

Just Space: Towards a just, sustainable London

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Just Space is a network of action groups influencing plan making in London, to ensure public debate on crucial issues of social justice and on social, economic and environmental sustainability. Operating mainly through mutual support among member-groups we are now active across all spatial scales of London – at neighbourhood, borough and London-wide strategic levels. What brought us together was a need to challenge the domination of the planning process by developers and public bodies, the latter often heavily influenced by property development interests. We see little to indicate that the planning system's formal commitment to community participation is more than lip service: the gap between policy and practice is immense where democratic engagement is concerned. Just Space is doing a bit to close the gap.

The influence of academic work on Just Space has been limited and indirect - via cooperation with researchers who have shared their learning environment. We would mention Arnstein (1969), Castells (1983), Healey (1992), Mayer (2011) as influential gateways to research on participation processes in city planning. On the specific issues of London—and especially the polarisation, displacement and gentrification processes—we have drawn upon Porter and Shaw (2008), Edwards (2010), Imrie, Lees and Raco (2009) and Aldridge et al (2013).

Just Space works by:

- Bringing together diverse participants representative of various interests and, through consensus forming, marrying expertise with direct experiences to formulate activities and collective views;
- Providing co-learning and sharing of information and knowledge by briefing papers, meetings, seminars/workshops and conferences;
- Facilitating the voices of local communities/groups in public consultation, plan making and formal scrutiny opportunities that are provided by the statutory planning system;
- Building links with researchers and students in universities which aim to harness their skills and capacities to meet community needs.

As an illustration, for the 2010 London Plan Examination in Public (EiP), Just Space coordinated or facilitated an unprecedented sixty community organisations which appeared and gave evidence.

The UK's statutory system of land-use planning (now re-named 'spatial planning') is almost the only field where procedures for public participation are embedded by law as compulsory elements of public decision making and this has been the case for some decades. In London it applies to the plans produced by the 33 Boroughs and, since 2000, to the new 'Spatial Development Strategy' (London Plan) produced by the Mayor of London. The Greater London Authority (GLA) created in that year has planning and various other strategic powers which are exercised by the directly-elected Mayor and also comprises a small Assembly whose powers are limited: it

can 'scrutinise' the Mayor, must approve the Mayor's budget and could - by two-thirds majority - reject the London Plan (Rydin et al 2004).

Just Space is a fairly fluid coming-together of community groups and concerned independent organisations, several of whom are pan-London bodies. It does not yet have a legal status and only recently has it adopted a constitution¹. In the first few years it consciously strove to maintain its informal structure and operation, but the desire and need to survive and develop, in the face of changes in the operations of the planning system and institutions, meant that a few of the features of formalised organisations had to be adopted.

This chapter presents a narrative of the formation and evolution of Just Space, highlights its main successes and failures and reflects on some of the issues confronting Londoners as they seek to influence, or even take control, of their city. The word 'sustainability' is used with care and caution since we so often find it being emptied of meaning, used to whitewash or greenwash policies and actions whose true sustainability is questionable.

Origins of Just Space

Just Space came together in a project in 2007 by the London Civic Forum, a body founded in 2000 and charged with developing civic engagement amongst Londoners. With some grant aid, we facilitated networking, information and other support to voluntary and community groups so they had the opportunity to take part in the Examination in Public of the Mayor's 2007 Alterations to the 2004 London Plan. The network was strengthened by the inclusion of the London Tenants Federation, which had been an active participant in the 2006 Alterations and in local campaigns, environmentalists and other activists who (as the London Social Forum) had mounted a public conference on Alternative Futures for London at City Hall in October 2005.

The groups which coalesced in that process had benefited from collaborative working and had secured a place and a role in the statutory scrutiny of alterations to the London Plan. They made significant interventions in the debate on the future of London on equalities, gender, disability, age, the needs of poor BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) communities in regeneration and in relation to housing. They presented evidence of how London's dearth of affordable homes manifested in a much higher proportion of housing-related problems for those seeking advice in London than in other parts of England. Proposals on the spatial needs of older people, put forward by Age Concern London, were accepted by the Mayor's Planning Team for incorporation. The case for a greater retention of industrial land—under pressure from an inflated housing market—was accepted. The groups argued for a social justice framework in relation to the 2012 Olympics decision-making and legacy and for more sustainable models for suburbs and town centres, trying to tie down the London Plan to precise statements that would enable London communities to sustain themselves in situ. They also reasoned that the plan should have proposals that would actually achieve carbon reduction targets, reduce the need to travel and improve air quality, not just rely on aspirational statements.

¹ <http://justspace.org.uk/about/constitution> and see Figure 1 below for an extract.

It was collectively decided (26 July 2007) to build upon this by establishing a network known as Just Space to strive for effective community involvement and effective delivery of spatial planning to communities, not only at the strategic level but also locally throughout London. This was done in response to a commonly held view amongst these representative organisations that change brought about by the spatial planning and development process can and often does adversely impact upon local communities. Planning practice, particularly in respect of marginalised communities and areas subject to development pressures requires critical reassessment and for community and voluntary groups to have a strong voice. Furthermore, this voice needs to be firmly grounded in the needs and issues facing Londoners, but which also can speak the language of planners and other decision makers. [“...the types of issues raised by London Civic Forum and London Tenants Federation are important and difficult to address” wrote Planning Inspectors to the Mayor of London (EiP 2007, §5.137 Panel Report Sept 2007)].

