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UK METROPOLITAN STRATEGIC PLANNING:
ACHIEVEMENTS AND PROSPECTS

by

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This paper could be taken up exclusively with setting out the very substantial achievements of the Metropolitan Counties in the last ten years - a relatively short lifespan in terms of the massive task they were established to undertake.
- 1.2 I will attempt this task in part, in order to concentrate attention on what will be lost under the Government's abolition proposals. In this I am mindful of the more particular issues of interest to this Conference, but I will not shy away from giving some attention to the Metropolitan Counties' achievements in policy and on the ground and also identifying the technical capabilities that will be lost if the abolition proposals are implemented.
- 1.3 My paper will argue that the proposals as now set out (and they seem to be changing almost daily) will lead to increased ad hoc decision-making, more local and less robust policies, a real threat to strategic planning and a reduced service from the planning system to tackle the challenge of urban regeneration in the United Kingdom. I know your concern will be more with meeting needs than who actually provides the goods; more with the operation than the mechanics of government. With this in mind, I propose during my paper to evaluate the proposals with a view to their effect on:-
 - i) the role and effectiveness of strategic planning;
 - ii) speed of plan-making, and keeping plans up-to-date;
 - iii) achieving policies which are consistent and robust under examination;
 - iv) the link between structure and local plans;
 - v) the development control process;
 - vi) effective control and direction of mineral activity and land restoration;
 - vii) strategic performance and implementing of policies for urban regeneration;
- 1.4 My case will relate to:
 - i) the experience of strategic planning, and its implementation before the Metropolitan Counties were established. What lessons were learned in the period of structure plan infancy?
 - ii) the achievements of metropolitan strategic planning between 1974-84;

- iii) a critique of the abolition proposals: the false assumptions;
- iv) what the proposals (including those for unitary plans) will do to strategic planning;
- v) the Western European experience;
- vi) how to salvage the wreck: some thoughts.

2. STRATEGIC PLANNING BEFORE 1974. WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE THE METROPOLITAN COUNTIES WERE ESTABLISHED? WHY WERE THE METROPOLITAN COUNTIES SET UP?

- 2.1 The answers to these questions help to justify the need for retaining strategic planning at the Metropolitan level.
- 2.2 Structure and Local Plans were established under the 1968 legislation replacing old style development plans. These previous plans, many hundreds in number, were prepared by too many local authorities, were far too detailed, were definitive with no strategic overview at all, were land based with no social, economic or transportation basis or resource overview, were cumbersome and difficult to update, and were prepared in relative isolation, with no formal inter-authority liaison to ensure compatibility with adjoining plan areas.
- 2.3 This system worked well for detailed local development control but precious little else. They were short-term plans with an immediate horizon. In the West Midlands alone there were over 20 such "town maps"; like elsewhere there were areas with absolutely no co-ordination or deliberate relationship between them.
- 2.4 The move to structure plans was therefore a major step to separate the wood from the trees - it was comprehensive resource-based planning in its infancy, an attempt at long-term land use planning which would reflect social and economic as well as transportation needs; identifying priorities and for the first time providing the conurbations with at least Borough level strategies. Housing, industry, recreation, public utilities and movement between them were linked and their inter-relationships made explicit.
- 2.5 This was the theory until 1974. In practice though Borough councils had few staff trained in strategic planning or thinking beyond land use plans as such. Seven to ten plans were prepared within each conurbation, and suburban areas often featured in Shire County Plans instead. Co-ordination between authorities was relatively ad hoc. The DOE were more concerned over compatible presentation and timetables more than an overall strategy. Some Boroughs offered too few staff resources for the job thereby prolonging plan completion. Others started on local plans, again to the detriment of the structure plans, reflecting the different priorities given to the latter. Delays caused by insufficient staff allocations in some authorities had a knock-on effect by prolonging achievement of a total structure plan for each conurbation.

