

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10914-7 - Land Use Planning and the Mediation of Urban Change: The British Planning System in Practice

Patsy Healey, Paul McNamara, Martin Elson and Andrew Doak

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## I

*Planning in practice: an approach to analysis*

This book is an account of how the British planning system has been put to work in different situations in the period from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s. Our account draws upon empirical research undertaken for the Department of the Environment between 1980 and 1985 (Healey, Davis, Wood and Elson 1982, Healey, Doak, McNamara and Elson 1985). The particular focus of this work was on the *Implementation of Development Plans* (1985), and involved analysis of strategic policy and detailed case studies of how policy had been implemented in the West Midlands, Greater Manchester and the western parts of the Outer South East.

The emphasis of our empirical work means that in certain respects our account is selective. For example, it does not cover the workings of the planning system in the special conditions of London, or in rural areas a long way from major conurbations. Nor does it explore the planning system at work in the specific cultural and institutional conditions of Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland. In terms of planning practice, we give more attention to strategic policies and the role of plans and policy statements than to the routine management of detailed changes in the built environment.

However, despite these caveats, we consider our material provides a sufficient range of examples upon which to build a picture of the variety of ways in which the planning system has been adapted to local circumstances in recent years. Drawing on previous work in London (Healey and Underwood 1979, Doak 1982), in Edinburgh (McNamara 1985) and in the Outer South East (Elson 1982, McNamara 1984b, 1984c), on our general review of local plans (Healey 1983a) and green belts (Elson 1986), we offer an empirically-based general assessment of the British planning system at work in the period after Hall's major study, *The Containment of Urban England* (Hall, Gracey, Drewett and Thomas 1973). Given the significant changes in economic fortunes, local institutions, political strategy and institutional organisation in recent years, we believe such an account is important for any understanding of the development of the planning system.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10914-7 - Land Use Planning and the Mediation of Urban Change: The British Planning System in Practice

Patsy Healey, Paul McNamara, Martin Elson and Andrew Doak

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 2

### *Land use planning*

The key questions posed in this assessment are:

how has the planning system been used and adapted for different problems in different places, and what does this tell us about (a) its adaptive potential, (b) the values locked inside it, and (c) its contribution to spatial change?

who has demanded what from the planning system, how has the system met these demands, and what does this tell us about who has benefited from the planning system?

through what processes have interests been mediated in the planning system, and what does this tell us about how powerful forces can be reinforced or counteracted through the policies and practices of the planning system?

what is the implication of this analysis for the future role, instruments, institutional arrangements and processes of an effective and distributively-fair programme for managing land use change, given the likely agenda of issues in the future?

In this chapter we outline what we mean by the planning system and give a brief introduction to our approach to analysis.

#### **What is 'the planning system'?**

In using the term 'planning system', we refer to the collection of institutional arrangements, powers and resources which in Britain constitutes an explicit programme for the management of land use and environmental change. The scope of this system is both comprehensive, since it covers all development in all parts of the country, and narrow, in that the definition of development excludes important categories of spatial change such as that arising from farming and forestry, and the considerations given priority within its operations have tended to focus on narrowly-based land use and development issues rather than broad economic, social and environmental questions (Bruton and Nicholson 1987). In practice, the scope and content of planning is the evolving product of the political and administrative processes surrounding the law and practice of the system. One of the main tasks of this book is to unravel the values and priorities lodged within the system in different times and places.

By an 'explicit programme', we mean the legislation, instruments and institutional arrangements which are embraced within the Town and Country Planning legislation and the work of local planning authorities in Britain. This itself is as much the result of historical evolution as any logical development of the issues addressed or the interventions of government. For example, environmental management is not part of the planning

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10914-7 - Land Use Planning and the Mediation of Urban Change: The British Planning System in Practice

Patsy Healey, Paul McNamara, Martin Elson and Andrew Doak

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Planning in practice: an approach to analysis* 3

legislation, yet many county planning departments are actively engaged in it. Local authorities have extensive powers to intervene in the development process but, as we will illustrate, these are often only tenuously connected to the exercise of the planning function.

