing that, we can create the potential to more easily understand the relationship between our decisions and public value. But this presents a challenge because it is both easier to find out about networks and communities across the world *and* potentially more difficult to interpret what this information means. We have to consider the impacts of local action on a much broader scale, which challenges how we understand the ways that individual, local good and public value coincide.

As an example, London's ecological footprint is approximately 125 times its size; the externalities generated by the city are felt globally. If planning is designed to manage the interaction between 'neighbouring' demands, then the exponential growth in global networks, flows and transactions poses a key challenge. This is a situation in which **local good becomes less easily reconciled with public value**, and how we respond will be a key determinant of creating sustainable places.
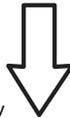
Mobile phone masts

John East, Head of Planning and Transport at Southwark council, described to us his experiences of the difficulties in connecting people's uses of, and attachment to, mobile phones with the consequent need to plan for increasing numbers of mobile phone masts.

'The large majority of people feel that they can't do without a mobile phone. But if an operator wants to put up a phone mast in a borough, the application will go to committee, where there will be residents' pressure for it to be refused. In these circumstances, we would most likely lost the subsequent appeal. Phone operators will find it incredibly hard to get their proposal through the planning process. But it's interesting how the same people who are *against* phone masts would probably, like me, have a mobile phone strapped to their waist.'

THE MOBILE PHONE

* currently 50 million in use

PUBLIC VALUE

* 40,000 base stations needed
* adds between 0.8% - 4.9 % to national productivity
* mobile phone industry adds 2.5 % GDP
* increasingly considered a lifestyle essential

LOCAL VALUE

* Possible health risks
* Property price risks
* Loss of visual amenity
* Strong focus of nearby residents

PLANNER

* An evident need for the Planner to act as independent negotiator between Public Value and Local Value
* Minimisation of visual impact through improvements in siting strategies
* Minimisation of need for masts through sharing and technological advances
* Minimisation of local opposition through better community consultation

c] Climate Change

The threat of irreparable damage to the environment has only recently become a mainstream media and political concern. The Government appears to recognise the threat, setting national targets to reduce greenhouse gases. Planning is seen as central in how we move from recognition to delivering sustainable development, through a range of contexts from transport and housing to shopping.

Patterns of production and consumption are likely to, and indeed need to, alter significantly with the potential to fundamentally change our socio-economic model and drive changes in how we deliver social and economic goods. There is an imperative to read any change, and any proposal, with the environmental impact a central consideration.

Climate change offers a challenge to our democratic model and our ability to act collectively because **local actions have global consequences**. For example, the cutting down of rainforests has an impact on people across the world, and in turn is arguably the product of a host of complex contributing factors. Yet the residential democratic model on its own provides limited scope for citizens to legitimately engage in global problems. That subsequently makes it difficult to join up the cause and effect of those contributing factors. This is a fundamental issue for a society in transition from a carbon to zero carbon economy, which requires environmental awareness at the everyday level of the citizen.

The Array Wind Farm

This potential disconnect between local and broader values is being played out publicly in the current debates about energy supplies. The development of wind-farms often generates local democratic opposition that is often at odds with a particular idea of the 'public interest'.

'The Array', near Faversham, Kent, is a proposed wind-turbine farm projected to be capable of producing a quarter of London's energy needs. The developers claim that the '1,000MW scheme would displace nearly 2m tonnes of CO_2 – equivalent to roughly 400,000 cars not driving for a year[xiii].

But serious local opposition saw the project stall, with it finally given planning consent in late 2006. We are not making a value judgment on wind farms. Rather, we see this as an example of the hard choices made between locally and nationally held private and public values. In such cases there can be a perceived lack of connection between the developers private gain, a broader public value, and democratically expressed local interests.

d] Private and third sector creating public value

Public services are increasingly being delivered by the private, public and civic sectors, in the same way public value in the built and natural environment is no longer the sole prerogative of the state. **A host of new relationships and organisations influence change around us, driven by powers beyond the public sector** – from social entrepreneurs and ethical investment funds to residual land holding developers.

The latter provides an example of the private sector taking a longer term view with regards to investment, and subsequently facing the need to be more conscious and conscientious with regards to social and environmental issues, and wider public value. Paul McNamara of Prudential has noted that private investment houses are beginning to realise that only truly sustainable development will guarantee returns from investors in 20-30 years time[xiv].