- 2.6 Transportation plans were also being undertaken for all or parts of the conurbations but only in parallel with structure plans and often reflecting the strength of the largest, more powerful authorities in terms of a share of resources. These transportation plans incorporated naive assumptions about development and the future economic prospects for each area. With local authorities independent from Passenger Transport Executives, there was no overall transport strategy in the Structure Plans; indeed no real "strategic" plan for the conurbations really emerged. Waste Disposal and minerals planning were Borough-based and featured little in the plans prepared.
- 2.7 Regional planning was ad hoc and again in its infancy. Much time and effort was spent in agreeing methods and assumptions yet no semblance of a conurbation strategy or one which related directly to the plans of the surrounding Shire Counties emerged.
- 2.8 Ultimately, each Borough prepared its own plan with its own policies and separate bid for resources. This was still a time of mobile and free-flowing investment. The competition for resources between authorities was obvious - a demonstrable overbid for shopping, offices, highway resources and infrastructure.
- 2.9 In the West Midlands, Coventry and Solihull were seeking to prepare compatible plans with Warwickshire, but major disagreements ensued about the scale and location of housing land. Despite Solihull and Coventry being within the metropolitan area their plans were examined separately from the other six Boroughs. Examining these latter plans, the Panel concluded that they
- "had to examine six separate plans differing in presentation and in their philosophical approach and yet wholly interdependent... the only point in which they were exactly comparable is in the presentation of the Key Diagram."
- 2.10 The Secretary of State made substantial subsequent changes to ensure compatibility. Even then disagreements continued within and between Boroughs and adjacent Shire Counties on overspill levels. There was little overall consistency on green belt, with substantial peripheral areas proposed for development in some fringe areas whilst adjacent authorities settled for none at all within their own areas or that of other authorities.
- 2.11 The theory was right but the practice a failure. The agencies involved had too few and fragmented capabilities to do the job. Structure planning was regarded as plan-making, and not a process in the wider strategic planning context.
- 2.12 Even with structure plans completed, therefore, their inadequacies were obvious. Little overt economic input, different assumptions and policies, competitive bids, double-counting, no overall

housing, industrial or Green Belt strategy or consistency, inadequate links to regional plans, no overall minerals, waste disposal or public transport strategy, suspicion between authorities and bids for new development often in each other's areas. No overall resource assessment was possible or clear priorities identified to demonstrate the wider conurbation needs. In summary, there was no clear direction for each conurbation and certainly no explicit recognition of the rapidly deteriorating scale of urban decline.

- 2.13 This rather lengthy but important preamble sets the scene for what the Metropolitan Counties actually achieved in the period after 1974. The 1972 Local Government Act, prepared not overnight by Government but after a lengthy assessment of metropolitan needs, finally brought together under one roof the components of strategic planning to tackle urban regeneration - structure plans, public transport and highway planning, waste disposal, and strategic determination of major development proposals.
- 2.14 The early years of the Metropolitan Counties were fraught with teething troubles: quarrelling over the operating arrangements for development control and the decisions being taken, non-certification of local plans, apparent and real duplication in the development control process. The big cities realised the strength and possible rivalry of the Counties, often in the presence of similar political control at the two levels. I think I can fairly say there was some political and technical determination not to allow the Counties to succeed in achieving the objectives for which they were established.
- 2.15 There can be little doubt, however, that the lack of clear statutory definition of roles; the concurrency of certain powers and conflict of opinion as to who should do what in this middle ground created a climate of public opinion that duplication and conflict were the rule and not the exception. In my opinion and experience, the duplication argument has been maintained by those determined to restrict the success of the Counties. The conflict argument is one which forgets that the whole process of achieving compatible policies and action across metropolitan areas, together with allocation of resources between social and economic priorities and areas is inevitably a process of compromise and negotiation. I would argue that elimination of a tier of local government will merely increase the "conflict" because of the greater number of apparent protagonists.
- 2.16 Additional legislation in the early 1980's quite sensibly sought to reduce apparent duplication between Counties and Districts. Districts were given a more direct role of determination on most planning applications; Counties were firmly established as minerals planning authorities determining minerals and waste disposal applications.

3. ACHIEVEMENTS OF METROPOLITAN STRATEGIC PLANNING SINCE 1974

On the basis of the consultations in response to the White Paper, the achievements of County strategic planning since 1974 either on plan-making or implementation are not being disputed.

3.1 Structure Plans

3.1.1 The major initial task in 1974 was to pull together and revise the 36 previously prepared structure plans into 6 conurbation plans. In the West Midlands 11 plans in part or whole were examined, and amended to achieve a Countywide strategy: ie one strategic plan.

3.1.2 Attempts were made to eliminate inconsistencies, duplication, different assumptions and differing policies towards, for example, Green Belt. Some structure plans were subsequently modified to reflect the strategic services by the new authorities.

3.1.3 These integrated County-wide plans have been approved by Secretaries of State and their robustness tested and upheld generally on appeal. Consistency has been achieved on policies such as shopping and green belt which had previously differed markedly between Districts.

3.1.4 Following the 1981 Census, structure plans were updated in the early 1980's to ensure the relevance of Plans to tackle the more recent deterioration in the urban fabric and economy of the conurbations, and to ensure they relate to realistic resource levels, and to provide an action framework for regeneration involving both public and private sectors.

3.2 Research and Intelligence

3.2.1 Metropolitan Counties rapidly established capabilities on research and intelligence, with statistical and economic expertise. This capability has usually provided a service for the County and Districts and also for the regional planning work involving the Shire Counties.