The historically-contingent nature of the ‘agenda’ of the planning system means that we have to treat its scope and content as an empirical question. Our account shows that both have varied significantly in place and time. But this variation presents us with a problem in drawing the boundaries for research purposes. Should we include all state interventions in land use and environmental change? Should we consider only those actions authorised by ‘town and country planning legislation’ or, alternatively, the wider set of activities carried out by the planning departments of local authorities?

Our solution has been to focus upon the practices which surround the exercise of the main tools of land policy. We identify these in the next section. Our concern is with the various ways the state intervenes in the development processes through which spatial change is produced. While town and country planning legislation, and planning authorities, have a major part in the state’s role in these interventions, we also consider the role of local authorities and other public agencies as landowners, developers, infrastructure providers and financiers.

### The elements of the planning system

In describing any policy programme, we need to consider its instruments and institutional arrangements, and the use made of them in the pursuit of strategies and values. We will argue later for the need to identify the *processes* through which the instruments and institutional arrangements are made active, in the formulation of strategies and the assertion of interests and values (chapter 10).

In chapter 2, we outline the evolution of the instruments, institutional arrangements and strategies of the planning system. In chapters 3 to 6, we analyse the way these have been put to work in relation to different problems in varying contexts. Here we merely introduce the system in outline.

There are generally recognised to be three broad types of land policy measure; regulatory, developmental and financial (Darin-Drabkin 1977, Lichfield and Darin-Drabkin 1980, Scott 1980) (see table 1.1). The British planning system, as it has operated in most of the postwar period, has centred primarily on the deployment of the regulatory tool, supported by guidance and information. Extensive use is also made of developmental and financial tools. Institutionally, the system is primarily operated by

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10914-7 - Land Use Planning and the Mediation of Urban Change: The British Planning System in Practice

Patsy Healey, Paul McNamara, Martin Elson and Andrew Doak

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 4

*Land use planning*Table 1.1. *A classification of land policy measures*

Measures	Primary emphasis
Control over specific development without taking land	regulatory
Control over specific development by taking land	developmental
Control over specific development by direct public authority participation	developmental
Control over general development by fiscal means	financial
Influence over specific development by fiscal means	financial
General influence on the land market	information and guidance

(Adapted from Lichfield and Darin–Drabkin 1980, p. 258)

local government. In Britain, local government is organised into large and highly professionalised authorities (Smith 1985). During our study period, a two-tier system of local government was in operation, with shire and metropolitan districts sharing planning functions with shire and metropolitan counties. As we will show, these overlapping functions produced many problems. Despite the capability of local government and its apparent primary role in the exercise of planning functions, central government has a powerful presence in the system. Central–local relations are thus a perennial issue, as attempts at central direction confront not only local political resistance but the inherent difficulties of implementing land use policy objectives without detailed knowledge of sites and locations.

A further inherent dilemma for the planning system, given its basis in regulatory powers, is its dependence on investment initiatives coming forward from public and private agencies in order to implement policies. The institutional arrangements for planning thus embody various procedures intended to govern the relationships between planning authorities and those seeking to develop, such as consultation opportunities and inquiries. At the same time, it has to take account of the concerns of those interests (such as local residents and adjacent landowners) affected by other people’s development projects. One of the major themes of our study is the fairness and effectiveness with which these so-called ‘third party’ interests have been addressed.

Some accounts of the planning system describe its practice and consequences largely in terms of the procedural experience of operating its instruments and institutional arrangements (Bruton and Nicholson 1984, Nuffield Foundation 1986). It is these which constitute the primary focus of attention of many local authority and central government planners. But such studies cannot avoid the variable way in which practice uses the

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10914-7 - Land Use Planning and the Mediation of Urban Change: The British Planning System in Practice

Patsy Healey, Paul McNamara, Martin Elson and Andrew Doak

Excerpt

[More information](#)

*Planning in practice: an approach to analysis* 5

instruments and operates the institutional arrangements. We seek to address this variety and uncover what structures it. In doing so, our concern is to assess how far and in what ways the form of the instruments and institutional arrangements *constrain* the practices which constitute the planning system.

