

Towards a Strong Urban Renaissance

An independent report by
members of the Urban Task Force
chaired by Lord Rogers of Riverside

Contents

The Urban Renaissance six years on	2
Introduction	4
1 Design excellence	5
2 Social wellbeing	9
3 Environmental responsibility	12
4 Delivery, fiscal and legal frameworks	15
Postscript	18
Acknowledgments	19

The Urban Renaissance six years on

by Richard Rogers

In 1998 the Deputy Prime Minister invited me to set up the Urban Task Force to identify causes of urban decline and establish a vision for our cities, founded on the principles of design excellence, social wellbeing and environmental responsibility within appropriate delivery, fiscal and legal frameworks. Many of our 105 recommendations have been addressed by the Government, shaping much of current and future national policy on England's towns and cities.

In the original Urban Task Force Report, we set out a vision: a vision of well designed, compact and connected cities supporting a diverse range of uses – where people live, work and enjoy leisure time at close quarters – in a sustainable urban environment well integrated with public transport and adaptable to change. Six years on, and with a third successive Labour Government in place, there are some notable successes:

- For the first time in 50 years there has been a measurable change of culture in favour of towns and cities, reflecting a nationwide commitment to the Urban Renaissance.
- People have started to move back into city centres: in 1990 there were 90 people living in the heart of Manchester, today there are 25,000 residents; over the same period the population of central Liverpool has increased fourfold.
- By adhering to the principle of sequential testing, re-use of brownfield land instead of building houses on greenfield sites has been encouraged. Today, a national average of 70% of new development is on brownfield land, compared with 56% in 1997.
- Building densities have increased, from an average of 25 dwellings per hectare in 1997 to 40 dwellings per hectare in 2005, making better use of our land and resources.
- The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment is now an established champion of design quality; the Academy for Sustainable Communities and the regional centres have been launched to address the skills deficit.

- Local authority performance is on an upward trend. The Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment of local authorities across the country has found the vast majority to be 'good' through to 'excellent'.
- There has been some progress to reduce the environmental impact of new buildings with a new and welcome code of sustainable building.
- There has been a significant increase in investment in public transport infrastructure, with greater attention given to the needs of pedestrians and sustainable transport.
- Private investment has been levered into the cities. Since 1996, £2 billion of private sector investment has flowed into the Manchester city region alone.
- £39 billion has been allocated over the next five years to deliver the Sustainable Communities Plan across England.
- Cities and regions have greater powers to control their destiny.

Thanks to these measures, and a period of sustained economic growth and stability, England's cities are very different places from the post-industrial centres of unemployment and failing public services of twenty years ago. English cities have established themselves as powerhouses in the UK economy and centres for cultural innovation. They stand more confidently on the international stage.

This progress is cause for celebration, but not evidence that the job is done. New issues have emerged, and old issues remain, which require renewed attention from Government.

- Failure to keep up with the challenge of climate change threatens enduring environmental degradation.
- Middle class families are moving out of towns and cities in search of better schools, less congestion and a safer environment. In 2001, only 28% of people in inner London were aged 45 or older, compared with 40% across the UK as a whole.

- Massive inequalities persist in our cities. Competition for space pushes up prices for housing, making access for lower income households much harder.
- Social housing supply is too low. The Barker Report estimated that an extra £1.2bn is required each year to subsidise 17,000 additional social housing units.
- Growing housing demand is a big challenge. How can we build compact, well-designed, sustainable neighbourhoods which make best use of brownfield sites, are well served by public transport, hospitals, schools and other amenities, and do not weaken existing urban areas?
- Opportunities to create sustainable, environmentally friendly communities are being missed because transport provision and funding is still too dislocated from the overall planning process.
- Few well-designed integrated urban projects stand out as international exemplars of sustainable communities, despite public investment in new housing.
- Design quality is not a central objective for public bodies with responsibility for the built environment. These often lack design input at board or cabinet level.
- The confusing sponsorship and funding arrangements of the Regional Development Agencies – through which they are 85% funded by ODPM but sponsored by the DTI – have led them to focus on economic development, jobs and growth rather than high quality, well-designed, sustainable urban development.
- Design advice to Ministers, Mayors, local authority leaders and cabinets is still too limited.
- The plethora of overlapping, but differently funded and monitored, regeneration bodies has reduced the effectiveness of public sector led regeneration schemes. Sustainable regeneration of large complex areas (e.g. Thames Gateway) suffers from fragmented decision-

making processes and institutions which lack coherent area-based delivery mechanisms.

- Whilst focusing on sustainable communities, we have weakened our stance on urban regeneration.

To solve the problems facing us today and build on our successes to date we have to learn from the experience of the past six years, reflect honestly on what has worked and where problems remain, and take decisions now to ensure the mechanisms to deliver an urban renaissance are fit to meet the exacting demands of the vision.

That is why I have asked my colleagues from the Urban Task Force to collaborate in writing this short report. It is not a comprehensive update of 'Towards an Urban Renaissance,' the final report of the Urban Task Force in 1999. Rather, it is an independent report based on the personal experience of Urban Task Force members on the ground, designed to stimulate public debate and encourage new thinking.

I hope this work will help us realise the widely shared vision of a lasting Urban Renaissance in England.



Richard Rogers
November 2005

Introduction

This report comes at a pivotal time for urban regeneration. Today, cities are seen as assets rather than liabilities. Their role as engines of economic growth is widely accepted and their spheres of influence – the city regions – are becoming recognised as fundamental building blocks in the national fabric. Against this backdrop of a shift in culture, milestones such as the Neighbourhood Renewal Areas, growing housing demand and proposals to develop London for the 2012 Olympic Games present once in a lifetime opportunities. Decisions taken today will dictate for a generation whether English cities can realise their potential to shape a more sustainable future for us all.

This national sense of urgency is reinforced by pressing environmental challenges at a global and local level. In March 2005, the Government launched a new strategy for sustainable development, which set out principles through which people can enjoy a better quality of life without compromising the quality of life of future generations. In this report, we show how urban regeneration has a crucial role to play in delivering that strategy. Done well, urban development can help us live within the limits of environmental resources and slow demand for energy and materials through efficiency measures and recycling. Done wrong, development can increase pollution, widen social and economic inequalities and deprive future generations of environmental assets.

