LONDON 2001

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Peter Hall

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London
UNWIN HYMAN
Boston Sydney Wellington

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Published by the Academic Division of
Unwin Hyman Ltd
15/17 Broadwick Street, London W1V 3FP, UK

Unwin Hyman Inc.,
8 Winchester Place, Winchester, Mass. 01890, USA

Allen & Unwin (Australia) Ltd.
8 Napier Street, North Sydney, NSW 2060, Australia

Allen & Unwin (New Zealand) Ltd in association with the
Port Nicholson Press Ltd
Compusales Building, 75 Ghuznee Street, Wellington 1,
New Zealand

First published in 1989
Revised paperback edition 1989

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Hall, Peter, *1932–*
London 2001.
1. England. south-east England. Regional planning.
I. Title
361.6'1'09422
ISBN 0–04–445161–X
ISBN 0–04–445556–9 pbk

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hall, Peter Geoffrey.
London 2001 / Peter Hall.
p. cm.
Includes index.
ISBN 0–04–445161–X (alk. paper)
ISBN 0–04–445556–9 pbk
1. City planning—England—London. I. Title.
HT169.G72L64615 1989
711'.4'09421–dc 19 88–23543
CIP

Typeset in 10/12 Palatino
Printed in Great Britain at the University Press, Cambridge

Preface

Twenty-five years ago, I published a book called *London 2000*. To my surprise and gratification, it received a great deal of notice. That, doubtless, was due less to its merits than to its timeliness. It appeared at a time when planning, above all the long-term strategic planning of activities and traffic, had just become a major issue, perhaps *the* major issue, of the day; the newspapers and television screens were full of it. In quick succession, after the book's publication in July 1963, there followed the Buchanan Report, *Traffic in Towns* (November 1963) and the first sketch of a strategic plan for South-East England, the *South–East Study* (March 1964). For any planner, Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, But to be young was very heaven!

Not so a quarter-century later. For planning, above all strategic planning, is under a cloud. No one seems to have a good word for it. The Prince of Wales and the Prime Minister, who do not seem to agree on much else, concur that it is responsible for the awfulness of our cities, in particular London's. Everyone seems to agree that in those golden years of the 1960s, when planners ran wild, they wreaked havoc on the sensitive fabric of our cities and towns. The fact – that, often enough, the planners were not even present – is not allowed to mar the enjoyment of the witch-hunt.

In particular, long-term strategic planning is dismissed as some kind of irrelevant game; we no longer need it, we will no longer pay for it. The inconvenient fact – that other countries and other countries' cities, which seem to have done at least as well as ours over the long haul and maybe even better, have done so on the basis of planning – is conveniently ignored. Few look over the water at Paris, the most obvious comparison, which has continued over two decades to implement its audacious development plan – and has done so steadfastly, come left-wing government, come right-wing.

There is an historical comparison. In the 1950s, too, planning in Britain was under a cloud. Then, too, it was reduced to a negative, residual, role. Quite suddenly, at the start of the 1960s, there was one of those perceptual sea-changes that transform the whole political landscape: almost overnight, planning was seen as both desirable and

necessary. And this affected people of every political persuasion; that most consummate of politicians, Harold Macmillan, sensed it early and sailed with the tide. Hence the notable fact that, during the years 1961–2, it was a Conservative government that initiated such classics as the Buchanan Report on *Traffic in towns* and the *South-East study*. Hence the huge swell of interest that, incidentally, caused *London 2000* to be commissioned.

History is not always cyclical. But a quarter-century later, as I started work on this book, my hunch was that there would be another turn of the wheel. If I am wrong, this new book may prove an historic curiosity. If I am right, it may make another modest contribution to the debate. As I finish it a year after I started, bombarded by newspaper articles and television specials about the crisis of planning in the South East, I think that my hunch was right.

It is a new book. It shares with *London 2000* only a similar title and a similar structure. There are a few sentences culled from the old book, in Chapters 1 and 9, mainly in the form of quotations. There are also passages culled from presentations I have made on the question during 1987–88; extremely assiduous readers may recall them in fugitive publications.