To tackle these issues, Just Space embarked upon a diverse range of 'Capability Sessions', workshops, events and conferences, all intended to create capacity within communities and support their networks to cascade, influence, challenge and sustain involvement in spatial planning, related strategies and development management. Potentially, they could significantly impact on statutory and non-statutory plans emerging from the planning system.

Resources and organisation

This work was carried on with Just Space only minimally constituted and under the wing of London Civic Forum. However it emerged that the Forum itself would close and Just Space decided to do the minimum necessary to become formally constituted and open its own bank account.

Nevertheless, efforts have been made to embed principles of diversity, mutual support and empowerment within a horizontal organisation in the Constitution. There are no elected Chairs or other Officers, save for a Treasurer, decisions are based on seeking consensus and tasks such as chairing meetings are rotated.

Figure 1: An extract from the Just Space Constitution:

‘The Just Space ethos is one of grass-roots networking, informing and supporting local communities so that their contributions to planning policy are empowering and effective. It does this by:-

- Maintaining an overview of strategic planning issues and their implementation
- Providing mutual support to community organisations engaging in the London Plan EiP process
- Raising awareness of London planning policies at local level
- Cascading learning to the local level in a way that informs involvement in Local Plans
- Working in partnership at the local level to develop new links between voluntary and community sector groups, groups concerned with equalities and active residents
- Developing plain language information that is accessible for all Londoners.
- Coordinating the skills and expertise of members where possible’.

Our meetings are open to everyone from the community sector who has an interest in planning issues. As to decisions, we do not take a vote; we ask if everyone is in agreement. Our experience is that voting is not the best model for a community organisation seeking a participatory approach. Where there is disagreement, we aim to overcome this through discussion and compromise, rather than risk people feeling excluded and wanting to leave because they are outvoted. Of course, we disagree on some things and there are tensions to overcome. There is, for example, a potentially strong tension between the protection of green space and the need for more housing so we have tended to avoid—so far—the issue of building on the Green Belt. However, by discussion we increase understanding and sensitivity and we find that housing groups value green space and environmental groups recognise the social need for housing, so the conflict is not as intractable as many of us imagined it would be.

Just Space retains a self-employed community consultant who has operated effectively as Just Space's coordinator since its inception and, together with other participants, has been the focus for the organisation's essential organisational memory and core capacity. Just Space does not have an office but draws upon its members to contribute such resources.

Within its membership, it is able to draw upon a wide range and depth of knowledge and experience at applied, academic and professional levels in planning, community organising, the environment and housing. The strength of Just Space lies in the diversity and enthusiasm of its participating members.

Member organisations and groups vary from time to time. As a snapshot, the following were active participants in Just Space at the beginning of 2010: London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies, London Tenants Federation, Hayes and Harlington Community Forum, King's Cross Railway Lands Group (KXRLG), London Gypsy and Traveller Unit, Race on the Agenda (ROTA), London Voluntary Service Council (LVSC), Women's Design Service, London Civic Forum, Friends of the Earth, Black Neighbourhood Renewal and Regeneration Network, Age Concern London, Third Sector Alliance (3SA) and Spitalfields Community Association. Others were technical support organisations: Planning Aid for London, and the Bartlett School of Planning, UCL. New organisations have joined at intervals and some members, hit by economic pressures and political cuts in funding, have ceased to exist or been unable to remain active in Just Space, particularly groups advancing equality and social justice.

The London Plan

At the strategic level, Just Space aims to sustain the momentum of community involvement in spatial planning that has developed since 2007. The London Plan sets the strategic framework for development throughout Greater London and in turn impacts on the practices of the 33 London Boroughs since their Local Plans have to be brought into general conformity with the London Plan. The London Plan is also supposed to guide the Mayor when he makes decisions on planning applications of 'strategic importance' where he has power to over-ride Borough decisions.

The current Mayor, Boris Johnson, brought forward the Draft Replacement London Plan for Examination in Public (EiP) in 2010, and subsequent revisions in 2012, challenges were made both times by a wide range of groups, individuals and organisations.

Process of participation in the London Plan

During the 3 months of public consultation on the London Plan in 2010, the Mayor's office undertook limited engagement activity – presentations to local government and business interests, some display boards at transport interchanges, some information on the Mayor's website. For many people, therefore, it was only community activity which made them aware of the London Plan and prompted written comments. We organised 2 major conferences and a number of workshops enabling member organisations to develop and refine their own submissions. These workshops formed the basis for Just Space to formulate its own statements where there was widespread consensus and especially where distinct issues needed to be linked.

What crystallises our participation is that the Mayor must, by law, organise an Examination in Public of the proposed Plan (or Alterations) following procedures set out in national regulations. The purpose is to 'objectively test' the document, with a series of roundtable discussions led by one or more independent examiners appointed from the Planning Inspectorate. About 25 people take part in each day's debate, selected by the Inspector from amongst those who have submitted written statements during the consultation period. To be invited to speak they will have raised points of substance likely to add to an informed discussion around those matters and questions that the Inspector considers need exploring. Just Space does a lot of work encouraging and supporting community groups to make effective written statements which give them the opportunity to take part in the debates, helping to maximise the range of groups which can present their evidence

The last full Examination of the London Plan in 2010 had 35 days of roundtable discussions. Just Space supported sixty different community groups to take part. Many had their own seats at the table, but Just Space itself secured a 'hot seat' for most days of the Examination which was shared by a range of community groups who would not otherwise have been able to participate: an innovation that successfully brought an unprecedented diversity of voices to the table.

