

SAUL Launch Conference 24th June 2003

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On behalf of the Mayor we're delighted to welcome you to London for this conference. It's a subject that's very dear to my heart. I was living 27 years ago in central London in Elephant & Castle when our daughter was born. In the subsequent 27 years we experienced the difficulties of bringing up a small child in an area where there were no civilised, accessible, readily usable open spaces and I think it was the single biggest factor in our decision to move out to Richmond which has probably got the biggest concentration of open spaces in London. I suspect that decision was replicated by many other people. It brought back to me just how powerful and decisive an influence the quality of open public space can be.

I want to talk about the London Plan and maybe bring some implications for your work from the policies we've been developing.

The new London Plan which is now in its draft stage, a very advanced stage, is the first plan to be produced and based on new legislation which requires a spatial development strategy for the city and in that sense it's a new departure for the UK. A **strategic plan** over the next 15 years which departs from traditional UK practice by having a very strong social and economic, as well as environmental and physical aspect. One that is looking at the **integration of policies like land use and transport**, and one which is taking the spatial implications of **other strategies** that the Mayor is producing which include strategies for biodiversity, for energy and so on, which clearly have great importance in terms of open space. We also were required to look at **London's place in the world** so this represents really quite a **new type of plan** for us.

There are two things that are significant to the SAUL project.

1. Firstly I think in terms of the key drivers you identified in IIC, they do take us forward.
 - i) **Regional Identity.** As you know for over a generation London has had no strategic authority and there's been no one to speak for London as a whole. We've now moved to a Mayoral system, where it is possible to start developing the strong regional identity we have envied and associated with many European cities. There is, whether you agree with it or not, a general acceptance that the plan represents a very strong, clear, decisive direction for London and that is the product of one man being elected to do certain things.
 - ii) **Emphasis on partnership.** Because this is a spatial strategy it requires us to work very closely with all sorts of other sectors that perhaps planners traditionally haven't, including for example the health sector, the education sector, as well as the private and voluntary sector and the community of course and therefore we can only deliver this plan if we are gaining ownership and support from those sectors.
 - iii) **Transnational Learning.** One of the key starting points on the plan is the understanding of London as a global city, that London is now a multinational city, a city in which over 300 languages are taught across London's schools, a city in which there is very rapid and sustained immigration from Europe and the rest of the world, and a city whose economy increasingly works on a highly specialised global basis that is driving a great deal of the growth in this city. So our plans and strategies can only work if they are placed in that multinational context.
2. Secondly, it's a spatial strategy of course. When we look at areas like urban landscape, open space and the public realm we are starting to look at them in a quite different way from the traditional, physical orientated way – we have now to understand their cultural significance, their significance in terms of health, of sport, their significance for learning, their significance for access, the contribution they make to social and community life as well as biodiversity and

the environmental aspects. So that is encouraging us, I think, in a way that your project I'm sure will greatly assist to think in that wider way.

This is reflected in the main objectives of the plan.

Making London a better place for people to live in. In many ways we score poorly (in some ways very highly) in terms of liveability criteria. I think this particular project in Peckham, which I know very well, is an interesting attempt to improve public space and a public facility together.

To make London a more prosperous city. We have I think the biggest gap between wealth and poverty of any city in North West Europe. In inner London nearly half of children are raised in poverty. So not only to make London a more prosperous city but to try and encourage infusion of investment including investment of open space and facilities in the areas that need it most.

A more equitable city in the situation I've described of increasing multiculturalism meaning that we need to think about how different groupings in the community are going to need, use and want facilities and spaces.

London is not **an easy city to get around** and therefore there's a great deal of emphasis being placed on improving public transport and that's an area where London's been able to benefit enormously from looking at other European experience, particularly in North West Europe where we've envied many of your cities and our aspiration is to replicate some of the quality of public transport you've managed to achieve.

And of course an objective of **making London more attractive and greener** and a **less wasteful city**, the ecological footprint of London is enormously high and one of our major concerns is to try and tackle that problem. You can see through those objectives, **sustainability** running through the criteria. Indeed this is **the Mayor's vision** to develop London as an exemplary, sustainable world city based on this economic, social and environmental set of drivers.