**The local variability of interests and issues**

Every locality is a unique configuration of economic activities, divisions of labour, cultural traditions, political alignments, spatial arrangement and physical form. As a result, most typologies of local economies or local political characteristics conceal more than they reveal (Sharpe and Newton 1984, Cooke 1986). Aggregating the patterns produced by the complex economic and political relations which happen to occur within an area obscures not only the unique qualities of each locality, but turns our attention away from the relations through which the patterns are produced. Yet it is these relations which should be understood if we are to address the question of the way the planning system is adapted to local circumstances. In particular, there is a need to analyse how economic and political relations produce interests in sites, properties, locations, environments and spatial arrangements, and how these interests are in turn articulated in the arena not only of local politics and local authority action, but of national politics, administrative action and the behaviour of other public agencies involved in development in some way.

For while the physical world has objective reality, issues and problems to do with land use, development and spatial arrangement only arise as these are experienced by people, households, firms, institutions and groups engaged in various economic and socio-cultural activities. Issues and problems arrive on the agenda of central and local government in different ways. Individuals and groups may explicitly identify their interests and, through the exercise of their power, insert them into the political arena. Their interests may also become embedded in the institutional arrangements and accepted values which pervade the practice of planning. Putting the planning system to work thus involves a complex process through which interests in land use change and spatial arrangement are mediated both directly and indirectly.

However, the issues and interests which dominate political discourse in a locality, and become lodged within the planning arena, may be far removed from what many people in an area might actually value, despite the claims for representativeness made by politicians and professionals. Housebuilders in recent years have argued vociferously that the planning system restricts land supply too much, yet benefit from the secure land

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10914-7 - Land Use Planning and the Mediation of Urban Change: The British Planning System in Practice

Patsy Healey, Paul McNamara, Martin Elson and Andrew Doak

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 6

*Land use planning*

values which such restriction sustains. Local people may object to large superstores on green belt land, but shop there enthusiastically once a scheme is built. Thus, in order to identify whose values and interests influence the way the system is put to work in an area, and who may be benefiting, it is necessary to penetrate the language of planning and local politics to identify the processes by which policies are formulated and decisions taken. We attempt to do this in chapters 3 to 6 by examining in detail how planning has been put to work in four different types of locale. Their selection merely reflects those parts of conurbation regions most affected by land use change in recent years. The four locales are: city centres; the inner city; the urban 'fringe'; and areas of open land facing both multiple pressures for future use and environmental dereliction from past exploitation. Through detailed case studies, we identify the significant relations, values and interests in land use change and describe the forms of interest mediation through which the planning system is made active.

Therefore, we do not seek to generalise at the level of localities, local economies or local authorities in approaching local variability. Instead, our emphasis is on specific groups, their various interests, and the issues that come forward for political attention. Each local authority, it is suggested, adapts the system to these specific issues and interests through the filter of its own political and institutional culture or ideology.

Our approach thus emphasises the uniqueness of local configurations of interest and of political responses to them. It recognises the plurality of interests. But we do not, as a result, accept a *pluralist* interpretation. For what individuals and groups value and what they explicitly demand are inseparably linked to a wider economic and cultural arena. The nature of the economy, the mode of production into which localities are linked, the political and administrative institutions which frame local possibilities, and the cultural traditions to which people in a locality variously relate, all affect the material resources and values extant in a locality. These broad forces provide a 'frame of reference' within which specific relationships are addressed in particular places. Individual actions serve to reinforce, modify and from time to time transform this frame of reference (Giddens 1976). In combination with locally specific patterns of wealth and position, it is this frame of reference which establishes the power relations within which specific issues and interests are perceived and asserted.

**Structure in spatial transformation**

The relationship between the economic, political and cultural dimensions of social organisation and socio-economic change in specific localities in

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10914-7 - Land Use Planning and the Mediation of Urban Change: The British Planning System in Practice

Patsy Healey, Paul McNamara, Martin Elson and Andrew Doak

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Planning in practice: an approach to analysis* 7

contemporary Britain has been the subject of considerable recent research (Dickins, Duncan, Good and Gray 1985, Lancaster Regionalism Group 1985, Cooke 1986, Hausner 1986). In what follows we merely highlight the major tendencies as reflected in pressures for land use change.

