

The National Plan ...

29/5 A. started this as:

We are facing a triple crunch – energy, climate and capital and many more knock on problems. Our planning horizon is too modest and does not appear to be as joined up as it could be. We need a proper plan, something which in the old days would be called a 10-year plan and perhaps some thought as to what the subsequent 10-year plan might be.

The point of this exercise is not to say what should be in the 10-year plan, that is the business of politics. But to describe its characteristics. It is to provide a framework to encourage the idea of a national plan to enter our political language but also to chart all the elements that need to be in the plan and the implications a decision in one part of the plan will have for the other elements.

As a framework the approach will need breadth but will not need much depth (from us). It should be open-source and allow the detail to be added by others which will likely to be for or against the various progressive positions that can be identified. It will also likely be of variable quality and some of it will be polemic. This is part and parcel of the process. What is important is that the framework identifies all the key issues, that a range of options are presented for each issue and that the implications that a decision in one area will have on other areas is apparent.

The framework will not fully quantify the implications as this is really the job of politics (and innovation). What the framework should do however is remove the possibility of siloed thinking. We are in a new era, the new normal. We can no longer rely on the rates of growth we have grown up with to dilute the effects of bad decisions. With reducing resources our choices going forward are more important than they have ever been and we need a tool to understand this process in the round. A framework for a national plan.

29/5 B. wrote

Initial observation: While accepting that 10 years might be a suitable staging point, so many of the drivers have a significantly longer horizon.

29/5 A. replied

I agree. There is nothing special about 10 years other than the resonance it has with other countries who are capable of putting together a 10 year plan. The length of the plan is whatever is appropriate to solve the problem, be it a threat like climate change or the failure of antibiotics or a political one – sacrifice in one area to achieve critical mass in another

30/5 C. joined in

I'm reading Postwar by Tony Judt at the moment. In case you don't know it, it is a history of Europe from 1945 to the fall of the Berlin Wall. I'm wondering if there is something to be learned from some European projects, particularly the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), which evolved into today's EU. The ECSC was the first organisation to be based on the principles of supranationalism, and was originally proposed as a way to prevent war between France and Germany.

That makes me think that a national plan needs a long term goal that everyone can support, and that the publicly-stated goal may not be what its authors are really trying to achieve. The simple analogy with the world I operate in is persuading a commercial office building owner to green his building not because it will help reduce CO2 emissions and save the planet, but because it will make his building more valuable.

A colleague has just sent me the attached infographic, which describes one way of achieving an 80% reduction in CO2 emissions by 2050. We could take that as a starting point, from which to identify the benefits to society that might result (warmer homes, less demand on the NHS, increased economic activity and tax receipts, increased employment, improved energy security, etc.).

From that we might be able to start to articulate a national goal (our version of “no more war between France and Germany”, with supranationalism replaced by suprapolitics) that would command widespread support. That, as you say, is the business of politics, but maybe engagement in such an exercise would help the politicians, and The Edge could do a great service to the UK by facilitating it. Or am I barking up completely the wrong tree here?

5/6 A. wrote

So we formed a sub-group at the last Edge to look at a National Plan.

[From Edge Minutes]

A. outlined the concept for the National Plan, how it would align with all past and future Edge Debates and how an expert community would feed into its development. JB stated that it was important for this to be a communication tool with a clear vision and output eventually feeding into the silos we currently have in the UK (e.g. schools, health etc); It should also have a moral purpose, supporting left and right visions whilst being politically neutral. FL outlined the potential complexities involved with socio-techno-economic models of this nature and how a clear framework was needed.

The group is an email list with some people added who I felt would have put their hands up had they been there. I have the go ahead to hold a conference at BH and have booked the only day available before the summer – 3 July. Can I suggest we (all or some) meet next week to begin the task of discussing

- a) Limits to our ambition
- b) Sense of how this will play out (is it for internal reference and possibly revealed later or is it revealed immediately) – does this affect who we invite?
- c) Minimum conditions that need to be met for day to be positive
- d) Format for the day – do we have an idea of how this will play out and then fit people into it, or do we try to discover on the day how it will play out
- e) How we scale the number of people we invite and the length of time they get to speak, formally and in discussion

I did originally put a few words down as to how this might work

We are facing a triple crunch – energy, climate and capital and many more knock on problems. Our planning horizon is too modest and does not appear to be as joined up as it could be. We need a proper plan, something which in the old days would be called a 10-year plan and perhaps some thought as to what the subsequent 10-year plan might be.