The planning process is complicated, with a great deal of jargon, formal documents and technical burdens, all of which make it difficult to assimilate information and take part. Just Space stands for a democratic and deliberative process: we take care of the process side so that community groups can concentrate on the issues they want to raise. Before Just Space began this networking and organising, those taking part in the Examination had been mainly land owners, developers and public bodies, but we changed the balance and ensured that at the 2010 Examination one third of the representation on any typical day was from the community. This was achieved without any financial support from the new Mayor of London or other government bodies. It is a major achievement because the prevailing orthodoxy about London and its future is so powerfully embedded in the web of pressure groups (led by London First), professions and property interests whose influence on London Plans has for years been almost unchallenged (Edwards 2001, 2010).

What issues did we raise?

The key elements giving a flavour of the Just Space representations can be seen in the opening statement on Day 1:

"...Our aim in this initial statement is to summarise why we consider that the draft plan is not—as it stands—fit for purpose.

"What we have in common is a central concern with environmental and social sustainability and our focus in social terms is on those who are poor, exploited or in some ways excluded from the full enjoyment of what this wonderful city has to offer. We don't claim to be the only representatives of the London victims of globalisation but we are grateful to the panel for acknowledging that the Plan must serve everyone, acknowledging it by inviting us and many of our member organisations on their own account to appear at the EIP.

"The main challenge faced by all global cities is how to limit the extremes of inequality which such cities generate and—where we can't limit them—how to mitigate the effects. Housing is an especially severe challenge because all of us live in the same or interconnected housing markets. And the challenge is especially severe in the UK because we have mostly become so passionate about protecting what we call the countryside and that makes space scarce - and thus attracts ever more speculative investment to inflate housing and land markets.

"We consider that the Draft Plan before us today is unfit for purpose for reasons which we can group under 4 headings:

- Environmental sustainability;*
- Its treatment of inequalities;*
- Its inadequacy as a way through the economic crisis;*
- The uneven playing field among stakeholders."*

The fundamental issues we raised were:-

- That major development and 'regeneration' does not benefit existing low income communities, who are often exported out of the area to make way for the entry of the middle class;
- A lack of supply of low cost rented housing, with the result that people's housing needs are not met;
- Questioning the economic model which has increased the gap between rich and poor. We argued for economic diversity and alternative economic strategies;
- The inadequacy of policies to achieve targets of reduced carbon emissions, to improve air quality and to achieve environmental justice.

The evidence which Just Space and its member groups submitted was not primarily academic evidence and it was not presented by speakers playing 'expert witness' roles. Most of the written submissions were a combination of critical evaluation of GLA and other available data and needs assessments, combined with narrative descriptions of the experiences of members as Londoners - with housing, with accessing services, with battling pollution and traffic, confronting and challenging inequalities and so on.

The impact of these submissions was sometimes quite strong and the Inspectors invited Just Space or other community groups to open the discussion of some topics, notably on urban regeneration. For example, the London Tenants Federation (LTF) was asked to draw upon tenants' grass roots evidence and case studies published in the *LTF Briefing Note on Inner London* and the *LTF London Plan Examination in Public Conference Report 2010*. These papers were preceded by the [Response to Consultation on the Draft Replacement London Plan in January 2010](#) which cited academic research and other reports on, inter alia, regeneration, housing provision, choice and affordability, health inequalities, and mixed and balanced communities (London Tenants Federation web site).

Deficiencies in London Plan preparation, evidence and analysis had already prompted criticisms of its methodology – no alternative scenarios, no linked forecasts, no cross-border analysis, weak local and collaborative evidence collection – and around its likely achievement of a recovering economy that would be more diverse and low carbon, with greater equality and well-being as plan outcomes. Just Space recommended further research to the London Plan team (Just Space 2010 web site) but without any detectable results. In the actual EiP sessions, the Just Space contributions gained their main impact from a combination of critical understanding of the issues and strong direct experience, simply delivered. "...The session...relating to Areas for Regeneration...was nothing if not lively. Particularly devastating in their critique were the members of the Just Space network...banded together to offer a concerted assault on many of the key assumptions on which the plan is predicated. The group's presentation focused on the experiences of social housing tenants living in areas that have undergone extensive developer-led regeneration over the past decade. We heard about residents...tenants...friends and neighbours of a lifetime's standing who had simply been dispersed across London for good" wrote Building Design Magazine (Woodman 2010)]

By holding the Mayor to account on these fundamental issues, and ensuring that a very large number of community voices were heard over the six month period that the EiP spanned, some progress was made. We succeeded in persuading the Mayor to strengthen policy on protecting local shops, extending green infrastructure and promoting Community Land Trusts and Development Trusts. However, the listing of the services and facilities that a local neighbourhood needs was not incorporated, but the concept that embodies this approach, 'lifetime neighbourhoods', was; albeit not at the level of specificity sought by Just Space and others. On the major issues of affordable housing, road user charges, air quality, avoiding displacement of ordinary Londoners from 'regeneration' areas they had convinced the Panel of their arguments, but the Mayor rejected the Inspectors' recommendations. "...Just Space network made two simple, but I believe, vital requests...that any regeneration project should incorporate a social impact assessment to establish the correlation between the transformation of buildings and the transformation of lives. The other...a definition of regeneration that recognises that the... concern is not merely with the renewal of its buildings but also with the social and economic renewal of its existing community" (Woodman 2010). Social Impact Assessment is nowhere to be found in the London Plan.