3.2.2 Such expertise has achieved:

- i) consistency and agreement on data, assumptions and projections;
- ii) analysis and interpretation of Census data;
- iii) co-ordination of District data to enable a unified, Countywide advocacy on issues of metropolitan importance (eg Housing Conditions);
- iv) assessment of land availability statistics, ready analysis, and agreement with the private sector on for example true housing land availability. This has significantly assisted in public inquiry work;
- v) a basis on which County and Districts (and regional consortia of local authorities) have been able to represent

- at national and European levels the scale and nature of problems.
- vi) a consequent capability to monitor strategic policies, assess their impact and suggest redirection of resources. In some Counties annual statements have been produced to provide an up-to-date basis for reviewing policies and thus maintaining their relevance in the light of rapidly changing economic circumstances.

3.3 Local Plans

- 3.3.1 Metropolitan Counties have prepared, with District agreement, local plans for countywide issues (eg Green Belt), major growth areas or cross-District planning issues; a number are now operative. The County responsibility for a Development Plan Scheme, has ensured that District-led local plans have been prepared for priority areas/issues only. The certification role of the Metropolitan Counties has guaranteed that local plans conform with the operative Structure Plan and has helped ensure compatibility and modesty in the bids for new investment resources. All Metropolitan Counties have had instances of refusing to certify local plans. This is an essential tool if strategic planning is to be effective, and local plans individually and in aggregate are to reflect the strategic plan.

3.4 Development Control

- 3.4.1 The 1981 legislation reduced the Metropolitan Counties role to that of consultee on planning applications except minerals and waste disposal. This has not generally prolonged the period for determination of applications (less than 5% of all). Whilst time-consuming in some respects the process has enabled Districts to "delegate upwards" some awkward and locally-sensitive issues; further, Counties have frequently supported appellants against District Council refusals based on purely local issues.
- 3.4.2 Those employed on this aspect of County work constitute less than 10% of technical planning staff.
- 3.4.3 The Minerals role has grown in importance since 1981, the County determining applications for mineral extraction and waste disposal. Counties have developed significant capabilities to often locally-sensitive problems of open-casting and deep-mining, together with the disposal of toxic and other sensitive wastes. Waste disposal by landfill in particular is sensitive at a local level, and County determination enables local feeling to be balanced with wider strategic considerations, solutions being derived from the range of technical skills available from within County Departments. In West Midlands, a highly controversial landfill proposal to use 3 million cubic metres of household refuse over a ten year period in the Queslett Sand & Gravel Quarries, was agreed with local residents. The proposal was for controlled land-fill, retention of valuable wild life areas, and

community-based after-uses and represented a sensible compromise between local needs and strategic land-fill requirements.

3.5 Action Programmes

- 3.5.1 Concurrent powers under the 1972 Act gave Counties opportunity to carry out major action programmes, with access to capital grant from Government.
- 3.5.2 Early consolidation of structure plans enabled Counties to quickly identify priority action needs and to generate action which would supplement District capacity, accelerate programmes and channel resources to areas where other agencies' were less equipped to act.
- 3.5.3 Taking land reclamation for example there were 27,000 derelict acres of land in the metropolitan areas in 1974, constituting over 3% of their total land area. The Counties themselves have reclaimed 13 square miles since 1974 being 50% of total reclamation in these areas, and 25% of total land reclamation in the UK during the period. The single-mindedness of the authorities has achieved a rapid response to the Government's call for increased private sector partnership in developing sites for housing and industry.
- 3.5.4 The initial momentum generated by this initiative has enabled Counties to apply and uphold relatively tight green belt proposals (supported on appeal) to assist in accelerating use of land in the older areas. Experience gained in the reclamation process together with detailed assessment of the scale of industrial obsolescence has accelerated acceptance in the conurbations of the recycling of industrial land and premises for housing and other uses. In the West Midlands County an additional 2,000 dwellings are now expected to be provided on recycled industrial sites before 1990. The Counties have participated in the Inner City Partnerships and other Urban Programmes offering specialist expertise on transport, economic and environmental initiatives, spending in the Birmingham Partnership Area for example 50% of the £24 million allocation this year.
- 3.5.5 Emphasis on action programmes has been on applying specialist staff units to specific activities often where District capabilities are limited thus ensuring complementary action to the Districts, except where staff at both tiers can be applied with agreement on similar initiatives to accelerate action on for example environmental activity.
- 3.5.6 Whilst larger District Councils are unquestionably capable of carrying out major development projects, the Counties have carried out schemes the implementation of which would have been doubtful were it not for the County initiative. This applies, for example, to the Tyne and Wear Metro (public transport linked to land use

strategy), Birmingham Airport (£60 million new terminal and aprons: public inquiry 1979, commencement 1981 and completion in early 1984): the 720 acre Rother Valley Park in South Yorkshire and the Maritime Museum in Merseyside.