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Are we happy with this and thus need a bit of thinking to take this further or are we back to first principles?

6/6 D. wrote

I like C.'s idea of articulating a national goal or a set of goals that will anchor and direct the development of the plan. I know this is at an early development stage, but as things stand, I see mostly a plan to "make a plan" but not enough on what the plan is for. The guiding principles and vision need to be very strongly fleshed out, even before you invite participants to an event develop them further. I have participated in a number of expert elicitation exercises over the last few years that have all suffered from a lack of focus resulting in 6+ hours of 40 experts in a room talking themselves in circles with no clear actionable outcomes i.e. they spent all their time talking about what they

thought they should be talking about because the focus of the exercise wasn't hammered home in the briefing they were given.

As a suggestion – I'd like to reference Jeremy Rifkin's "The Third Industrial Revolution" from 2011, which articulates a vision of a world where information technologies and renewable energy combine to usher in an era of unparalleled prosperity. Okay, so it's just a vision, but Martin Luther King certainly didn't inspire a generation by saying "I Have A Nightmare" – your basic premise has to start with the something that looks good, that's how people work.

Also for the idea of a national plan to have any impact beyond our immediate network it is really important to examine closely what is already published in this area so that the group can articulate clearly how the contribution is distinct from other approaches. I imagine there are no shortage of sector specific roadmaps and industrial development strategies out there in the wild clamouring for attention from policymakers. The idea of going beyond siloed thinking in a resource constrained world is a strong start I think.

17/6 A. wrote

We met last week to talk about the national plan The idea is still in the tilting at windmills box with a smattering of the Burke quote about for evil to triumph... but I think it fair to say we are encouraged.

We have a date for the workshop and think the workshop, while involving outsiders, should be about asking in a quiet and private way, would this work, is it more useful as an internal tool than as a crusade, is it worth doing even if it goes wrong, what is the best that could happen and what is the worst, and other such questions.

Our own conversation on the matter was wonderful, fast and stimulating. 2 hours went by with all of us feeling we had not been able to get a word in edgeways, and thus the first event was encouraging and worth it for the insights it offered on so many things

Instead of writing it up I agreed to move straight on to the invite, trying to capture something of what we had discussed, and I attach this now. I had hoped to have done this earlier and to have given the guys at the meeting the chance to pull it apart and reassemble, so what you have is only one view of what took place. I would say we disagreed with each other about as much as we agreed with (particularly on the vision and whether this is a framework for a process or the vanguard of the people) so not much unanimity on the small things but much on the big (and if we agreed on the small there would be less need for the workshop).

Therefore, the invite is not the final word, it is the means to get people to the room to discover the opening words.

Sorry I can't be with you this evening. Would be interested in what you think, who you think needs to be there, how you think the format for the day/morning should run, (do we run it like a cabinet meeting for a new government), who needs to speak and what should he/ she say, plus all the other things I have not thought of

23/7 A. wrote:

We have had some progress on this front. There have been 2 developments (Ecobuild and an evolution of the thinking) and we need to agree a date for a workshop

1. We may have a slot to talk about the National plan at Ecobuild in Feb 2014. We had to write a SHORT intro for the event, and, predictably, this went through a number of iterations. Sorry not to have fully consulted but there little time and the task was more about changing what EcoBuild wanted to say about the event than starting from first principles. We seem to have settled on:

Thinking further ahead, a framework for a national plan - Long-term planning is difficult because it ties down resources that could be used to deliver short-term gains and thus electoral victories. It is the prisoner's dilemma and has not much mattered as long as the future was assured. This no longer seems to be the case and thus the dilemma needs to be resolved. A framework for a national plan is the way. It will involve some consensus on what we are aiming at as a country and a mechanism that accepts left and right leaning policies to get us there

2. In conversations with where we had got to, in looking at which bits of society are calling for a national plan the loudest and in trying to explain what this is about to others it seems sensible to,

in part, talk about it in terms of infrastructure. It is more than infrastructure, but my road-testing suggests mention infrastructure and people get it one, if you don't you sometimes need to come at it from a couple of different directions. Therefore I have re-drafted what I am suggesting we are about to what follows below and we were able to discuss this at the last Edge Committee meeting (15/7/13)