Middlehaven Regeneration Project, Middlesborough

Quintain

English Partnerships

BioRegional

Alsop

social relationships

Public Value

Middlehaven BC

Tees Valley Regeneration

One North East

Local   National

State/NGO

+

Private

+

Community

Public Value
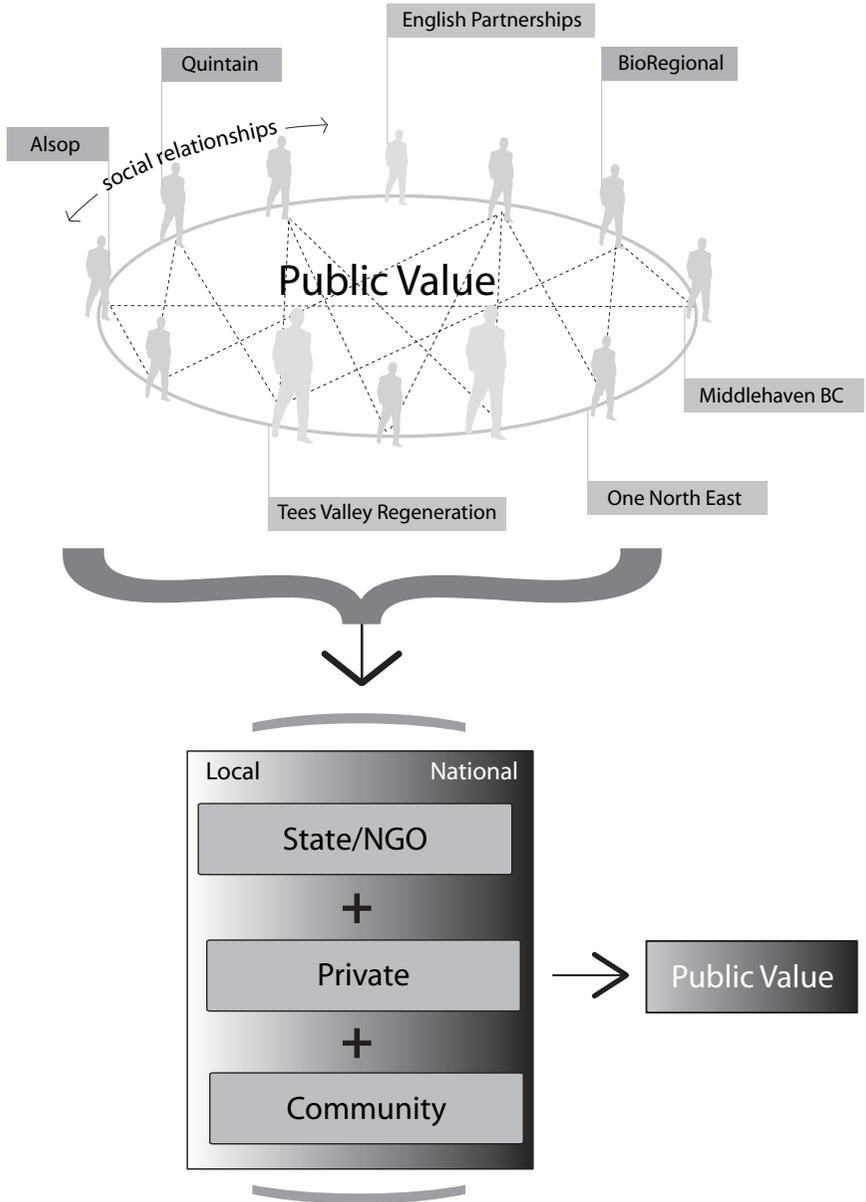
Regeneration partnerships provide a good example of these complex sets of relationships. We found this in Middlesbrough, where the Middlehaven mixed-use project is being delivered through a bewildering array of investors and public bodies – an environmental organisation (BioRegional), a private property investor (Quintain), a national non-departmental public body (English Partnerships), a regeneration company with shareholders from five local planning authorities and the Regional Development Agency.

e] Planning beyond the plan

Innovation and change is happening at an increasing pace, and follows unpredictable paths; 'plans' rarely survive first contact as the ground shifts under the planner's feet. Governance of the built and natural environment through a static master-plan no longer makes sense in a world focused on networks, knowledge and creativity because so much of what happens is spontaneous, opportunistic and outside of formal control.

