

IS GMSF REALLY ACHIEVABLE?

■ Last month, GL Hearn gathered experts from across the private and public sectors to discuss how the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework will affect development and whether the region can deliver on its growth ambitions

Topic: What will be the impact of the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework?

- Joanne Roney**, chief executive, Manchester City Council
- Gavin Taylor**, regional general manager, Far East Consortium
- Paul Moore**, managing director, Redrow Homes NW
- Pam Smith**, chief executive, Stockport Council
- Paul Westhead**, head of land and partnerships, Trafford Housing Trust
- Hunter Lyden**, development manager, Urban Splash
- Guy Montague-Jones**, deputy editor, *Property Week* (chair)



Paul Moore



Joanne Roney



Hunter Lyden



Pam Smith



Paul Westhead



Gavin Taylor

The hotly anticipated draft of the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework (GMSF) sets a 20-year target to deliver 201,000 new homes – but is it really achievable? The new plan pledges to make a quarter of the new homes ‘affordable’ and the amount of green-belt land earmarked for development has been halved compared with the old version that mayor Andy Burnham binned in 2017.

Ahead of the publication of the final document, GL Hearn gathered leading figures from the private and public sectors in Manchester to explore the extent to which the plan will help or hinder development and whether, in the context of a slowing economy, Greater Manchester can deliver on its ambitions for growth and development.

Has the draft of the GMSF been positively received?

PS: The GMSF is about making sure that we create sustainable communities. The refocus on brownfield and trying to use as little green-belt land as possible is critical.

Being part of the GMSF is also about us all working together across the boroughs. One of the key advantages is that we can look at infrastructure across Greater Manchester, not just Stockport or Rochdale. Given where we want to build houses and have the commercial offer, we can decide where to build infrastructure.

JR: I think the GMSF is really important. We do it a disservice by thinking of it as just another plan. It’s more than that. We wouldn’t be able to deliver the local industrial strategy if we didn’t have a GMSF and were absolutely clear about the places we want to create in the future. As a city we need every part of Greater Manchester to be successful. The city cannot cope if it’s the importer of population without vibrant infrastructure and vibrant housing markets that surround it and job creation that is spread across the district.

PS: I get asked: are you trying to do a London? London’s different. We’ve got distinct towns in Greater Manchester and we want those towns through the spatial framework to

be world class so that we’re all supporting the city’s drive forward.

How exactly does the GMSF help achieve all this?

GT: What the broader plan does is set a tone. It solidifies a series of golden threads that cascade down into individual projects, whether that be in relation to density, blend of tenure or creation of sustainable communities. It sets a broader framework and we then distil that down. It’s all about creating place. Unless that’s set and is co-ordinated with other developments, it’s not going to be functional.

Is the reduction in the amount of green-belt land earmarked for development universally welcomed?

PM: In the division I run at Redrow we’re used to developing on greenfield sites but we would be happy developing brownfield sites. It just has to suit our product. We would be very keen and interested to be working, not necessarily in the city centre, but on the outskirts. It’s just

a question of how those opportunities come around. One of the barriers that we find in particular with the Homes England Delivery Partner Panel framework is the great big pass and fail questions, mainly to do with things like modern methods of construction. The focus on that can be off-putting. Our product is slightly different to most national housebuilders. There’s a lot of detail around the elevations and how the product is put together. Modern methods don’t suit our product and what we aren’t prepared to do is sacrifice our product. For me, I’d like to see a bit of relaxation on the criteria that the DPP set.

Will there be a marked increase in development outside the city centre?

PS: I think so. In Stockport, we’re going to build 3,000 homes in and around our town centre over the next 15 to 20 years. It’s a coming of age, really. I say we’re the Brooklyn equivalent of New York. The towns have offers that complement the global city of Manchester. If we’re marketing ourselves on a global stage,

that’s how we have to think of ourselves.

JR: We undersell ourselves. Last year, we developed 1,000 homes outside the city centre. We’re a little bit lazy describing the housing market as being defined by the city centre.

Is the affordability agenda being tackled appropriately in Greater Manchester and what role can housing associations play?

JR: We need more affordable housing. There’s no question about that but it requires intervention on a number of levels. When it comes to the for-sale market, there are issues around Help to Buy. I’d like to see a refreshed offer because there are young people struggling to get on the housing ladder. There are also still issues around what role registered providers (RPs) can play and what support government can offer them.

PW: We’ve gone into different areas of the market in the last few years but this week’s announcement that we’re becoming part of L&Q and bringing £4bn of investment into the

North West is a step up. Where we should be committing ourselves is the grittier parts of the market, the town centres, where we can bring that patient investment. What we want to do is create a cross-subsidy model that blends all the tenures. Some of that early investment has to be non-affordable product simply to create the right blend. The other key thing is quality. You’ve got to set the tone.

GT: We do have a fixation with affordability and we need to come away from that and focus on sustainable communities. Yes, key worker housing, social rent and shared ownership are important but we also need a diverse mix of housing.

What can be done to help housing associations accelerate delivery?

PW: There are more coming to the market. An RP typically had a board made up of tenants, local councillors and so forth. Bring them a commercial development opportunity with contaminated land and all sorts of risks, and the boards aren’t skilled up to handle it. You

need more private sector people in the RPs. It takes time to get the board right and then everything else cascades down.

Are you confident that the 20-year housing delivery target in the GMSF will be hit?

HL: It’s a 20-year plan. The number written down will never be the number achieved. It’s more the sense of direction that’s important rather than a question of pass and fail.

JR: I think the city is doing really well. I feel confident in our ability to deliver and it’s crucial that the rest of Greater Manchester gets away as well. Key to that has to be the unlocking of the £50m Housing Investment Fund that was agreed in 2017 and we are still waiting for it in

2019. We have a push to go on that. Even with forward-thinking authorities such as Stockport and the commitment of the public and private sector, we still have some tricky sites to get away. Unlocking that Housing Investment Fund would act as a catalyst to escalate delivery.

GT: We’re bullish. We think we can deliver our numbers. There will always be variables so we need to be agile and we absolutely need to be innovative in the way we work with the public sector.

PW: From an L&Q perspective, they haven’t announced what they have and are then going to sit back. We’ve made a good start with the 2,000 homes we’ve built in the last two years. It’s now 20,000 and we’d like to do most of that in Greater Manchester.