

Prime Minister ④



Minister for Planning
and Regional Affairs

Department of the Environment
2 Marsham Street
London SW1 3EB

Telephone 01-212 3434

28 July 1986
R30h

Dear Prime Minister

On 19 June Nicholas Ridley sent you a copy of the strategic planning guidance for the South East. That mentioned, that more detailed strategic guidance would be provided for London in due course. We are now taking the first steps towards preparing that guidance for which, following the abolition of the GLC, the Secretary of State is responsible.

I attach a copy of a letter I have today sent to Miss Hamwee, chairman of the London Planning Advisory Committee, setting out our views on the scope of the guidance and a possible timetable. We are circulating it widely for consultation, inviting comments by 3 October.

I am writing in similar terms to all Members for London constituencies.


THE LORD ELTON



Department of the Environment
2 Marsham Street
London SW1 3EB

From the Minister of State

Telephone 01-212 3434

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Dear Councils

THE AGENDA FOR STRATEGIC GUIDANCE IN LONDON

In our circular on Transitional Matters (circular 30/85) we undertook to consult LPAC and other bodies about the scope and content of the strategic guidance that the Secretary of State might issue to assist the London boroughs in the preparation of their Unitary Development Plans. The Secretary of State will look to you for advice on the matters that might be covered by that guidance. This letter therefore sets out the Government's thinking on the coverage of the guidance and a possible timetable.

During the passage of the Local Government Bill it was stressed that the responsibility for most planning decisions should rest with the boroughs. It follows that the Secretary of State's strategic guidance should cover only those matters which cannot be dealt with by any one borough on its own account. Similarly guidance should be limited to land use matters which are the proper concern of the planning system.

As you know on 19 June the Secretary of State issued strategic guidance for the South East region as a whole. This was in response to the Regional Statement prepared by SERPLAN. Within London, of course, the current strategic document is the Greater London Development Plan (GLDP) which was approved in 1976. The proposed alterations to the GLDP were treated as having been withdrawn as from 1 April 1986, though no doubt much of the background work which was undertaken will continue to be useful to us. The responsibility for providing strategic guidance now rests with the Secretary of State and it is important to move forward on this front as quickly as possible. The guidance should not be as detailed as the GLDP, but should rather take the form of a fairly brief document which will provide a basis for the preparation of the Unitary Development Plan and enable the Secretary of State to issue the necessary commencement orders.

The guidance, seems likely to express the objectives of facilitating development and the jobs that go with it, revitalising older urban areas, providing a wide choice of housing for Londoners and preserving the open spaces, fine views, surrounding countryside and other amenities which are valued features of the Capital. It will also stress the fact that London's continuing prosperity is necessary for the well-being of the national economy and thus seek to ensure that, within London, industry and commerce enjoy as much freedom as possible to grow and adapt.

We will no doubt wish to preface the guidance by a brief discussion of the major issues facing London. This statement will set the context for the consideration of the individual topics on which the guidance will concentrate.

In the paper which the Department issued in June 1984 a provisional list of topics which strategic guidance could cover was set out. These were the general level of housing provision in each borough, the provision for new commercial and industrial development, mineral extraction, major transport links for which development plans should make provision and the maintenance of the Green Belt. We would, however, now add one or two other matters arising out of our own thinking since 1984 and discussions with various bodies. Our list, with an indication of the approach which we feel is desirable, is now as follows:

(i) Housing. The distribution of new housing within London is bound to be an important element of strategic guidance. The Secretary of State's response of 19 June to SERPLAN agreed that the housing provisions for the 1990's proposed by SERPLAN for Greater London and the South East provided a reasonable basis on which to bring forward proposals for Structure Plan alterations. However the figure for Greater London (150,000 dwellings including conversions), which was agreed by the GLC, is not broken down between boroughs and is contingent on the success of the continuing efforts to stimulate the provision of private housing in London, both through new build and conversions and on whether demand will reach the level postulated. The Secretary of State would welcome LPAC's views on how the total of 150,000 dwellings should be distributed between the boroughs.

(ii) Commercial and Industrial Development. The continuing health of London's economy and the need to provide jobs for Londoners point to a presumption in favour of development, having regard to all material considerations, unless that development would cause demonstrable harm to interests of acknowledged importance. There are, however, many competing

pressures for development in parts of London, particularly around the City and in the outer west segment. In both these areas there are existing land uses which may wish to preserve, such as open land in the outer area and housing around the City. An assessment is needed of the extent and nature of these different pressures and whether guidance should be given as to the best ways of accommodating them. For example, is the concentration on strategic centres adopted in the GLDP still justified? In contrast we will also need to examine how best land use planning can contribute to the task of revitalising those areas where development and jobs are scarce.