The plan is placed in the context of London now experiencing very rapid population growth by our standards. We anticipate that London will grow by at least 700 thousand people by 2016 – and we also anticipate, despite the current ups and downs, that by 2016 there will be a net growth of 2/3 million jobs in London. One of the Mayor's principle objectives is for London to be self contained in the way it deals with that growth. That we will not, as has happened very often in the past, seek to export that growth to the regions around London, nor are they very likely to welcome it were we to seek to do so. We are going to need to make London a more compact city; at the moment we have one of the lowest densities of major cities in Europe. There are benefits and disbenefits to that, a more compact city inevitably means higher densities and more effective use of our land and our resources. We feel that if we do this in the right way it represents a sustainable approach. One in which we are making the best use of the land, the human, social and economic resources of London. But of course that places great pressure on our open spaces and it is one of the absolute key stones of the plan that we should protect existing open space and enhance and provide new open space and the Mayor has made it very clear in a series of very tough decisions that this is an absolute for him, that the slippery slope you can go down by saying 'you can allow this school playground to disappear because ...'. The Mayor is taking a very strong line and I think he's right to do so.

In our plan we seek to value open space extremely highly, we seek to advance those multiple roles that I've talked about in terms of open space and the public realm. We seek to protect it and where there is any replacement to make that full and equivalent and effective replacement. We certainly seek much greater access for open space, especially for those in the community who experience the greatest difficulties. The plan sets out a hierarchy of open spaces at different levels in London, we set out the standards of open space that we expect for each of those levels and that will then be used as a guideline by the 33 London boroughs in order for them to formulate their proposals to ensure that their areas achieve that standard. We ask that all 33 of the Local planning authorities (the London Boroughs) produce open space strategies that will include an audit of existing spaces and an analysis and proposals for the development of new spaces. We are currently working on a design guide, which is in draft, which will assist the local authorities in that process of producing their open space strategies. We lay great emphasis on the public realm as a whole and understanding the interconnectiveness between formal spaces, informal spaces and movement. There's a separate and

substantial section on the River Thames and the Blue Ribbon network of waterways, which is one of London's most rich inheritances. We say a good deal about biodiversity as a link through to our biodiversity strategy and we have a very strong policy of retaining greenbelt, which as you know has surrounded London throughout the post-war period, and on finding ways in which to improve access to the countryside which has often been very difficult particularly for those in the community least able to make those kind of movements. So in all of this we are looking to make the most effective and efficient use, to improve management of space and to make the best use.

I was particularly interested in and pleased in your inclusion of Burgess Park in the work you've been doing and what you've been looking at because over 20 years ago I was the chief planning officer for the area in which Burgess Park sits and spent 10 years in the struggle to find the resources and wherewithal to move that forward. It always seemed to me that there was a lack of cohesion between the park and those very high density areas with people in great need of the opportunities that the park could provide and I think that anything that you and local people can do to continue the process of making those connections is of extraordinary value to us all.

So our plan, we hope, will be adopted early next year. It's been through an inquiry process and we are hopeful that we can move it forward. It already reflects some of the work done under Interreg IIC. We've set up a London Parks and Green Spaces Forum and we're also committed to an early review of the plan because, after all, this is the first plan for over 20 years in London, a new kind of plan in an environment that's changing very quickly, for example we now have the bid for the Olympic games which must inform our thinking. There is the opportunity to use the work that comes out of this stage of the SAUL project in the next review of the London plan.

Let me just make one final point which is really about European collaboration. My personal perspective is that London for a long time was extraordinarily introvert. I think much of that reflected the lack of strategic leadership, literally, in the city. One of the Mayor's objectives very much is for London to become again the partner/collaborator with its natural partners in North West Europe and Europe as a whole and that's just one more reason why we're so pleased to be engaged in this project.

QUESTIONS

Q: Jens Scheller, Greater Frankfurt Planning Authority

We are doing a joint regional land use plan for 75 communities so that would be probably something like joint UDP for the whole of the Frankfurt region. Could you reflect a bit on the relationship between the draft London Plan and the local authorities, the boroughs and their UDPs and the conflicts arising, because they have been used to doing their own planning for over 20 years and now there is this new authority. This is a big problem for us in the Frankfurt region and I would like to hear something about that from you.

