

Stephen Gwynne

Matter D: About Birmingham, Vision, Objectives, Strategy and general policies (BDP sections 2 & 3, policies PG2-3)

Main issues: Do sections 2 and 3 of the Plan set out a sound basis for its policies and proposals? Are the provisions of policies PG2 and PG3 justified and effective?

Questions: 1) Do the sections of the Plan entitled *About Birmingham* and *The Vision, Objectives and Strategy* provide a sound basis for the policies and proposals in the rest of the Plan?

I argue that the Birmingham Development Plan (BDP) does not utilise objectively assessed evidence (OAE) to demonstrate that economic growth through population increase will result in sustainable development (SD). Similarly the BDP does not utilise OAE to demonstrate that economic growth through population increase will result in sustainable economic growth. As such, as stated in the sustainability appraisal, no proof exists to demonstrate that economic growth through population increase will result in social, economic and environmental SD objectives and that in fact they are considered incompatible (see Sustainability Appraisal table 5.1).

In contrast, OAE does exist to show that economic growth through population increase has a detrimental effect on SD objectives. For example with regards creating a prosperous economy for all, it has been shown by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) that at present increasing Gross Domestic Product, which presently results from economic growth through population increase, correlates with reducing net disposable incomes and decreasing values of human and social capital¹. Similarly, recent SD indicators from the ONS shows that in general, people in the UK feel less trustful in their neighbourhoods, have experienced a reduction in their annual incomes and experienced an overall decrease in their human capital (see appendix 2). These decreasing SD indicators correlates with the current strategy of pursuing economic growth through increasing population and was earlier in the year highlighted by central government politicians who make reference for the need to 'reform an economy hard-wired into a cycle of low wages, low skills, insecure jobs and high prices that is tearing into the living standards of ordinary families'².

Moreover, whilst the Sustainability Appraisal does make reference to the incompatibilities between creating a sustainable city and the strategy of economic growth through population increase, it does not make any specific reference to the likely detrimental social and economic impacts of economic growth through population increase considering the importance of these measures of well-being due to the failure to refer to up to date national well-being insights across society, the economy and the environment as produced by the ONS. However, it does make clear that economic growth through

¹ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/wellbeing/measuring-national-well-being/reflections-on-measuring-national-well-being--may-2014/info-insights-across-society.html>

² <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2534072/British-families-lose-influx-cheap-labour-Romania-Bulgaria-Miliband-admits-call-close-low-wages-loophole.html>

population increase will have detrimental environmental impacts especially through the destruction of green belt land and the depletion of natural resources.

Related concerns are highlighted in recent research funded by NASA which shows that economic growth through population increase and the associated income inequality that often results from economic growth will lead to civilisation collapse through the erosion of the ecological basis of our survival and the collapse of our socio-economic systems³.

Similarly, very recent research by the University of Melbourne also points to the fact that the strategy of economic growth through population increase will also likely result in the erosion of the ecological basis of our survival⁴. As stated in the study :-

If the present growth trends in world population, industrialisation, pollution, food production, and resource depletion continue unchanged, the limits to growth on this planet will be reached sometime within the next one hundred years. The most probable result will be a rather sudden and uncontrollable decline in both population and industrial capacity. So far, there's little to indicate they got that wrong.

In short, all this OAE shows that a strategy of economic growth through population increase as promoted in the BDP is unsustainable in the long-term and has detrimental social, economic and environmental impacts in the present.

By extrapolating the data and trends that I have referred to, it can be seen that far from creating sustainable economic growth, pursuing a strategy of economic growth through population increase will have deteriorating effects on social, economic and environmental well-being ultimately leading to social, economic and environmental bankruptcy. Appendix 6 shows how a cycle of impoverishment will be perpetuated by pursuing a strategy of economic growth through population increase. This chart maps the likely long-term effects that population increase will have. Initially a downward pressure on wages and disposable incomes will be experienced and then an increased demand for scarce resources will have an upward pressure on prices, both resulting in a depreciation of living standards and increasing national debt. In short, a strategy of economic growth through population increase only serves to create a negative downward spiral of increasing social, economic and environmental impoverishment and debt.

