

## **The Economy gaining an upper hand over the Environment in the British Planning System**

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**Abstract:** *UN General Assembly convened a conference on the “human environment” at Stockholm in June 1972, which came out with guiding principles on “human environment”. It emphasized that man has the fundamental right to live in good environment quality and also that he has a responsibility towards protecting the environment for present and future generations. Sustainable development in urban planning is one of the main focus and also a challenge in today’s urban development and growth. It means attaining a balance between environmental protection and human economic development between the present and future needs.*

*However, a debate exists about how to preserve the potential for future generations to enjoy wellbeing and living standards at least at the level experienced by this generation, and whether economic growth is necessary to achieve this. In particular, it has been argued that current economic growth is linked to environmental degradation which left unchecked, would undermine wellbeing and lead to dangerous climate change. There is also a wider debate that seeks to understand how best to measure societal progress, with concerns that economic growth does not on its own adequately capture progress or sustainability. It requires an integration of economic, social and environmental approaches towards development.*

*This research aims to analyze how economic and environmental issues were incorporated in sustainable urban development and why economy is getting upper hand in comparison to environment. Through this, it tries to understand the problems and hurdles that are affecting environmental issues in sustainable development. A detail study has been done on both the subjects (economy & environment in the case of England, considering all important aspects.*

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### **I. Introduction:**

#### **The redistribution of the region competences:**

Before 2010, Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) in England set out the objectives and actions for identifying, protecting or enhancing environmental assets of (sub)-regional significance through local development documents. The policy required local authorities to include in their local plans policies that optimize the contribution that the natural, built and historic environment can make to the physical, economic and social regeneration. It was encouraging local authorities to work together with other agencies and local communities in developing regeneration schemes.

The regions with the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) had a multiple approach, where the environment and the economy with the RSS were interlinked. Nowadays, the revocation of the RSS facilitates to build a new partnership between the enterprises and the local authorities which is called LEP’s (Local Enterprise Partnership). This partnership is strictly dedicated to the economic development; taking into account the environment was not given that much attention.

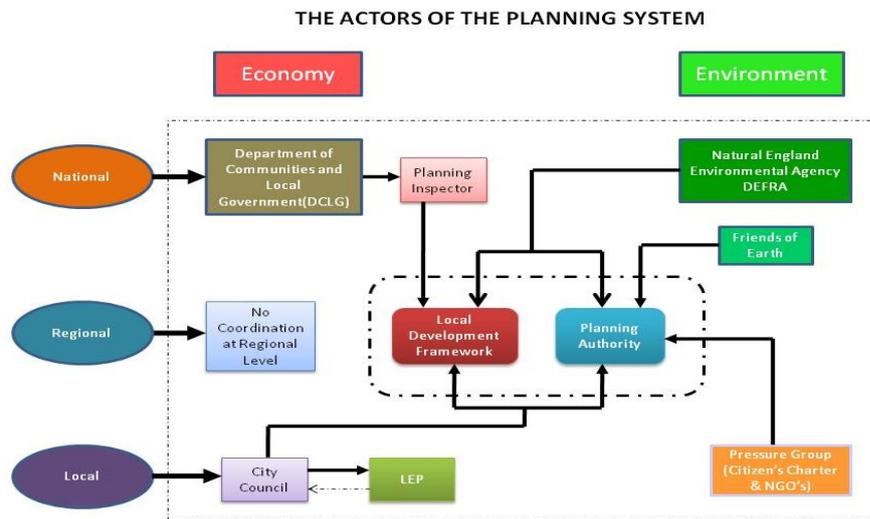
However, the national policy has a very strong impact in the local authorities; so, even if the RSS was removed, environmental problems are taking into account. Nationally and internationally designated sites will continue to be subject to statutory protection. Under the Habitats Regulation, wherever necessary local authorities are required to undertake habitats regulation<sup>1</sup> assessment of their local plans. Other than exceptional circumstances, they must not grant planning permission for a proposed development unless they have certainty that it will not, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, adversely affect the integrity of the European site concerned. National planning policy on biodiversity, landscape and heritage will still apply, so local authorities will need to continue to have regard to policies aimed at the conservation and enhancement of the natural and local environment by minimizing impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible.

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<sup>1</sup> Habitats regulation

The environment is taken into account by the NPPF and Planning Policies Guidance, which give director lines at the local level<sup>2</sup>. The only environmental actors are the consulting bodies as Natural England, Environment Agency. According to Ian Smith<sup>3</sup>, their opinions have a real impact on the planning projects. For example, the environment Agency gave its advice on a project, and if it does not approve all the requirements of the project, the local authorities can act without showing any concern about it, but it will be difficult for the political point of view and issues. In another hand, pressure groups and citizens also have an important role in the protection of the environment, particularly for the greenbelt. These groups influence the decision of city councils on development applications and most of the time, the first defender of the greenbelt are its residents themselves, who want to keep a good quality of living with large green spaces. We can think that they don't have the power to interfere project, but they succeed to stop the construction of a motorway on the Greenbelt few years ago.

