

**Towards a Suburban Renaissance
The Suburban Taskforce**



Call for Evidence

An Inquiry into the Future of the Suburbs

August 2020



PURPOSE OF THE TASKFORCE

The suburbs of our towns and cities are home to the majority of the population. Yet their form, function and connectivity give rise to unique challenges and opportunities. This Taskforce seeks to clarify the circumstances facing our suburbs and to understand the implications this has for the way in which we plan for their future. The intention is that this will inform recommendations as to policy initiatives which will contribute to the creation of suburbs which are thriving, sustainable and inclusive.



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INTRODUCTION

The Taskforce has been set up to investigate the challenges and opportunities facing our suburbs and the ways in which we can better support these areas in the future.

...

It is increasingly apparent with county lines, hollowed-out high streets and overpriced housing, that it's net curtains for representatives who ignore the plight of suburbia. Yet the majority of those in Parliament represent precisely such constituencies.

Unlike "those inner cities" that Margaret Thatcher tasked Michael Heseltine sought to sort out, suburbs are rarely if ever considered problematic. Suburbs have, instead, been left to get on with it. For the past decade this has meant facing up to the challenges of austerity. However, suburbs are now facing problems of inequality and underfunding whilst being under pressure to expand or intensify.

The stereotypical suburban lure was as an escape from grime and satanic mills in search of "the good life" in "Metroland". This idea is nonetheless being challenged. Delivering "the compact city" has supported local services but resulted in physical changes to our suburbs, such as an increase in the number of tall buildings, which do not always reflect the nature of suburbs which many envisage. This is particularly evident in major cities such as London.

Suburbs once were once envisioned as an ideal balance between town and country. The way in which we achieve that balance may, of course, be different today than a century or more ago. However, it's equally important that, be it Solihull

in Birmingham or Didsbury in Manchester, our efforts do not result in hollowed-out high streets and unaffordable housing. Our suburbs need attention if they're to adapt for the better.

This Taskforce draws those from all political backgrounds to focus on the suburbs, seeking to understand what "suburban" really means in modern Britain and how we can ensure that the aspirations we once held for our suburbs can be secured today.

We need to shine a light on the suburbs in order to identify and secure clear, long-term and resourced policies to ensure a future which is thriving, sustainable and inclusive. Now, as we emerge from a pandemic which may well redefine our relationship to the places in which we live, work and play is the right time for that.



Rupa Huq MP

Co-Chair, Suburban Taskforce

ABOUT THE TASKFORCE

The Suburban Taskforce is an independent inquiry into the state of the suburbs. It is a cross-party parliamentary taskforce, comprising representatives of both Houses of Parliament, from all political backgrounds. It seeks to set out an agreed agenda for change.

TASKFORCE

Membership of the Taskforce is open to all members of both Houses. The Taskforce currently comprises the following members:

Co-Chairs

Rupa Huq (Labour)
David Simmonds (Conservative)

Vice-Chairs

Jon Cruddas (Labour)
Gareth Bacon (Conservative)

Lords Liaison

Baroness Susan Kramer (Liberal Democrat)

Current Members

Karen Buck
Seema Malhotra
James Murray
Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Steve Reed
Sam Tarry

ADVISORY BOARD

The Taskforce is assisted by an expert Advisory Board comprising professionals from a multi-disciplinary background. Its current members include:

Chair

Jonathan Manns
(Rockwell, UCL)

Members

Richard Blyth
(Royal Town Planning Institute)

Nicholas Falk
(URBED Trust)

Katie Perrior
(InHouse Communications)

Will Tanner
(Onward)

Tony Mulhall
(Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors)

Peter Murray
(New London Architecture)

KNOWLEDGE PARTNER

The Taskforce is being supported by UCL to ensure the academic rigour of the evidence which is presented and the conclusions which are drawn. This is resourced by the Bartlett School of Planning.

Academic Advisor

Dr Lucy Natarajan

Researcher

Dr Dimitrios Panayotopoulos-Tsiros

SECRETARIAT

The Secretariat for the Taskforce is the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for London's Planning and Built Environment; members of which voted at Parliament to establish the Taskforce on 5 March 2020.

GOALS OF THE TASKFORCE

- **To illuminate** the nature of social and economic activity in the suburbs. This is to include patterns of work, life and play in addition to associated conditions in terms of investment, expenditure, built and natural environment.
- **To identify** policy mechanisms and interventions which may assist in supporting the long-term sustainability of suburban areas. This will have particular regard to supporting polycentric centres, not least through fiscal considerations (such as taxation and investment) and the planning system.
- **To illustrate** the potential differences between suburban areas and those which are either more central or more rural, in addition to wider spatial distinctions which may exist, for example between larger and smaller settlements. In doing so, to inform our understanding of what constitutes a “suburb” in 21st Century Britain.



KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The Taskforce seeks to address three key considerations and welcomes submissions which address either all or some of these. These are:

1. **The Nature of Suburbs**
2. **The Suburban Experience**
3. **The Policy Framework**

It is currently envisaged that the Taskforce will review these areas in two distinct phases of investigation.

- Phase One: The first phase is intended to develop a robust foundation for investigating the aforementioned considerations. It will have particular regard to the Outer Boroughs of London, both as an area for pilot research and as a setting of interest in itself as a context in which suburban challenges may be experienced intensely.
- Phase Two: The second phase is intended to expand the initial investigation and will be based upon the findings from Phase One. At this point, it is anticipated that this will involve exploring the initial findings in greater detail and/or expanding the geographic focus to comprise a wider area of study, in order to understand variation and factors in these.

Accordingly, the Suburban Taskforce welcomes all contributions which relate to the three key considerations, irrespective of their particular spatial or economic circumstances. It should be noted, however, that it will initially seek to prioritise evidence from the Outer Boroughs of London.

