

Key Resources

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Author

Clara Greed is Professor of Inclusive Urban Planning and Architecture at the Faculty of the Built Environment at University of the West of England.

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Email: ukpoverty@oxfam.org.uk for more information.
www.oxfam.org.uk

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A place for everyone?

Gender equality and urban planning

A ReGender Briefing Paper



Why is planning a gender issue?

Looking at gender issues in planning is central to success in economic regeneration and social inclusion. We take the opportunity of the new Gender Equality Duty on public authorities to look at the barriers, examine planning levels, and recommend changes, giving examples of good practice. Land-use planning provides the spatial setting for government policy, shaping the way our towns and cities are designed. However, planning policy tends to ignore the fact that women and men use public space very differently and have different concerns about how it meets their needs. For more detailed guidance, we recommend the Royal Town Planning Institute Good Practice Note on Gender and Spatial Planning (RTPI, 2007)

Gendered patterns in use of space

- ❖ Poorly considered land-use zoning policy separates residential areas from employment locations, with a greater impact on women's mobility.
- ❖ Women make more complex journeys than men, often travelling to childcare, school, work, and shops. More than twice as many women as men are responsible for escorting children to school.
- ❖ Seventy-five per cent of bus journeys are undertaken by women
- ❖ Only thirty per cent of women have access to the use of a car during the daytime.
- ❖ Poor public transport and lack of caring facilities and shopping outlets near employment locations restrict women's access to the labour market.
- ❖ Women feel less safe than men being out alone after dark, especially in the inner city, or social housing estates.¹

A virtuous circle?

When planning takes into account the different needs of women and men, this means:

- ❖ public transport routes that support women's travel patterns
- ❖ measures to make public space feel safer at night
- ❖ more support facilities, such as local shops, childcare, and public toilets
- ❖ employment opportunities locally, meaning more mixed use development
- ❖ more women would be able to take employment, training, and leisure opportunities
- ❖ economic development opportunities would be increased
- ❖ social inclusion programmes would be more effective.

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The Women's Design Service² has carried out Safety Audits in Walthamstow, Southwark and Peckham. As a result, pavement obstacles such as litter-bins and traffic signs have been removed, and lighting improved to increase personal safety.

In Lewisham, new policy proscribes solid shutters over shop windows, because they worsened the quality of lighting on the streets at night, and made women returning from work in the evenings feel threatened.³

Planning space in cities: levels of concern

1. City-wide planning is the most important planning level for setting the context and direction of gender-inclusive planning. The key to success is integrating gender considerations into mainstream spatial planning policy **topics**, such as housing, employment, and leisure, and linking gender into other high-level overarching policy **issues**, such as sustainability, economic growth and social inclusion. A matrix approach can be useful.

The London Borough of Lewisham uses an Equalities Impact Assessment spreadsheet. Gender implications and other equality issues, are assessed for each policy area in the Unitary Development Plan. As a result, Lewisham shifted its policy on employment site provision to provide more local jobs to benefit women and reduce long-distance commuting.⁴ There is also benefit for sustainable development policies

2. New regional and local tiers in the planning system mean local authorities can meet gender needs in the development of Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Frameworks.

Gender has been integrated into regional policy, anti-poverty initiatives and urban regeneration programmes, in the Midlands and Yorkshire, connecting employment policy to childcare provision.^{5,6} Local women were involved from the outset. They gave their preferences on the location of childcare provision in relation to

their journey patterns between home and work, and were represented on decision-making regeneration committees.

3. To find out what really concerns both women and men, public participation needs to actively include them.

Thames Gateway Forum, as a result of a new approach to participation, pioneered innovative ways of involving women in decision-making, in traditionally 'male' technical transport planning. Rather than restricting consultation on already agreed policy issues, women and men in the community were encouraged to raise their concerns. Women drew attention to station toilet provision, safety at unstaffed stations, and off-peak journey provision for part-time workers.⁷

4. Local authority planners, using a proactive approach, have a major role in ensuring gender is taken into account locally. For example, Leicester has established a model gender monitoring system in its development control department.¹⁵ Local authority technical departments can have a profound effect on women's access to, and movement within the built environment. Research has found that if public toilets are not available at transport termini and in city centres, within walking distance, some women will not travel at all.⁸

5. Planning law is influential. Reasonable social requirements should be included in the development plan (with detail provided, if necessary, in a SPD). The move from land use to spatial planning, which takes into account broader social, environmental and economic concerns, should reduce the risk of reasonable social requirements being 'ultra vires' ('beyond power'). An inclusive and creative approach to 'planning gain', through Section 106 agreements can result in gender-related provision, such as the requirement for childcare provision as part of new commercial development.^{9,10}

City-wide planning is the most important planning level for setting the context and direction of gender-inclusive planning

Recommendations

Getting policy and practice right

Gender should be a key consideration in all overarching policy areas including sustainability policy and economic development.¹¹

This would also contribute towards high-level policy objectives in social inclusion, housing policy, healthy cities, crime reduction, liveability, transport planning and urban regeneration (Department of Communities and Local Government, 2006¹²).

Revisions to national planning guidance, including Planning Policy Statements, should incorporate advice on the gender implications of specific planning policy topics. Gender guidance at national level should be cascaded down through the Government Offices, and taken into account by Regional Development Agencies, strengthening government support for gender-sensitive planning at local planning authority level.

Local planning authorities should develop gender-disaggregated statistical data on the needs of men and women, when monitoring transport planning policies, use of facilities and types of development, complaints, feedback and public participation exercises.

Gender considerations need to be taken into account at the local planning level, on development control practice and management, and in all aspects of local area decision-making. To make this requirement effective the scope and remit of planning law needs clarification and revision to accommodate the requirements of the new equality agenda, and the Gender Equality Duty in particular.

Local authority technical departments, and transport operations need to develop awareness as to the different impact of their work on women and men. Areas of responsibility include design and maintenance of street lighting, highways, railway stations, public toilets, refuse disposal, and street management.

Gender should be a key consideration in all overarching policy areas including sustainability policy and economic development

Planning policy should take into account the requirements of women as well as men in the location of different land uses and the transport links between them at strategic and city-wide level.¹³

More public transport routes are needed within and between local areas, especially in the suburbs and for more off-peak provision for those undertaking part-time work locally.

Hearing from women and men

The specific needs of women and men need to be actively brought into "Statements of Community Involvement", now a statutory requirement in the new planning system. Practical issues such as when, where and how meetings are held, and a more open, proactive approach is needed, rather than a fixed agenda to comment on.

Men are the majority of planners and urban decision makers, and they need to be aware of the different needs of women and men. Examples of good practice include gender-sensitive training schemes for planning inspectors.¹⁴ Gender awareness training should be integral to educational programmes, degree courses, and Continuing Professional Development alongside other overarching issues such as sustainability and transportation policy.

Women should be encouraged into the built environment professions, such as surveying, architecture and engineering. There are fewer women in the commercial sector of property development and therefore there is unlikely to be an consideration of gender issues in the deliberations on regeneration schemes.¹⁵ For example, currently, the Royal Institute of British Architects is acting upon research recommendations to recruit and retain more women architects.¹⁶

Guidance and support is already out there: the RTPi Toolkit (RTPi, 2003) and the Equality Score Card (RTPi, 007) enable local planning authorities to integrate gender considerations into planning.