The vision of the Urban Task Force remains an integrated and multifaceted one founded on the creation of urban communities that:

- are well designed, compact and connected
- support a diverse range of uses in a sustainable urban environment
- are well-integrated with public transport
- are adaptable to change.

True to that vision, and in keeping with the original mission of the Urban Task Force, we make recommendations in this report based on the principles of:

- design excellence
- social wellbeing, and
- environmental responsibility

set within a viable and sustainable economic, legislative and delivery framework.

Chapter One looks at quality of design. We recommend that the design of buildings and public spaces be hardwired into the public institutions responsible for delivering sustainable communities by placing design champions at strategic board level, making design quality a corporate objective, and reinforcing this in the way Government funds and tasks their activity. We recommend a strengthening of design advice to ministers, mayors, local authority leaders and cabinets. We recommend that public transport be funded and prioritised based on its potential to deliver urban regeneration, not just on a transport business case.

Chapter Two looks at social wellbeing. We want to encourage communities of mixed tenure, income and ethnicity by increasing the supply of affordable rented and owner occupied housing within existing built up areas close to local amenities and open space. We also recommend a target to transform all social housing estates into mixed tenure communities by 2012.

Chapter Three considers our response to pressing environmental challenges. We urge an approach to the growth areas that strengthens and regenerates existing urban communities and takes a brownfield-first approach to development. We recommend extending the national Code for Sustainable Buildings to all new housing developments by the end of 2006, and encourage the Government to extend similar measures to existing buildings.

Chapter Four examines the delivery, fiscal and legal frameworks within which the principles of urban renewal must be turned into practical action. We believe city governments and mayors should be empowered to raise taxes and funds, and we recommend Urban Regeneration Companies be given the powers they need to take a pre-eminent role.

1

Design excellence

Introduction

A key message of the Urban Task Force was that urban neighbourhoods should be vital, safe and beautiful places to live. This is not just a matter of aesthetics, but of economics. As cities compete with each other to host increasingly footloose international companies, their credentials as attractive, vibrant homes are major selling points. This demands that ever greater significance be given to the design and management of the public realm. Well-designed and maintained public spaces should be at the heart of any community. They are the foundation for public interaction and social integration, and provide the sense of place essential to engender civic pride.

Progress

It has been widely recognised that the physical and social spheres must be linked to be truly sustainable, and there has been a concerted attempt to tackle inequality by promoting more affordable housing. However, quality and delivery have been extremely weak. Despite over £2bn being invested by central government in urban regeneration since 2000, only a handful of completed projects can be considered of international stature. The Millennium Village in Greenwich, innovative schemes in Manchester and the many visionary Peabody Housing projects in London are encouraging examples.

The majority of new developments remain poorly designed, with public realm and buildings of a very low quality. Where some good practice has emerged, it tends to be in smaller 'infill' schemes where designers can relate to an existing context. However, too many housing projects are just that – thoughtlessly laid out groups of cheaply built fragmented residential units relatively isolated from surrounding communities. These often lack the core social and commercial institutions that sustain urban life and any sense of place or beauty. There is a risk of increased ghettoisation between market and subsidised housing.

The reasons for this are four-fold. First, there is a lack of vision at the outset, compounded by overweight decision making structures that are unable to focus and prioritise. Secondly, the procurement and delivery process is fragmented and not joined-up. Thirdly, quality of design is not considered a priority by many of the public institutions

investing in the country's urban regeneration effort. Fourthly, public bodies lack core delivery skills.

The Urban Task Force report argued strongly that the institutions tasked with delivering the urban renaissance (such as the Regional Development Agencies, Urban Development Corporations, Urban Regeneration Companies and English Partnerships) should place the quality of the built environment at the heart of their mission. This has not happened. Too many delivery agencies focus on site delivery rather than quality of design, so will never deliver the quality and variety of urban communities championed by the Urban Task Force. Ministers are also hampered in making planning decisions when CABE – their adviser on design issues – has been previously involved in the planning process.

At the delivery end, design culture is not yet embedded in the procurement and management process. The Urban Task Force recommended that public funds should only be invested in significant urban projects that are subject to design competitions and that all major schemes should be conceived as three-dimensional spatial masterplans. While the last six years has seen many competitions in the UK for urban masterplans, the vast majority have been badly run, lagging well behind the standards of our European colleagues. Despite the wealth of design talent available nationally and internationally, they have not yielded a new generation of high quality solutions. The quality of design briefs is often poor – ignoring the Urban Task Force recommendations for integrated, spatial design that gives priority to connectivity, social inclusion, high quality public space and sustainability. A clear and deliverable public realm strategy must be a pre-requisite for any sustainable community, rather than an afterthought or planning gain add-on. Strict design codes, such as those used for planning layouts, are no replacement for well informed design professionals.

In our mind, the same high standards for sustainable inclusive design should apply to private projects as to those driven by the public sector. In areas of the country where the housing market is overheated, we are concerned that the need for short-term 'numbers' is overtaking the need for long-term vision. Many large-scale projects, often in sensitive town and city sites, are being developed in a piecemeal fashion without appropriate investment in the quality of the



Although built to higher density, the poor design of this development in Appleton, Warrington, does little to convey a sense of place and public transport connections are poor.

public realm, appropriate access and the design of individual buildings. Although the levers of public funding and other control mechanisms cannot be brought to bear on private projects, the design of individual housing units must be improved and the quality increased to reflect advances in new technologies, construction techniques and environmental efficiency. The Urban Task Force did not address the issue of the private residential sector in detail, but it is clear that new measures are needed to ensure that private housebuilders – despite their best intentions – do not build a new generation of mono-functional enclaves based on lowest common denominator design.

Transport

Transport lies at the heart of urban regeneration. In the original Urban Task Force report we presented a vision of how this should be done: road space would be planned, as it is in the most advanced European cities, to give priority to walking, cycling and public transport; a seamless-web system of fast, efficient public transport would connect city centres with strong sub-centres developed around transport interchanges, allowing quick and easy transfer from express light rail to feeder buses; planned densities would increase around these points of maximum accessibility, and mixed uses would maximise easy access on foot to shops and services.