It is now widely recognised that the contemporary period has witnessed a major restructuring of manufacturing processes throughout the capitalist world (Massey and Meegan 1982) and that these are associated with global strategies to reorganise capitalist production and investment processes to ensure continuing profitability (Hall 1985, Harvey 1985). The uneven spatial effects of these processes have been increasingly visible since the mid-1970s. The collapse of traditional manufacturing, for example the metal manufacturing in the West Midlands, has produced striking land use effects following plant closures in the 1980s. The older industrial areas face major problems of dereliction, while whole communities are affected by the consequent unemployment. As spending power falls in such areas, consumer services decline in profitability and number. This sets in motion a downward spiral of disinvestment, which not only undermines the quality of life of people remaining in such areas, but also threatens property values.

Meanwhile, new industries and services, and reorganised established industries and services, demand more attractive locations accessible to different labour markets and patterns of distribution. The affluent skilled workforces of the new technology and management activities in turn seek out environments which symbolise new tastes and old images of rurality. Thanks to the long-established planning policies of containing urban development into compact cities, towns and villages, the British rural landscape remains a highly attractive location for families who can afford its property values and dependence on private transport. Thus an upward spiral of investment in the built environment is set in train, as consumer spending power moves out to the urban fringe and beyond, producing further demands for space from the service economy. Services themselves are subject to rationalisation, to increase profitability and introduce new technology. In the retail sphere, this is producing both 'megastructure' projects on the American model, and a diversity of small services and shops to suit affluent consumer lifestyles.

Spatial decentralisation is therefore proceeding apace in Britain, as in most other developed countries (Hall and Hay 1980, Goddard and Champion (eds.) 1983, Cheshire, Carbonaro and Hay 1986, Hall, Breheny, McQuaid and Hart 1987). This in turn generates new patterns of spatial segregation to reinforce those already existing, as those unable or unwilling to move are left behind in inner cities, peripheral public housing estates, or unmarketable owner-occupied houses. Here, both households

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10914-7 - Land Use Planning and the Mediation of Urban Change: The British Planning System in Practice

Patsy Healey, Paul McNamara, Martin Elson and Andrew Doak

Excerpt

[More information](#)

and firms are increasingly dependent on state expenditures. In such areas, local authorities are major land and property owners, often as a result of the major redevelopment programmes of the 1960s and past strategies of municipalisation.

It is in the older industrial inner city areas that the challenge and contradiction of the ideology of the Thatcher administration is at its most acute, since it demands both a reduction in state spending, and a return of private investment to achieve urban regeneration. Inner city policy in recent years has stressed private investment in property construction and renovation. However, such areas remain risky to investors, with property market attention focused predominantly on London and the South. Thus to attract private capital back to the inner city, whether in the form of housebuilding, commercial development or property renovation, some form of subsidy to underwrite risks is required. The proliferation of initiatives designed to 'lever' private investment back into older industrial areas has been a characteristic of both central and local government policy in recent years. The resources available through these initiatives – the Urban Programme (UP), Derelict Land Grant (DLG), Urban Development Grants (UDG), Enterprise Zones (EZ), as well as the deployment of public land holdings – dominated the resource context of our inner city study areas, as these initiatives increased in scale relative to the rapidly diminishing budgets of the 'mainstream' local government programmes.

City centres have not been immune from the decentralising pressures either. Their retail base has been threatened by rationalisation into larger units. This reflects both the logic of distribution efficiencies, and increasing competition for consumer spending. It produces demands for large sites in locations well-located on road networks. While some districts resist such pressures, in order to prevent further encroachment on green belt land, others see retail schemes as a way of sustaining local economies. Thus fringe districts may compete with conurbation centres challenging the longstanding policies of a hierarchy of centres within city regions. The position of city centres may be further undermined by manufacturing collapse or the changing distribution of office functions. These economic pressures in turn collectively threaten the symbolism of centres as the physical expression of city culture and municipal power.