Having a planning system flexible enough to capitalise on opportunity will be increasingly important. That means a system with **planners who can respond to and mould market dynamics and adapt to and harness opportunities for increasing public value**, mindful of the place and the legacy of history.

Planning deficits

The four drivers identified above - from the changing nature of democratic legitimacy, the proliferation of networks, the increasingly urgent questions of environmental sustainability and the re-understanding of public value - are helping to define the 21st century. To date there has not been enough debate about the actions necessary to resolve these emerging issues and therefore build an appropriately inclusive model of planning.

Planners need to be able to respond and adapt to this changing context. Through our research we identified four main 'deficits', to which responses to this broader context can usefully be addressed.

Democratic deficit: There has been significant change in how people look to exert influence over the world around them. This is not necessarily reflected by a broadening of the channels through which people can influence planning, which leaves many struggling to keep faith in traditional residential democracy.

Skills deficit: The planner is increasingly in demand due to the scale of development being undertaken and proposed in the UK. At the same time, the public sector has found it challenging to recruit and retain planners with the skills needed, or to maintain the highest levels of innovation.

Empowerment deficit: Innovation and planning is increasingly 'real-time' and opportunistic. Planners need more opportunity to respond to a changing, dynamic marketplace and the aspirations of people.

Public value deficit: The rise of the networked world means local value is no longer synonymous with public value; we have no democratic method to support evaluation and adjudication based upon the notions of public good which take account of impact beyond locality. This is a core issue in terms of planning and a significant basis of our recommendations.

We aim to respond to these deficits on two levels. Firstly, we look at the skills and roles of the future planner. Secondly, in section five we propose changes that can help support these roles and the next age of planning.

4 - The Future Planner

The 'planner' is a modern profession. Since its emergence in the 1920s, it has fallen in and out of fashion following shifts in political ideology and social circumstance. The profession's most recent history can be read from the 1980s, a decade marked by a political faith in free-flowing markets and deregulation. The planning system was taken as an obstacle to the accumulation of economic growth. But we are seeing a return to the idea of planning as key in enabling democratically legitimate sustainable development.

What becomes clear through our research is that the answers for successful planning do not come from planners, *or* citizens, *or* the private sector, but all three. One planning officer in Middlesbrough commented that '…planning is not the be all and end all. But without it, some of the other economic and social ends and objectives can't be delivered'. There is a complex mix of *responsibility* and *support* – matching community aspirations with planners' capacity to respond, and of developers' rights with their responsibilities to the environment and communities in which they are working.

Central must be an affirmation of planners' commitment to creating public value, which involves an understanding of how planners can marshal the combined power of the private and third sector and communities themselves to deliver sustainable places.

Independent experts: The professional and public value

Planners place great stock in their neutrality. But planning is increasingly politically contestable. We have made the point that it can not be taken for granted that public bodies will always pursue the public good. So the planners' relationship as an employee of the council, which has a local political mandate, or as a consultant to the private sector, which has commercial interests, can undermine their perceived independence and neutrality. As a result, the public's perception of planning professionals, regardless of their professional ethics, can be compromised. Many people equate planners with the interests of power seemingly beyond their grasp – either through the planners' technocratic expert knowledge or political affiliation.

This perception is all the more remarkable in the context of the emergence of new professional identities that are more engaged, ethically conscious and focused on public value[xv]. As a planning officer in Milton Keynes told us, 'you genuinely feel you can make the world a better place'.

These professionals understand that they are inescapably moral agents, whose work depends upon public trust for its success. And they're committed to the role; a council officer in Middlesbrough told us: 'I might earn a lot more money…if I worked in the private sector. And a lot of people don't understand that planners work way beyond their paid hours because we're committed to the job we're doing.' Most planners we spoke to – in the public and private sector – instinctively felt this ethical dimension.

The story of the Future Planner is about the new ways that their substantial knowledge and expertise is used and shared. The changes we have outlined have recast the planners' relationship to decision-making and authority, lessening the extent to which the public are inclined to defer to pure technical knowledge. To be an independent agent of public value, the planner needs an open, collaborative model of expertise. They increasingly need to 'listen differently', with a willingness to let the public ask different and challenging questions[xvi].