In a few best-practice cities and towns there are signs that this is beginning to happen. In London, the congestion charge has helped civilise conditions in the centre, the bus system has responded massively and flexibly to the challenge of growth, commuter rail has modernised and responded to rising demand. There are individual good examples in other cities, especially in their central areas where civilised public spaces have been created. But they are few and far between. Urban streets are over-engineered to maximise traffic flow, pedestrians and cyclists are still treated as second- or third-class citizens, and public transport in most cities is totally un-integrated.

The root of the problem is that decisions on urban transport are taken piecemeal, in apparent isolation from their impact on regeneration; indeed, there appears to be next to no evaluation of the broad regeneration benefits that investments would help bring about. Merseytram has stalled, despite the renewal it would bring to a corridor stretching from Liverpool's Pier Head via Lime Street and Norris Green to Kirkby. Manchester's Metrolink extensions have not started, despite their vital importance to the regeneration of New East Manchester. Money is lacking to extend London's Docklands Light Railway through Barking Riverside, crucial to the start of this key regeneration scheme in Thames Gateway. Corby still lacks a passenger rail service, despite being a target for regeneration and an important part of the sustainable communities plan. The examples could be multiplied; the evidence is that the Department for Transport, again dominated by highway engineers, is simply not part of the government's regeneration agenda.

Communities Minister David Miliband recently said, "All departments should be regeneration departments." That must equally apply in central government, where we need far greater integration between the ODPM and the Department for Transport in particular, and in our city administrations.

The challenge is to produce urban environments as good as those in Amsterdam and Copenhagen, Freiburg or Strasbourg. There is no reason why we should lag so far behind the best practice of our neighbours.

Money for investment is one key. In French cities like Strasbourg and Nantes, resources are found to support new tram routes that underpin regeneration; there is joined-up urban policy. Reintegrating the different parts of the urban transport system is another: bus quality contracts are a start, but very far from the seamless-web philosophy that is needed. Re-educating the engineers, and creating a new profession of urban transport designers capable of producing efficient and elegant urban environments, is a third. Good transport planning and good urban design go hand in hand.

Challenges

- Too much emphasis is given to the delivery of quantity rather than the benefits of quality. Even when experienced designers are involved in a regeneration project, the brief often undervalues the benefits of design.
- High quality design is not integrated or hardwired into the procurement and delivery process of regeneration projects.
- The attention given to design quality varies too much across Government departments, their agencies and local authorities.

- Ministers, mayors, local authority leaders and cabinets receive too little good advice on design.
- Public sector clients lack the necessary skills to give significance to design quality from inception to realisation. Major public clients do not have design champions at board or cabinet level or in executive positions, and do not possess the appropriate design expertise to promote, evaluate and deliver well-designed developments.
- We lack clearly structured decision making bodies of a manageable size to get things done.
- Development briefs for key urban sites are poorly structured, often giving more importance to short term commercial value than the creation of an integrated urban vision to bring long term economic benefit.
- Too often, design is imposed on communities rather than involving them. Community groups and local representatives are still excluded from the decision-making process and are not adequately supported by professional facilitators. They are rarely involved by client groups in the development of design briefs and are often excluded from selection panels.



Communal space is integral to the design of this development in Malmö Western Harbour, Sweden.

- There are insufficient mechanisms in place to ensure that housebuilders and developers follow through to deliver high quality schemes once they have acquired land from public sector agencies.
- There is too often a separation between the design team appointed to carry out the masterplan and another design team charged with delivering the detailed design of individual units and places. It is a fragmented process that creates fragmented environments.
- The competitive bidding process is not used to the full and is failing to provide opportunities for emerging design talent in the UK and abroad to invest their design skills in complex regeneration schemes across the UK.
- Design quality is threatened by an excessive reliance on design codes rather than design professionals.
- While there have been welcome moves in some cities and boroughs to rebalance the relationship between vehicles and people by prioritising pedestrians, there is still much to be done.
- Space continues to be wasted thanks to overly demanding highway standards and sprawling road layouts, despite explicit guidance requiring Local Authorities to review their standards.
- The poor design and lack of coordination of street furniture too often impedes its function and reduces the aesthetic value of its surroundings.

Vision

In our vision, high quality design is a central objective for public bodies responsible for delivering regeneration and is entrenched in the delivery of private sector residential communities. Public space takes priority over the car, well designed and complementary public and private realms create a sense of place, and the built environment is fertile ground in which communities can flourish.

Recommendations

Design quality and procurement

- **Integrate and hard-wire quality of design of buildings and public spaces into public institutions by placing design champions or advisers at strategic board or cabinet level and making design quality a corporate objective.**
- **Review the Government's tasking framework and funding agreements for all relevant public bodies to make design a central component and require regular reports on delivery. Use the comprehensive performance assessment to do similar for local authorities.**
- **Improve the quality of independent design advice available to ministers, mayors, local authority leaders and cabinets in ways that complement the role of CABE in the planning process.**
- **Insist that existing design competitions guidance (e.g. Commissioning a Sustainable and Well-Designed City: a Guide to Competitive Selection of Architects and Urban Designers, GLA Architecture + Urbanism Unit, July 2005) is followed in all regeneration projects which receive public funding, ensuring open and transparent procurement and high quality design briefs. A majority of design competition jurors should be architects or design professionals.**
- **Ensure that design quality is delivered throughout the lifetime of urban design developments. For larger sites, commission spatial masterplans for the wider area, invite**

developers to bid for individual sites on the basis of a design proposal, not just a financial offer, and evaluate tenders on the basis of design quality and long term value-for-money, not solely on short term financial considerations.

- Develop mechanisms that ensure public participation and involvement in the development of urban vision statements. Promote the involvement of professional facilitators to support community groups and qualified designers at key stages of project development and implementation alongside landowners, developers and project sponsors.
- Place an architect or allied professional in a key advisory position within the Olympic Delivery Authority.