National Plan

(1) **Vision:** - line about improving quality of life in UK and elsewhere (but if we needed a short-hand we might say **it** is about jobs)

(2) **Rationale**

Remaining competitive means investing in infrastructure

- Infrastructure in its widest sense, inc. health, education & community
- Tragedy of the commons
- Shortage of cash plus size and range of infrastructural investment needed
- Can't afford to do everything
- Issue politically charged
- Without a plan no easy way to assess relative merits
- With a plan the questions of what, why and when become answerable

(3) **What does it look like?**

Our efforts towards a plan can't be THE Plan but only the method for better plans

If we wrote the plan we would be a political party

The plan, as it is about long-term thinking, has probably got to last 20-30 years

Gov't change in this period

- new gov'ts need new ideas

Better that our efforts go towards a framework for a plan

- This indicates costs and benefits
- Indicates a hierarchy of objectives
- Indicates which can be changed easily and which cannot

(4) **How to proceed?**

Look at inputs and outputs:

- We spend money on infrastructure (might regard culture, community, art, education, health, defense, international development and welfare as part of infrastructure – in other words all the things you need to spend on to prevent a tragedy of the commons)
- We get GDP as a result
- Sankey diagram of this process
- Inputs also go to sustainability of the system (future outputs + flexibility and resilience against change)

(5) **How would things be different?**

National plan would be part of the national debate

Osborne calls for belt tightening

- A call for a sacrifice with no vision of what the sacrifice will achieve
- Would make siloed thinking more difficult
- Would have a planning horizon longer than 2 years

23/7 C. wrote

A very nice piece of work – thank you.

In *Achieving Zero*, published by The Environmental Change Institute at Oxford University, Brenda Boardman proposed a very simple framework for future government policies which seek to drive down energy use in buildings. She argued that we need separate but coordinated policies aimed at owners, at occupiers, at domestic buildings and at non-domestic buildings, as in the matrix below:

	Property owner	Occupant
Residential		
Business		

When you wrote that “Our efforts towards a plan can't be THE Plan but only the method for better plans” it made me think of BB's policy framework and wonder if that might point us towards a way of describing the “method for better plans”.

23/7 E. wrote

A., I think this is indeed good progress, thank you.

- For me the Thinking further ahead, a framework for a national plan para is very clear, well written and an excellent introduction.
- I agree with the point about infrastructure

I'm less confident that jobs can be a shorthand for quality of life; uncomfortable about defining the plan too heavily in economic terms.

D. expressed a similar idea in his email - paraphrasing- if we have the same starting point and objective as George Osborne, the logic of current policy is impeccable. In the case of the National Plan if we define our plan in current economic terms won't the only logic be austerity? So, investment in infrastructure will support growth but quality safeguards public good. Public good is not always or exclusively achieved by jobs and growth. (cf. recent exchange about Green Deal etc.). In simple terms some things are worth paying for because they are right. Not just because they make us richer/ balance the books.

- Finally, I agree with the sacrifice part but again I think it's playing within the austerity framework. Since I do not accept that austerity is the starting point I don't want to go in at the level of the effects of austerity- i.e. whether or not the sacrifice is worthwhile. I would go upstream in front of the question whose answer is austerity. Back to the vision of what we want to achieve. Then work out how to get there.

26/7 A. wrote

Here is something written from the perspective of jobs

<http://www.ippr.org/publication/55/11002/a-job-for-everyone-what-should-full-employment-mean-in-21st-century-britain?>

30/7/13 A. wrote

It was an interesting evening. The venue is amazing. It is in Battersea and is where Will Alsop has his office. I think they have offered us the space for edge debates for free. Not the easiest of journeys but worth it.

The film / debate was awful. Batty woman mixing a half-baked transition engineering with her footage of herself on retreat in Tibet. No rigor and kept saying that locally produced agriculture and out-perform industrialised agriculture but with no references.

Reminded me that the Susan Krumdieck piece on transition engineering is very good. (excellent- RN)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M9YRNqewGIY>.

31/7 A. wrote

We need a plan for our plan. In other words, if we are going to organise a day event, which will involve speakers, we need to be clear about the rails it will run along. These two graphics came to mind (for the energy sankey, read everything). One way might be the exercise of combining these two diagrams? (apologies I haven't attached govt spending.png or energy sankey.JPG - rn)
What thoughts?

end.... for now