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PART I

**Planning and the Planning
System**

Introduction: Why Planning Matters

The scope and nature of planning

The purpose of this book is to provide a comprehensive introduction to the subject of town and country planning. It covers the historical background, the development and structure of the modern-day planning system, key policy and legislative areas, along with planning theory, some urban sociology, and more reflective elements. The book seeks to tell the story of planning in an accessible manner and thus to explain how planning works so that readers new to the subject can get an idea of the scope and nature of planning, whilst giving more advanced readers an up-to-date account of planning and providing material for reflection and discussion.

Throughout the text, some key references and important websites are provided. A fuller list of references per chapter entitled Further Reading is provided on the companion website linked to this book (at www.palgrave.com/companion/greed). This provides guidance on source material and identifies key main texts plus ancillary reading. You will also find on this website a set of Tasks to undertake per chapter, including information gathering activities, essays and projects. The book is illustrated with a selection of photographs, diagrams, tables and textboxes. You will find additional illustrative material on the book's website too. You will also find a series of E-Supplements on the web which contain reference material. For example, E-Supplement 1 provides a comprehensive list of legislation, government planning policy guidance, and other official sources which is relevant to most of the chapters.

Whilst providing an accessible and descriptive overview, the book will also incorporate a discursive and conceptual perspective, so that readers are aware of the current debates, conflicts and discussions

within this field. Students often ask '*what is the right answer?*' to a particular planning issue, but the nature of the right answer always depends upon what current theories, standards and ideas are shaping planning practice, and what was right in the past may not be right now. For example in the past, planners used to plan strongly for the needs of the car and this shaped the standards on road widths, housing densities and layout. At present, there is far more emphasis on the needs of the cyclist, pedestrian and public transport user, and this has reshaped our approach to road design and layout principles.

Planning by its very nature is frequently subject to philosophical trends, changes in planning theory, revisions to policy approaches, and changing political priorities. Therefore it is important not only to cover contemporary planning issues and policies, but also to give readers background, perspective and understanding of the foundations and sources of the current planning agenda. Although there have been many changes in policy approaches, the 'same' problems and issues that planners need to tackle remain, particularly those concerned with transport, land use and the environment.

In spite of all the changes in policies and approaches over the years, this book is based on the premise that planning is important and worthwhile. In the United Kingdom land-use planning is essential to help fit everything and everyone into limited space on our small set of islands, whilst retaining a balance between town and countryside. Nearly 80 per cent of the population of Britain lives in urban areas, and while there are still substantial areas of open countryside between the towns and cities, it is misleading to believe that there is room for much more house-building: the areas where there is most pressure for development are generally those areas

where the availability of land is most limited. For example, South East England is much more built up than Northern Scotland and different planning policies and priorities apply.

According to 2011 UK Census results, the United Kingdom has a population of 63.2 million. Eighty per cent of the total 24,410,000 hectares of land is agricultural, although there is actually very little untouched land that is completely undeveloped (Office of National Statistics, 2012). It is not just a matter of numbers in terms of how many houses and people there should be in a particular location, there are also major planning policy issues to be taken into account. For example, policies on the environment, the countryside, transport, the inner city, development and land use, and the social aspects of planning are all within the remit of planning. For example, every time a new housing estate is built on the edge of a city for commuters working in central area offices, the cars generated by the new development will add to the rush-hour congestion in the centre. The next little site development may be the straw that breaks the camel's back. It is hoped that in reading this book you will gain a wider view of the nature of planning, and develop an informed perspective on the different policy approaches, conflicts and options that confront planners.

Rather than seeing planning as a mindless bureaucratic activity, it is hoped that readers will see the benefit and value of planning, as a constructive, beneficial influence in society, which has the potential to make people's lives better. It is envisaged that readers will get a deeper insight into key policy issues, such as environmental issues, transport planning and property development, as well as the wider social and economic aspects of planning. As a result readers will see the issues more clearly and broaden their intellectual horizons in the process, while coming to understand why planning is important and worthwhile.

What is town planning?

Common misconceptions

This section seeks to address some of the commonly held misconceptions about the nature of planning, often gained from the media, and to outline the true

Textbox 1.1 Town Planning According to Keeble

Town planning is the art and science of ordering the land-uses and siting the buildings and communications routes so as to secure the maximum level of economy, convenience and beauty (Keeble, 1969).

scope and nature of planning. People often get the impression that town planning is chiefly concerned with regulation and control. It may also be imagined that planning is chiefly concerned with building new developments, when in fact it is also strongly concerned with the conservation, improvement and management of existing areas. Planning may also be seen as being primarily concerned with built-up urban areas when in fact it is concerned with both town and country.