Transport

- Fund and prioritise public transport based on its potential to contribute to a fully rounded urban renaissance, not just on a transport business case or simplistic job creation arguments.
- Extend the “London-type” bus franchising system to the rest of the country, so that certainty can be introduced into public transport planning and delivery. This will enable developers and regeneration agencies to have some confidence in the public transport systems around which they are being asked to structure higher-density mixed use development. Franchising is also virtually the only way of ensuring integrated services, ticketing and fares.
- Enforce the requirement set five years ago that Local Authorities should review all highways and parking standards in the light of planning guidance on housing.
- Review how public transport and Highways Agency decision making can be integrated more closely into

sub regional masterplanning to recognise, encourage and enable comprehensive regeneration.

- Draft new design guidance for highway engineers and traffic planners that gives priority to the needs of pedestrians and demands a safe, high quality environment without imposing a rules-based recipe for over-engineering.
- Involve utility companies earlier in the planning process so they can take responsibility for a strategic approach rather than being presented with problems to tackle in too short a timeframe.

Skills, research and education

- Tackle the lack of urban design skills within local authorities by strengthening the role of the Regional Centres of Excellence for Sustainable Communities, developing a close working partnership between it and the Leadership Centre for Local Government, and ensuring they complement, rather than overlap with, the Academy for Sustainable Communities in Leeds.
- Ensure public agencies and local authorities procure and manage a high-quality design and development process by insisting they follow appropriate advice from CABE.
- Task an independent review team to scrutinise the formal education process followed by design professionals and recommend changes to ensure a more integrated approach to planning, architecture, landscaping and the social and ecological environments.
- Dedicate a greater proportion of government research funding into the quality of the built environment and the public realm, rather than focusing on construction methods and costs.



Started in the late 1990s, the Greenwich Millennium Village in London's Greenwich Peninsula shows how good results can match high expectations when a proper commissioning process is in place. Masterplanning by Erskine Tovatt.

2 Social wellbeing

Introduction

Cities drive prosperity and provide access to services. They bring diverse people together and offer shared spaces, experiences and amenities such as parks and libraries, schools and transport. These assets offer opportunities to people on low incomes and drive the growth of cities as magnets for the young seeking better lives. Even at their lowest ebb, our declining cities offered these benefits and continued to attract many hopeful migrants while failing to retain the more established and more successful.

Progress

The revival of our cities has been driven by economic recovery and the steady expansion of jobs since 1993. Although unemployment and economic inactivity in deprived neighbourhoods are far above national average levels, most cities have experienced sharp falls in unemployment. Major regional cities such as Leeds and Manchester now boast growing numbers of highly skilled jobs. The Government's plans to move more of its key offices out of London should encourage this trend.

Economic recovery took longer in areas where previous decline had been steeper, such as Northern and Midlands cities, but significant growth in the number of jobs has in the main led to falling poverty. Families with children have further benefited through child tax credits and those in low paid jobs from working tax credits. Inequality between those on the lowest incomes and those of middle incomes has reduced somewhat as a result, but the incomes of those at the top have continued to move away from the rest.

There are signs of neighbourhood recovery where neighbourhood management and careful reinvestment measures have been applied intensively. Council stock transfer in cities such as Bradford, Manchester and Liverpool has attracted resources and stimulated investment in renewal. Strong opposition to demolition plans for run-down Victorian terraces all over the North stems in part from improvements to the fabric of these inner city areas, which were previously considered 'out of bounds'. Sheffield, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds and Glasgow have all attracted working incomers and held onto previously declining communities, refuting the view that inner urban areas are "clapped out", obsolete and in terminal decline.

A focus on revaluing existing communities, in London and other popular smaller cities around the country such as Edinburgh, Durham, Chester and York is leading to creative infill developments, mixed tenure, better transport and competitive alternatives to out of town shopping. In many ways, cities are making a comeback and extreme social polarisation is no longer accelerating as it was in the 1980s and 1990s.

Other specific advances have been made since the original report of the Urban Task Force six years ago:

- Over half of all social housing is now owned by housing associations, increasing the potential for significant investment, upgrading and intensive management. Arm's length structures are proving their value through better neighbourhood conditions.
- Local authority performance ratings have shown an upward trend, and local authorities are playing a bigger



Imaginative infill development, such as this example in Coptic Street, Camden, can help lead to more mixed and integrated communities. This development of 23 maisonettes and flats was designed by Avanti Architects for a housing association.

role in controlling and managing urban environments by using powers to tackle mismanagement of private property such as Empty Dwelling Management Orders and selective licensing of private landlords. Neighbourhood management is proving popular and successful and many alternative local partnerships to deliver regeneration are emerging.

- Crime prevention and increased supervision measures are having a positive impact – visible growth in street policing and the number of neighbourhood wardens makes people, particularly mothers with children, feel safer. The Government’s financial and political investment in addressing antisocial behaviour has involved communities across the country, equipping them with resources and clout to deal with local problems.
- The Leadership Centre for Local Government has been established to help meet the leadership training needs of politicians and senior officers.
- Thanks to local authority-led Local Area Agreements, management responsibilities for delivery are now clearer, allowing partners to work together more effectively.



The Chatham Maritime development includes three purpose built play areas for younger children on St Mary’s Island. Families in many other urban neighbourhoods feel under pressure from unsupervised, poorly maintained parks and a loss of local shops, play spaces and other services.