I note that you have asked your Chief Planner to prepare a report on retail development in and around London. Clearly the location of major retail developments and the extent to which they impinge upon existing centres is a matter of importance to London. You will be aware that our general policy on this was set out in Patrick Jenkin's statement of 5 July 1985. You are also, I am sure, aware of a SERPLAN Working Party on this topic.

One important element of commercial development, at least in central and west London, is tourist accommodation. I am pleased to know that you have decided to nominate a representative to serve on the London Joint Tourism Forum. The Secretary of State for Employment has just published a progress report on how tourism has developed since 'Pleasure, Leisure and Jobs and the Business of Tourism', was published in July 1985. This includes a response to the report commissioned by the ETB into London's tourist accommodation needs in the 1990s. That report highlighted the shortage of suitable accommodation in London, particularly in the central area. Nicholas Ridley will be writing to you and to the boroughs about this and consideration will need to be given, in consultation with the ETB and the LVCB, to ways of ameliorating this problem.

(iii) Transport and Land Use. The close inter-relationship between transport and land use will be taken into account in framing strategic guidance. It will need to include a statement on the Department of Transport programme of trunk road improvements in London and on any policies for public transport which impinge directly on land use. It will need to take account of the findings from the DTP's assessment studies of 4 of London's major traffic corridors, on which the Stage I reports are expected later this year and it will need to have regard to the current consideration by SERPLAN of the implications of their

regional statement and the Secretary of State's guidance on the South East, for transport planning within the region, including London. The Secretary of State for Transport, as provided under the Local Government Act, will be issuing guidance on traffic management in London after consulting with the Borough Associations and the police.

(iv) Green Belt and Open Land. As Circular 14/84 says the essential characteristic of Green Belts is their permanence. Protection of the Metropolitan Green Belt will continue to be an important consideration affecting the pattern of development in London. The aim should be to work up development strategies which ensure its long-term protection and secure the fullest possible use of urban land which can be made available for development, including land which is currently derelict and also vacant or underused land in public ownership.

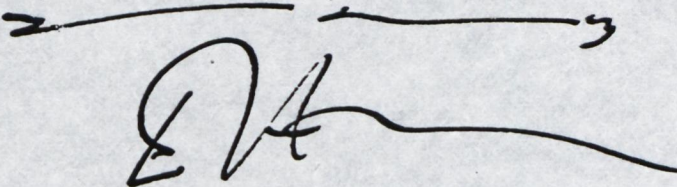
Open land, including both the Green Belt and the smaller space within the urban area is of recreational, educational and ecological importance. This will include significant areas of agricultural importance, including horticultural and associated businesses, all of which require consideration in the strategic planning process. In general each borough will be responsible for defining and preserving areas as Metropolitan Open Land. There are, however, some such areas which cannot be dealt with by the individual borough. LPAC may wish to assess whether other areas, besides the Lee Valley Regional Park and the Colne Valley Park, should be selected and maintained as sites of regional recreational value.

(v) Minerals. Although many of the boroughs have neither active mineral workings nor mineral resources suitable for future development, building and road construction require aggregates such as sand and gravel and the cost of transporting them is a significant factor in the delivered price. It will be important therefore that full use should be made of mineral deposits within the London area and the extent to which this would be compatible with environmental, agricultural, and other relevant considerations should be considered. As future supplies of aggregates will increasingly have to be brought from beyond the London area, further wharves and rail distribution depots may be required to provide London's supply of aggregates. The ways in which this demand is to be met will need to be assessed.

(vi) Urban Design. Finally, the unique character of certain parts of London should be retained and enhanced. Often this cannot be dealt with adequately by any one borough acting alone. In particular there is a need to preserve historic and important views and to ensure that development close to the Thames provides a suitable backcloth to the river and does not inhibit public access. The GLDP lays down principles which the boroughs should follow when considering planning applications for high buildings and sets out the areas in which high buildings are inappropriate. Similarly it provides guidance on planning along the Thames. The GLDP, however, was drawn up more than ten years ago and some re-assessment of the guidance would seem timely.

It is important that guidance should be available, as quickly as possible. I appreciate, however, that you will require some time to undertake the work necessary to provide advice. My staff will, of course, also be working on these topics and close liaison between our two organisations will be necessary to ensure that there is no unnecessary duplication. I am sure we can leave it to them to sort out the detailed arrangements. I would be interested in your views on timing. If you feel able to offer advice next summer the Secretary of State should be in a position to issue his guidance in draft in Autumn next year. He will then wish to consult widely before issuing his guidance in final form. Beyond that, of course, there will be a need to monitor trends in London to ensure that the guidance remains relevant. We will need to consider next year the timing of Commencement Orders for UDPs as progress on the strategic guidance becomes clearer.

If you would like to discuss this letter with me I would be happy to do so. I am publishing this letter so that the various bodies interested in strategic guidance will be aware of the agenda I have in mind. I hope that any such bodies which wish to comment will let me have their views by 3 October.



THE LORD ELTON