- 3.6 Together with Metropolitan Counties successful advocacy for European funds, Urban Programme status, derelict land grant, and housing and transportation funds, the Counties role in accelerating regeneration of the conurbations cannot be questioned. The Structure and Local Plans have helped to provide a basis for increasing investment certainty and channelling private sector resources into the areas most in need. In addition, the Counties have provided for the first time since before 1974, agreement with the Shire Counties at regional scale on levels of migration and overspill, principles and extent of green belt, and mineral extraction. This has successfully eliminated or reduced the inter-authority wrangling between individual Districts and Shire Counties on development requirements. This increased influence of the Metropolitan areas in regional planning has enhanced the credibility of a local authority lead in the regional planning process, as well as that of the Met Counties in advocating the needs of their built-up areas.
- 3.7 Thus in terms of achievement, the Met Counties have been fulfilling their statutory requirements; they have helped to introduce greater private sector involvement in the strategic planning process; and they have substantially contributed to translating priority needs into action by developing capabilities to tackle the problems involved.
- 3.8 These achievements have, with few exceptions, been confirmed by Central Government throughout the last ten years, with very little criticism and significant reassuring and financial support.
- 3.9 The ability of the Metropolitan Counties to perform their tasks over this period reflects in large measure the integration of necessary technical skills. Structure Planning has benefitted from strategic land use planners, economists, transport planners, statisticians and "action" planners, helping to ensure policies are practicable. Action programmes have called on reclamation engineers, landscape staff, planners, valuers, pollution control input, industrial economists and architects.
- 3.10 Whilst the 1972 Act may not altogether have anticipated these skills would be accumulated, nevertheless in practice the combination has reaped dividends in the quality and scale of output. This has been carried out often using joint arrangements with the Districts to maximise efficient use of staff, but generally without dissent. For example, Greater Manchester has a joint reclamation team with Lancashire, being a highly successful continuation of pre-1974 arrangements, and retaining key technical skills in one unit, despite re-organisation.

4. CRITIQUE OF THE WHITE PAPER

4.1 The 1972 Local Government Act setting up the Metropolitan Counties followed lengthy and numerous assessments of the future possibilities for local government; the Senior Report of 1969 for example. Also Government evidence to the 1969 Royal Commission stated "huge urban masses have to be planned as a whole"; and the Commission itself advised that "transportation is inseparable from planning"; "there must be a metropolitan authority responsible for planning and transportation".

4.2 The White Paper will by now be well-known, I will not, therefore, reiterate here its full contents. I will, however, set out the fundamental misconceptions in the Government's proposals;

- (i) I would argue for a number of reasons that the philosophy underlying the White Paper attack on strategic planning operated by the Metropolitan Counties is ill-conceived and ill-advised, and in practice has little support from the District Councils who are seen as the likely recipients of most services carried out by the Counties. I would not pretend however that many Districts would welcome some return of some services.
- (ii) The emphasis on areas of operational dispute, which were apparent in the early years, partly due to lack of clarity of function in the 1972 Act, have largely been eliminated.
- (iii) There is no conception of strategic planning as a process. The inbuilt assumption appears to be that Structure Plans have now been prepared and it ignores the need for regular (even annual) updating in key policy areas to ensure that the Plans reflect contemporary social and economic needs, changing resource levels and priorities.
- (iv) There is a failure to accept and retain the integral link between land use and transport planning, accepted by the CBI and even, as fact, in the White Paper itself although this acceptance did not emerge in the final proposals.
- (v) There is no mention or recognition of the information services and data analysis carried out by the Metropolitan Counties serving both strategic and local planning, Districts and the regions.
- (vi) There is an assumption that Structure Plans are only useful in growth situations. I would argue that the need for them, however, is even greater in current economic circumstances when the conurbations are going through fundamental restructuring.