Regeneration policy

In the EiP of 2010 Just Space and the London Tenants Federation made a concerted effort to challenge the Mayor's policies on Regeneration Areas and the closely linked Opportunity Areas. Bringing together academic evidence (some of it gathered and digested by student volunteers) with London Tenants Federation analysis and the direct experience of speakers from many parts of London which had been subject to 'regeneration', we argued that the main beneficiaries of the process tended to be property interests while the deprived populations in whose name regeneration is always initiated usually lost heavily, their communities dispersed and their voices not carrying weight.

The argument was made powerfully enough to convince the Panel of Inspectors to say in their Report:

"§2.96 It was alleged that "regeneration" of these areas followed a largely similar pattern involving the displacement of existing settled communities and their widespread dispersal mostly to unsuitable areas. Some of those affected (including elderly residents) had been impelled to make their own and often very unsatisfactory housing arrangements, or had effectively been forced to make themselves "homeless", because dereliction of the estates during the decanting process had made their homes uninhabitable or the local environment unsafe. This was followed with redevelopment to provide mainly market housing with much smaller numbers of affordable units (and especially social rented housing) than the operation of London Plan 2008 affordable housing policies would require, and which were not available for the original community to return to. The affected communities consider that the only beneficiaries are developers and Borough finances. Moreover, it was put to us that the whole process is based on two false premises. Firstly, that the existing communities were "deprived" (this being an almost unavoidable finding given that the existing tenants are mainly elderly, so by definition workless, or existing occupants of social housing, so inevitably on low incomes). Secondly, that the outcome was that deprivation had been cured (when in reality all that had happened was that a new wealthy community had supplanted the original one, which had been simply moved elsewhere to create new areas in need of "regeneration").

"§2.97 ... the community representatives, in response to the Panel's question, did not argue that the identification of Areas for Regeneration was inappropriate, or that some other spatial approach to the subject should be developed. Rather, within the areas identified, the principal points put to us by community representatives were that they:

- want involvement in the future plans for their areas;*
- oppose wholesale and permanent displacement;*
- want to contribute to, as well as derive benefit from, regeneration through new housing provision, local job opportunities and skills training, better environments and from improved community infrastructure of sufficient capacity and appropriate utility for all; and*
- should be subjected to processes that are not unreasonably drawn out in implementation.*

"§2.98 We do not see those as unreasonable aspirations.

...

"§2.101 If the risk of disadvantage being increased and intensified in other areas is to be avoided, however, the aim in regeneration should be to secure the same

quantity of affordable housing within the areas concerned at the end of the process as there was at the beginning, even if the “mix” (expressed as a percentage of affordable homes to market homes) changes. Although this affordable housing may not be wholly available to the original community (many of whom may by then have put roots down elsewhere and may be regarded, in a statutory sense, as suitably re-housed) it should at least be available for those displaced from regeneration projects nearby. The appropriate “split” (expressed as the proportions of affordable housing that are to be social rented or intermediate) can then be tailored, by the housing providers in consultation with the Boroughs concerned, to meet the needs of the incoming community. We accordingly recommend that Policy 2.14 be modified by addition of a requirement that the aim should be no net loss of affordable housing within individual regeneration areas.” (EiP Panel report 2011)

On the other community group demands, the Panel either accepted the Mayor's existing policies or urged better borough-level consultation. However this key recommendation for a strengthening of Policy 2.14 was a substantial victory. The Mayor, however, refused to accept it and inserted a new wording which, while appearing to be a compromise, in fact entirely circumvented the intentions of the community groups and of the Panel: *“Policy 2.14... These plans should resist loss of housing, including affordable housing, in individual regeneration areas unless it is replaced by better quality accommodation, providing at least an equivalent floor space.”* The 2011 Plan thus permits net losses of [units of] housing, and of affordable housing where the replacement is more luxurious and no smaller in total floor space: exactly what we were trying to prevent.

Rent levels in "affordable" housing

The major focus of the next (2012) EiP was on alterations proposed to the plan to bring it into line with the coalition government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) for England and various other contextual changes. Our main target in this was to challenge the applicability in London of a new government definition of "affordable" housing to be let at rents up to 80% of local open-market rents. This new definition would, of course, put such housing in London out of the reach of poor households and, in many Boroughs, out of the reach of middle- and some quite high-earning households. (See the London Tenants Federation's [The Affordable Housing Con \(2012\)](#)). These new rents were to become the variable required by policy and would supercede the prevailing social rents (also known as 'target rents') charged by Councils and Housing Associations at (in London) much lower and fairly affordable levels. Many organisations thus came together to challenge the Mayor.