The formal move to a spatial planning system puts a strong emphasis on the technical skills needed by the planner, be it urban design, the ability to undertake sustainability appraisal or the skills to talk to and negotiate with diverse interests. At the same time, as Sir John Egan has pointed out[xvii], planners also need to develop the relational skills to lead the process of 'co-production'. This collaborative spirit will be central in developing the expert planner of the 21st century. For example, those we spoke to were keen to stress the importance of knowing the limits of their own knowledge – of knowing when, where and how to draw on skills they don't have.

In Tower Hamlets we were told by a planner that '…you need enough knowledge to identify an issue…Then it's about making the connections to the right resources'. And we found this role well articulated by a participant in our workshop: 'planners bring spatial awareness to others' knowledge'. In The Wash, this applied to shoreline management. The planner might not be an experienced engineer but would need to be able to 'hold their own' in representing the local authority, pulling together the contributions of others and the lessons from and local experiences of fellow professionals.

Regeneration of the Gresham ward, Middlesbrough

In Gresham, Middlesbrough Council proposed to knock down 1,500 houses and replace them with 750. Unsurprisingly, this has sparked significant controversy.

One planning officer we spoke told us "…it's obviously a very emotive subject. But the feedback we get isn't always objections they can *technically* use to object and comment with. So we have to think about how planning processes fit into that wider picture, because the LDF (*Local Development Framework*) process has a social impact. We're not about stifling that input; we want to help them say what they think, not stop them."

The controversy sparked by these proposals offers a story of how planners themselves relate their expertise to both the public and the politicians. Those we spoke to see their expertise as a resource that can contribute to the development of good policy and outcomes. They aren't responsible for making political decisions based on their professional authority. But they acknowledge the political nature of the decisions – and see their role as facilitating the expression of people's emotive and political opinions in the legal framework that planning works within.

New roles for the planner

Central to our understanding of the new role of the planner is the need to reinforce their independence, which involves acknowledging their position as experts in the sense implied above. That process also includes planners communicating and developing the new roles that sit with the changes we have outlined.

Expressing what their skills are within those roles is equally important. The planner increasingly has a key role in project design and project management for the delivery of public value. To do that, the future planner will need to be able to:

• negotiate
• be independent
• mediate
• communicate
• collaborate
• understand people in their communities
• be able to think in scenarios

Through our research we have identified four potential future roles for the planner.

Planners are likely to be required to work across these roles; traces of this fusion can already be found in the way planners currently work.

1] The Planner as Enabler

Planners hold great expertise in law and policy, and in the immediate experiences of the built or natural environment - what we might call the development ecology of a place. But they also develop immense experience of how the system works. Planners increasingly see their role as using that wisdom to *enable* a vision for an area to emerge – helping people express their aspirations, and using their knowledge and networks to help it become reality. This means effective use of the development management process to secure public, private and community agreement; knowing how developers can help deliver public value; and how relationships within councils work. These collaborative processes are part of bridging the democratic deficit; for example, the planner could play a key role in integrating the Community Plan undertaken by the LSP with spatial planning led by the Local Authority.

2] The Scenario Planner

Scenario planning, pioneered by companies such as Shell in the 1970s, derives from the growth of uncertainty and risk in today's world and the consequent impossibility of knowing precisely what the future holds. These sets of scenarios are essentially collaboratively produced stories and rehearsals of the future designed to make visible different possible development forces, and to shape the move from a possible to a preferred future.

Scenario planning will become increasingly important in the future, as the new Government policy on planning for housing identifies it as a key tool[xviii]. As a leader of scenario building, the planners' role will be to reconnect cause and effect by making explicit the implications of action, and placing a responsibility on developers and citizens to recognise the long-term risk and value of development. Scenario planning helps to address the empowerment deficit by placing flexibility and responsiveness at the centre of planning for the future.

3] The Provocateur

There is an important role to be played by a 'trouble making' planner, questioning people's assumptions and offering alternative contexts and perspectives. This vital role disrupts dogmatic assumptions in order to support innovation and change in the built and natural environment. In connecting what happens locally with national or global changes, the planner becomes part of the process of helping people, politicians and the private sector understand the implications of their actions.

This is particularly true, with regards to planning, in the context of potentially divisive projects where understanding local value versus public value is central. Similarly, questioning the demands and assumptions of the private sector from the stand-point of a community, and vice versa, can be a vital tool in developing consensus. Such 'provocation', through constructive challenging and questioning, can be important in addressing the public value deficit we highlighted by actively engaging with perceptions of local and public value, and the connections between them.