- (vii) An emphasis on disputes with Districts, even though the 1981 legislation clarified roles in development control. The resulting very real achievements in minerals and waste disposal control and planning, are not recognised in the White Paper.
- (viii) Apart from proposing regional planning conferences each chaired by a civil servant, the contribution of Metropolitan Counties in negotiating the Metropolitan requirements in a regional context has been ignored. There is no apparent recognition of the largely successful regional mechanisms of inter-Authority liaison which in the main work most effectively.
- (ix) There is no recognition of the regional variations in the scope and character of Metropolitan areas and consequently the contents of the various Structure Plans and action programmes;
- (x) The case for abolition may arguably have been focussed on non-planning activity. The achievements of strategic planning appear not to have been recognised: neither have the implementation aspects of County planning activity outlined in the previous section of this paper;
- (xi) Despite continuing and increasing Central Government support to Metropolitan County action programmes, there is no recognition of the valuable technical capabilities developed or the benefits of these being under one roof. An implicit assumption exists that the pace and scale of land reclamation, landfill and transport infrastructure to name but a few activities, will be maintained by District Councils, once the capabilities are disbanded. In the West Midlands, the County reclamation unit comprises 20 staff with engineering, valuation, planning, pollution control, financial and landscape skills, for a £2m programme per annum: break up of this unit would not maintain this level of performance.
- (xii) There is no recognition of the close and generally harmonious rapport at working level between Counties and Districts on strategic policy and action. Some conflicts of interest do and will continue to exist but this is exception not rule.
- (xiii) There is an assumption that 36 Districts (to replace 6 Metropolitan Counties) will be able to produce, through 36 Structure Plans, the same quality, robustness and consistency of policies.

5. THE EFFECTS ON STRATEGIC PLANNING

5.1 The weight of opinion in consultations on the White Paper has

been to stress the ill-effects of abolition on the services provided by the Counties: industrial associations, professional institutions and local authorities have added weight to this concern.

- 5.2 Based on my awareness of reactions to the White Paper, and in my personal and professional judgement, I believe that the following major effects will be felt if the White Paper is enacted, including a retreat to many of the difficulties in strategic planning which existed prior to 1974:
- (i) There will be a break-up of co-ordinated land use and transport strategies which have been so successfully developed: transport strategy itself will be fragmented with public transport and highways devolving to different types of authority;
 - (ii) There will be a fragmentation of resource planning for the major public services currently carried out by the Metropolitan Counties;
 - (iii) District Authorities will inevitably and increasingly be competing for the resources required to implement the areas of action carried out by the Metropolitan Counties;
 - (iv) Competition between Districts will be intensified in order to attract mobile investment, leading to overprovision of land, a possible increase in competition for infrastructure and conflicting priorities for the public services regarding the location and scale of services being demanded;
 - (v) There will be increased inconsistency in the development of strategic policy and its application; notably in shopping and on green belt reflecting (iv) above; also increasing ad hoc pressures to change policy for reasons of short-term expediency;
 - (vi) Momentum on regeneration action programmes will be lost, with staff capabilities split up between authorities (or possibly being lost through redundancy). Inevitably, duplication will increase as a result. Staff requirements in each District will increase to undertake strategic tasks or action, previously carried out by small integrated teams. It is difficult to countenance 36 structure plan teams to replace the 6 currently in operation. Different priority may be given by contributing authorities to the resources they wish to apply for example to reclamation, economic, highway and environmental programmes;
 - (vii) The loss of momentum will endanger the recent efforts to intensify private sector housing and commercial investment in the older areas, thereby increasing pressures on the Green Belt;

- (viii) The environmental uplift of the older areas, so important in advance of commercial investment in the older areas, will lose momentum with a subsequent loss of industrial potential. (It is questionable for example whether the West Midlands County Council's £20 million per annum "Greenline" programme of environmental improvement straddling 5 District boundaries, or the £1 million per annum "Green Up" campaign of landscaping major highways, will be maintained by the respective District authorities.)
- (ix) Districts will be unlikely to implement in their areas strategic decisions with which they have previously disagreed (strategic planning inevitably involves decision making on issues which would be unpopular at local level). I would expect an increase in the number of appeals and subsequent costs to the private and public purses.
- (x) The inevitable loss of an effective voice for each metropolitan area will set back agreement on the metropolitan needs to be met in the surrounding region.
- (xi) Strategic minerals and waste disposal planning will disappear: decisions on land-fill and mineral extraction will be based more specifically on local issues. Thus there will inevitably be disruption to the minerals industry, and increasing difficulties for the disposal of household and trade wastes. The success since 1974 in linking phased mineral extraction to phased restoration using landfill material from a wide area to accelerate this process will be lost.
- (xii) There will be a loss of metropolitan advocacy in support of each Metropolitan area seeking UK and European resources, both public and private. In this context, Metropolitan scale industrial and tourism promotion will be made the more difficult and each component area will be more inclined to promote itself: once again an example of further likely duplication of effort and staff resources.

6. UNITARY PLANS

- 6.1 In spite of the substantial technical and political disagreement with the White Paper, the only change now proposed by Government is to introduce "Unitary Plans".
- 6.2 The purpose of this change is to combine Structure and Local Plans into a two-part plan to be prepared by each District within the Metropolitan Counties. The first part will be equivalent to a Structure Plan and the second to a Local Plan. At present it appears that the two parts are to be prepared concurrently, and the second part would be a local detailed plan for the whole District. Strategic guidance would be provided by the Secretary

of State, following in theory advice from a Conference of Metropolitan Districts and adjoining authorities. Such guidance would not be subject to the right of objection.