Just Space, the London Tenants Federation, and others, argued strongly that the new, high, “affordable housing” rents would totally fail to meet the mounting needs of large proportions of Londoners without growing reliance on housing benefit—and that government restriction of these benefits coupled with a cap on the total of all benefits meant that this safety valve was not available. We, therefore, called for the retention of existing definitions of affordability as expressed in social rents and that 'social rented housing' should continue to have its own separate target-setting (and monitoring of outputs).

The Inspector concluded that the Mayor's proposed alteration was not based upon evidence but *“... is a pragmatic approach in the circumstances.”* (EiP 2013 §13). On

that rather frail—and highly arguable—ground he decided not to recommend a change.

The Inspector did, however, recommend a change to a related proposal by the Mayor, to prevent Boroughs from capping rent levels of “affordable housing” at levels lower than the London norm established by the London Plan—something which Islington and Tower Hamlets had already started to do. This proposed prohibition had attracted the ire of many Boroughs, nine of whom (a mixture of Conservative and Labour controlled) formed a consortium to object. They argued that, where local evidence showed that the need was for social rents, or rents lower than 65%-80% of local market levels, they should be free to set these levels in their Borough plans. They demonstrated that they could secure development at these lower-rent levels through creative use of their own land and resources. The Inspector recommended that the prohibition of Borough rent caps should be deleted from the proposed alterations to the Plan.

The Inspector's report, though promised by him for January 2013, is actually dated 19th June and was published by the Mayor, along with his own response, finally on 14th August 2013 in the middle of the summer holidays. The Mayor rejected the Inspector's recommendation and insisted that what is effectively a ban on Borough autonomy in setting rent caps within borough spatial plans should be implemented. At the London Assembly Extraordinary Meeting of 3rd September 2013 a motion to reject the Mayor's REMA in the light of the views expressed against the revised policies on affordable housing by, amongst others, 21 boroughs, and to ask for further revisions incorporating the recommendation of the independent Inspector was put to the vote. Whilst there was a ‘simple’ majority to reject at 13 to 9, this was not the required two-thirds majority, so the Assembly was deemed to NOT have rejected REMA. As evidence of the strength of feeling on this issue, subsequently, 8 boroughs have formally notified the Mayor that they will launch judicial review proceedings. Somewhat overshadowed, another vote was won 13 to 9 calling on the Mayor to bring forward further alterations that should include a definition of Sustainable Development along the lines of the Government's 5 guiding principles². This definition had been proposed by the Mayor in his Note ED16 to the EiP in response to representations by the Friends of the Earth, but on 11th October 2013 ‘REMA Consistency With The National Planning Policy Framework’ became operative as formal alterations to the London Plan - without fulfilment of the Mayor's undertaking. More extensive Further Alterations are known to be in the course of preparation and GLA planners are signalling that these will address the unprecedented rise in London's population and the development pressures that this brings with it. More than a million additional people are expected to live in the capital over the next decade, representing double the rate of growth previously predicted.

² Namely: living within the planet's environmental limits; ensuring a strong, healthy and just society; achieving a sustainable economy; promoting good governance; and using good science responsibly. These 5 principles are from the UK Sustainable Development Strategy *Securing the Future* 2005 which was archived by the Coalition Government but resuscitated in 2011. The principles are also found in the National Planning Policy Framework 2012 - after §5.

Just Space is mobilising to prepare for the consultations that will begin in January 2014.

These two summaries of the debates of 2010 and 2012 triggered by Just Space and its member groups give some flavour of what we do, though not the range of topics which we have addressed in the London Plan. Representations also covered air quality and global warming, green space, the defence of markets and local shopping, the needs of gypsies and travellers, use of waterways, space standards in housing and many aspects of transport.

The link with the local level

To be effective in influencing the London Plan, we need to be active at the borough and neighbourhood levels, raising awareness of London Plan policies and monitoring what is happening on the ground. Thus, Just Space's regional partnership has a local reach covering a diversity of issues and people. This link between geographic scales in community engagement has eluded cities around the world and London has an opportunity to break new ground.

At Borough level for the last 4 years, Just Space has provided planning support to London's voluntary and community sector under London Civic Forum's "Policy Voice" campaign (funded by London Councils). This support has been provided typically through borough based workshops, empowering the local voluntary and community sector to respond to consultations on borough planning documents and prepare for the Examinations in Public of these policies, as in the cases of, for example, Hillingdon, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Lewisham.

In Hillingdon borough, community workshops were attended by some 150 people representing community groups, or as individuals, generating wider awareness and interest in the forthcoming Local Plan. As a consequence, issues articulated by the 56 written representations from the community were broadly based, soundly evidenced and reasoned. At the hearings the prior coordination meant a focused discussion and best use of the resources deployed by the Council and Planning Inspectorate. The community now has a better understanding of the opportunities and limits of planning and is carrying this forward with a community planning forum. The Council is committed to improving its consultation process to avoid a feeling of exclusion, embracing the Localism Act and giving more say to residents, including involvement in neighbourhood planning (Planning Inspector's report to Hillingdon Council, §14).

All borough-based workshops have raised awareness of the contribution of the Mayor's London Plan. This has empowered groups to raise regional policy at the local level and also to raise local policy concerns at the regional level through engagement with the London Plan Examinations in Public. As well as supporting local groups to participate in Examinations in Public, we try to build up a planning expertise within communities. Some groups then gain interest in wider planning and become involved with Just Space in London-wide activity. Other local groups gain strength from contact with other localities fighting similar battles and become involved in supporting each other across the city.