4] The Planner as Judge

In a world of multi-channel democracy planners will need to find a role as independent arbitrators of global, national, local, individual and future values. This would require a shift in the planners' relationship to the council structure and a level of autonomy. Disconnecting themselves from perceived vested interests, and being demonstrably independent, as we have mentioned, is important for reasserting planners' professional ethic of neutral expertise. Part of this involves being clear about the potential and limits of their role – of their position and power – and exactly what their independence means. That also means being open about their relationships with politicians, the private sector and the public. We therefore support the suggestions made in the Local Government White Paper and by Kate Barker that the status of the Chief Planner within the local authority should be raised, as an important first step in addressing these issues.

5 - Propositions for supporting the next age of planners

"In the regeneration of Newham, planning was one tool in the box. It sat alongside political will, lobbying, the removal of barriers to investment and bringing in transport- for example we have new routes like the DLR. That then created the opportunity to create a discussion about the balance of the best uses of resources, and how to ensure physical development leads to wider regeneration. But that argument only happens when the investment comes."
Seema Manchanda, Head of Physical Regeneration and Development, Newham, interview for Future Planners project

Our research shows that planners acknowledge how their roles are changing, and that they are adapting to the new challenges. We need to think how best to *support* and *develop* that adaptation. Future planners need mechanisms which work with the grain of the changes described in the preceding chapter, but stop short of *major* planning system change – for which there is little appetite. The following propositions are designed to suggest how the current system can support the planners' emerging roles and meet the four planning deficits we outlined previously; democratic, skills, empowerment and public value.

a] Options for Addressing the Democratic Deficit
The following propositions are designed to reinvigorate the democratic legitimacy of planning through emphasising collaboration and empowerment.

Building citizen awareness & engagement in place-making
The changing democratic context suggests that we need to embrace a more inclusive participatory planning system which helps people become more aware of, and more engaged in, their local environment – regardless of whether they work, live or play there. Equally important, however, is that people are then given sufficient resources to do something to change and improve it. The first step is recognising that people's everyday actions are of inescapable significance to planning – but are outside of its direct *control*.

Significant new community 'infrastructure' tools are emerging nationally and internationally, using innovative approaches to new technologies[xix]. Investing in the dissemination of current best practice in this area will be important in engaging citizens with planning. This is beyond communication; central has to be both connecting action with consequence, and supporting people's ability to respond. Planners and planning need to recognise people's informal interactions with their neighbourhoods; with the people, buildings and amenities in them.

The following list provides some best practice examples of how government can invest in building citizen awareness, engagement & social capital.

Collective Visioning
Engaging citizens in the development of collective futures using innovative tools such as those used by Urban Tapestries[xx], as well as Neighbourhood email exchange, Google Maps and Google Earth[xxi], can help the collaborative development of an area vision. These collective 'social mappings' could be facilitated by planners but driven by the aspirations of people – building on the good practice of, for example, *Planning for Real*[xxii] and *Enquiry by Design*[xxiii].

Equally as important as collective visioning is the role of these new tools, that often incorporate increasingly useful GPS systems and easy-to-use software, can have in mapping an individual's or a community's impact on the wider world. They can help to connect what we do, or purchase, or talk about, to the consequences across a broad range of areas.

Communicating Planning

Increasing the public's understanding and awareness of the planning process through improving public communication is vital. At a basic level, this involves communicating what is happening, changing and being proposed in an area more clearly. For example, local planning authorities could invest in more tangible, understandable and explicit planning notices that physically and graphically mark out the size and purpose of the proposed development and its public value.

There are three further aspects however. Firstly, planning needs to communicate the 'bigger picture' of which it is a part. That means helping people understand more clearly how change happens and what their role, and the role of planners, is in that change. *Planning Aid* is one example of where such practice can take place. Secondly, education is fundamental to building awareness about public value and our rights and responsibilities to our environments. It will also help to bridge the gap between the public and the planner. Thirdly, planning needs to use the media more effectively. That includes not only traditional broadcast and print outlets - which are still crucial in the formation of public opinion - but its own 'new' media assets, such as accessible websites and podcasting for example, to make processes and changes transparent.

Neighbourhood Level Communication

Fundamental to delivering community neighbourhood engagement is the basic infrastructure for neighbourhood conversation. Historically, when more people in a community lived similar lives, communication and engagement within the neighbourhood could be relied upon to happen informally. As a response to changes in patterns of living, there are useful and informative ways for people to use new technologies to communicate and organise informally at a neighbourhood level. For example, there could be a use for neighbourhood Myspace-style networks. Equally, street bulletin boards and community email addresses could play a role.