6.3 These proposals, applicable only to the Metropolitan County areas, have not been the subject of consultation. The following aspects of this scheme fill me with further anxiety for the future of metropolitan planning:-

- (i) the system of Structure and Local Plans will continue in the Shire Counties and therefore two different planning systems will operate in adjacent areas;
- (ii) the Secretary of State has increased the extent of guidance that will be given to Districts, including level of provision for housing (note: not location of such); major transport links (note why only these; no public transport proposals either); general level of provision and locations for major commercial/industrial development and strategic centres; overall policies on green belt, mineral extraction....
- (iii) guidance for metropolitan planning will include advice from adjoining authorities, not merely the constituent Metropolitan Districts. A regional conference will be chaired by a representative of the Regional office of the DOE;
- (iv) whilst the White Paper implied the reduced value and need for strategic planning, this is now to be strengthened through increased and mandatory Central Government guidance which is not for consultation; we have yet to be advised where the additional Civil Service staff are to be found for such work and what the resulting costs are likely to be;
- (v) the imposed guidance will not be subject of public examination and therefore in any subsequent examinations-in-public, inquiries/planning appeals, the Secretary of State will be both judge and jury, without local accountability;
- (vi) the proposals imply that the Metropolitan District Councils will have the resources to prepare a District-wide local detailed plan, whereas this has without exception not been possible to date in the Metropolitan areas. Additional staff resources would clearly be required for such a task;
- (vii) these proposals purport to be a simplification of planning. In my view they are likely to become more cumbersome, more complex and confusing. I just cannot conceive how long it will take for a "local plan" to be prepared as a detailed land use plan for cities the size of Manchester, Liverpool,

or Birmingham, and the scale of staff resources required to keep such plans up-to-date

(viii) the intention that each District prepares a two-part comprehensive plan, and each District's plan should relate to and parallel those of the adjacent Districts, fails to appreciate the varying policies, priorities and resources of each authority.

6.4 I would be surprised if these latest proposals met with support from District Councils in the Metropolitan areas, the very Authorities who are to implement them.

7. SUMMARY

7.1 The Unitary Plan proposals suggest that the Secretary of State now recognises the importance of strategic planning in the Metropolitan County areas, and he will in addition take over this responsibility when the Metropolitan Counties are abolished.

7.2 This apparent reversal of thinking on the value of strategic planning has paralleled further unco-ordinated proposals for change to the planning system, generated from the D.O.E. In addition to the Unitary Plan idea there are recent DOE proposals for Simplified Planning Zones (despite the Roger Tym report on Enterprise Zones identifying planning relaxations as a relatively unimportant factor in firms deciding to establish there); New Circulars on Green Belt and Housing have had a chequered history; following previous drafts, Circulars were withdrawn and revised drafts proposed. It is regrettable in conurbation terms that the new Circulars have taken limited account of the recommendations of the recent Environment Committee of the House of Commons which stressed the links between Green Belt and regeneration, derelict land reclamation, permanence of Green Belt and so on.

7.3 It may be argued therefore that the White Paper on "Streamlining the Cities" is but one part of a seemingly ad hoc process of modifying and restricting our planning system, which has been soundly based over a period of many years.

7.4 In addition one cannot but conclude that the Secretary of State is attempting to increasingly intervene in the planning process to the detriment of local accountability and responsibility.

7.5 If it is that the need for strategic planning in the major conurbations is now accepted and that this increasing intervention is in fact proposed, it is highly questionable how much local determination and local accountability will remain in the planning process, and also whether the quality of planning service will in any way improve.

7.6 The costs to the planning service of implementing the White Paper are still the subject of conjecture and disagreement and the issue has as a result not been included in this paper to the Conference. In my view, however, if all proposals currently put forward on abolition were to be implemented, I see as inevitable the need for additional Central Government and District staff resources: at a cost. Moreover, I also suspect that the overall costs to the private sector will increase.

7.7 In addition to my concern over Unitary Plans it is of considerable disappointment that no changes to the White Paper proposals have been made as a result of the extensive and in depth comments of the many bodies who responded on the White Paper and expressed reservations and concern as to the impact on the strategic planning service if abolition were to go ahead.

8. STRATEGIC PLANNING IN WESTERN DEMOCRACIES

8.1 In proposing the need for a strategic authority at metropolitan level, the RICS considered a 1983 study by Alan Norton into metropolitan administration in Western Europe and North America.

8.2 This study is highly significant in demonstrating the need for and successes of metropolitan government including strategic planning. Mr. Norton has kindly agreed that his report be circulated with my paper.