The first objective is to look back at that youthful work, full of naive hope and burning evangelism, and ask: What, if anything, was achieved? How much of the vision of the early 1960s did we get, how much hope was betrayed, and why? The second aim is to take stock of where we are now, to map out the problem landscape, and to suggest some solutions as a contribution to a new debate. Essentially, then, *London 2001* shares with *London 2000* something else: its purpose.

In an old-fashioned way, which many critics will doubtless find fuddy-duddy, I try to insist that, like its predecessor, this book is apolitical. Though the idea of planning itself has latterly become the subject of fierce political controversy, it is perhaps worth remembering that the founding father of the new conservatism, von Hayek, thought that the word and the concept were worthy of a better fate.

Three days before the manuscript went to press, the London Planning Advisory Committee published its consultation draft, *Strategic Planning Advice for London: Policies for the 1990s* (London Planning Advisory Committee 1988). It is a hopeful sign that such a body has produced a comprehensive and balanced review. It is less hopeful that the media gave it so little attention. This book should have given it much more, but in the circumstances that was impossible. Some key points have however been noted.

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London 2000 was dedicated to John Vaizey, who inspired it and persuaded me to write it. He spent his too-brief life as fierce crusader for independence of thought, for ideas that flew in the face of the conventional wisdom, for a continuous attack on what he liked to call the forces of cant and humbug. It is all too appropriate that this successor should be dedicated to his memory.

PETER HALL
Berkeley, California, and London
May–June 1988

Acknowledgements

Sheila Dance of the University of Reading Department of Geography drew all the maps for this book, producing work of superb quality against impossible deadlines, as so often before.

Figs 3, 4, 8, 10, 13 and 14 draw on material from research by SERPLAN. It is a pleasure to acknowledge SERPLAN's continuing contribution to our understanding of regional change.

My thanks to the following suppliers of illustrations: Hunting Aerofilms (Plates 4a, 8 and 11); British Road Federation (Plate 7); Olympia and York Canary Wharf Limited (Plates 1(a) and 1(b)); David Crewe Associates (Plates 10(a) and 10(b)); Eurotunnel (Plates 12(a) and 12(b)); JAS Photographi 2 (Plate 9); and London Regeneration Consortium PLC (Plate 4(b)). The remaining plates are my own work.

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Introduction

> The first problem with London is to define it. London has never taken kindly to attempts at delimitation, whether by people who wanted to govern it, or by those who just wanted to fix it statistically; every time this was done, London promptly outgrew its administration or its figures.

Thus began *London 2000*, in 1963; thus, 25 years later, begins *London 2001*. If anything, the problem is more intractable now than then. The 1981 Census gives figures for a unit that in 1988 no longer exists: the 620-square-mile *Greater London Council*, now the area of the City of London and the 32 London boroughs. It corresponds very roughly to the continuously built-up area of London, which however snakes out beyond it in certain directions, especially along the busier commuter lines. It is thus roughly co-terminous with the London of 1938, and it is bounded by the Metropolitan Green Belt, an idea first fixed by legislation in that very year in a vain attempt to halt the spread of the metropolis into the fields of surrounding England, and properly realized only after the Second World War.

Greater London includes at least three smaller units, commonly used in comparative statistics, which fit inside each other like Russian dolls. The smallest of all is the 677-acre ancient *City of London*, which – as *London 2000* predicted – survived both the administrative holocaust of 1965, which brought the GLC into being, and that of 1986, which eliminated it. Around it is an area ten times as large, the 10-square-mile *central area* embracing the City, the West End, and such specialized areas as the 'Museum Quarter' of Kensington. It is a convenient shorthand for the area that contains the biggest concentration of employment in Britain, and one of the three or four largest in the world.

Finally there is *inner London*: the area of mainly older and denser housing, corresponding very roughly to the built-up area of London in 1914. Confusingly, there are two different definitions of it. One is the area that still – as this book is finished, but not for long – is administered for educational purposes by the Inner London Education Authority: it corresponds to the old *London County Council*, which administered London from 1888 until the GLC supplanted it.

