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The... SUSTAINABLE URBAN NEIGHBOURHOOD Initiative

I t was Ruskin who said; "When we build let us think that we build forever". This, on the whole is what we try and do in the UK. The Japanese may treat buildings like automobiles, to be discarded when tastes change but in the UK we build to last.

Yet over the last 40 years we have manifestly failed in this task with social housing, shopping and commercial developments in urban areas. Estates built only 20 years ago have been demolished and others have required huge expenditure on renovation. The cost of this is enormous, not just in financial terms but in the social costs of communities forced to live in failing estates or uprooted and dispersed.

Ten years ago the view would probably have been that these mistakes were history, albeit very recent and rather uncomfortable history. Never again would we allow architectural and planning dogma to ruin the lives of vulnerable people. No longer would we play fast and loose with architectural innovations. We would build traditional buildings with traditional bricks. It may not be exciting but at least it would last.

What do we do then when as David Page pointed out; *"There is now evidence that the process of rapid decline of large social housing estates, which some had thought peculiar to council housing, can also apply to the stock of housing associations"*? What do we do when estates of traditional design fail as disastrously and in some cases more rapidly than the despised system built estates of the 1960's? It may be that in our haste to castigate councils and to distance ourselves from the despised deck access estate and the tower block, we have overlooked some fundamental questions regarding the provision of social housing at the end of the 20th century. If we are to ensure lasting solutions these questions must be addressed.

The challenge of creating sustainable communities

A sustainable community can be defined on two levels. At its most basic it is the creation of areas which will not fail. At the more general level it is the development of neighbourhoods which enhance the quality of social and economic life of their residents and businesses. We should be aiming at both levels, but inner city development has often failed the most basic test of sustainability. It is true, there are private estates which have failed but these are rare because ownership gives people a vested interest in the success of their neighbourhood. The challenge is to engender the same level of pride and 'ownership' in social housing. Yet at a time when social housing seems to have become a numbers game about getting the largest number of people off the homeless register

for a given level of grant, and new tenants are more deprived than those ever before dealt with by social landlords, community pride is becoming a distant goal.

It was not always thus. When Peabody and Guinness started building in the last century the housing was intended for the upper sections of the working class. The logic was that these households would vacate property which would be occupied by the poorest households so that they would also benefit. The ethics of this and the notion of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor may be questionable but the housing has lasted.
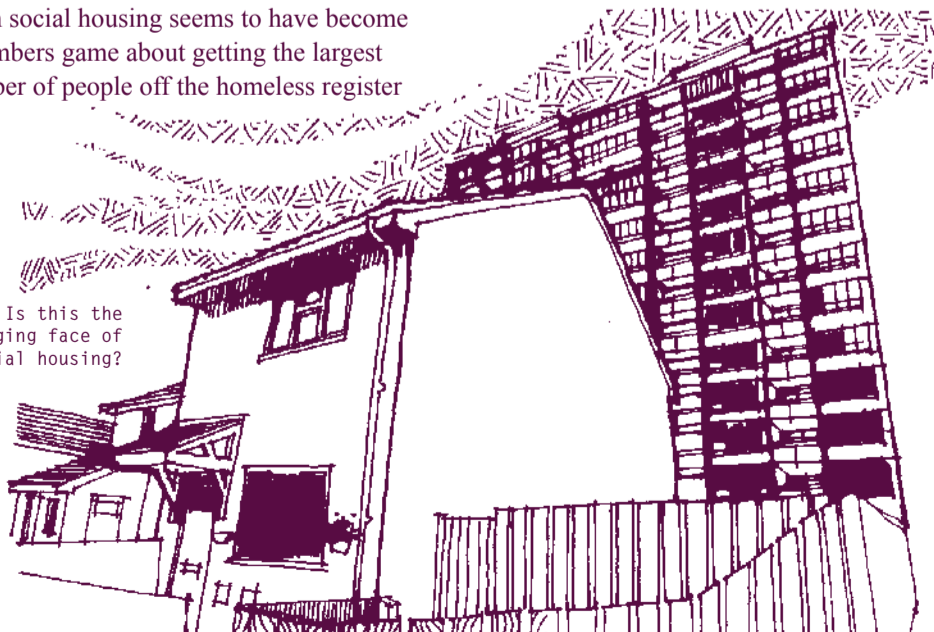
Today social housing development has created a ghetto culture where a housing association tenancy and an inner city address has become a badge of disadvantage. This is a perception shared by both social housing tenants and owner occupiers who are increasingly shunning housing association neighbours. It is in this context that we must create sustainable communities.