As stated earlier, all of the above OAE shows that far from resulting in SD, the stated strategy of the BDP to facilitate economic growth through population increase will in fact result in unsustainable development and as such makes the plan unsound. In particular, the above OAE shows that the likely effects of the strategy to increase economic growth through population increase is to reduce environmental capacity, reduce the value of human and social capital and reduce economic well-being. In this respect the BDP needs to apply the precautionary principle in order to comply with the

³ <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/earth-insight/2014/mar/14/nasa-civilisation-irreversible-collapse-study-scientists>

⁴ http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/sep/02/limits-to-growth-was-right-new-research-shows-were-nearing-collapse?CMP=fb_gu

presumption in favour of sustainable development and restrict economic growth through population increase until such a time that adequate OAE can be provided to show that this strategy will indeed result in positive indications of social, economic and environmental SD.

In conclusion, without adequate OAE to show that economic growth through population increase will result in SD, the current strategy of the plan is unable to fulfil the objectives of being positively prepared, justified, effective or consistent with national policy. In truth the only OAE that is referred to by the plan to justify economic growth through population increase are population projections provided by the ONS which in themselves do not provide evidence that economic growth through population increase will result in SD. In this respect, the decision to facilitate economic growth through population increase by increasing the housing stock of Birmingham by up to 80,000 dwellings fails to refer to adequate OAE to justify that decision since as stated populations projections alone do not demonstrate that SD objectives will be realised but this particular point is I appreciate another individual issue that will be addressed in another individual submission.

Finally, since this plan does not refer to adequate OAE that shows that the strategy of economic growth through population is likely to result in social, economic and environmental sustainability, I argue that the BDP does not defer to the presumption in favour of SD but is a plan that defers to a presumption in favour of economic growth through population increase which then seeks to mitigate expected negative SD impacts through local policy generation as a secondary concern. This is an argument that is shared by others (see 3.3.1 BCC Green Belt Assessment – overwhelming majority decide against green belt development) and one which disagrees with the Birmingham City Council's decision to maximise economic growth through population increase. In this respect, far from the BDP fulfilling the vision and aspirations of local people, the plan has incorporated objectives that the People of Birmingham have not democratically sanctioned or approved of. This feature of the BDP in itself shows that there is no public support behind the plan as well as reflecting a strong likelihood that Birmingham City Council will continue to disregard the vision and aspirations of the People of Birmingham which as I understand it, is contrary to the Localism Act 2011. However again, the green belt issue and the blatant disregard of local opposition to green belt development is the subject of another individual submission.

Proposed changes

1. Considering that the BDP should be created with a presumption in favour of SD, it is necessary to provide OAE to show that the strategy of economic growth through population increase will indeed result in positive social, economic and environmental SD outcomes and in particular will result in positive shifts in SD indicators. At the moment the plan does not utilise any OAE to demonstrate that SD objectives will be the outcome of the strategy to encourage economic growth through population increase.
2. If adequate OAE can be provided to justify a strategy of economic growth through population increase, then adequate OAE needs to be produced to show what level of economic growth through population increase will result in positive SD outcomes.

3. To provide OAE in the form of a cost/benefit analysis to show that economic growth through population increase does indeed equate to sustainable social, economic and environmental growth.
4. Considering that current available OAE suggests that economic growth through population increase does not result in social, economic and environmental SD, an alternative strategy and one that demonstrates a presumption in favour SD needs to be developed. I propose a strategy of a steady-state economy which is an economy of relatively stable size which features stable population and stable consumption that remain at or below ecological carrying capacity and aspires towards social, economic and environmental equality and equity. Such an economy has at its core the fulfilment of SD objectives and would utilise a reasonable and justified mix of low/medium/high carbon activities and lifestyles based on prevailing and appropriate OAE.
5. A further alternative policy option is a de-growth economy strategy which aims to reduce production and consumption in favour of environmental protection and social equity.
6. Ideally the plan needs to embed an ecological rights framework in order to fully fulfil the presumption in favour of SD or else in the interim, embed a much more comprehensive social, economic and environmental sustainability appraisal and one that includes an appraisal of the vision and aspirations of local people to shape their surroundings.