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The other, widely used for statistical purposes, chops off an ILEA borough in south-east London – Greenwich – but for good measure adds two others: Haringey in the north and Newham in the east. Because this is the definition commonly used in the statistics, I shall use it here.

That much is relatively simple. The real problem, as *London 2000* pointed out, was that even by 1963 Greater London was no longer great enough: as early as the 1950s, it was declining in population, while a wide ring around – up to 45 or 50 miles from the centre – was the fastest growing part of Britain, growing by nearly 1 million people, 29 per cent, in only ten years. Statisticians and planners were just then learning to call this the Outer Metropolitan Area. It went on growing, but at diminishing speed: nearly 19 per cent in the 1960s, 8 per cent in the 1970s, between 2 and 3 per cent in the 1980s.

It was not that population growth had ceased, though: the growth was just rolling farther out. In the 1950s, as already noted, the belt of maximum growth was between 15 and 30 miles from the centre. In the 1960s it was already 35–70 miles distant, and had begun to break up into conglomerations corresponding to major urban groups: Reading–Basingstoke, Southampton–Portsmouth, Milton Keynes. In the 1970s it was even farther distant, and even more broken. By the early 1980s it had lapped outside the South-East region as defined for statistical purposes, into the neighbouring South-West, East Midlands, and East Anglia regions (Figs 6(a)–(d) below).

Small wonder then that during the early 1980s the official statisticians stopped using the concept of the London Metropolitan Area, and hence the Outer Metropolitan Area outside Greater London; instead they referred to the entire South East, and to ROSE (the Rest of the South East), again outside Greater London. 'Roseland', as some commentators call it, is still one of the fastest-growing areas of Britain. But its growth too is slowing, a product of that same outward roll: its percentage increment was over 18 per cent in the 1960s, 6 per cent in the 1970s, but less than 6 per cent in the 1980s. What we need now is a concept no one has officially recognized, though it was first described in a 1983 report by the Regional Studies Association: a Greater South East, incorporating the entire official South East and the fringe of fast-growing counties, 10 or 20 miles wide, around it. In 1986 this area had an estimated population of 19.8 million, just under 40 per cent of the total for England and Wales (Table 1 and Fig. 1).

The real growth in this extended South East has recently occurred right at its edge, much of it outside the official South-East region, in what Table 1 terms the 'South-East Fringe'. In terms of counties, the

Table 1 Definitions of London and the South East

	Population				
	1961 Census	1971 Census	1981 Census	1981 Estimate	1986 Estimate
'Greater South East'	18 217 529	19 484 079	19 615 233	19 859 800	20 266 300
South East	15 993 116	16 930 630	16 795 756	17 010 400	17 264 600
Greater London	7 992 443	7 452 346	6 713 165	6 805 700	6 775 200
Inner London	3 492 879	3 031 935	2 497 978	2 550 200	2 511 700
Outer London	4 499 564	4 420 411	4 215 187	4 255 500	4 263 500
Outer Metropolitan Area	4 390 087	5 206 831	5 461 918	5 513 600	5 581 000
Outer South East	3 610 586	4 271 453	4 620 673	4 691 100	4 908 600
ROSE	8 000 673	9 478 284	10 085 591	10 204 700	10 489 600
South East Fringe	2 224 413	2 553 449	2 819 477	2 849 400	3 001 700
ROGSE	10 225 086	12 031 733	12 902 068	13 054 100	13 491 300

Source: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (1984, 1987).

