RTPI Response to Zero Carbon Economy Call for Evidence

Preface

The RTPI champions the power of spatial planning to create prosperous places and vibrant, sustainable, communities. As a professional body, we have over 25,000 members across all sectors, and are responsible for setting formal standards for planning practice and education. As learned society, we use our expertise and research to shape policy, practice, and thinking.

We therefore focus here on the questions of particular relevance to planning not only because this is where our expertise lies, but because effective spatial planning is one of the most powerful tools society has for responding to climate change. Indeed, there is mounting evidence that land use[1] and spatial planning[2] will be a central part of any successful attempt to respond to climate change globally.

For reasons we outline in response to question 13, which relate to the devolved state of planning policy in the UK and the English system's comparatively poor performance on climate issues, we often (but by no means entirely) focus our responses on England.

We would be more than happy to help further with this or any other enquires.

Kind regards,

Dr Daniel Slade

Part 2: International Action

Question 4 (International collaboration): Beyond setting and meeting its own targets, how can the UK best support efforts to cut emissions elsewhere in the world through international collaboration (e.g. emissions trading schemes and other initiatives with partner countries, technology transfer, capacity building, climate finance)? What efforts are effective currently?

ANSWER:

The Sustainable Development Goals

- The Sustainable Development Goals are an important set of globally-relevant human

[1] CCC. 2018. Land Use: Reducing Emissions and Preparing for Climate Change. https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/land-use-reducing-emissions-and-preparing-for-climate-change/

[2] IPCC. 2018. https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjAs-anvY3fAhWjMewKHUHFCq8QFjAAegQICBAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ipcc.ch%2Fpdf%2Fassessment-report%2Far5%2Fwg3%2Fipcc_wg3_ar5_chapter12.pdf&usg=AOvVaw0XYzTgjsipRnuVpFl4xkYm.

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development targets, developed through the UN, which have climate change mitigation and adaptation at their heart. They are particularly valuable in this context for two reasons:

  - They link issues of climate mitigation/adaptation to wide-reaching social issues, including justice, resilience, equality, shelter, and economic growth. An effective response to climate change at any level requires the consideration of these issues.

  - Monitoring progress towards the SDGs relies on the monitoring of a series of indicators, covering a wide range of climate-related data. One of the greatest challenges governments, including the UK government, have faced in implementing the SDGs is identifying suitable data sources and reporting mechanisms[3]. This has had the effect of forcing nations, including the UK, to think more critically about their domestic climate data analysis and reporting mechanisms, and in particular how different stakeholders (whether levels of government, sectors, etc) collaborate effectively. It has also promoted the sharing of best practice in data analysis and collection between national governments (for example, the National Audit Office working with Ghanaian Government to improve their reporting procedures).

- By all accounts the UK Government, led by the FCO, have been strong advocates for their implementation around the world, and this needs to continue. However, this needs to be mainstreamed across all UK government departments, especially MHCLG – the department responsible for SDG11, concerning Sustainable Cities and Communities. The strength of our advocacy depends on our domestic performance, but at present the commitment of MHCGL to deliver SDG 11 is difficult to gauge. We do however consider that the actions of the Welsh and Scottish governments have exhibited some greater commitment to the goals across the board. (See Question 13)

Exporting and sharing environmental planning expertise

- The UK government should also seek to share and export the UK's planning expertise, particularly concerning environmental planning, in which it is a world leader, to other markets and nations. This will disseminate and embed best practice globally, while also being as major commercial opportunity for UK PLC. Ourselves, the Royal Institute of British Architects, Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors and the Chartered Institute of Building laid out how this can be done effectively in a joint letter.

Part 3: Reducing emissions

[3] For example, the ONS is still exploring data sources for three of indicators underpinning SDG11, which concerns 'sustainable cities and communities'. See: https://sustainabledevelopment-uk.github.io/sustainable-cities-communities/.