A major restraint on the extent and form of urban decentralisation in Britain has been the postwar policy of safeguarding good quality agricultural land. The principle behind this was to sustain a high level of home production (Bowers and Cheshire 1983). This policy provided the primary economic plank for the spatial strategy of urban containment. But this has now been undermined by agricultural overproduction in the EEC. Falling agricultural land prices, and the economic difficulties of many farmers,

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10914-7 - Land Use Planning and the Mediation of Urban Change: The British Planning System in Practice

Patsy Healey, Paul McNamara, Martin Elson and Andrew Doak

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Planning in practice: an approach to analysis* 9

may generate a ready supply of land upon which to accommodate decentralising tendencies. Meanwhile, the land demands of the main mineral extraction industries, coal and building materials, have also been affected by volatile economic conditions and political considerations. Fluctuations in oil prices led to an expansion of opencast coalmining in the later 1970s. This produced conflicts over environmental quality and development needs around several conurbations. Building materials extraction, on the other hand, was affected by declining demand (Blowers 1980), although searches for new sources of supply continue to generate conflict.

**The rationale for planning under challenge**

Recession, economic restructuring and the radical shift away from welfare policies at the national level have thus had major spatial impacts. Established alliances of interest which supported planning policies have been undermined, exacerbating old conflicts and generating new ones. Our account of the planning system thus covers a period of major challenge to assumptions and operating practices. These challenges are not merely directed at the specific way interests have been 'balanced' in existing planning policies. The severity of economic conditions has encouraged the dominance of new 'frames of reference' within which this balance is constructed. These shift the balance of power towards stronger support for production and for increasing profitability. Some have even argued that this new emphasis on production means that the planning system must be discarded, or severely limited, since it acts as a brake on economic regeneration (Adam Smith Institute 1983, British Property Federation 1986).

This line of thought assumes that the objective of spatial planning is to limit economic activity and private interests in order to safeguard or promote environmental conservation and social welfare. These latter objectives have, of course, held a strong place in planning thought and practice since the war (Foley 1960, Hall *et al.* 1973). However, there are many reasons why economic agents themselves may demand effective spatial planning, notably in order to assist in the co-ordination of inputs to production, and to reduce uncertainty about land and property markets and the quality of the environment (Scott 1980, Harvey 1985). Many firms benefit from the co-ordination of development, making their land collectively more profitable for investment and providing a more efficient and attractive environment for their activities than each may individually achieve. Individual firms suffer as much from the adverse externality effects of what others do with their land and buildings as do residents in an area. Firms often seek some security about the future environmental

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10914-7 - Land Use Planning and the Mediation of Urban Change: The British Planning System in Practice

Patsy Healey, Paul McNamara, Martin Elson and Andrew Doak

Excerpt

[More information](#)

quality of locations, either as a guarantee of future production inputs, or to preserve the financial value of their property. In many cases the environmental quality of an area may be necessary to guarantee the availability of particular production inputs, for example, labour.

The demand for strategies for managing land use and environmental change thus rests as much on the search for improved production and investment conditions as on the concern for social welfare and environmental quality and amenities, that is, consumption. The conflicts which arise over land use and environmental change are as likely to be *between* economic interests, as between economic, environmental and welfare values. Hence, a major function of a land use planning system in Britain is the mediation of conflicting *production* and *consumption* interests in respect of how land should be used and developed. How this mediation is done will depend on national and local particularities with regard to political, administrative and legal arrangements. It will also depend on the importance attached to concepts of 'place' and 'environment' in any particular locale and time, and the historically contingent configuration of economic and social interests.

Despite some current political rhetoric, it is not the existence of a programme for managing land use change which is under fundamental challenge. Rather, it is the *policies* pursued through the system and the *practices* by which it operates which are being questioned. New economic and social agents are seeking to insert their interests *within* policies and practices, in place of established assumptions and processes. In this way economic and political changes continually reconstitute who has what interests in land, and how the planning system is fashioned to respond to the demands generated.

#### **Analysing processes of interest mediation in planning practice**

We have argued that the planning system is a programme of intervention by the state in the management of land use change and spatial arrangement. Such programmes are almost universally adopted in one form or another in complex urbanised economies as a result of:

- (1) the need to assist the spatial coordination of individual activities,
- (2) the need to mediate conflicts of interest over how land should be used and developed,
- (3) the periodic concern with representing place symbolically, as 'community', 'city', or 'municipality' in physical form.

Land use planning therefore *inherently* involves complex assessments of needs and demands and the relation between social process and spatial