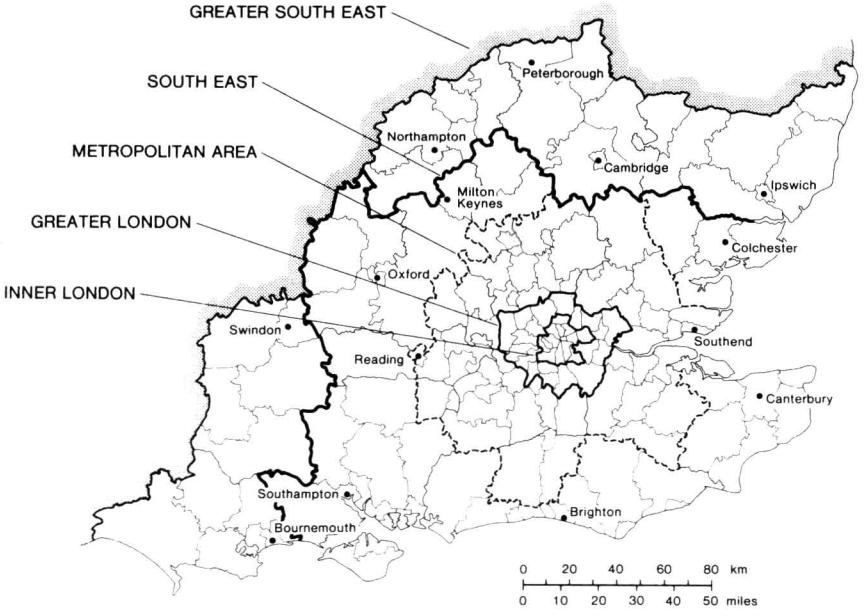

Figure 1 Greater South East: constituent rings Greater London, the area of the old Greater London Council, is part of a much larger London Metropolitan Area. But growth has now rippled right outside even this latter area – even, in fact, beyond the official South-East region, making it necessary to talk of a Greater South East.

'Golden Belt' of the 1980s runs from Dorset on the south coast, via Wiltshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire, and Cambridgeshire to Suffolk on the east coast, at distances of 60 to 110 miles from central London. And the official statisticians in the Office of Population Statistics and Surveys expect this pattern to continue down to the end of the century: the 'Fringe' will have far higher growth rates than areas closer to London (Fig. 11(a) below). Within this belt, growth is highly concentrated in a few key city regions: Bournemouth–Poole, Swindon, Milton Keynes–Northampton, Peterborough–Huntingdon, and Ipswich.

So the wider London, big enough and confusing enough in 1963, is now bigger and more confusing by an order of magnitude. According to this widest definition, it now extends from Poole Harbour to the Suffolk coast, from the middle of Northamptonshire down to Sussex. The fastest-growing parts of that region, in the 1980s, were the borders of the South East and the neighbouring South West, East Midlands, and East Anglia regions. Within that fringe, certain urban areas were showing extraordinary dynamism. The question must be: what, if anything, has this vast region in common, apart from having London at its rather eccentrically positioned centre?

Clearly, it is not continuous bricks and mortar. Perhaps that might have been true if we had seen unplanned, unconstrained urban growth over these past forty years; but ever since the historic 1947 Planning Act, urban England has been contained. The best estimates we have, set out and compared by the late Robin Best in 1981, relate to the period 1961–70; at that time, the 'official' South East had between 13 and 19 per cent of its total area urbanized (Best 1981, 65). The figures for the South West and East Anglia were much lower, though there has been some urban growth since then. So the view from the aeroplane is no optical illusion: most of the extended South East is green, the towns relatively few and far between.

Perhaps, then, what the region has in common is a set of functional relationships, above all with London itself. Geographers have long liked to plot commuter flows, or trips to shop for what they call 'comparison' goods, or the catchment areas of local newspapers or radio stations, as indicators of the sphere of influence that a city or town exerts over its surrounding countryside. The latest and most sophisticated exercises of this kind have come from John Goddard's Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies (CURDS) at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne (Champion *et al.* 1987). This CURDS regionalization of Britain has a particular value in analysing the parts of the country that are most heavily and complicatedly urbanized, because it is hierarchical: it shows not

merely the immediate spheres around the smaller places, but also their relationship with larger higher-level catchments.