One type of planning or many?

The modern planning system was established under the Town and Country Planning Act 1947 as part of the wider Post-War Reconstruction programme at the end of the Second World War. At the time the primary emphasis was upon controlling land uses and development and producing actual physical plans, which showed where new building and reconstruction was to take place. This approach is reflected in the definition shown in Textbox 1.1 which was made by a prominent post-war town planner who was famous for his publications on how to build complete new towns from scratch.

So, post-war reconstruction planning was based upon a simplistic physical master plan, blueprint approach, best suited to planning new towns on green-field sites (undeveloped land). Although planning has shifted from its physical map-making origins, it is important not to forget the spatial aspects of planning. Development plans still shape the built environment. Patterns of employment, investment and social well-being continue to show distinct spatial variation between regions, and so '*space matters*', that is the geographical context is still important (Massey 1984). The location of land uses and the placing of settle-

ments have often been established for historical or geographical reasons (such as coal mining) long before modern planning came along. Planning policy, especially in respect of location policy for new housing developments, is influenced by natural factors, such as the extent of flooding, and by the increased likelihood of flooding occurring on low-lying land. But it is the role of the planner to take all these factors into account and manage wisely where and how development takes place.

In reality, planning is about more than just physical land-use control, it incorporates economic, social, environmental and political dimensions, at local, regional and national levels. The visual, architectural and urban design aspects of planning are also very important. Planning also overlaps with the discipline of geography to some degree, both in terms of physical environmental concerns, and the social geography of a highly urbanised society (Dorling 2012). For example, current planning policy is concerned with climate change, transport systems, sustainability, urban regeneration, urban design and social inclusion (Rydin 2011). So there are many different types of planners and many different specialisms within the profession.

Policies or regulations?

Planning law and regulations are important parts of planning, but this is only half the story: planners are also policy-makers. To the outsider town planning may appear to be chiefly concerned with standards and rules about the size of plots, road widths and the layout of new developments. Many people's first contact with the planners is in relation to seeking planning permission, perhaps for an ill-fated house extension proposal. So planning is often viewed in a negative light, as something that has to be overcome in order to carry out development. Many people see the planner as '*a man waiting for something to turn down*', unlike Dickens's Micawber who was always waiting for something to turn up. This is an image fuelled by media representations of the planner, who is generally seen as a white male bureaucrat, who wants to restrict the operation of the private property sector. This book argues that town planners can perform a constructive role in enabling, rather than hindering, development and urban renewal; thus

making urban problems better rather than worse (Bayer *et al.* 2010). There is room for improvement, and ways to enhance both the image and effect of planning will be discussed, but, in fairness, planners are dealing with complex issues to which there is often not one simple solution which will please everyone.

The 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act introduced by New Labour has been, until relatively recently, the main piece of legislation underpinning the planning system. This was superseded by the 2011 Localism Act as will be explained in detail in Chapters 2 and 3 (Ricketts and Field 2012). These major planning acts determine the scope and nature of the operation of the planning system, and specific types of development plans and forward planning policy documents to be prepared by local planning authorities. In addition there is a wide range of other planning legislation, case law and regulation that is concerned with controlling development. One of the main aspects of the town planner's work is the production of development plans which determine which sites can be built upon in the first place. This is likely to constitute a spatial strategy plan which is composed of both maps and a substantial policy document, and although the exact form that development plans take alters under each successive government the basic principles remain.

Development control, also known as development management, or sometimes the development consent process, is a major function of the planning system. As explained in Chapter 3, this process determines whether or not planning permission is given for development which not only includes new-build, but also substantial change to the structure or use of existing buildings (Cullingworth and Nadin 2006). In making the decision as to whether to permit development or not, planners have to retain both a city-wide perspective and a local neighbourhood awareness as to the likely effects of a particular scheme, and maintain a more critical viewpoint towards new development than the private-sector developer whose horizons may be limited to the boundaries of the site owned and the cost factor. Planning decision-making has to take into account international considerations too. Because of concerns about global warming, climate change and the environment, most major planning proposals,

plans and policies are subject to environmental assessment. This reflects global concerns with reducing the carbon footprint of development, and creating sustainable human settlements.

Old or new development?