A: Robin Thompson:

It's particularly difficult for us because you now have a generation of professionals as well as politicians who have grown up without this idea of a strategic authority and I think even now some of them are finding it hard to get the idea that there is the greater good. Our Mayor is an independent so he's not locked into any of the main political parties. So there are some difficult issues here. We've tried very hard to work with the boroughs, obviously that's necessary and many of the implementation powers quite rightly rest with the boroughs. One of the mechanisms we've decided to use is that we've identified 5 sub-regions within London and we are working with sub-regional partnerships which include the boroughs but also private and voluntary sector and other key partners and we're doing that mainly because we want to find that interface between the strategic and the local. Certainly in London the gap between 1 and 33 is a very big one and we are finding some success with this that at the sub-regional level. You can make some translation from our overall aspirations for London but also you can come from the bottom-up to the local level and I think the boroughs have found that a useful mechanism and so this is one of the ways in which we are seeking to move forward. Having said that I think in the area we are particularly looking at in SAUL, by and large, there's quite a

collaborative relationship because the aspirations are often the same and in many ways we are responding to some initiatives that are taking place at the local level and trying to use the strategic framework to encourage other boroughs to take up the kind of initiatives that are going on elsewhere.

Q: Dieter Buelte, Statsverband Saarbrücken

We are confronted with the same issue my colleague from Frankfurt mentioned. We have the same problem in cooperation with 10 communities, far less than you are concerned with, but anyway I'd be interested to know more about the key issues of forming the sub-regions you mentioned and I'd also like to ask you about 'a new policy on protecting views' combined to your standards in urban design – what is meant by this?

A: Robin Thompson:

A little word on the sub-regional approach. One of the reasons why we are using that approach is that interestingly these sub-regions were already forming themselves and I think what had happened when the strategic authority disappeared in recent years, groupings of the boroughs, together with some of their public and private partners were starting to form these partnerships anyway. As Harry indicated this is very much in line with Government aspirations with the communities agenda so we are aspiring to build upon momentum that was happening anyway and I think what our individual authorities were finding and I guess a lesson that maybe you can use is that if you remove the strategic authority, at the end of the day, everyone loses because it's very difficult to do the big things like the bigger public transport schemes. Individual communities or boroughs fight each other for investment, town centres compete against each other and I think one of the lessons we learned when Mrs Thatcher abolished the GLC was that you do need a strategic authority, so maybe you invite your communities to come to London and see what happened when you didn't have that kind of overall benefit.

The protection of views is a very interesting point. Partly because the Mayor is supporting higher density and tall buildings in appropriate places, that's very controversial but it fits with the compact city. I think our opinion is that the old system of protecting views was very crude and clumsy, you have these long corridors within which nothing could happen, we're trying to encourage a rather more sophisticated approach where what you do is you protect the view that matters without sterilising long corridors, which in our opinion was happening in the past.

Q: Anke Schuler, Projekt Ruhr in the Ruhrgebiet

We are working on a master plan dealing with the regional park; Emscher Landscape Park and we are also often concerned with design questions. I'm very interested about the design guide you're working on and I'd like to know who's working on it and who do you involve and what kind of content are you going to put into it and how formal is it going to be?

A: Jane Carlsen:

The slide actually brought together two areas of supplementary planning guidance which we are working on at the moment which are relevant here. One is taking forward our approach to urban design and that develops a whole raft of issues looking at how we can develop London as a world-class city in relation to improving the quality of the design, the quality of the environment that we have. The 2nd area of the guidance is in relation to what we are calling sustainable design and construction, that's how we can give additional detailed guidance on a whole raft of issues; whether it's looking at passive solar gain, whether it's looking at developing renewal energy schemes or looking at sustainable urban drainage. How we can bring all those concepts together, advertise best practice and help boroughs, clients and developers actually produce good design in this area of the compact city which as Robin said is one of the keys to achieving the Mayor's vision of accommodating the growth within the city so those are 2 of the main areas where we are actually detailing up additional policy work which we couldn't include within a strategic overall plan.

Q: Frankfurt Colleague

My colleague asked about the frictions and the concurrence perhaps between the boroughs and the GLA. In our region there is this kind of concurrence and we have the other kind of concurrence between the greater Frankfurt Authority and the Prime Minister of Hessen who doesn't like any kind of concentration of power. Is there a similar process or thing in your case?