Substantial work at the local level on regeneration, neighbourhood plans, the formation of community planning networks and the local economy is illustrated through examples of recent projects.

Community and regeneration

In partnership with Professor Loretta Lees, then at King's College London, Just Space, the London Tenants Federation and Southwark Notes Archive Group worked on a project to gather data on resident and business displacement in urban 'regeneration'. The project, which was funded through an Activist Scholar award from *Antipode*, also considered the tools necessary to oppose demolitions and develop community-led alternatives (see Lees, et al, 2014).

On 4 council estates in London – the Heygate and Aylesbury estates in Southwark, the Pepys estate in Lewisham and the Carpenters estate in Newham – former tenants were interviewed to find out why and how they were displaced, where they went to and the experience of moving . Researching the displacement of local businesses was also important given the rhetoric of new employment opportunities provided by regeneration.

The regeneration process tends to be top-down—controlling—imposing development upon local communities rather than engaging them in meaningful decision making. This approach produces high density, mainly market housing and employment that addresses only the highly skilled and fails to meet the needs of existing deprived communities. Just Space has proposed that social impact assessments be carried out and development proposals only approved when it has been shown that established populations living in and around the area will benefit.

As part of this project, the *Developing Alternatives for Communities facing Gentrification and Displacement Conference* took place in January. Eighty representatives from tenant and other community groups took part, many of whom had been involved in campaigning against top-down regeneration / gentrification / demolition and displacement.

The Conference considered approaches to preventing displacement and alternatives to the gentrification of these schemes. Demolition rather than refurbishment is promoted in 'regeneration' schemes without evidence that the existing housing is structurally unsound and without other costs being factored in. For example, these costs include embodied carbon costs and the social costs related to new build and displacement, such as disruption to children's education, and losing family and community networks. At a time when social-rented homes are being replaced—at best— with homes rented at up to 80% of open market level (as explained above) the need is greater than ever to protect existing stocks of social rented housing. Our next priority is developing a sound community-based model for analysing the price-tag of demolition versus refurbishment that includes both long-term environmental and social costs.

The Conference also considered how new, genuinely affordable, house building could be organised through housing co-operatives, self-build and Community Land Trusts (CLT). Across Europe housing co-operatives provide a significant proportion of accommodation for people from all walks of life – up to 20% in some countries. In

Britain the proportion is much lower, less than 1%, and mostly aimed at social housing tenants. Housing co-operatives, other tenant-led and self-build housing are a means of providing affordable housing and community facilities and give communities greater control of both homes and neighbourhoods. The vision for self-build projects goes well beyond housing and includes fair rents, mutual funds and credit unions, education, workspace, healthy eating cafés and land for food.

Through examination of CLT developments in the UK and the USA and with contributors from new trusts in London, the Conference considered a CLT as a bottom up community based initiative, covering housing, enterprise and community facilities and amenities. The Conference explored its viability in London and whether successful examples may support pressure being brought on the London Mayor and London Councils to release public land for further CLT schemes that would be genuinely and permanently affordable, enabling communities to sustain themselves in the long term.

The Conference also explored how local communities can use the concept of Lifetime Neighbourhoods as a positive tool to help define local development needs and on-going long-term community stewardship of a neighbourhood. The concept, in a rather undeveloped form, is already present in the London Plan but is in need of elaboration in relation to public and private services and for suburban as well as inner city contexts. When tenants were asked “What is a community? What does it need?” they created a practical list of community needs and emphasised the importance of people’s involvement and ownership. The London Tenants Federation definition of a Lifetime Neighbourhood includes housing, community centres, amenities for young and old people, a range of social facilities, well-maintained public and green spaces, access to affordable public transport, allotments and a vibrant local community.

Neighbourhood Planning

Just Space, through its members and the events that it organises, has contact with many community groups who are interested in developing neighbourhood plans a kind of planning newly formalised by the Localism Act 2011. The support needs are immense and include the difficulty of producing an integrated plan and the need for community engagement skills, a community involvement strategy and for a shared understanding of sustainability. To address some of these support needs, we have done substantial work with the Bartlett School of Planning, UCL, linking up students with community groups. Whereas the early rounds of Neighbourhood Forum activity in London had been heavily concentrated in middle-class areas, these initiatives are well distributed between different types of areas and predominantly in less affluent districts.

An example where student support has been delivered is the Elephant and Castle. UCL students assisted with workshops at an event held by Elephant Amenity Network in January 2012 and joined walkabouts with residents to explore sites of interest for the neighbourhood plan. The students provided mapping support and advice on design issues. There has been particular interest from students in a walkabout to map Latin American sites at the Elephant and Castle (retail, educational and other community facilities). Just Space has supported the formation of the Unity Neighbourhood Forum in Brent including defining a clear geographical

boundary for the forum and for the plan, organising walkabouts, mapping businesses and street design work. We are providing similar technical and community engagement support, with considerable input from the London Tenants Federation, UCL students, and funds from the Antipode Activist Scholar Award mentioned above, for the production of a Community Plan for the Carpenters Estate in Stratford, interviewing residents and businesses, holding workshops and organizing an exhibition of the draft community plan.