Town planning is often associated with building new towns, garden cities, and with new developments on green-field sites. In spite of their apparent importance in planning mythology, much less than 5 per cent of the population of Britain has ever lived in New Towns. No new ones have been started by the government since the 1970s, and most of the existing ones have now been de-designated. There is much interest in creating eco-towns and model communities, but little has actually been constructed as yet. Much of the modern planner's work consists of dealing with already developed older sites in which a major objective may be to incorporate existing buildings into a proposed new scheme. On such sites it may be impossible to apply exact standards or apply precise blueprints. The planner's job is to seek to be flexible in respect of planning standards when negotiating with the developer in order to get the best solution possible within what is often a difficult situation. Emphasis is likely to be put upon retaining significant existing buildings and features where possible, rather than demolition and total clearance, because of the national importance of our historical heritage.

Governments have set targets for increasing the amount of new residential development to meet the needs of a growing and changing population (Allmendinger *et al.* 2000). For example, New Labour wanted to see 4 million new houses built by 2016 (Hall and Tewdwr-Jones 2010). But much of this development was to take place within existing urban areas on brown-field sites (that is previously used, and mainly derelict, industrial sites). The Coalition government has cut back on these targets, but still wants to see a growth in house-building, both to rent and to buy, not least to facilitate the free movement of labour especially in areas where would-be home-owners are priced out of the local residential property market.

Overall, planners are much more concerned with planning for existing towns and cities, with regener-

ation, refurbishment, conservation, sustainability and urban management, and with building upon derelict and infill sites, that is upon 'brown land'. New construction represents less than 3 per cent net of the total building stock each year and indeed even less in times of recession. However, much higher rates were recorded in some regions than others, for example, in the South East of England. Urban conservation and the preservation of historic buildings and areas has become a major preoccupation of town planning. Maintenance and refurbishment of existing stock is a major aspect of the construction industry. In the public sector there has been a dramatic decline in the building of council housing, most of the new-build social housing development being undertaken by housing associations.

Rural or urban?

A major factor in keeping development at bay is the modern town and country planning system which has sought to control development and was established under the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act. The emphasis in this book will be primarily urban, that is upon *town* planning, but rural issues will be explored too, along with environmental planning and sustainability. But, the full title of the subject remains as 'Town and Country Planning' as enshrined in the many Acts of Parliament of that name. The division between urban and rural may be seen to be rather old-fashioned as modern planning policy is concerned with creating sustainable environments which are affected by overarching global factors. Indeed nowadays there is a strong emphasis upon global issues, upon sustainability, global warming, climate change and other factors that overarch UK planning, but which have to be integrated into national policy-making and legislation.

Urban or regional or local?

A key issue over the years has been the level at which planning is undertaken. Whilst town and country planning has primarily been concerned with urban areas, it was soon realised that planners needed to take into account the wider context of the geographical and economic region in which the urban area in question was located. For example, planners have

attempted to balance out development within the different regions of the UK and have been particularly concerned with overpopulation and congestion in the South, and economic decline and social deprivation in industrial areas in the North. Under the Labour government (1997–2010) importance was given to regional planning. Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS) were seen as the main policy level of plan-making (Amin and Thrift 1995) although community planning was also important. Subsequently under the Coalition government (Conservative–Liberal Democratic alliance) which came into power in May 2010, a greater emphasis was put upon a new localism, community issues and neighbourhood planning, with the Local Plan becoming the main level of planning under the 2011 Localism Act.

Present or future?

Planning by its very nature is concerned with policy-making and that involves attempting to predict what future need might be, and producing plans that may cover periods five or ten years ahead. In contrast, sometimes it seems politicians, and for that matter local residents, want instant change, and there have been many attempts over the years to speed up the planning system as if complex policy issues can be solved overnight. In reality, whatever the level of planning adopted, good planning takes time to come to fruition. The results of policies may take many years to manifest their true effect. One cannot realistically plan a local area, or make snap decisions, in isolation from the city as a whole as every area is but one piece in a larger jigsaw. Each local area is linked up to other areas by transport systems, and a range of overarching policy issues in respect of the environment, the economy, and social and cultural issues and considerations.

Admittedly there might be pressing local issues that need to be dealt with as soon as possible in respect of local sites and circumstances, such as decisions as to whether to build more housing in a specific location, and pressure from private developers to get on with a particular scheme, as delay costs money. But such decisions need to take into account higher-level city-wide considerations and longer-term planning objectives such as, for example, urban

containment and green-belt protection, or getting the right balance between jobs and houses across the region as a whole.

There is also considerable difference of opinion as to what should be done. Not all local residents have equal power to shape decisions as articulate middle-class groups who know how the system runs are likely to sway the planning process more adeptly than those from poorer districts. Furthermore, too much emphasis on the new localism, on local planning, community issues, and local residents' requirements, mocked in the press as 'duck-pond planning', may lead to a situation in which there are conflicting demands between different local areas and a lack of joined-up thinking.