The Local Government White Paper proposes to introduce a duty on local authorities to ensure that proper participation is a fundamental part of how they work. But whilst there is much rhetoric around participation, we still have not fully built the framework that would be consistent with the changes we have outlined. The bottom line is that great tools and awareness campaigns will do little to empower communities if they are not matched with independent resources to fund participation, and to buy-in independent expert help where needed. 'Community Chest' style planning funds should be available to local groups to fund their participation.

Visible and accountable planning powers

Our research suggests that addressing the democratic deficit involves making planning powers clearly identified and accountable.

That could come, for example, through a strong and democratically accountable leader endowed with planning powers, or councilors elected with a planning mandate who are well placed to make the tough decisions that sustainable development requires.

Currently place-making is not a significant political agenda at local authority level; although we vote for local councillors the selection of the planning committee is largely opaque and therefore one step removed from the democratic process. A few elected mayors have taken on place-making; creating and leading a strong vision for an area whilst forging a stronger connection between voters and the broad place-shaping process. These leaders could also be chosen in 'prime ministerial' fashion, as the identified leader within the leading council group – fully accountable to council and the local electorate.

It is interesting to note that often, when given the choice to have a mayor, communities have voted against the idea. It seems to have proved most successful in communities with a strong, established sense of identity, and where a leader is well known. Further analysis on where this approach is appropriate, and why, is recommended and could provide some useful insight into place shaping. Local governance arrangements need to be contextually appropriate and based on community consent.

Ken Livingstone

"I think the reason we were able to publish the London Plan in such a remarkably short space of time is that we had the backing of an elected mayor."
Debbie McMullen, interview for Future Planners research

As elected Mayor, Ken Livingstone has been able to drive significant change in policy and practice. The focal point and backing provided by a democratically accountable figure provides an opportunity to implement specific programmes of development and policy.

We found that the challenge for a Mayoral vision, especially on the scale of an area such as London but equally in our research in Middlesbrough, is still managing specific local impact and being open to challenge and discussion from opposing opinions. But the Mayoral role often exemplifies how greater democratic legitimacy provides the space and *potential* for stronger leadership – through accountability, responsibility and visibility.

Raising the status of the Local Strategic Partnership [LSP]

Successful 'Local Strategic Partnerships' (LSPs) provide an opportunity for an alternative and inclusive framework for engagement and democratic legitimacy. They potentially move beyond a focus on what we have called residential democracy, pulling together a broad range of local 'stakeholders'. Yet at present some LSPs appear unfit for purpose, being under-supported and consequently little more than a collection of local authority officers. Our research suggested that currently the LSP process often fails to attract key decision makers from many of the stakeholder organizations because they feel real power lies elsewhere.

LSPs are responsible for creating Sustainable Community Strategies, yet the planning policy which is largely responsible for *delivery* remains outside their remit. These two policy frameworks have considerable overlap and synergy and yet remain separate. They often replicate each other. A shift to combining the two would integrate the production processes for the Local Area Agreement, Local Development Framework and Community Strategies. We advocate a combination of the visioning of the Sustainable Community Strategy and the rigour and delivery focus expected from spatial planning. Further guidance can be found in Planning Together: LSPs and Spatial Planning a practical guide DCLG Jan 2007.

Three components are fundamental to achieving this:

1 Mayors, or clearly identified, democratically accountable leaders, acting as chairs of LSPs;

2 The composition of LSPs being a consistent and robust fusion of local authority, economic, environmental and social interests;

3 The involvement of a corporate director professionally qualified in planning.

To succeed, a wider remit for the LSP may be needed. Wycombe District Council, for example, has set up a 'Planning Forum', steered by the local authority's cabinet and LSP, but including business, planning agents, community groups and parish councils. Multi-area and multi-agency agreements are further examples of current practice embracing wider collaboration across sectors and places.

Presently and despite the multi-sector composition of the LSP, the outcomes are focused on the responsibilities of the public sector. The process does not bind private or community sector partners to integrating LSP objectives into their own activities[xxiv]. We suggest that in return for having a place on the LSP, the private and community sector partners can be reasonably expected to reflect LSP objectives in their own plans and programmes. Further research in this area could provide other similar innovations to strengthen the effectiveness of collaborative working through LSPs.