Question 6 (Hard-to-reduce sectors): Previous CCC analysis has identified aviation, agriculture and industry as sectors where it will be particularly hard to reduce emissions to close to zero, potentially alongside some hard-to-treat buildings. Through both low-carbon technologies and behaviour change, how can emissions be reduced to close to zero in these sectors? What risks are there that broader technological developments or social trends act to increase emissions that are hard to eliminate?

Aviation:

In England, decisions about domestic aviation and airport expansion, such as the consultations on Heathrow expansion, are currently made with limited consideration of their relationship to other modes of transport or impact on other regional airports (this is a problem with infrastructure decision making in the UK in general[4]). Aviation policy needs to set within a wider transport strategy, at the national and ideally pan-European level, which contains clear and ambitious emission targets which support modal shift away from domestic and short-haul international air travel to low-carbon alternatives such as high speed rail.

Question 8 (Technology and Innovation): How will global deployment of low-carbon technologies drive innovation and cost reduction? Could a tighter long-term emissions target for the UK, supported by targeted innovation policies, drive significantly increased innovation in technologies to reduce or remove emissions?

ANSWER:

It is important for the Committee to consider how low-carbon technology contribute to sustainable, resilient and inclusive patterns of settlement growth and well-designed urban environments.

Low-carbon technologies such as distributed and renewable energy generation, heat networks, electric vehicles, smart meters and digital mobility platforms, are currently being integrated into the existing built environment. Local and strategic planning authorities play an important role in ensuring that proposals for new development and urban regeneration incorporate low-carbon technologies, and do so in a way that supports wider economic, social and environmental objectives, such as reducing travel demand, increasing housing supply, ensuring inclusive street design, and improving public health. Strategic planning and transport policies can also help to reduce unintended consequences from the deployment of low-carbon technologies. This includes the risk that electric and autonomous vehicles increase travel demand and facilitate low-density urban sprawl (and thereby emissions) by making car use cheaper and more attractive, or that the introduction of EV charging points creates barriers for people with limited mobility.

This requires sufficient investment in local planning authorities so that they are able to work effectively with developers, neighbouring authorities and infrastructure delivery bodies (such as utility companies, healthcare providers and transport operators). We would also encourage the Committee to consider 'PlanTech' as a form of technological innovation with the potential to reduce emissions by improving the effectiveness of the planning system – for example by enabling more sophisticated modelling of the transport impacts of development proposals, the changes to travel behaviour that result from traffic removal schemes, and data sharing agreements that enable infrastructure providers to consider synergies and conflicts between their plans.

[4] See Slade & Davies (2017) https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/IfG_infrastructure_strategy_final.pdf

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RTPI research is currently investigating the barriers and opportunities to integrated infrastructure planning and delivery in England and Scotland, and the role of the planning system in enabling the delivery of smart grid technology.[5]

Question 9 (Behaviour change): How far can people's behaviours and decisions change over time in a way that will reduce emissions, within a supportive policy environment and sustained global effort to tackle climate change?

ANSWER:

Integrated and strategic planning can help to facilitate behaviour change to more sustainable modes of transport and reduced travel demand. This can be achieved by shaping the built environment to deliver higher levels of density, mixed land use, connectivity and accessibility, and promoting urban regeneration, high-quality green space and measures to reduce travel demand (such as congestion charging zones). These environments are positively correlated with higher levels of public transport use, walking and cycling, and while is difficult to quantify, should play a critical role in reducing transport emissions. They also provide wider economic, social and environmental benefits, such as increased climate resilience and better mental and physical wellbeing[6].

Question 10 (Policy): Including the role for government policy, how can the required changes be delivered to meet a net-zero target (or tightened 2050 targets) in the UK?

ANSWER:

A key overarching theme our response to this consultation is that many of the most effective policy responses governments can make to climate change lie outside of the immediate domain of 'climate change policy' itself. With this in mind, the following policy changes will aid the delivery of the changes required:

UK government must provide more certainty to English local authorities through national planning policy:

- Our research and work with members consistently points to a lack of certainty at Local Authority-level about how they can go with climate change policy in their local plans, and specifically, the strength of the requirements they are able to place on developers[7].
- Equally, many Local Authorities are quite simply not aware of the power and requirements

[5] See www.rtpi.org.uk/integratedinfrastructure and https://www.rtpi.org.uk/knowledge/better-planning/better-planning-climate-change/ for more details.