In it, London's immediate metropolitan region – with 7.8 million people in 1981, little bigger than the area of the Greater London Council – is surrounded by no less than 30 other Local Labour Market Areas (LLMAs), forming a contiguous group and occupying much of the South-East region, which are classed as 'subdominant' to the capital (Table 2 and Fig. 2). Together they form the London Metropolitan Area, with well over 12 million people at the Census of 1981. Additionally, two other places in the South East-Brighton and Portsmouth – qualify under the CURDS system as independent, freestanding metropolitan regions. Over and beyond these, the outer parts of the South East contain no less than 25 other LLMAs based on cities and towns, of which three – Luton, Oxford, and Southampton – have the title of Southern Freestanding City, indicating that they have considerable importance in their own right. And, beyond the regional limits but within our Greater South East, Bournemouth, Swindon, Northampton, and Ipswich all attract this appellation. Within the South East, only one Local Labour Market Area – Didcot in Oxfordshire – is classed as 'Rural'. Within the East Anglian fringe, there are rather more: here the major growth centres are separated by quite wide areas, where the central places – Huntingdon, Newmarket, Woodbridge – still do not qualify as fully urban on the CURDS criteria. But these areas are few and far between.

To summarize, the functional London region, joined together by complex ties of commuting and other kinds of dependence, is a vast area of over 12 million people, stretching from Basingstoke to Chelmsford, from Bishop's Stortford to Horsham. Contiguous to it, but not so strongly linked, is a whole series of other areas stretching

Table 2 Local labour market areas (LLMAs) in the South East

	No. of LLMAs	Population 1981 ('000)	Example
London	1	7 836.9	London
London subdominant cities	7	1 740.2	Southend
London subdominant towns	23	2 794.9	Maidenhead
London Metropolitan Region	*31*	*12 372.0*	
Freestanding metro areas	2	727.7	Brighton, Portsmouth

Source: Champion *et al.* (1987)

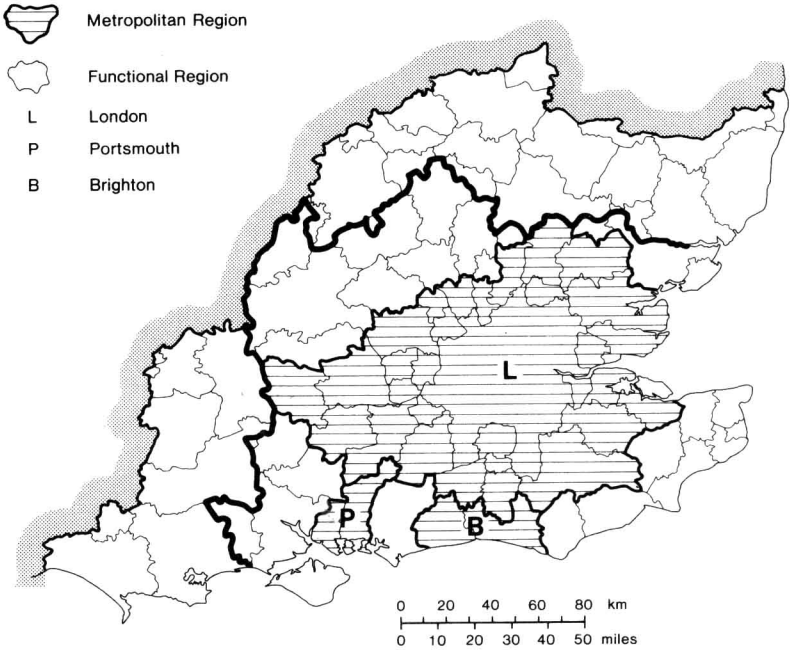

Figure 2 Greater South East: metropolitan regions and functional regions As defined by the CURDS group at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, London's metropolitan region stretches far beyond Greater London itself, even beyond the officially defined Metropolitan Area (Fig. 1). It is surrounded by a host of smaller functional regions based on the region's major towns. Portsmouth and Brighton constitute separate metropolitan areas in the CURDS scheme.

out to the South-East boundary and beyond. And these definitions are based on the functional relationships as long ago as 1971. We know from more recent analysis by the London and South East Regional Planning Conference (SERPLAN), that between 1971 and 1981 London's own commuter sphere extended relatively little (Figs 3(a)–(c)). Perhaps, since then, it has shown a quantum outward leap: in 1987 and 1988 the press was full of reports of huge increases in long-distance commuting from places like Diss in Norfolk, 80 miles from London, and Grantham in Lincolnshire, 105 miles distant. All this may be just another example of media (and estate agency) hype; maybe not.

