EDGE

Planning for the Future
Roundtable
30th September 2020

SUMMARY Document

a 'voluntary' multi-disciplinary, self-selecting
built and natural environment think-tank

See www.edgedebate.com

Edge Planning for the Future Roundtable - Summary

1. Givens:
    1. It is essential to protect and enhance biodiversity & the natural environment
    2. There is effectively a legal requirement to achieve a net-zero carbon built environment by 2050
    3. We already know what works
    4. A collaborative (joined-up) approach is needed

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2. The climate and biodiversity emergency needs to be the overriding focus of any proposals for changing the planning system.

   Any changes must be closely co-ordinated with more ambitious and well-enforced building regulations and infrastructure delivery.

   Both mitigation and adaptation are essential

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3. Any proposal for overhauling the current planning system should pass a series of tests, including :

- Resource efficiency (land & resources)
- Integration of planning & building control
- Good and clearer guidance
- Putting nature and sustainable design first
- Performance - clear and verifiable GHG reductions & use of energy
- Learning from experience

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4. Retention and re-use of existing buildings and fabric should be the default position with demolition only justifiable on the basis of sequential tests involving:

    - overall (whole life) energy/carbon savings
    - net bio-diversity gain
    - social benefit

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5. Planning proposals should pass a Sustainable Development Test involving:

- Connectivity: access to public transport and amenities
- Decarbonisation: inc. EV charging infrastructure
- Resource infrastructure: water, energy
- Ecology/Land Quality Priority Assessment
- Potable water management
- Renewable energy infrastructure
- Resilience

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6. New developments/codes should deliver:
    - a 75-80% reduction in CO_2 emissions by 2025
    - net-zero CO_2 ready by 2030
    - verified out-turn performance on emissions
    - bio-diversity net gain
    - overheating and flood-risk mitigation.

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7. Many technical issues can be pre-codified, e.g.

- Daylight
- Avoiding overheating
- Energy
- Wind (safety & comfort)
- Light pollution
- Acoustics

But also many inappropriate/outdated requirements which should be removed

Need pathfinder Local Authorities to innovate and drive requirements

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8. Things should perform well:
    - Is deregulation able to improve design quality?
    - Move to smart regulation & (high) standards that work
    - Current system too slow
    - About better guidance, digital planning, more resources

Front loading the system

- Public engagement difficult for strategic planning
- Single sustainable development test – simple, accessible & works!

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9. Codes need to achieve the right thing

Codes should be :

- Location specific
- Design tools
- Flexible (site by site)
- Tangible (real places)
- Gradual (as sites come forward)
- Verifiable;

… & should mainly deal with:

- Land use
- Movement
- Street types
- Build form
- Rainwater management
- Public realm, open space and tree cover;

Design coding should primarily deal with sustainable urban design issues.

… and should stop short of defining architectural style.

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10. Working with codes

- Design codes can demand increase standards for dealing with climate change (e.g. Eddington/NW Cambridge)
- Should be co-ordinated with wider vision for a development
- Who, in practice, will produce the new design codes?
- Who will manage the community engagement?
- What are the skills, time and resources required (& afforded)
- What is the life span of a design code
- Codes need to balance prescription and flexibility
- Will the codes be ambitious enough?
- Will they be monitored during delivery & beyond completion

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11. Highways

- No mention of traffic decarbonisation in Planning White Paper. It's as if PPG13 never existed.
- Much new development dependent or predicated on the car
- Will codes address these issues at all?
- Lots about streets – little about role of highways authorities
- Will highways authorities be engaged? Will they be willing to be engaged?
- They've messed up a lot of codes in the past
- Good Manual for Streets being revised
- Can Active Travel England (new quango) help?

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12. Design review issues:

- Poor schemes can still accord with a code
- Lack of reference to adjacent plots etc.
- Short term vs long term
- National code + specific masterplan could work
- Ambiguity on zero carbon – what can be delivered by a local code?
- Plans for future zero carbon, overheating etc.
- Performance

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13. Land Use framework:

- Digitised planning yes but complete and multi-layered incorporating all of what we already know*
- Information to be open source
- Systems for mapping need to work together
- Designed to facilitate an evidence-based approach
- Bio-diversity critical – need to manage natural capital as complete eco-systems
- Bio-diversity also requires a fine-grained, local approach
- Cross-authority strategic management & systems approach necessary
- Proactive strategic planning required

* Physical, social & economic data

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14. Local Authority – view from trenches

LAs need:

- freeing up to allow focus on local issues
- a system that pulls everything together relating to individual place
- 3-D planning information system
- adequate resources and skills to:
  - improve and monitor development quality;
  - respond to the climate and biodiversity emergency; and
  - allow existing systems to continue during transition while preparing new local plans.

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15. Regions – problems with new housing :

- Apparent over-emphasis on aesthetics & look (beauty)
- Lack of connectivity
- Distributor roads splitting communities
- Poor public realm
- Maximising car parking capacity

Solutions

- Frontage access
- Location specific codes
- Filtered permeability (car storage rather than short journeys)
- All streets connected streets
- SUDS , ponds , biophilic design

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16. Completed projects:

- to be audited for compliance with planning requirements
- a significant proportion of major developments to be subject to in-depth research studies.
- rapid and robust enforcement processes to be in place
- Both audit and enforcement processes to be adequately and permanently funded.

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17. Coding recommendations:

- Location-specific codes to be developed for growth areas, based on the national code
- Don't waste time on generic regional codes
- Producing effective and usable coding is a highly skilled activity and takes time – adequate resources and required to make it work.

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18. A clear policy trajectory is required, delivering and providing for :

- Reductions in energy use (annual & peak)
- CO_2 reductions sooner rather than later
- A consistent, step-by-step transition from fossil fuels to renewables
- Local leadership (wherever viable)
- Help to the wider market
- Continuous improvement