Challenges

- Cities are stark reminders of massive inequalities. Competition for space in a crowded country pushes up prices for housing, making access for lower income households much harder. As wealth expands, this problem becomes more intense for those at the bottom of the social ladder.
 - Household fragmentation into predominantly one and two person, childless households makes it impossible to build the type of home people aspire to for everyone. Attempting to do so is a recipe for cheaply built, low quality, quick fix
- supply in areas like the Thames Gateway and the outer surrounds of all our big industrial conurbations.
 - New build housing outside the city is heavily subsidised and attracts out mainly white, moderate income households causing a deepening racial and social polarisation. The big exodus of certain social and ethnic groups from cities is creating growing racial segregation within them. It reflects poor performance of schools, environmental neglect and fear and insecurity in poorer inner city areas in spite of some improvements. Our challenge is to ensure that cities are net attractors and that they both attract and retain a diverse and balanced community. The biggest challenge is to hold onto working families.
 - Despite progress in some areas, ethnic polarisation in the poorest areas has intensified. Newham, Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Barking exemplify this process in the Thames Gateway and have strongly growing ethnic minority communities, causing major community tensions and the rise of extremist groups. Birmingham, Leicester and Bradford all have growing minority-dominated neighbourhoods and many schools have close to 100% intake from different non-white minorities. Too little real work is going on to help integrate distinct communities and virtually nothing to hold onto existing residents. Very often policy works directly against integration through housing over-supply in declining regions and insensitivity in targeted lettings.
 - Families in more disadvantaged urban areas feel under immense pressure from crime, youth disorder, environmental decay, traffic pollution, unsupervised poorly maintained parks and a loss of local shops, play spaces and other services. These neighbourhood problems are intensified through concentrations of disadvantaged households including lone parent families, households with no earners and those with poor educational backgrounds, particularly in the large Council estates that still dominate many inner city neighbourhoods. Moves to demolish and replace them are increasingly problematic as the need for affordable, accessible “social” housing in cities does not go away. Cities like Birmingham are stuck with this problem.
 - There are fewer failing schools now than at the time of the original Urban Task Force report. But, despite the City Academy programme, steps to improve urban schools through Excellence in Cities and the Building Schools for the Future programme, schools yet to improve place families under enormous strain.
 - The Government is committed to creating sustainable communities, but funding is skewed heavily towards new building and new communities while the infrastructure funding available for these is insufficient to support truly

integrated and sustainable development. This biases growth towards already over-congested areas and accelerates the destruction of existing communities.

- The trend towards even bigger housing associations driven by development ambitions is diluting the commitment to community involvement that was the hallmark of good management. Many smaller associations perform better on this front, but funding drifts to larger scale organisations.
- Problematic local authorities struggle to improve neighbourhood conditions yet resist diversification of delivery which they perceive as a loss of control. Many plans are clumsy, insensitive, rushed, funding driven and wasteful. This applies particularly in Housing Market Renewal and growth areas.
- Scarce revenue funding may impact heavily on future Revenue Support Grant settlements for local councils, which could affect their ability to fulfil their strengthened economic, social and environmental urban management duties.
- There is a much greater need for youth provision and support for families with internal problems. Government support for community level action is fragmented, confusing and increasingly dilute. Too little action on social and community divisions, particularly on ethnic lines, means that inter-ethnic tensions are growing in poorer, fast changing communities. Building out is no solution.
- Despite some successes, neighbourhood and suburban shopping and community centres are failing in many places and need a much more creative approach.
- The need for Government to fund new infrastructure through Section 106 agreements may result in too small a pot of development gain resources being channelled towards social amenities.

Vision

In a densely populated and built up country like Britain, we have to value existing communities and infrastructure if our environment is to remain intact and our social systems are to hold communities together. In our vision, we create imaginative new housing through infill development leading to more mixed, more integrated communities; we convert and upgrade existing buildings thereby revaluing older decaying inner areas; we restore and manage parks and open spaces with ground level supervision in order to encourage families to stay in cities; and we introduce neighbourhood management to every urban neighbourhood to integrate services, make every street safe and attractive and retain a mixture of ethnic and income groups in all urban communities.

Recommendations

- **To ensure communities are mixed in terms of tenure, income and ethnicity:**
 - set a target to transform all social housing estates into mixed tenure communities by 2012.
 - Use the many small unused sites within already built up areas to increase the supply of affordable housing close to local amenities and open space by using public funds to lever a variety of housing types of different scales, costs and sizes that respond to the needs, aspirations and budgets of ordinary households.
 - improve city conditions through better schools, greater policing and more neighbourhood management.
 - renovate, modernise and build in-fill housing within the existing city framework by reshaping units and adding new high quality units to older neighbourhoods.
- **Rebalance the incentive for repairing and restoring existing properties with the incentive to build anew so that the housing market renewal programmes in the Midlands and the North really do re-value cities and towns.**
- **Re-value and upgrade inner suburbs, which comprise at least half of our current housing stock, with conversions, additions and improvements to make them more usable and attractive, thereby effectively expanding and enhancing the supply of moderately priced homes.**
- **Empower local authorities in a strategic, co-ordinating role while encouraging them to involve voluntary and community organisations to a greater extent in service delivery, so introducing more contestability in the delivery of services at the local level.**
- **Involve residents more directly in making the key decisions about priorities for services and how they should be delivered within local areas.**
- **Increase provision for young people through a major reinvestment in youth services including sport, supervised open space and imaginative use of the arts and music.**
- **Ensure Local Area Agreements provide local solutions to local needs by extending their freedoms and flexibilities and resisting overly centralised control.**
- **Extend the Comprehensive Performance Assessment to assess whether local authorities are leading the social, physical and environmental improvement of their cities.**

3 Environmental responsibility

Introduction

Climate change has emerged as the greatest threat to our planet's future. Carbon dioxide emissions, increased energy consumption, pollution, deforestation, water contamination and the protection of biodiversity are pressing challenges facing the developed and developing world. If the United Kingdom is to demonstrate a national commitment to environmental responsibility, we need a coordinated response to these challenges that protects the natural environment, contains urban sprawl and reduces energy use and waste.

The ecological balance of our nation depends on the shape of our towns and cities and the protection of our valuable countryside. In a country with limited land and resources we can only maintain this balance if we use our urban assets better. Where we must accommodate growth outside our towns and cities, we must do so in a way that will not have negative impacts on the social, physical and environmental balance of existing urban centres.

People increasingly recognise the need to live and work in a good quality environment and are more aware of the long term damage caused by badly-located, land-hungry and car-dependent settlements. Pressure for development places huge demands on the environment – and will continue to do so – but, properly done, new development can create attractive, successful, sustainable places that are well located, carefully designed and conducive to public transport, walking and cycling. It can provide important opportunities to recycle and re-use brownfield sites, tackle contamination, improve environmental standards and enhance rather than diminish our natural and cultural heritage. In this way, successful urban renewal will help address some of the most important environmental challenges of our times.

Progress

Since the original Task Force report six years ago, the Government has set a target to reduce carbon emissions by 60% by 2050. Since buildings produce 50% of emissions, and urban sprawl and congestion are major drivers of energy

use, urban regeneration is an essential element in policies designed to meet that target. So, it is a welcome sign that progress has been made to improve the environmental performance of existing and new buildings; from April 2006 all publicly funded new homes should respect a new code to make them more sustainable. And, it is good news that positive steps have been taken to make better use of land; the density of new residential development has risen to 40 dwellings per hectare and the share of development on brownfield sites to 70%.

