

Planning for sustainability a new agenda for spatial planning

Mike Hayes

National Planning Forum – vice chair for professions

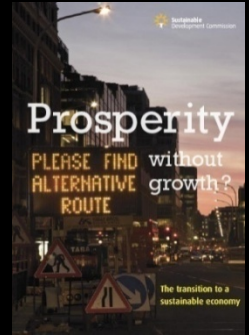
Every society clings to a myth by which it lives. Ours is the myth of economic growth. For the last five decades the pursuit of growth has been the single most important policy goal across the world. The global economy is almost five times the size it was half a century ago. If it continues to grow at the same rate the economy will be 80 times that size by the year 2100.

This extraordinary ramping up of global economic activity has no historical precedent. It's totally at odds with our scientific knowledge of the finite resource base and the fragile ecology on which we depend for our survival. And it has already been accompanied by the degradation of an estimated 60% of the world's ecosystems.

Today we find ourselves faced with the imminent end of the era of cheap oil, the prospect (beyond the recent bubble) of steadily rising commodity prices, the degradation of forests, lakes and soils, conflicts over land use, water quality, fishing rights and the momentous challenge of stabilising concentrations of carbon in the global atmosphere. And we face these tasks with an economy that is fundamentally broken, in desperate need of renewal.

In these circumstances, a return to business as usual is not an option. Prosperity for the few founded on ecological destruction and persistent social injustice is no foundation for a civilised society. Economic recovery is vital. Protecting people's jobs – and creating new ones – is absolutely essential. But we also stand in urgent need of a renewed sense of shared prosperity. A commitment to fairness and flourishing in a finite world.

Prosperity consists in our ability to flourish as human beings – within the ecological limits of our finite planet. The challenge for our society is to create the conditions under which this is possible. It is the most urgent task of our times.



'Prosperity without growth?'

Professor Tim Jackson, Director of the Research Group on Lifestyles, Values and Environment at the University of Surrey
Economics Commissioner : Sustainable Development Commission

What might the world look like?

- Less travel, fewer cars and greater use of public transport, cycling and walking
- More 'local' - and community living
- Less disposable income – fewer shops; but a resurgence for town centres
- Expansion of internet retail, learning, communication, entertainment
- More intensive use of rural and open landscapes – and even more intensive use of urban landscape
- More investment in sea defence, flood and river management and green infrastructure
- Fewer people working for fewer hours
- Increased volunteering and community activity
- A different economy – high speed broadband, low carbon, biotechnology, life sciences, digital, advanced manufacturing, financial services, 'traditional' manufacturing for goods with high transport costs
- Low carbon, factory made housing on medium/high-density developments with high investment in community facilities and local services, connected to public transport or integrated with existing towns
- A different design of space and place to adapt to impact of climate change

So what are the implications for spatial planning?

I Environmental challenges for spatial planning

- Understanding the implications of climate change mitigation + adaptation in the short, medium and long term
- The technologies of carbon reduction
- Energy + water supply
- Protecting habitat + environment
- Increasing bio-diversity
- Delivering effective sustainability
- Pressure on urban, rural and open landscapes for food, bio-fuel, renewable energy, flood management, local recreation and leisure
- Urban heat island effect
- Air quality
- Noise management and reduction

2 Economic challenges for spatial planning

- Funding aging infrastructure replacement, upgrading and maintenance
- Energy + water supply
- Enabling business start up + growth
- Providing the new infrastructures for technology
- Regional disparity in economic performance
- The future of retail + town centres
- Finding new models for development, regeneration and mixed use
- Location and land supply for a post recession, green economy
- Reducing the need to travel by private car and road haulage
- Retro-fitting housing and commercial premises to improve environmental performance

3 Societal challenges for spatial planning

- Understanding the implications of climate change + the technologies of carbon reduction for lifestyle and behaviours in the short, medium and long term
- Dealing with the impact of local unemployment
- Homes – shortfall in numbers + affordability + infrastructure and services to support new communities
- Ecotowns v sustainable urban extensions v retro-fitor all three?
- Turning housing (estates) into (sustainable) communities – new mechanisms for delivery to achieve quality outcomes
- Regional disparity in wealth + quality of life
- Local wealth + quality of life disparities
- Resilience, community safety and extreme events – particularly in protecting an increasingly elderly population
- Responding to community led and single interest groups

4 Process challenges for spatial planning

- New models for development, regeneration and mixed use
- Understanding place-making
- Achieving high standards of design and sustainability performance
- Making LDF's work
- Making integrated regional strategies work
- Achieving coherence from PPS/NPS/RIS/LDF – the golden thread
- Reducing bureaucracy, complexity and overloading
- Maintain efficiency, but improve effectiveness
- Achieving confidence in the evidence, targets and outcomes of planning
- Embedding development management to achieve quality outcomes and effective use of resources
- Developing skills in development economics and the metrics of carbon reduction
- Discovering what works and communicating best practice
- Making place making, infrastructure and planning central local government activities
- Overcoming the crisis of decision making and the 'democratic deficit', building confidence in new agencies

We need a new strategic approach to spatial planning

A ‘big conversation’ at national, regional and local levels to find win/win solutions rather than trade offs and which engages communities, politicians and developers.

Evidence, sound analysis and practical options; clarifying a shared vision for each area to meet 21st century needs and assessing its spatial implications and impacts - a more coherent and better understood planning that enables subsidiarity, embraces better governance and clearer decision making, is iterative and hierarchical – particularly at regional and sub-regional scales.

Longer term strategic planning at all levels including the proposed ‘Infrastructure UK’ advisory body to ensure climate change challenges are met by taking appropriate action on transport, energy, green infrastructure and utilities.

Less tinkering with the planning system more focus on achieving better outcomes via better engagement with people.

A ‘back to basics’ approach that test assumptions about land use and landscape, regeneration, transport, town centres, the location of business and homes and builds new visions and strategies to meet 21st century needs.

... and at a practical level

More joined up policy and decision making supported by sound national spatial planning with input from Infrastructure UK – and less legislation.

Single regional strategies and sub-regional plans that integrate transport, utilities, green infrastructure, and respond to climate change through the intelligent location of economic development, new homes and retrofitting existing buildings and places.

Local plans that set the framework for local decisions and create sustainable communities by reducing flood risk and carbon emissions and adapting to the new economic, social and environmental conditions.

Integrate the new models for development finance, regeneration, housing supply and tenure and with plan-making .

Supporting sustainability and climate change initiatives at local level – e.g. CAN, Transition Towns, local food production, new local meeting places, local green infrastructure, facilities for cycling and traffic reduction, youth centres.

Co-ordinate delivery with up to date spatial plans and infrastructure strategies – delivery as the outcome, not the input!

Provide the spatial framework for a new, more active, government-led industrial policy driving growth and creating high value jobs – building on PPS4.

Develop the skills that climate change and carbon reduction via strategic plan-making by encouraging leadership and mentoring.

A National Planning Forum contribution

- Strengthening leadership across sectors
- Developing both local and strategic responses – identifying innovation and best practice,
- Facilitating the big conversation – values/ethics/process/outcome/delivery/choices/policy
- Research – building on and working with the Foresight Project
- Creating shared agendas and joint commitment across sectors
- Advocate a new approach to address new and pressing challenges
- Critical friend to government
- Mentoring senior officers and chief executives
- Develop individual sector responses:
 - Local government
 - Business
 - NGO's
 - Professions
 - Central government