The key to a successful outcome is ensuring that the parties involved feel the process engenders results – that the LSP holds the power to follow its proposals through. These changes would promote greater accountability, help counteract 'silo thinking', and add consistency to the process while endorsing the legitimacy of participatory democracy.

b] Options for Addressing the Skills Deficit

"Building thousands of new homes means you are bringing thousands of new people into an area.
And the question is, are we addressing the social issues or potentially compounding them? We think
we've got some solutions - but we don't know."
Planner, inner city London, interview for Future Planners research

Without the resources to navigate the complex changes we outlined above, the planner can be insufficiently trained in the networking and project management roles they are increasingly asked to play. The following propositions are designed to enable the recruitment and retention of planners with appropriate skills, and provide continuous professional development.

Recruitment and story banks

A vital part of making sure planners can respond to the challenges they face is making their skills more visible and tangible to the wider public. The esteem planners are held in by the media and the public has a sizeable impact on the morale of the profession and its desirability as a career. Communicating the bigger story of which planning is a part will be important in giving the profession a renewed sense of purpose. Both of these have an impact on the ability to recruit, train and retain the best talent and skills. This is partly about communication, but also public recognition from policy makers of the important role planners have in place-making.

One way to do this would be set up a 'Story Bank' for planners. This would be an open online resource for planners to share the challenges they have faced, and the particular and innovative ways they have sought to respond. A similar project found success at Xerox, where company 'heroes' emerged from their Eureka scheme – a project to share technical and on-the-job knowledge of fellow professionals[xxv]. That proved a useful way to train their teams across the globe, and gave a significant boost in morale. Similar models in planning could help identify local 'heroes and heroines' of the planning system. The practitioner networks the professional bodies already have, and the mechanisms they have for sharing knowledge, could be modified towards the story bank model.

Sharing public and private sector skills

Public and private sector planners share some broad skills, yet their experiences and practices can vary. With collaborative cross-sector working becoming increasingly commonplace, bridging the gaps and creating a dialogue across these practices - between design and adjudication, for example – becomes more important.

One method of achieving this is through approved planning 'evaluators'. These would be locally accredited companies or individuals authorised to carry out local planning evaluations on behalf of local authorities. A locally based "peer-to-peer' evaluation scheme, with appropriate accreditation and checks against conflicts of interest, could help to replenish skills and knowledge at the level of the local authority.

This could be particularly useful in relation to design, where planners now have a key role in deciding what 'good design' is, but are backed towards a largely reactive role by the planning process. The skills picked up would consequently be up to date with the evaluators in touch with market and professional best practice.

It is vital that accreditation remains local to ensure approved 'evaluators' demonstrate an understanding of the opportunities, contexts and constraints relevant to their location. These 'independent approved evaluators' are designed to support the *evaluation* of planning applications in the interest of public value; the *adjudication* and decision making power should remain in the hands of the public sector.

c] Addressing the Empowerment Deficit

"I see the role of the planner increasingly as that of a facilitator. The vision has to come from the community. How you do that is the difficult bit."
Leonora Rozee, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Policy, Planning Inspectorate, interview for Future Planners

Planners often lack the power and legitimacy to be responsive to a dynamic marketplace, innovative social practices at the community level, and growing environmental mandates. These are some suggestions on how to enable a responsive and responsible planning system, with planners that are enabled to work proactively with the private, public and third sector.

Devolving regulatory power: Development Plan Documents

Empowering the local planner should, we recommend, involve creating sufficient flexibility within the regulatory system to address market, social and environmental changes with the aim of achieving public value. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 has created a certain degree of flexibility with regards to accommodating change, with the ability to approve individual development plan documents [DPDs]. These are a collection of documents that together spell out the planning policy for a particular area.

We suggest that planners take full advantage of the flexibility provided by the current system. For example, we encourage the review of DPDs at differential rates in order to keep them aligned to fluid and changing needs, something which is possible under the current system and provides an example of the opportunities within the current framework. This would ensure they are addressing the most pressing issues facing places, such as sustainable regeneration, coastal retreat, or housing growth.