But, while Government has made welcome progress in recognising the wider environmental costs of development, it needs to be more aware of the hazards climate change is likely to create and the need to plan flexible approaches to cope with them. Such hazards include damage to infrastructure, fluctuations in water supplies, flooding from extreme events and contamination of all kinds, with associated effects on local and regional economies.



Sustainability must lie at the root of original design concepts. This building in Bow, East London, by ZEDfactory Ltd. (www.zedfactory.com) has been built to ZEDstandards. This means the levels of insulation and thermal mass are such that no central heating system is required. It shows how a Zero Fossil Energy Development can be delivered on a tight urban site as a conventional development opportunity. The sale prices for the flats achieved by the developer were well above local comparables, showing there is a healthy appetite for sustainable housing in the marketplace.

Steps are being taken to meet demand for new housing and address the polarisation of assets that occurs when only those with inherited wealth can afford to buy a place to live. But there are fears that not all the lessons of the urban renaissance are being put into practice. The environment still feels marginal to the Sustainable Communities Plan and there is growing anxiety about the Plan's overall cost financially, socially and politically. Local communities face development that appears to be imposed on them from outside with too little care and attention given to their views about what matters in their local environment. Opportunities to make better use of urban land, and thus reduce transport-related emissions, are being missed and environmental standards in refurbishment and new building are still not respected and need enforcement.

The Urban Task Force and Urban White Paper recommended that wherever possible brownfield development should be prioritised over greenfield development. Adherence to this principle has greatly improved the quality of some of our cities and is fundamental to the concept of compact, sustainable, well-connected, vital and secure communities. However, although the Government should do all it can to facilitate development on difficult urban sites, there are circumstances where housing demand and the need for greater choice can only be satisfied in areas outside cities rather than on over-constrained brownfield land, which may be poorly connected by public transport, be located close to disruptive facilities or be too highly contaminated to allow affordable development. In these cases, housing development should be encouraged in growth corridors which adhere to the core principles of compact, well-designed and well-connected neighbourhoods.

In our view, the latest reviews to planning guidance have placed undue emphasis on market factors in determining the volume and location of new housing development. In areas designated for high numbers of new homes, developers will be able to bring forward both greenfield and brownfield sites, perversely weakening the brownfield-first approach in those areas of most rapid growth. It is also concerning that proactive urban capacity studies are being replaced by housing land availability studies. If overdevelopment were to continue outside cities, there is a risk that this could have a negative impact on the significant progress made to date on inner city revitalisation.

Challenges

- It is widely accepted that carefully placed growth is required to meet demand for new housing. Every opportunity must be taken that when development does occur in growth areas, it creates compact, well-designed, sustainable neighbourhoods, well served by transport,

hospitals, schools and other amenities, which do not undermine existing communities or the wider benefit of the urban renaissance.

- Market considerations risk distorting future planning decisions in the fastest growing parts of the country in ways that obstruct social and environmental goals and move away from a brownfield first approach.



Lily Ponds in Drainer's Dyke, Wicken Fen. With the support of partners including the ODPM, the National Trust is expanding its Wicken Fen nature reserve ten-fold, turning it into a mini National Park for the growing city of Cambridge. Doing so shows how the interests of people and wildlife can be interwoven in long-term planning for growth.

- There is room to improve and better enforce targets for re-using brownfield land and increasing density.
- Opportunities for improving environmental quality and the standards of new development are being missed.
- The true cost of greenfield development, in particular of providing the necessary infrastructure, is not yet fully recognised.
- Fuel poverty is exacerbated by inadequate design and improvement of lower income accommodation.
- There is very little priority given to the environmental importance of regenerating existing communities and improving existing housing to the highest eco-standards.

Urban developers, rural campaign groups, environmentalists and those who care about deprived communities have a shared interest in seeing these challenges met.

Vision

Our vision is of a planning system that takes every opportunity to use brownfield before greenfield sites; of a regeneration, recycling and reinvestment approach to existing homes and communities; of new high-density

developments that meet the highest energy efficiency standards; of buildings and neighbourhoods designed in such a way as to reduce resource consumption and pollution; of communities served by high quality environmental infrastructure; and of a development process that engages communities and encourages a sustainable approach from the public and private sector bodies that play a part.

Recommendations

Growth areas and brownfield development

- Agree a vision for growth areas based on strengthening existing urban areas, the retention of neighbourhood communities and the provision of good public transport.
- Exploit all opportunities for an urban renaissance by taking a brownfield first approach, including in growth areas, and recognise the continuing substantial role of windfall sites in contributing to land supply and of urban capacity studies in identifying future opportunities.
- Increase the share of new building on brownfield sites across the country by establishing a new target for an average 75% of residential development across all England's regions to be on previously developed land by 2010, supported by varying targets for brownfield use in Regional Spatial Strategies to reflect regional differences in supply and demand.
- Draw on local community views by making character assessments of historic and landscape value compulsory and integral to regional and sub-regional planning and the development of growth areas.

Density and green space

- Raise the minimum density standard for new residential development to 40 dwellings per hectare, subject to exceptional circumstances, and extend the "density direction", which requires all lower density housing development to be notified to the Government Regional Office for possible call-in, from three to all English regions.
- Increase investment in the creation and long term management of green infrastructure and open spaces in growth areas and areas of existing deficiency.

Sustainability through design

- Extend the national Code for Sustainable Buildings to all new housing developments by the end of 2006 and extend similar measures to existing buildings.
- Ensure sustainability not only lies at the root of original design concepts, but is followed as a philosophy through to deconstruction.
- Support innovation and investment in environmental infrastructure – including zero waste, combined heat and power and sustainable urban drainage schemes.
- Place an energy efficiency obligation on developers that matches the obligation placed on utilities.
- Recognise the huge energy and recycling potential embodied by our 22 million existing homes, the vast majority of which are structurally sound and potentially re-usable.

