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# Crime Prevention, the Planning System and Sustainable Development: Addressing Policy Challenges in English Practice

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## Abstract

This paper examines the experience of seeking to introduce crime prevention as an objective of planning in England, at a time when the primary purpose of the planning system is seen as the achievement of sustainable development. It argues that although the rhetoric of safer places is well established in the approaches to sustainable development found in government policy documents, the practice of delivering this on the ground is much less clear. In part this is because the process has been an incremental one, with work still to be done to fashion all the tools needed if this vision is to become an everyday reality. But the most difficult issues are probably those that arise from conflicts between the urban design and the crime prevention advice that is available to the planning system, some of which are exacerbated by the absence of research evidence that might help to resolve them. The paper ends with some suggestions about how these issues might be tackled.

## Journal Information

Edited by Professor Sir Peter Hall, University College London and Professor David Banister, University of Oxford, Built Environment is a peer-reviewed journal published quarterly in March, June, September and December. With an

emphasis on crossing disciplinary boundaries and providing global perspective, each guest-edited issue focuses on a single subject of contemporary interest and relevance to practitioners, academics and students working in a wide range of disciplines. Subject areas include: architecture; conservation; economic development; environmental planning; health; housing; regeneration; social issues; spatial planning; sustainability; urban design; and transport. Guest-Editors are established international experts in their respective fields; they not only commission contributions, but also oversee the peer-reviewing process in collaboration with the Editors. All issues include reviews of recent publications.

## Publisher Information

Established in 1979, Alexandrine Press focuses on the built environment in the broadest possible sense – from urban and regional planning to architecture; from housing and the environment to social issues and sustainability. Alexandrine Press has been the publisher of Built Environment since 1980 and has had a key editorial role in the Routledge book series Planning, History and Environment since its launch, also in 1980.

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### Crime Prevention, the Planning System and Sustainable Development Addressing Policy Challenges in English Practice

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*This paper examines the experience of seeking to introduce crime prevention as an objective of planning in England, at a time when the primary purpose of the planning system is seen as the achievement of sustainable development. It argues that although the rhetoric of safer places is well established in the approaches to sustainable development found in government policy documents, the practice of delivering this on the ground is much less clear. In part this is because the process has been an incremental one, with work still to be done to fashion all the tools needed if this vision is to become an everyday reality. But the most difficult issues are probably those that arise from conflicts between the urban design and the crime prevention advice that is available to the planning system, some of which are exacerbated by the absence of research evidence that might help to resolve them. The paper ends with some suggestions about how these issues might be tackled.*

The starting point for this paper is that crime prevention should sit comfortably within a planning system which has as its declared primary purpose the achievement of sustainable development, since contemporary understanding of what sustainable development actually is increasingly includes the belief that it should offer safe localities to the people that occupy and use that development (Cozens, 2008). But the paper proceeds to argue that, while at the level of broad policy proposition this relationship is indeed seen as straightforward, the process of turning this into a reality is far less so. There are several strands to the process of identifying operational difficulties, but this paper concentrates on those that stem from the pace of development of thinking about crime prevention in a planning context and from advice that is available to practitioners about what they should actually do in order to deliver in this area. In particular,

it emphasizes the ambiguities that exist in that advice, which inevitably make the process of taking decisions in practice very difficult.

The paper looks at this issue as it plays out in English practice because this is one of the countries where studied attempts have been made over a period of time to build crime prevention into the planning process (UN-Habitat, 2007, chapter 4; Schneider and Kitchen, 2007, chapter 4). As such, English experience can offer lessons to other countries which seek to go down this road, as UN-Habitat urges them to do as a means to improving the safety and security of residents in cities, and particularly in the rapidly growing cities of the developing world (UN-Habitat, 2007, chapter 10). Because of the fragmentation of planning practice between the different countries of the UK, (Tewdwr-Jones, 2002) the focus here is solely on English practice.

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