[6] For more information see Melia (2018) https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tra.2018.09.021, and Harris (2018) https://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/2822766/settlementpatternsurbanformsustainability.pdf.

[7] See TCPA & RTPI (2018) https://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/2852781/TCPA%20RTPI%20planning%20for%20climate%20change%20guide_final.pdf

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existing policy and legislation (particularly the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, and the 2008 Climate Change Act) *does* give them to demand that new developments in their area are low-carbon and sustainable.

Siloed working between government departments fundamentally undermines our ability to ensure developments – devolution needs to accelerate

- Working across government departments remains poor, and this undermines the government's ability to bring together housing (MHCLG), infrastructure (BEIS, DfT, DCMS), and environmental measures (Defra) in a concerted way that produces sustainable development. For example, our paper on *Settlement Patters, Urban Form and Sustainable Development* explains how transport decision making can inadvertently facilitate the dispersal of housing and economic activity into peripheral locations, which increases travel demand and associated emissions. By moving decision-making closer the 'places' that matter, devolution is a powerful way of cutting across these departmental siloes.
- Evidence to-date also strongly suggest that even within a less-than-supportive national policy environment in England (see above), given the powers and the resources, Local Authorities and Combined Authorities will experiment and push for higher standards than might otherwise be achieved
    - Greater Manchester's establishment of a Resilience Officer and current development of a resilience strategy[8], and 'Green City Region'[9] policy suite is a good example.
    - As described above, the key brake here is a national planning policy framework which is at the same time overly restrictive and too uncertain for Local and Combined Authorities to innovate and push standards locally.

Part 5: Devolved Administrations

Question 13 (Devolved Administrations): What differences in circumstances between England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland should be reflected in the Committee's advice on long-term targets for the Devolved Administrations?

ANSWER:

Planning in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland is a devolved responsibility, and the systems in each have steadily diverged from England's. This has some important consequences for the CCC's advice on long-term targets for each:

- First of all, the CCC must acknowledge that planning - one of the crucial delivery mechanisms for responding to climate change - varies across each of the nations.
- Additionally, the Scottish and Welsh governments have generally regarded their planning

[8] See http://100resilientcities.org/cities/greater-manchester/ for more information.

[9] See https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/info/20005/green_city_region for more information.

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systems as much more important delivery and coordination mechanisms for a range of social and environmental policies, including those relating to climate change, than English governments.

  - This means that environmental policy has been much more tightly integrated into decision-making on urban development in these nations.
  - This has been buttressed by additional legislation and policy in both nations, much of which has ensured that issues of social justice are embedded within decision making on climate change. A notable example is the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which requires policy makers to consider the long-term effects of policy decisions.
  - England can learn a great deal from both Wales and Scotland.

- Northern Ireland's system is rapidly evolving, following the decentralisation of plan-making powers to the local level in that nation. This means that any Committee recommendations regarding land use and spatial planning in this Nation should take into account that a) resourcing and capacity in local authorities is extremely stretched here, and b) there is the potential to embed best practice here, subject to policy change.
- Clearly, achieving our climate goals will require a high level of cooperation between the four governments. The RTPI supports, for example, the concept of a transnational environmental watchdog and principles for the UK after Brexit (environment and climate policy obviously being closely linked)

Part 6: CCC Work Plan

Question 14 (Work plan): The areas of evidence the Committee intend to cover are included in the 'Background' section. Are there any other important aspects that should be covered in the Committee's work plan?

ANSWER:

As argued and evidenced throughout the answers above, matters relating to the effective governance (including the potential for further decentralisation and the need for clearer national strategy) and regulation of land use and the built environment are also crucial. It is through these mechanisms and processes which much of the technological innovation and behavioural change required for an effective response to climate change will be implemented. To-date, they have also been one of the critical barriers to doing so.