Building sustainable communities

From our work we can suggest four principles by which sustainable communities should be created.

Neighbourhood based development: New development is rarely of sufficient scale to create a neighbourhood in its own right. It is however important to think at the neighbourhood scale to ensure that development sustains and enhances existing communities. Neighbourhood is a term which has fallen out of use as we have concentrated on housing 'estates' and business 'parks'. Neighbourhood implies a mix of uses and tenures integrated into the fabric of existing urban areas whereas estates imply the zoning and separation of uses. Social tenants should be able to relate to the neighbourhood where they live rather than an estate with the stigma that this has come to imply.

Robust urban development: There is a need to develop models for urban development. It is a mistake to assume that suburban models, because they are so successful with private housing, are appropriate for all housing, despite this often being the wish of tenants. Suburban owner occupation thrives because of a fragile framework of economic and social pressures which ensure that, for example, fences are maintained and voids do not appear. This framework can be undermined if poor maintenance or voids allow access to the rear of properties. Urban

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There is no point building environmentally sustainable housing areas if they have to be demolished within 30 years. Yet this has been the fate of many council estates built since the war. How can we build urban neighbourhoods which are both socially and environmentally sustainable?

Traditional mixed use urban streets may provide useful lessons for new social housing

Is this the changing face of social housing?

SUN dial

INSIDE

NEXT ISSUE

The failure of housing innovations may have masked some more fundamental issues about social sustainability

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design techniques such as perimeter blocks can create a much more robust separation between the home and garden and the public realm of the street.

Economic opportunity: It is clear that estates which are distant from jobs and other services are unsustainable. Britain like the US has become a car based culture with shopping employment and leisure uses moving out of town. Let us set to one side for a moment the Government's view that housing should be built within towns to reduce car use. Consider instead the homeless family rehoused on an estate without public transport or good local shops. They would be forced either to run a car, to use taxis (which proliferate in such areas) or to pay higher prices in local shops. They will be isolated from support systems and may have difficulty reaching the jobs that do exist. It must be better and more sustainable to house such people within existing communities with existing facilities.

Balance and diversity: It is generally accepted that the key to sustainable communities is a 'balance' of public and private housing. Planning authorities can require new private developments to incorporate social housing and most regeneration initiatives include an element of housing for sale. What does a 'balanced community' mean? It is true that established communities tend to be socially mixed but it is equally true that there are working-class and middle-class communities which thrive on shared interest rather than diversity. The problem is the concentration of deprived groups on new estates. In this case there are two potential answers. The first is to allocate new social housing to established tenants moving out of existing stock. These households would then create voids which would be occupied by more vulnerable lettings who would then be moving into an established community. The second answer is to concentrate on small infill development in established neighbourhoods which contain a mix of tenures.

Community and stewardship: The most important challenge is to promote the feeling of community and stewardship (the willingness to look after the area and neighbours) in new housing which exists in established neighbourhoods. Designers have been struggling with this for years without success. Designing an area to look like a community by, for example grouping housing around courts, does not create the social structures that sustain community life. It is necessary to look at other ways in which communities can develop.

The most successful agent in the creation of community spirit is **time**. Almost any area, if given long enough, will develop community structures. However we can't always wait years for communities to develop. We should however be wary of sweeping away what exists. Existing communities, like listed buildings, should be conserved through refurbishment and sensitive infill. Even the deck access estates built in the 1960's have developed community structures. If these estates are redeveloped it is important to keep these communities together by giving neighbours the opportunity to move together.

Another valuable tool is **community involvement in design**. This has made little headway with housing associations, not because of resistance to the idea, but because properties are not allocated until completion. Involvement in design can start the process of community building and can give tenants a feeling of ownership and pride in their neighbourhood.

Housing associations have also made little progress in **tenant involvement in management** compared to the council sector. There are good reasons for this since Estate Management Boards have a means of addressing management failings and housing associations can claim that their tenants have had less to complain about. Nevertheless associations could give more active support to tenants associations or Estate Management Boards to promote pride and community.