What we do know is that by 1981, virtually the whole of the South East outside London consisted of a complex set of commuting relationships into, and between, the major centres – CURDS' London

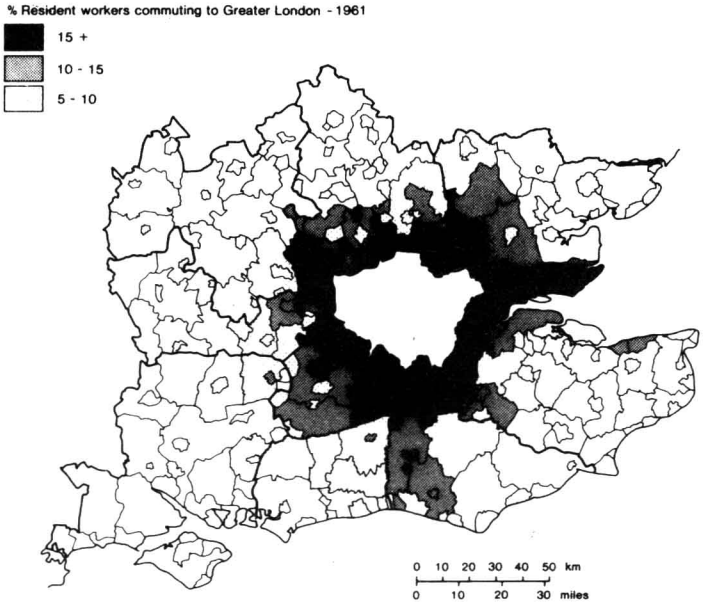

Figure 3(a) The London commuter area, 1961 The commuter field of 1961 formed a fairly tight ring between 15 and 25 miles from central London, but stretched down the Brighton and Southend lines to the coast. Figs 3(a)–(c) are based on research by SERPLAN.

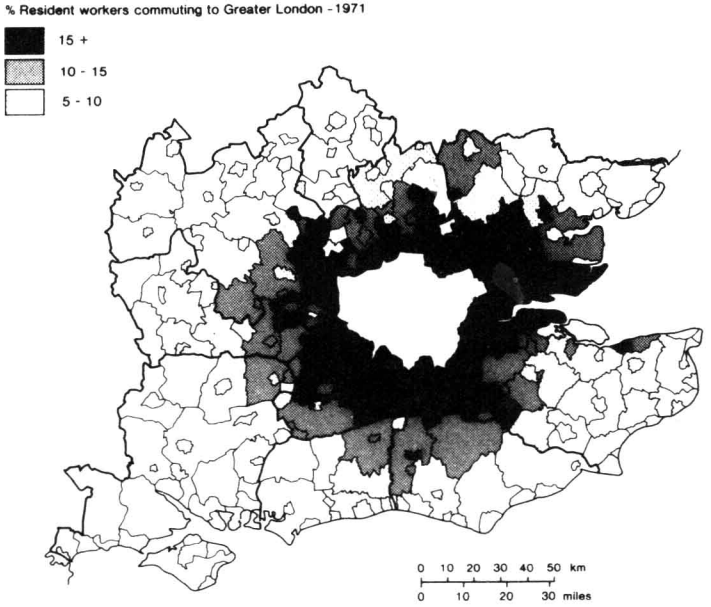

Figure 3(b) The London commuter area, 1971 The commuter field extended steadily during the 1960s into the 30–40-mile belt, and in some sectors even beyond that.

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