Appendices

1. Measuring National Well-being: Insights across society, the economy and the environment -May 2014.

Office of National Statistics <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/wellbeing/measuring-national-well-being/reflections-on-measuring-national-well-being--may-2014/info-insights-across-society.html>

2. Sustainable Development Indicators - July 2014.

3. British families will 'lose out' from influx of cheap labour from Romania and Bulgaria, Miliband admits in call to close low wages loophole – January 2014.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2534072/British-families-lose-influx-cheap-labour-Romania-Bulgaria-Miliband-admits-call-close-low-wages-loophole.html>

4. Nasa-funded study: industrial civilisation headed for 'irreversible collapse'? March 2014

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/earth-insight/2014/mar/14/nasa-civilisation-irreversible-collapse-study-scientists>

5. Limits to Growth was right. New research shows we're nearing collapse. September 2014.

http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/sep/02/limits-to-growth-was-right-new-research-shows-were-nearing-collapse?CMP=fb_gu

6. Flow chart showing the likely social and economic impacts of economic growth through population increase.

The Social and economic impacts of economic growth through population increase

Wages ↓ downward pressure

Prices ↑ upward pressure

Disposable income ↓ downward pressure

Reduction in living standards

Less savings

Less investment

More borrowing

National debt ↑ upward pressure

Cut back on public services

Loss of jobs

Unemployment ↑ upward pressure

Less spending

Less profits

Less investment

More unemployment

More borrowing

National debt ↑ upward pressure

Increased taxes to pay debt

Less spending

More borrowing

More national debt

Bankruptcy !

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Ref – Examination Hearing BDP 2014

To whom it may concern

I'm not sure if it is too late or not but I feel it necessary to include a formal statement of my position to help others better understand my proposed changes to About Birmingham, its vision, strategies and objectives as well as my proposed changes with regards green belt policy.

To explain In ecological terms,

Sustainability is created by encouraging diversity which in turn encourages a system to be stable, healthy and so resilient in the face of external stress. In this respect, encouraging ecological diversity, including human diversity, should be the core goal of the BDP. If social, economic, cultural, political and ecological well-being is the goal.

From this perspective of sustainability, it is seen that it is only by facilitating and creating system diversity that human social, economic and ecological sustainability and well-being will be achieved. In other words, by encouraging system diversity, a human system will experience more sustainability and well-being through being more stable, healthier and more resilient in the face of external stress. Hence any development/planning/economic vision, strategies or objectives need to have diversity enhancement as their main guiding principle.

In effect, the objective of the BDP would be to socially, economically and ecologically develop a human species/system that distributes resources in such a way as to create the greatest diversity of species, genes, habitats, communities and societies and the greatest diversity of links between species, genes, habitats, communities and societies.

Therefore, I strongly suggest that the BDP should incorporate as its core vision, diversity enhancement which I argue will not only make Birmingham the most forward green city in the world but also the most sustainable, the most resilient and the most healthy city in the world.

With respect to green belt policy, since evidence needs to be shown to determine which strategy options will enhance the diversity of the green belt the most. Suggested options are :-

- 1) A strategy of economic growth through human population increase that is facilitated by green belt boundary revisions, i.e. a human economic growth strategy
- 2) A strategy of actively enhancing green belt diversity with case by case evidenced-based social, economic, cultural, political and ecological assessments, i.e a steady-state human economic policy
- 3) A strategy of precaution which largely preserves the green belt as it is for the time being until such time as a comprehensive body of evidence exists in order to be better informed of how to manage diversity enhancement in the green belt, i.e a temporary human economic de-growth trajectory.

Many thanks

Steve Gwynne