With London Civic Forum and Community Development Network London (CDNL) Just Space organised an all-day event *How Neighbourhood Plans Work* (March 2012) to explore the potential of Neighbourhood Plans to enable community groups to have greater control over planning in their local areas. The event had 45 representatives from community organisations, housing associations and academics from across London and considered:

- The Legislative framework in the Localism Act;
- The importance of a Community Development approach to neighbourhood planning;
- How community groups can enter into mutually beneficial collaborations with professional organisations when developing Neighbourhood Plans.

Follow up support was then provided through local workshops. In Kensington and Chelsea, 2 workshops were held, one with One Voice about how the Localism Act could be used to protect African Caribbean heritage in the borough using the Right to Bid for assets of community value and a Neighbourhood Plan; the other with Action Disability Kensington and Chelsea about how to ensure Neighbourhood Planning in the borough was accessible and inclusive.

One outcome was that One Voice commented on the Draft Planning Brief for some land under the Westway. In their response, they raised the fact that the plan could emphasise the development of community assets and they felt that the planning brief could offer the opportunity to develop social and community space that would specifically celebrate the history and culture of the African Caribbean community, which has been established in the area since the Windrush era.

Community planning networks

Just Space is committed to communities having an enduring involvement in the planning of their localities, boroughs and city. We recognise that the activities outlined above inevitably call for and are best responded to by the emergence of community planning networks. This is in order to reap the continuing benefits of mutual support and co-learning to sustain the necessary dialogue, as well as maintaining democratic representative legitimacy.

Currently, Just Space is supporting the London Tenants Federation in a Trust for London funded project to set up community planning networks in 3 boroughs and in 3 London Plan Opportunity Areas where major developments are planned. All are relatively disadvantaged areas with many marginalised and excluded communities where the need to encourage tenant and other community groups to influence or challenge development plans is at its greatest. Just Space also provided support to Tower Hamlets Tenants Federation (THTF) to deliver a programme of events on community planning aimed at Tenants and Residents Associations (TRAs) in the

borough. An event on neighbourhood planning was attended by representatives from 15 TRAs and from the Mayor of Tower Hamlets Office, Limehouse Community Forum, UCATT trade union, East London Community Land Trust, Quaker Social Action and Turk's Head (a local charity). THTF felt there was a huge information and consultation gap to overcome. They put together a plan for spreading the word about neighbourhood planning, through Area Forums, and by providing a space at THTF meetings for planning officers to collaborate with TRA's.

The session also identified 3 potential projects that THTF would like to deliver if the resources could be found:

- To assist one of its member Associations to develop a pilot neighbourhood plan which would have lessons for all TRA's in the borough;
- To collaborate with the Council in producing recognition criteria for a Neighbourhood Forum and guidance on the involvement and consultation that should be expected for a Neighbourhood Plan;
- To undertake an educational project on neighbourhood planning and the Localism Act with the large Bengali community in Tower Hamlets.

The economies of London

It became apparent through all of these deliberations and activities that a deeper consideration of the economic life of London was needed. If economic development is to be sustainable, it needs to value the different ways of organising economic activity and make connections between the economy and the rest of social life. For example, recognising the contribution of local shops and markets to the local economy and protecting industrial land against conversion to housing and the loss of local employment that goes with this.

In response, Just Space organised the event *Alternative Strategies for Economic Development in London* (March 2013) as a first step to creating a space to discuss economic planning at a metropolitan level, so as to influence the next set of Alterations to the London Plan and to support local groups in challenging the economic ideas behind major developments. Nineteen community and voluntary sector representatives and 10 university based researchers attended with discussions focussed on alternative measures of economy, re-industrialisation and alternative strategies for local economic development.

Patria Roman Velazquez (City University) set out her research with Latin American communities, in the Elephant and Castle and Seven Sisters. She explained the role of small retailing as a route to economic progression for Latin Americans in London. Many small retailers are women and the work they do is important in enabling immigrants to integrate into London, contributing to a sense of belonging and identity, as well as generating economic assets for London. Pauline Rowe (Friends of Queen's Market in Newham) described a report on the economic value of the market from the New Economics Foundation. This had, among other things, found that the market delivered twice as many jobs per square metre as a food supermarket.

The Mayor of London's focus on growth of what economists measure as the market value of output (GDP) and the amount of market value 'added' per worker (GVA per capita) leads to an emphasis on particular parts of the economy—especially financial

and business services— at the expense of all other economic activity which is portrayed as un-dynamic or unproductive. So for example, people may be employed at Queen's Market, they may provide an important service for the local population, but somehow they do not have any visibility or priority in the GLA perspective. They are not seen; it is as if they do not exist or are waiting to be modernised out of existence.

To tackle this and other issues, Just Space is now hosting bi-monthly meetings on *Economy and Planning*. The intention is that the meetings develop a culture of collaboration between community groups and researchers on economic thinking that addresses social and environmental issues and what is actually happening at the grassroots level.