**A comparative approach on the consideration of environmental and economic issues:**



And after the RSS was abolished in 2010, the objective of this policy could be delivered by means other than through the strategy. National planning policy will continue to expect the planning system to conserve and enhance the natural environment. Local authorities should continue to work together and with communities, on conservation, restoration and enhancement biodiversity, geo-diversity and landscape interests. Revocation would not have an adverse effect on European sites. The statutory requirement for local authorities to undertake Habitats Regulations Assessments of their plans and appropriate assessments of relevant projects will remain.

For example, for the green belt, an officer who works in the West Midland Council said that people are concerned about environment and they try to protect the green belt. Another important aspect for protection of green belt is the national planning law. As not only encourage development but they have put a barrier to stop urban sprawl. We can see that the green belt is around the city from the map (State of the environment and protected areas). It is very important to prevent the urban sprawl and we have seen that there are some areas of green belt which were built up. As in an interview, the officer in Birmingham City Council said that the economy is always given a priority ahead of the environment. Another officer in Birmingham City Council said there are some development areas on a green belt in 2026 plan. So there is an opposition for buildings in green belt but it isn't very strong. There are Projects to develop green space, mostly with rivers and canals. We can say that the economy wins against the environmental issues.

The chart shown below shows a comparison as what major changes happened before and after planning reform in England.

<sup>2</sup> Planning policy guidance

<sup>3</sup> Interview of Prof. Ian Smith

	Before 2010	After 2010
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In England Regional Planning Bodies (in London, the Mayor) prepare and produce a Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) (in London, the Spatial Development Strategy) reflecting the needs and aspirations for development and land use for a ten to fifteen year period (Office of Deputy Prime Minister: General Planning System).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Since 2010, regional level is abolished by national government, the shift of power as gone to nuclear level. As currently, local authorities are directly responsible for their development and land use planning based on national guidance.</li> </ul>
Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Each RSS should reflect, and build on, the policies set out at national level. The RSS can include policies relating to the area, or part of the area, of more than one local planning authority, allowing for sub-regional planning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As currently each local authority is responsible for its development and policies. As such no specific regional coordination is available on regional dimension within local authorities.</li> </ul>
Decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In England, decision-making was more regionalized, but primarily to suit the convenience of central government. A few powers and responsibilities have passed down from national level.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Now, the decision-making has become more centralized, primarily to suit the convenience of central government in economic development. A few powers and responsibilities have passed down from national level to local level.</li> </ul>
Regionalism or localism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regional government in Britain was responsible for region economic performance in the longer term.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A move to regionalism to localism in Britain may improve economic performance in the longer term. But much depends on the powers and resources they receive and their capacity to construct the public-private alliances that make economic strategies most effective.</li> </ul>
Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It was a Bottom up approach towards planning policies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Now, it's a top down approach towards planning as central government holds direct control to local level.</li> </ul>

**A. General characteristics of Regional Level before and After the reform :**

In a national level (national scale) the policies and rules will try to conserve and enhance the environment. So there are many plans which protect the environment. First, the Green Deal: the Energy Bill includes provision for a new “Green Deal” which we believe will revolutionize the energy efficiency of British properties. To be more precise, the Government is establishing a framework to enable private firms to offer consumers energy efficiency improvements to their homes, community spaces and businesses at no upfront cost, and recoup payments through a charge in installments on the energy bill. The Climate Change Act 2008 makes the UK the first country in the world to have a legally-binding long-term framework to cut greenhouse gas emissions and a framework for building the UK’s ability to adapt to a changing climate.

The Act requires a: A UK-wide climate change risk assessment (CCRA) that must take place every five years; A national adaptation program (NAP) which must be put in place and reviewed every five years, setting out the Government’s objectives, proposals and policies for responding to the risks identified in the CCRA; Adaptation Reporting Powers which enable the Secretary of State to direct “reporting authorities” to prepare climate change adaptation reports.

Many people think that once an area is designated as green belt, no new building will ever be allowed there. The reality is more complex and not always easy to interpret. Circular 42/55 invited local authorities to consider designating green belts. It was replaced by Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 (PPG2) in 1988, which was updated in 1995. However the fundamentals of Government policy on green belts have remained largely the same over its fifty year history. The main aim of green belts is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. PPG2 describes its five purposes:

- To check the unrestricted sprawl of larger built-up areas;
- To prevent neighboring towns from merging into one another;
- To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns;
- To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

Green belts, once defined, may help achieve other goals – such as providing areas for sport and recreation, preserving attractive landscapes, supporting nature conservation and retaining England has international engagement about climate change. So national government adopts a UK Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA) and regions: Climate Change Action Plan. The strength of the Government's response lies in this dual, 'no regrets' approach. CO2 reduction and car reduction initiatives are being done. They are trying to reduce and restrict car transport, and encourage public transportation which will stimulate development and there is a big congestion issue also in London etc, there is a need to get a nodal shift.