8.3 Whilst I would draw attention of this Conference to the study and in particular its conclusions, the following points summarise key issues of strategic planning importance in his paper:

- i) Metropolitan systems of interdependent communities and inter-related problems can be defined and given governments to regulate and provide for these problems;
- ii) Whilst the metropolitan authority will inevitably have a difficult and often controversial role, it needs good (central) government support and backing. Decisions of central government and the more local levels of government need to support each other and not conflict with the agreed metropolitan strategy;
- iii) It has been generally accepted that such (Met) areas need their own administrations. Such a focus of decision-making cannot be satisfactorily provided from central government level;
- iv) Two levels of decision-making are required - local and metropolitan;
- v) purely voluntary associations are not known to have a satisfactory record of success;

- vi) Metropolitan Authorities have benefitted from a process of thorough periodic review enabling an opportunity to adapt their functions to the changing nature and perception of metropolitan problems;
- vii) The metropolitan authorities must have effective means to ensure implementation and control functions which cannot be satisfactorily implemented at lower than metropolitan level;
- viii) Strategic decision-making, implying planning, lies at the heart of justification of the metropolitan authority;
- ix) Metropolitan land use planning is critical and intertwined with economic and social considerations;
- x) Its task in influencing the improvement of life in a period of low growth or decline has equal validity as in growth situations.
- xi) There is a need for a metropolitan planning authority to be deeply involved in implementation so that its decisions have influence.

8.4 Mr. Norton's analysis examined a number of metropolitan situations outside the UK. Whilst his study does not assume overseas experience directly compares with our own metropolitan situation, it is clear that the Government's proposals for abolition "buck the trend" towards strengthening the system of metropolitan government and planning. I find no substantive difference between the UK and other Western democracies to justify a reversal of the general trend.

9. CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS : HOW TO SALVAGE THE WRECK

9.1 The Metropolitan Counties were established to co-ordinate and implement strategic services. This operation was, and continues to be, justified in the light of rapid decline in the social and economic conditions of the major conurbations.

9.2 These authorities have developed their implementation activities since 1974, not as the White Paper so mistakenly argues "generating a natural search for a strategic role which may have little basis in real needs". Rather these activities have been in full response to the structural decline and change in the metropolitan areas. Moreover, and this is important to stress, these developments in land reclamation, inner city partnership projects, public transport and major capital schemes, have been with the full acceptance and agreement of District Councils and financial support of Central Government.

9.3 Based on the achievements in the last ten years it is a total misrepresentation in the White Paper that the 1960's and early

1970's were "the heyday of a certain fashion for strategic planning, the confidence in which now appears exaggerated". Rather the need for strategic planning as operated by the Metropolitan Counties is I would suggest even greater to tackle the problems of our older areas particularly in a period of reduced resources and investment in public sector services.

- 9.4 The Metropolitan Counties have matured, developed, and accelerated their strategic role to combat the structural problems of the older urban areas. The Structure Plans, and their updating to reflect changing conditions and needs, have proved to be acceptable and robust, and have a proven track record. Successive Secretaries of State have confirmed confidence by generally approving their contents with limited amendment.
- 9.5 County-led local plans, for Green Belt or other issues beyond the boundaries of individual Districts, have been confirmed and proved to be robust in appeal decisions.
- 9.6 The Government's proposals for changing the planning system by abolition of the Metropolitan Counties are ill conceived and ill founded. Emphasis has been placed on apparent duplication and conflict. The Government have not as yet quantified the scale of such duplication and conflict. In my view, particularly with the great majority of Metropolitan Districts opposed to abolition, this is an unjustified assertion.
- 9.7 The Government's acceptance and continuing support for the Metropolitan Counties action programmes, and the Secretary of State and his Ministers' personal involvement in Inner City and other Urban Programme initiatives testify to a technical acceptance of the valuable role of Metropolitan Counties in tackling, together with Metropolitan Districts and Government, the problems of regeneration. It is deeply regrettable that the valuable and universally-accepted partnership of County, Districts, and Government in regeneration has not been recognised at all in the White Paper and subsequent proposals.
- 9.8 We have yet to identify the purported large body of consultees who have expressed support for the White Paper and the subsequent proposals such as for Unitary Plans. The majority of Metropolitan Districts and I believe Shire Counties will have opposed the White Paper. The professions also have generally showed disfavour. Even the CBI call for retention of strategic capabilities for planning, transportation and action programmes.
- 9.9 I would remind the Conference that strategic planning is about more than Structure and Local Plans. It is a process beyond simply land use planning a fact hardly established in the White Paper. It is also a process which will have a fundamental impact on the future of our metropolitan areas. The cost of failure in regenerating our urban areas is only too clear in the United States.