Challenges and prospects for London

Just Space can provide, perhaps uniquely, an approach that harnesses our firm grounding in the requirements and issues of London's communities coupled with academic and professional knowledge and experience. Specific strengths include:

- Integrated analysis and action on housing, planning and regeneration, taking forward a substantial body of work in London Plan Opportunity Areas (with a focus on affordable housing and lifetime neighbourhoods).
- Capacity building support for community groups on planning processes and policy, building upon strong links from previous Just Space work in a number of boroughs (Hillingdon, Greenwich, Tower Hamlets, Newham, Brent, Haringey, Hackney, Barnet, Kensington and Chelsea, Southwark, Lewisham, Bexley).
- Existing links with groups in other boroughs through our members (particularly London Forum of Civic and Amenity Societies and Friends of the Earth) and through our London wide activities.
- Access to University planning expertise and skills (both academics and students, mainly planning and geography) which brings in more resources for community groups and opportunities for research funding bids.
- The production of briefing papers on planning policy issues, which, with funding, could be disseminated much more widely.

Just Space has studiously avoided aligning itself with any political party - or indeed becoming anything like a party with manifestos, membership requirements and so on. It might perhaps be regarded as an 'urban social movement' (Mayer 2011) but it is probably more accurate to describe it as a kind of organisational infrastructure for grass roots urban activism and effective public participation. It is thus in a position to facilitate alliances and movements without itself becoming one.

Just Space is not an organisation given to theoretical discussion and has not collectively considered whether its perspectives are 'post-political' (Swyngedouw 2009) but we rarely find our positions aligned with any of the main political parties. We have, on occasions, invited individual politicians to speak at our meetings and have made practical alliances sometimes with individual elected members of the London Assembly or borough councils. Many people assume that community groups of the kind we have as members will tend to support Labour party politicians

and councils but the authors of this chapter take the view that, on key issues of urban policy, regeneration and environment, Labour boroughs can be as subordinated to property development interests as Conservative or Liberal ones, and just as reluctant to pay serious attention to community needs.

What we do could create significant capacity to support a very positive engagement with spatial planning that can begin to address the needs of diverse sections of the population and to ensure that policies are more sustainable, equitable and inclusive. Just Space partners are well placed to cascade the learning and the practices developed in such work into other areas of their own activity and to encourage others to support it in other parts of London. They have a range of skills, have strong user involvement, are accessible, and often represent those hardest to reach. Although the process of community involvement in strategic spatial planning is continuing, it is demanding and the need for support—especially for formal consultation events—is largely unmet.

A major challenge is resources to sustain ourselves and to provide free and open access to our events and to consultation and research documents. We find fewer and fewer opportunities to access public money to support our work, but have been successful in securing grants from some of the charitable bodies active on London-wide or localised problems of poverty or deprivation. We are now also finding that some of our work supporting Neighbourhood Forums attracts payment on a small scale.

Universities have sometimes been helpful financially in recognition of their need to integrate community perspectives and associated skills in professional training and in the formulation of research which has impact on real social needs. Despite the alarming trends for universities to become ever more business-oriented, many have allocated budgets for 'public engagement' from which we benefit through joint projects. We are proud of the *Research Protocol on collaboration between community/activist groups and university staff and students on housing and planning issues*, a document which is being used elsewhere in Britain and abroad (Just Space 2010 web site)

Our interactions with large NGOs have tended to be difficult: some have become bureaucratic and managerial, lacking the skills and habits of real grass-roots engagement. Many have become so dependent on government or similar grants that they are reluctant to support major challenges to the established orthodoxy which prevails in the London policy communities.

In many ways our greatest challenge is the orthodoxy surrounding the triumphal view of London as a Global City, 'inward investment' as an unquestioned goal of policy, and market criteria as the test of 'viability' (e.g. of social housing provision). Although we may not yet have secured major changes to the plans we engage with, we have at least ensured that displacement and other regressive policies do not go unchallenged.

There is perhaps some hope in that even very mainstream commentators (outside formal politics) are beginning to agree that Britain's headlong pursuit of debt-fuelled ("financialised") accumulation of land and property asset values is destructive, de-

stabilising and a major driver of inequality. Since many of London's most acute housing, planning and environmental problems flow from that orthodox trajectory some major re-alignment may be in prospect.

We take some cheer from the tenacious citizens who know that the future of the city is what we, collectively, make it. There are alternatives, whatever we are told by our media and by most of our politicians.

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Web Sites

Just Space:

<http://justspace2010.wordpress.com> (up to and including the work on the London <http://justspace.org.uk> *Replacement London Plan 12 January 2010*; *LP Research Gaps 2009*; and *Research Protocol* on collaboration with universities).

<http://ucljustspace.wordpress.com/> (concentrating on UCL's collaboration with Just Space)

<http://justspace.org.uk> (current activities and projects including the 2013 conferences described above).

London Tenants Federation:

<http://www.londontenants.org/framesets/ftb&sinformation.htm> (for the following reports)

[Response to Consultation on the Draft Replacement London Plan \(January 2010\)](#)

[LTF Briefing Note on Inner London](#) (for 2010 EiP)

[LTF London Plan Examination in Public Conference Report 2010](#) (June 2010)

[Lifetime Neighbourhoods, LTF's definition](#) (for 2010 EiP)

LTF [The Affordable Housing Con](#) (2012)

Mayor of London:

London Plan, various dates, all accessible at <http://london.gov.uk/priorities/planning/london-plan>

EiP Panel Reports on 2007 EiP (2007) and 2010 EiP (2011) at <http://www.london.gov.uk/priorities/planning/london-plan/examination-in-public/previous-eips>

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