Neighbourhood control of Section 106 or Planning Gain Supplement proceeds

"Community ownership of assets can provide local communities with a financial and social stake in their own areas. So we are announcing a new £30 million fund to encourage local authorities and the third sector to work together to expand community ownership of community assets"
Gordon Brown, Pre-budget report, 6th December 2006[xxvi]

Currently Section 106 Agreements [or planning gain] are negotiated between the private sector and the local authority on behalf of the community. We recommend a redistribution of current planning gain directly to the neighbourhood. This is not about increasing planning gain levied on the private sector but about seeking to change how that levy is distributed and who distributes it. This will not only engage communities in the development process by giving them a direct return, but also raise awareness and encourage them to be proactive in planning the future of their place. It would encourage people to take responsibility for addressing the wide-ranging issues within their area.

We see this tool as being particularly applicable to regeneration schemes in deprived areas, so that it does not have a socially or spatially regressive impact, and ideally linked with other regeneration funding initiatives into a single pot. It would also be important to link the resources to an area rather than a specific group or organization.

d] Addressing the Public Value Deficit
We have argued that public value emerges from a dynamic mix of multiple stakeholders, incorporating social, economic, environmental implications and the legacy of physical and social capital. What are the new methods required to support evaluation and adjudication?

Developers undertaking lifecycle risk assessments on all new developments
90% of our urban fabric will be with us in 30 years time[xxvii]. The built and natural environment exists beyond the life-time of current stakeholders and their interests, generating value and risk throughout its lifecycle. This has social, environmental and economic implications that are currently underestimated in assessing the public value of a new development. We propose a whole-life risk assessment, which accounts for the issues potentially emerging throughout the life of the development. This could help embed lifecycle thinking into the design process, safeguarding the long term sustainability of our neighbourhoods.

Sustainable development ratings a requirement for all new developments
Evaluating sustainability is an established part of planning which is delivered through a mixture of regulatory requirements (such as for Environmental Impact Assessment) and best practice (local sustainability checklists). We recommend that new development proposals should be given a sustainability rating which integrates environmental and social value and risk.

This would present the findings of the various appraisals in a straightforward, non-technical table, in the manner of energy star ratings on fridges, driving more sustainable development through engaging consumer awareness and demand.

We suggest that planners take charge of managing this process as part of their role in advocating sustainable development. These assessments would need to be easily accessible and easy to read in order to help develop participation and a sense of ownership.

Citizen Planning Juries

Addressing the issue of democratic legitimacy which reinforces public value by connecting to local and collective interest is a key issue identified in this research. One method of tackling this, and of maintaining the democratic legitimacy of the decision making process in planning, is the use of planning juries which mirror the legal jury system. The jury should be selected from a national pool to maintain a broad public value focus and to avoid the dominance of short term, financial interests or local 'NIMBY-ism'.

In addition Citizen Planning Juries could usefully input to a vision for planning policy and add democratic legitimacy to how it is created - nationally, regionally and locally. This will help to increase engagement in national, regional and local planning policy. Juries could be particularly valuable in relation to development that is locally controversial, such as traveller sites.

6 - Long live the future planner

"Urban planning is, in short, facing a 'paradigm crisis' as its classical foundations are exposed as anachronistic, dangerous and intellectually spurious"[xxviii]
Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin, Splintering Urbanism

"Urban design and land use planning regulations have the potential to facilitate a less energy intensive society, while balancing a range of wider economic and social objectives."[xxix]
Sir Nicholas Stern, The Stern Review: The economics of climate change

It has become clear that the paradigm crisis Graham and Marvin speak of might herald the ultimate demise of the overly prescriptive *plan*, but it should usher in a new age of the *planner*.

To support this, there is a need to progress the debate beyond the historic but increasingly less relevant ideological conflict between private economic interest and a state-centred model of environmental and social value. This has too often left planners side-lined, caught up in defending the speed of their procedures rather than developing and articulating the substance of their role. The debate needs to move towards a focus on the relationship between local and public value.

To help deliver successful planning, recognition of the changes outside planning is vital. These are shifts in how the system, of which planning is a part, works. They are reshaping the relationship between the planned-for and the planned-by. A focus solely on planning and its legislation fails to address that broader point.

One cannot ignore that planning is an activity wrapped in contestability and contention. Legislation might not eradicate disagreement, but responding appropriately to the changes outside planning will build the legitimacy for planners to grasp the leadership needed to take difficult and contestable decisions.

It is time for planners to look outwards and tell a new story about themselves as independent agents of public value working across diverse sectors and interests, to champion inclusive and sustainable development. Only then will collectively produced, democratically legitimate principles be embedded at the heart of the future of our places.

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