Policies or processes?

Town planning is not primarily concerned with imposing an instant Master Plan on our cities; rather it is concerned with gradually reshaping and controlling development. Planning has become much more of a process, or a methodology, that is a tool of urban governance (Hill 2005; Haughton *et al.* 2009). Senior town planners, particularly in local government, are strategic managers whose skills are valued because their professional perspective enables them to take the broader view, to see the connections between a diverse range of issues and topics in order to initiate urban renewal and economic regeneration. Modern planners are more likely to work in multidisciplinary teams, liaising with other policy-makers from the fields of housing, economic development, cultural and social policy to fulfil higher-level governmental targets. For example, planners may work alongside other professionals on policy initiatives as diverse as urban regeneration, crime and design, employment, education, tourism, ecology, power station provision and transportation networks. As a result of these changes, planning can no longer be seen as a discrete, purely spatial activity (Low 1991; Dorey 2005).

People or property?

We must not forget that planning is for people (Broady 1968) (Photo 1.1) and that social considerations are as important as environmental factors. The

Photo 1.1 Planning is for all sorts of people

Part of the queue at the London Eye. Planning policy needs to take into account the needs of all sectors of the population, old and young, male and female, abled and disabled, car driver and pedestrian.

needs, wants and activities of the population are what generate the demand for development in the first place. Thus planning has a social component too, and planners need to be aware of the requirements of ‘users of land’ (that is the people) rather than simply focusing on the ‘land uses’ in isolation. In order to develop planning policy, it is important to be able to understand what people want and also to predict changing social and economic trends. As will be explained further in Chapter 8 on planning theory, planners need to be aware of the aspatial (non-physical) factors and processes (Foley 1964: 37) such as the economic, social and political forces that determine the spatial (physical) end product of the built environment. However, modern geographers might argue that all these forces and processes are inherently spatial too, and such debates continue.

It is important, as a general principle, to plan equally fairly for everyone. To return to the above definition of town planning (Keeble 1969) one must ask for whom is it important ‘to secure the maximum

level of economy, convenience and beauty’? Different members of the urban population do not have the same needs or requirements, and planners can only hope ‘to please some of the people some of the time, rather than all of the people all of the time’. Planning for the average man may lead to planning successfully for no one at all! It is important to take into account the needs of everyone in society, including women, ethnic minorities, all social classes, all age groups, and the disabled. But this is often not the case as clearly different groups have different agendas, and, for example, developers may be more concerned with getting the best return from a site, than worrying about such social considerations.

A blessing or a curse?

In spite of its achievements, many people are of the opinion that town planning policy has been ineffective and misdirected, and that more could have been achieved with better policy in town and countryside

(Gallent *et al.* 2008). Some take the view that town planning imposes unnecessary restrictions on the property market and on individual citizens' freedom, with little of benefit to show in return. Others consider the British planning system to be the best in the world and argue that without it Britain would long ago have been covered coast to coast in housing development to accommodate a disproportionately large population relative to land surface. This book will show that planning has had its successes, but will admit that there have also been some terrible disasters and mistakes made. But it is easy to be wise after the event.

But overall, governments have continued to retain the planning system, although Conservative governments tend to have a more negative view of planning than Labour ones, which are more enthusiastic about state control and thus planning. For example, the Conservative government (1979–97) attempted to speed up the planning system, but did not abolish it. The subsequent Labour government (1997–2010) sought to modify the objectives of planning towards their own agenda, but were also quite tolerant towards reducing state control on private enterprise and development. So political attitudes towards planning are quite complex and nuanced. Many private developers also support the need for town planning because it is seen as providing a framework, a level playing field, within which the private property market can operate. But they may question the objectives upon which planning is based, and the way it is administered. The Coalition (Conservative–Liberal Democrat) government (which came to power in 2010), in spite of its emphasis upon achieving change through a greater role for the private developer, has in many respects retained much of the previous government's commitment to sustainable development.

Natural or political?

The modern nature of towns and cities is not God-given, inevitable or natural, with just one obvious right answer. The fact we have running water in every house, sewerage, drainage, passable roads, parks, libraries, sports facilities, are all the result of political reform and state intervention, often achieved after years of campaigning. They are the

result of centuries of decision-making by individual owners, developers, and government bodies. Although topography and geography do play a part, they do not absolutely determine development. The nature of towns and cities, to a considerable extent, is dependent on who has the greatest influence over policy, and thus who has the strongest voice. Let us explore further the important role of politics in shaping planning.