THE NATURE OF SUBURBS

Proposition

The Taskforce recognises that the nature of suburbs is likely to vary spatially; for example, between London, other major cities and smaller towns and settlements. It nonetheless proposes that suburbs can be seen as distinct from areas that are either more centrally located or rural, and consequently that unique characteristics may be defined.

Questions

What are the unique characteristics of suburban areas?

In particular:

- How might we define suburban areas, and differentiate them from urban / rural areas, in terms of their social, environmental, economic, and other dimensions?
- Are there any notable examples?

GOALS OF THE TASKFORCE

THE SUBURBAN EXPERIENCE

Proposition

The Taskforce recognises that the nature of local governance, functional economies and social expectations of development are often distinct for suburban areas. It proposes that this will give rise to unique challenges and opportunities with distinct implications for policy.

Questions

(A) What unique challenges and opportunities face suburban areas?

In particular:

- What are the concerns and aspirations of suburban communities for their places?
- Can you share any evidence?

(B) Are there any dimensions of spatial equality, which are unique or of particular relevance to suburban areas?

In particular:

- How might the nature of suburbs affect issues of social, environmental, economic, or other types of disadvantage?
- Are there any areas that are notable in this regard?

THE POLICY FRAMEWORK

Proposition

The Taskforce recognises that existing policies have distinct spatial implications. It proposes that some of these will affect suburban locations more than others and that there may be scope for certain policies to either be reformed or introduced which could assist with the creation of better suburbs.

Questions

(A) What are the governance implications arising from these challenges and opportunities?

In particular:

- How can policies, policy-thinking, or policy networks adapt to the needs and goals of suburbs?
- Are there any examples of approaches to policy, regulation or stakeholder networks that are sensitive to these challenges?

(B) What existing policies or policy 'silences' have the most significant impact on the suburbs?

(C) What new policy reforms or new policy initiatives could be deployed to assist in the creation of suburbs which are thriving, sustainable and inclusive?

NEXT STEPS

Submission of Evidence

This “Call for Evidence” is open for a period of two months from the publication of this document and will close at 1700hrs on 02 October 2020.

As has been stressed elsewhere in this document, the Taskforce wishes to have a particular focus on the Outer Boroughs of London in the first phase of research. It would be helpful if answers and evidence, whether general or specific, could be set in this context wherever possible.

All evidence is to be clearly marked “Suburban Taskforce – Submission of Evidence” and should be submitted electronically, by email, to Submissions@suburban-taskforce.org. It should be provided in both MS Word and PDF formats.

All evidence should clearly set out the following information:

1. Authorship: The author(s) of the response and any affiliations should be set out at the start of the document. This should include contact details for the corresponding author.
2. Questions & Answers: The document should make clear to what questions it relates and, where several questions are addressed, should be structured accordingly.

It is assumed that, through the submission of evidence, the author is willing to attribute copyright for the submission to the Taskforce and agrees to the use of the submission, by the Taskforce, for whatever purposes it sees fit. This includes replication and publication of the submission in whole or part.

Programme

The Taskforce intends to review all Phase One submissions and, where appropriate, receive and interrogate oral evidence in Autumn/Winter 2020. Publication of the Taskforce’s initial Phase One findings are targeted for Summer 2021. The programme for Phase Two will follow this and be subject to the conclusions.

CONTACT

The Secretariat of the Taskforce can be contacted for all purposes on Secretariat@suburban-taskforce.org www.suburban-taskforce.org

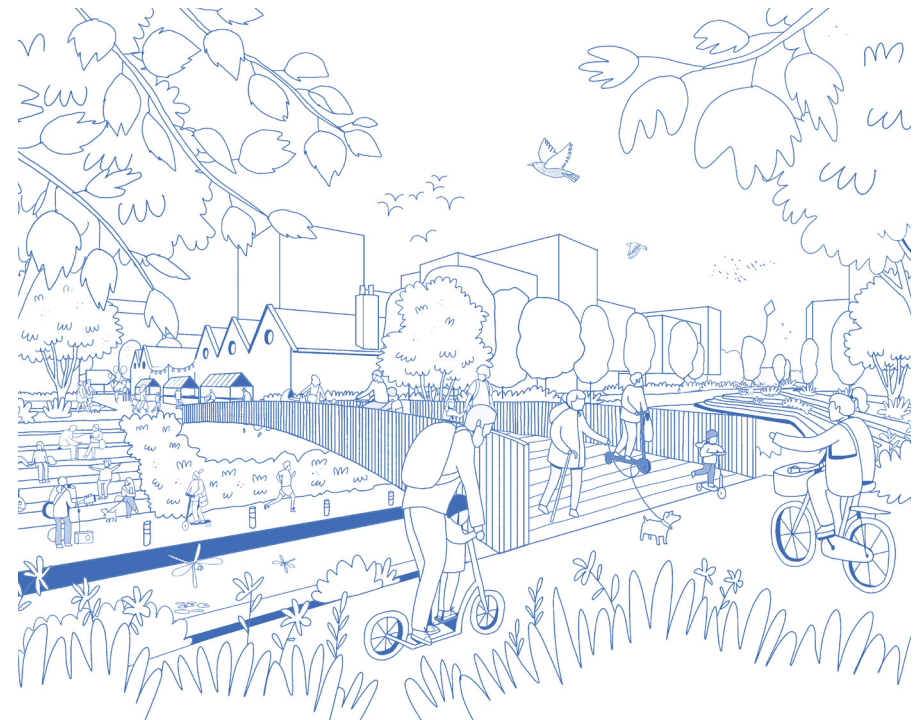


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