9.10 Thus, in my view, if we believe that strategic planning must continue, there must be a capability and an organisation able to develop and implement strategic policy. Options have been proposed in various circles if the Metropolitan Counties were in fact to be abolished, some examples of which merit further consideration.

(In these examples I regard as critical the retention of certain planning and action capabilities to maintain the momentum of performance developed over the last few years);

- i) A Strategic Planning & Transportation Authority proposed by the RICS and, in principle by the CBI and including public transport and promotion. This body would deal with structure plans, research and intelligence, urban regeneration activities, waste disposal, minerals and transport planning, retaining current technical capabilities. Such a body would of course retain at Board/Authority level an implementing role in connection with its policy-formulating responsibilities. Strategic planning and highways planning would thus be retained at a level above the Metropolitan Districts.

It is most encouraging that the RICS accepts the need for an effective system of planning at metropolitan level and therefore opposes the White Paper proposals. This option would provide the minimum technical disruption to services currently provided by Metropolitan Counties.

This option inevitably leads one to conclude that there may be a body of opinion that would suggest merit in the County Councils being retained as strategic authorities but with more restricted terms of reference to maintain their strategic direction.

- ii) A more formal regional planning system. The current form of regional planning liaison varies between region, but it is crucial that the needs and responsibilities of metropolitan areas are formally recognised in the regional planning framework.

Arguments have been put forward for establishing regional planning authorities. It is however doubtful in my mind without an implementing or resource allocation role, that such a system would be effective. Should Metropolitan Districts be integral parts of such a mechanism, the Shire Districts - Stoke-on-Trent, York, Preston for example would also expect involvement. Previous experience of regional planning pre-1974 including all Counties, Districts and DOE suggest little prospect for effective regional planning unless it is very much streamlined in terms of membership. I would suggest regional authorities may be too distant from action on the

ground to be sufficiently effective and I firmly believe any strategic body must have direct influence and involvement in the implementation of policies. I do not propose, however, at this stage in my paper to commence discussion on the principle of devolution to the regions.

- iii) Metropolitan Government with a wider scale of responsibilities in resource determination and allocation. The European experience suggests an argument for extending co-ordination of strategic services to water supply and sewerage, pollution control and possibly the health services.
- iv) Extension of the Metropolitan areas beyond their existing boundaries. True Metropolitan planning has to take into account the resources and requirements of the hinterland as well as the built-up area. It may be argued that the Metropolitan Counties have been severely constrained by their tight boundaries which places the success of Metropolitan planning on negotiation and compromise with adjacent Shire and District Counties.

It is conceivable that all these options could in fact be combined to streamline metropolitan planning.

- 9.11 Metropolitan County experience since 1974 suggests that a pre-requisite for success has to be a single-mindedness and determination to allocate resources to key activities for physical restructuring of the conurbations. The current complexity and breadth of District activities in addition to the reallocated County functions brings into question their ability to maintain the momentum built up by the Counties in recent years to tackle regeneration. The early 1970's experience of District-prepared Structure Plans gives little confidence to suggest effective strategic planning will be maintained if the system prior to 1974 is re-instituted particularly if it is separated from public transport planning.
- 9.12 Any break-up of the capabilities developed by the Counties particularly in strategic planning, research and intelligence, land reclamation, minerals and waste disposal control will undoubtedly reduce the momentum and scale of operations which have been developed. Even in such relatively recent developments as County-wide nature conservation strategies, the same threat applies.
- 9.13 At decision-making level, the mixture of County Councillors well versed in particular District problems (often dual representation) and County Councillors having particular skills in specific County services has helped to sustain and accelerate a general level of service provision lacking disagreement with District Councils.
- 9.14 The RICS concluded that there is a need to retain a metropolitan

body with wide strategic functions. This analysis, raises the critical question of whether or not the abolition of the Metropolitan Counties can at all be technically justified.

- 9.15 My overall conclusion is that effective strategic planning will be lost in the metropolitan areas under the current abolition proposals. There is no doubt in my mind that no case exists on technical grounds for abolition. The central issues appear to me to be clouded by the wider governmental attack on strategic planning, and indeed, town planning as a whole which has been one of the successes of post-war governmental action in the United Kingdom. It is deeply regrettable that the media concentration on contentious non-planning issues at the Counties in recent years has overshadowed the very real success of Metropolitan Counties in the technical field of planning and its delivery, being central to Metropolitan service activity and achievement.
- 9.16 There will be those who consider Metropolitan County planning services can be equally well provided by Central Government and Districts. Whatever the merits of such a case, which I dispute, the issue then becomes one of debating the merits of Central or Local control over planning and a whole range of other local government services.
- 9.17 My case rests here and I leave you to judge and consider the consequences for metropolitan planning and the future of our conurbations into the next century.

A.A.CAVE,
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