As a whole we can conclude by saying that the National policy has a strong impact in the local authorities, Local level has direct link with national level through the presence of relationship managers devoted to work on individual level. One of the main reasons of removal of region is National government wants direct connection with local government. In other words we can say that it wants to control the economy at a certain level and give partial freedom to local authority. Another reason may be that local authority does not have that broad vision as the national government (Basically government wants to restructure the economy). Though in one hand, we can say that there is a loss because of removal of region as it may have some impact on identity of place but on the other hand it has some huge advantages also as it will give the local authority a new way to restructure the economy. But what should be notes it that more of co-ordination is required between economy and environment rather than competition. The environmental issues are taken into account nationally and local authorities are bound to follow the guidance of environmental organizations such as Natural England and Environmental agency. Pressure groups and citizens have also an important role in protection of environment<sup>4</sup>. RSS sets out the objectives and actions for identifying, protecting and enhancing environmental assets through local development documents. Environmental issues have been put secondary because of economic development LEP is completely focused on Economy and has nothing to do with environment. Building partnership between enterprises and local authorities has given economy a new dimension. It should also be noted that the LEPs are relatively new and it will take a quite a bit of time to understand them fully depending upon their consistent functioning and developments.

#### **A. Different environmental organizations & their role**

##### **Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)**

Environmental issues are totally excluded from the government structures. The only public body for the preservation of environment is the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). It's three department (Natural England, English Heritage and Environment Agency) acts as an adviser and consultant in the development of framework and plans by local authorities. They also have to be consulted on of development application, and their opinions on these strongly influence the final decision of local authorities. Finally, pressure groups and citizen also have a role in the protection of the environment, particularly for the greenbelt.

These groups influence the decision of city councils on development applications and most of the time, the first defender of the greenbelt are its residents themselves, who want to keep a good quality of living with large green spaces. The green belt also have the richest residents of the territory, and in the case of Birmingham, the interest of keeping the green belt untouched is obvious. Based on the interviews, it can be said that learned the actual crisis strongly affect the policies of local authorities. Cities are now looking forward to solve the problems of unemployment and unskilled youth, which appears for them to be much more urgent than environmental issues. In this context, LEP seems to be the best tool to promote local economic development.

##### **Environment organizations like FOE (Friends of the Earth), WWF and CPRE (Campaign for Protection of Rural England)**

There are some environments organizations like FOE (Friends of the Earth), WWF and CPRE (Campaign for Protection of Rural England) who also works in England at different level.. As an interview with the person who works in the FOE told that the action of FOE is to make the people aware and make them understand it is for their own benefit. The citizens have a very important role as in to give their pressure to the government in certain problems and issues. In interview, he also mentioned that it is very expensive to go through law to protect the environment for a pressure group. And in the earlier it had a role in for environment in LEPs process but it is completely shut now. Finally, pressure groups and citizens also have a role in the protection of the environment, particularly for the greenbelt. These groups influence the decision of city councils on development applications and most of the time, the first defender of the greenbelt are its residents themselves, who want to keep a good quality of living with large green spaces.

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<sup>4</sup> Interviews and government data(ONS DATA)

Field	Actors	Role
Environment	Environmental Agency	Environmental Guidelines for new development at <b>national and Local Level</b>
	Natural England	Conserving the natural resources from new development and making guidelines
	Citizens charter and NGO's (Pressure Group)	Power to oppose and ask for an explanation (Local authority should make a survey and take opinions)
	Friends of Earth	International Organisation raising concern over environmental issues.
	DEFRA	Department is responsible for natural environment and its protection, Biodiversity, sustainable development, pollution control and green economy.
Economy	Department of Business and Innovation Skills	Department is responsible for business development, business law, economic development
	European Regional Development Fund	Support sustainable development through policy and funding and Regional coordination. Funding available from EU to regional Level.
	European Social Fund	Funds available for social development
	Local Enterprise Partnership	LEP Build partnership between Private groups and Local Authority on project basis or establishment of new business

## II. Conclusion:

From the observation, it can be said that for the local authority (local level /local scale), since they have to deal many issues like the high unemployment rate and unskilled labor rate<sup>5</sup> and environment is just one of them and thus it is not a priority. There is a strong rate of unemployment, and a high proportion of unskilled labor. Birmingham's adult population has a particularly lower rate of employment, with the 2001 Census showing that only 64.4% of men aged 16-64 and 55.6% of women are employed compared to 74.1% and 64.0% in England and Wales. This is an improper use of the Birmingham's workforce potential and could hold back the future growth of the local economy by causing labor shortages. The important fact which is to be understood here is that a balanced development in Birmingham or any such territory is based on three dimensions of development which are the social development, environmental development and economy development and thus equal importance to all the three are to be given at the same time ; rather than prioritizing or emphasizing on the development and upheaval of one of them ,for present day or near-future needs one may be more important but for constant and stabilized development of the territory in a long run equal importance and opportunities for development are to be given to all the three dimensions.

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