4 Delivery, fiscal and legal frameworks

Introduction

Private sector institutional investment is an essential part of the regeneration package. To bring this powerful force to bear, public and private sectors must recognise their shared interest, understand their complementary abilities and know the different frameworks within which each makes decisions. Institutional attitudes to investment in regeneration areas are changing, but continued investment relies on providing appropriate fiscal encouragements and removing inappropriate legal deterrents.

Progress

Since 1999 there have been some significant changes in the legal and delivery frameworks operating in regeneration areas, and a corresponding substantial increase in private sector institutional investment vehicles.

The balance between risk and reward in deprived and regeneration areas is now better understood. Two key studies, one for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Economic and Social Research Council and Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors by the Universities of Aberdeen, Dundee and Ulster and one for Morley, Igloo and English Partnerships by the Investment Property Databank, have shown that investing in deprived areas can provide returns as good as those available from prime areas and that regeneration areas can outperform prime areas by 20%. Consequently, urban regeneration has become a significantly higher priority for institutional investors. The first regional regeneration investment company, as recommended by the Urban Task Force, has recently been set up in the East Midlands.

The Government has introduced a number of tax incentives. Measures to encourage Living over the Shop, remediation allowances and Stamp Duty Land Tax reductions in deprived areas have been positive steps.

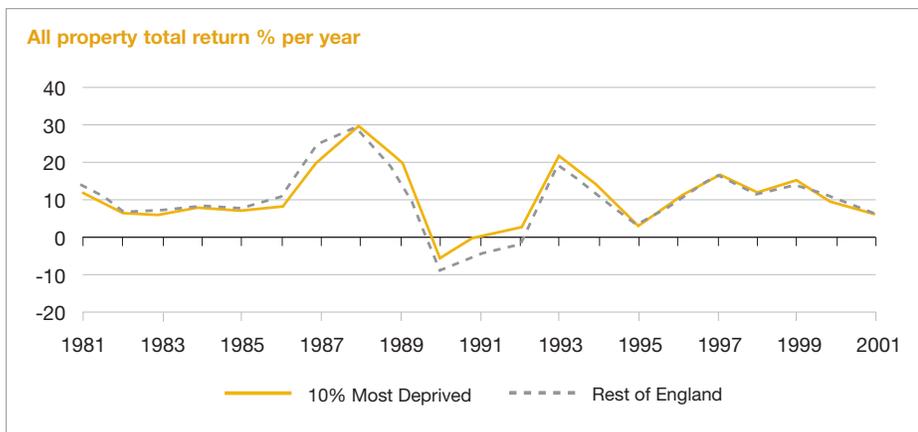
Policy has also moved on in the detailed technical areas of planning gain, compulsory purchase and land remediation in ways recommended by the Urban Task Force. Compulsory Purchase Orders are again being used in areas like Ancoats

in East Manchester, the redevelopment of Hastings and in the Lower Lea Valley in the Thames Gateway. This has helped the many new area based delivery vehicles, including the New Deal for Community Areas, Urban Development Corporations, Urban Regeneration Companies and Housing Market Renewal areas. In addition, programmes such as the Coalfields Programme and the Millennium Communities are successfully turning round deprived communities. Local authorities have been given powers to advance the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of their communities.

In conjunction with the Better Regulation Task Force, progress has been made on simplifying the licensing system for remediation processes on site. The difficulty created by the Van de Walle case – concerning the definition of when soils are ‘waste’ – has led to a joint initiative to agree on the definition, and some progress has been made on the vexed question of the soil guideline values (SGVs). Whilst these are small steps, they are essential to reduce costs and speed up the process of cleaning up contaminated sites.

Challenges

- Private investment is limited by a significant shortfall in public investment from:
 - the lack of an effective gap funding or rental guarantee system;
 - the Regional Development Agencies being directed towards funding economic development rather than regeneration;
 - English Partnerships redirecting its activity to the growth areas in the south east; and
 - European funding reducing after 2006.
- The plethora of overlapping, but differently funded and monitored, area based regeneration bodies has reduced the delivery effectiveness of public sector led regeneration schemes. This has been exacerbated by the disconnection of regeneration expenditure between Government Regional Offices, Regional Development Agencies and English Partnerships and the huge number of new ineffective partnerships at local and sub-regional levels, particularly in areas like the Thames Gateway. This not



Property returns in deprived areas
Investment Property Databank research for Morley, Igloo and English Partnerships has shown that investing in deprived areas can provide returns as good as those available from prime areas. A separate study undertaken by the Universities of Ulster, Aberdeen and Dundee found that regeneration areas can outperform prime areas by 20%.

only dilutes the effective use of money but also reduces the vision to mediocrity.

- The confusing sponsorship and funding arrangements of the Regional Development Agencies – through which they are 85% funded by ODPM but sponsored by the DTI – have led them to focus on economic development, jobs and growth rather than high quality, well-designed, sustainable urban development.
- The Urban Regeneration Companies that have been established lack the powers they need to fulfil their crucial role.
- While the democratic deficit is being addressed, short-term local political horizons have resulted in compromise rather than excellence and have militated against the longer-term view required to deliver quality, sustainable schemes.
- Legal and fiscal changes have not yet generated the incentives and controls to deliver the urban renaissance. The incentives continue to favour greenfield over sustainable brownfield development when VAT, the lack of public investment in infrastructure, the new local authority growth incentive and planning gain are all taken into account.
- The ability to strategically plan coherent urban areas is limited by the piecemeal way in which land is made available for development. Rather than designating an area and setting out clearly what will be delivered and when, the public sector is constantly on the back foot, intervening as and when land becomes available.
- Changes in leasehold enfranchisement have discriminated against vertical mixed use and changes in the financial accounting frameworks for regeneration bodies have made their all important land assembly function substantially more difficult.
- Compulsory Purchase Orders in regeneration areas are still difficult to achieve. This occurs particularly where the

sites in existing neighbourhoods needing acquisition are small, fragmented and expensive to develop, such as in Manchester's Northern Quarter.

- The implementation of the Landfill Directive has considerably increased the costs associated with building and land clean up to such an extent that many more sites are now marginal and consequently not being bought forward by the landowner. The part 11A contaminated land legislation is still lacking comprehensive guidance, with values being issued for threshold soil toxicity levels without detail on how they are to be used. This is leading to unnecessarily high standards of clean up, which when coupled with the effects of the Landfill Directive increase costs to an even greater degree.
- Lower income households suffer disincentives to repair due to VAT on all reinvestment.