A: Robin Thompson:

There isn't so much of a problem in the sense that London is now a region and therefore our plan is both the strategic plan for London and the regional plan. There are however 2 difficulties, 1 is that we now are seeking to plan for the mega city region, the wider metropolitan region which is about 18 mi people and the separation of regional powers creates some difficulty although we are working with our 2 regional neighbours but that is a process that is complicated by the institutional structures that divide London up from its hinterlands which is clearly very important. And the second issue for us is that our colleagues in national government so far have not supported the idea of a national spatial strategy such as a no of countries in NEW have devoted and that has created an issue. The Mayor's view is that London should grow, and not surprisingly. And he feels that's in the national interest but there's no national spatial strategy against which to judge is that right? Or should we try and put more growth in the northeast and the northwest? And my personal view is that perhaps a light touch national spatial strategy would be a benefit to us because we could better fit London into that national context. It's an irony really that we have an international context with the European spatial development strategy perspective but not quite the same nationally.

Q: Peter Schirmbeck, Frankfurt group

1. In our project of Route of Industrial Culture we don't look only back but incline towards the modern time and we have several examples where there is no augmentation of jobs. We have most modern factories of cars in the world in our route and it has 99% automization and the most modern power plant on the Rhine, we have 3, from the 50s, the 70s and today. 60 persons, 40 persons, 3 persons respectively, so I would like to know where you get your belief from that there will be more jobs or if you take it from the role of London as always the number 1 so it takes the jobs from the rest of England.
2. It was mentioned what role London or Britain can play internationally. When you look back in history there was a movement which was green which took over all the world - the English landscape garden. I would like to know whether we have a sensitivity to look and to find out if there are movements like this which people want or if we try as planners to create everything ourselves. Of course behind the English landscape garden were the powerful and mighty people of those days, the dukes and kings etc. and they created the parks and I have the impression that the powerful people of the day is the economy which is interested in getting those green fields to build high skyscrapers and their own uses. But I would like to know if we have the ear to hear if there are international movements like the English landscape garden that we should obey and to look on so we don't try to do everything ourselves but also to look and to listen to what people want.

A: Robin Thompson:

If I answered those questions fully we would be here a very long time. Let me very quickly on your 2nd point – I think for us this is a major challenge and one we need to think about in this project. There is this huge tradition as you said of russi nervay, that ideally the Englishman wanted to be on his country estate but if he couldn't have that then he'd have his garden and there is a tradition that is very powerful and has shaped, one of the reasons why London is such a low density city, particularly in its suburbs and I think a challenge for us is how to take the best of that tradition into a situation where we will become a more compact city because what is driving London is pretty much irresistible and in many ways beneficial and in many ways sustainable and so one of the things we are looking for in this project is how do we achieve the best of that English tradition perhaps with the best of some of the continental traditions of higher density. – A very brief answer I'm afraid.

The 1st question – I think a lot of what we see in London is something quite particular which we see also in New York and Tokyo. Which is the development of a global economy which is highly specialised and which requires extremely specialised support and services and that's certainly been driving London enormously powerfully we think (not everyone agrees) that will be so in the future along with personal services which become more and more important. I think one of the top ten growth industries in the UK at the moment is personal trainers – it's that kind of thing.

A: Harry Knottley:

I was listening with interest to what you were saying and one or two of the earlier questions as well and I think built into those questions were also some important words like listening, hearing, the ears

and there's some concern about pressures from the important groups, the economy. I think this is actually what is very important that's happening here in Interreg as well but more generally the involvement of communities so that they do have a voice, that they are heard, and the value of Interreg, of ...

... These thoughts that are coming up from communities, marrying them across borders and influencing, maybe in a smaller way, but I think it's a very important and encouraging trend so I'd just make that observation.

Q: Clive Fox,

80 Application proposals so far and 38 projects approved and no doubt many more still to come in the next year or two is a fairly daunting prospect for the joint secretariat, I'm interested to know how that European level you'll be able to capture and draw together this wealth of ideas and thinking that must be going on throughout all of these projects, and how those can be developed into some kind of conclusion in NEW, which is again much larger than the sum of the parts.

A: Paul Stephenson:

Now the projects are getting underway what we are really trying to develop are very solid project clusters among those projects approved in each of the areas. E.g. transport – we now have 7 projects from priority 2 in transport, from priority 4 that have supported canal restoration projects, from priority 5 looking at ferry links so we're really trying to encourage synergies between these projects and we're really trying to emphasise that in the communication activities of all projects that they do try and get in contact with each other and really develop their transnational marketing and promotional activities together between projects. WE have just also approved a project called European garden heritage network which is German led which you may be interested in if you want to look at the website.