Planning is inevitably a highly political activity. Firstly, this is because it is concerned with land and property. Planning is concerned with the allocation of scarce resources (Allmendinger *et al.* 2000). It is inextricably linked to the prevailing economic system. Planning policy change is inevitably reflective of the booms and slumps which are an enduring characteristic of the property market and capitalism itself. Planners are not free agents: they are not operating in a vacuum but within a complex political situation at central and local government levels which reflect these societal forces (Simmie 1974). But, as Rydin has commented, town planning alone cannot externally control the market, as the forces involved are immense (Rydin 1998: 6; Rydin 2011). There is much talk of partnerships between the public and private sector. Indeed, whether planners are working for the public or the private sector of development, there are certain common requirements which have to be adhered to in order to make a scheme work, such as infrastructure and transport provision.

Secondly, planning is political as it has become a component of the agenda of national party politics and political ideology. Planning is a political process, informed by a range of ideologies (Young and Stevenson (eds) 2013). It has been scrutinised by those concerned with understanding capitalism, and class and power structures within society. Urban social theory, which influences social planning, is seldom neutral. It will be seen that Labour and Conservative interpretations of the role of planning have differed considerably. Social town planning has, in particular, been associated with the Left, for example in respect of the policies of the Greater London Council (GLC) which was at its height in the 1980s (GLC 1984) or as part of full blown East European state socialism. The Greater London Authority (GLA) replaced the GLC in 2000, but put

more emphasis upon economic development and the needs of the private sector, relatively speaking. However, the GLA has continued to be concerned with social issues, but this has been manifest in more planning for equalities and minority groups, rather than traditional socialist concerns with social class issues (Reeves 2005; GLA 2010), although the situation is still evolving under the Conservative Boris Johnson as Mayor of London.

Thirdly, the planning process is political at the local urban area planning level, where community politics and grass roots activity thrives, and where individual personalities, especially councillors, exert influence over planning decisions. Planning attracts interest from people across the political spectrum, and some of the most radical challenges to planning have come from environmentalists who do not fit into the conventional right/left political divisions. Planners cannot develop policies as if politics does not exist, nor can they operate as if the private sector and property ownership rights do not exist. The powers of planning and the planners are always limited and constrained by the government's approach to planning at the national level, and also at the local level by the political activities and preferences of local councillors.

Why study planning?

Tackling a challenging but interesting subject

As can be seen from introductory observations, planning is a complex subject area, but one with many different specialisms within it, and one that can provide an interesting and useful career. In discussing the topic of why it is important to study planning, at the start it has to be said that there are broadly two types of students who study planning: those who want to, and those who do not. In the first category are those who have chosen to study the subject perhaps on a planning degree, or as a module within perhaps a geography degree. On the other hand there are those who have to study to planning as part of a property development, surveying, architecture or construction degree, who may see it as irrelevant to their career, or view the subject negatively as a block on property development and their future activities. Of course there are also those who

are quite undecided, or may never have come across the subject before and are willing to keep an open mind. Indeed such students may have an open mind about the topic of planning. Let us now discuss the reasons for studying planning (and thus hopefully reading this book) from the view point of first planning students and secondly non-planning students. This section may involve the reader in some healthy self-reflection on what they are trying to get out of their course and how they see planning.

Planning students

Some students are attracted to town planning because they have a vocation to leave the world a better place than they found it. Town planning, although categorised as one of the land-use professions, has much in common with the other welfare professions and may therefore attract a more socially motivated type of student. Planning is a discipline which has links across, particularly within local and central government agencies, to the realms of social policy, urban governance, economics and political science. Others, particularly mature students, might have experienced the problems of inner-city living and have specific changes in mind which they would like to bring about by becoming town planners. Others may have studied Geography at A level and they then look around for an alternative to a geography degree and settle on town planning. In contrast, some students have a very clear idea of what they want to do, and are interested in specific aspects of planning and development, such as sport, conservation, transport, housing. It is always worth checking the RTPI website for information on careers for students, and being a student member gives access to more useful information.

Once students begin to understand the subject, they may be eager to put forward their own solutions, saying enthusiastically in tutorial discussions, '*the government ought to do something*', as if it were just a matter of realising what was needed, without appreciating the problems and tortuous paths involved in getting policy accepted and implemented on the ground. Well-intentioned policies, motivated by the best of intentions, can lead to monumental disasters unless they are accompanied by a well-informed understanding of the nature and complex-

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