Vision

Our vision is of one, clearly recognisable and empowered, regeneration delivery body, with a skilled management team. This agency is area based and combines all the relevant public funding streams and executive powers to act. Its remit is to assemble land early and quickly, incentivise private investment, ensure design excellence, engage local communities, deliver substantial social, economic and environmental benefits and share in the increased values created in the long term. To achieve this we make the following recommendations:

Recommendations

General

- **Ensure that any publicly owned land released to the market (e.g. redundant military, NHS or rail property) is assessed for sustainable development and is not sold on the basis of financial considerations alone.**

- Create stronger incentives for infill development, particularly for very small sites under two hectares. Their development would help break down social and ethnic barriers and increase the supply of affordable market housing, while posing environmental and design challenges at a scale we have the skills to tackle.
- Review local authorities' land-use designation in areas in close proximity to sites of special amenity value (e.g. rivers, canals, parks, etc.) and explore the potential to accommodate more appropriate and sustainable uses that respond to their urban potential.
- Either:
 - provide clarity to the Regional Development Agencies with a revised remit that directs them to focus on economic development and urban regeneration together, giving appropriate attention to design and quality of the environment, or
 - make new, clearer arrangements through which RDAs can focus on economic development while other bodies focus on lasting urban regeneration.

Governance

- Campaign for city region mayors to integrate the city region strategies and investment plans for regeneration, planning, housing, economic development and transport.
- Empower city governments and mayors to raise taxes and funds (through single-issue referendums, propositions or bonds) to deliver visions and initiatives for their citizens.

Delivery vehicles

- Move towards one area based delivery body per regeneration area. These should be based on the Urban Regeneration Company model first proposed by the Urban Task Force. They should act as single purpose delivery bodies with executive powers and influence over all relevant public funding streams, in accordance with sub-regional spatial strategies, in partnership with local authorities and Regional Development Agencies, and should report to an elected Mayor or other politically accountable body or bodies.

Fiscal measures

- Reduce VAT on all repair and renovation.
- Introduce Tax Increment Financing pilots for regeneration and transport in the Thames Gateway and a Northern Way city.
- Select local authorities to create and have funded infill development plans to deliver the potential revealed by their urban capacity studies.

- Introduce effective state aid compliant gap funding and rental guarantees in all regeneration areas.
- Increase the ability of acquiring authorities to purchase land, and provide incentives to owners to sell quickly rather than wait for the CPO process.
- Reduce commercial use enfranchisement exemption to 15%.
- Encourage and reward socially and environmentally responsible practices from partners in the investment and development communities.

Waste and remediation

- Expand the tax incentives for land remediation to cover broader regeneration costs.
- Identify and deliver strategic sites for hazardous waste tips and soil treatment centres.
- Provide clear guidance on how waste regulation applies to regeneration projects.



The Government has introduced a number of tax incentives. Measures to encourage Living Over The Shop, remediation allowances and Stamp Duty Land Tax reductions in deprived areas have been positive steps. The owners of this property in Hull, a company from South Wales who had bought it unseen and had never visited the city, were persuaded to make the journey by the Living Over The Shop (LOTS) initiative. LOTS worked with them over a period of three years, resulting in long-disused offices being converted into three flats. Once this conversion was completed, the owners of adjoining buildings showed interest, but after funding was withdrawn from LOTS, interest waned and the spaces remain empty.

Postscript

This report has examined the progress made towards an urban renaissance in England's towns and cities. It has set out the practical steps we feel are needed to make the original vision of the Urban Task Force a reality.

While our recommendations are largely targeted at central Government, realising the vision they support is not only the responsibility of politicians and civil servants. Delivering on policy promises and campaigning for change will require the energy and commitment of a wide range of people. Not just those who work in regeneration, or even those who live and work in cities, but those who recognise urban renewal can deliver a safer and more sustainable future for all of us, today and for generations to come.

This is a critical time for urban regeneration. We hope this report will stimulate debate, help shape future policy, and encourage others to join a concerted effort to strengthen the urban renaissance.

Urban Task Force

Lord Rogers of Riverside	Chairman
Chris Brown	Chief Executive, Igloo Regeneration
Richard Burdett	LSE Centennial Professor in Architecture and Urbanism
Tony Burton	Director of Policy and Strategy, The National Trust
Alan Cherry CBE DL	Chairman, Countryside Properties plc.
Martin Crookston	Director, Llewelyn Davies Yeang
Anthony Dunnett CBE	President, International Health Partners (UK) Ltd
Sir Peter Hall*	Bartlett Professor of Planning, University College London
Phil Kirby	Managing Director, National Grid Property
David Lunts	Director of Policy and Partnerships, GLA
Anthony Mayer	Chief Executive, GLA
Anne Power	Professor of Social Policy, LSE
Wendy Thomson CBE	Director, McGill University School of Social Work
Sir Crispin Tickell	Chancellor, University of Kent
Lorna Walker	Director, Lorna Walker Consulting

Some of these original Task Force members were not able to participate in the drafting sessions for this report but endorse its contents.

*Footnote by Professor Sir Peter Hall

Though I am in total and enthusiastic agreement with colleagues on the great majority of this report, I regret that I cannot support certain arguments and recommendations of Chapter 3. My reasons are set out in two recent publications¹.

In summary: I believe there is no overriding need to save greenfield land, of which we have a surplus in South East England; the case on sustainability grounds for further raising minimum densities is non-proven; the requirement to first develop brownfield land in the growth areas would in practice lead to inflexibility which would almost certainly slow their development; present policies are already

inhibiting new housing completions and causing an unprecedented increase in apartment construction, unsuitable for families with children and undesired by potential residents.

I am therefore concerned that the proposals on brownfield and densities, however well-intentioned, would – if implemented – deepen the well-documented housing crisis that faces us and our government.

¹The Land Fetish (TCPA Tomorrow Series, Paper 16, 2005) and “Aux Armes – Against Housing Disaster” (Town and Country Planning, 74, October 2005, 288-290).

Acknowledgments

Edited by Jon Bennett, Director, Linstock Communications
Design and production, Wordsearch