There is also an imortant role for **tenant empowerment** through structures like co-operatives, self-build groups and community based housing associations. Within weeks of the completion of the Homes for Change Housing Co-operative development in Manchester (see issue 2) the community spirit was tangible. People felt able to leave their doors open, started to personalise their flats and leave plants out on the walkways. The form of the scheme is similar to the deck access blocks where many of the members used to live. The difference is not so much the physical structure of the scheme but the community structures within the co-op.
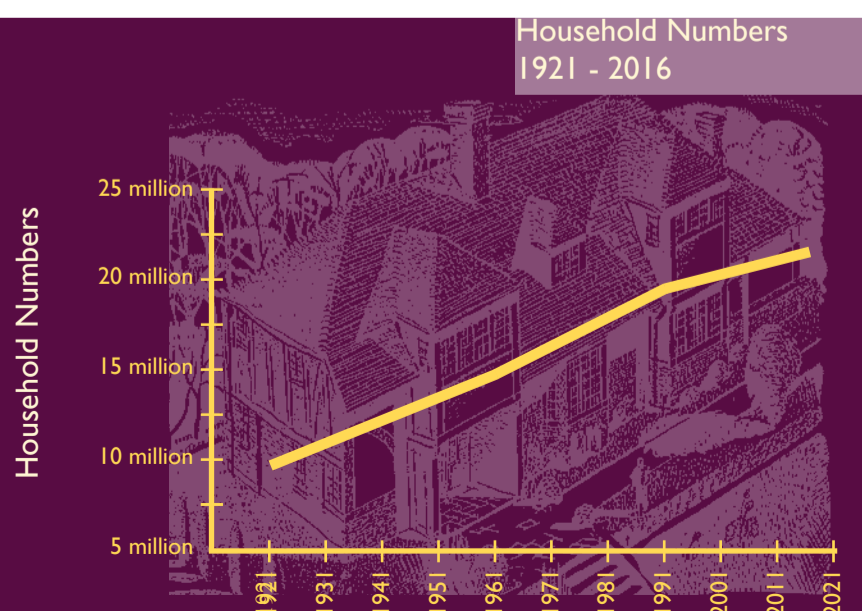
We have suggested that the key to building sustainable communities is to build on a small scale within existing neighbourhoods to contribute to local diversity. We have also suggested that it is vital to involve tenants in the design management and even ownership of their homes as a way of building local commitment and pride. Simple as this may seem, it does not always coincide with land availability, modern procurement techniques or the imperative of redevelopment. However, successful development tends to be small scale. This type of **balanced incremental development** is how human settlements have always been built. We should remember this and not be tempted by the easy fix of building large homogeneous estates on the land which is most easily available.

To look at the standard product of most of the UK housing industry you would think that the predominant household in the UK was made up of two parents with children, was able bodied, mobile and in regular employment. This may be the view of the middle class professionals who shape the housing that is built but no longer reflects the demographic character of Britain. Just as the 19th century home changed in response to the growth of the nuclear family so the 21st century home will inevitably reflect its decline.

THE DECLINE OF THE
FAMILY
and the Sustainable Urban Neighbourhood

Recent months have been dominated by the debate about the 4.4 million extra households projected over the next 20 years. This however is nothing new. Between 1921 and 1961 the population rose by 20% to 46 million but household numbers leapt by 6.2 million to 14.9 million an increase of 1.75% a year[1]. Compared to this the 4.4 million increase to 23.6 million between 1991 and 2016 represents an increase of less than 1% a year.

Figures from the 1991 census show that the nuclear family made up of a mother and father with children now makes up just 19.8% of households, rising to 25.1% if you include families with more than two adults, such as an elderly relative. Indeed when you include single parent families the total number of households with children is only 30%. Compare this to the 40% of households who have no children and 30% who are pensioners and one may question why most of the housing that we build is designed for families.

Household Numbers
1921 - 2016

Household Numbers

25 million
20 million
15 million
10 million
5 million

1921 1931 1941 1951 1961 1971 1981 1991 2001 2011 2021

Source: DoE Projections and..
Burnett - A Social History of Housing 1815 - 1985

Household Numbers 1921 - 2016

Household Numbers

- 1989
- 1996
- 2001
- 2011

12 million
10 million
8 million
6 million
4 million
2 million
0

Married Couples   Lone Parents   one person   other

Source:
Household Projections England 1989-2012 HMSO 1991
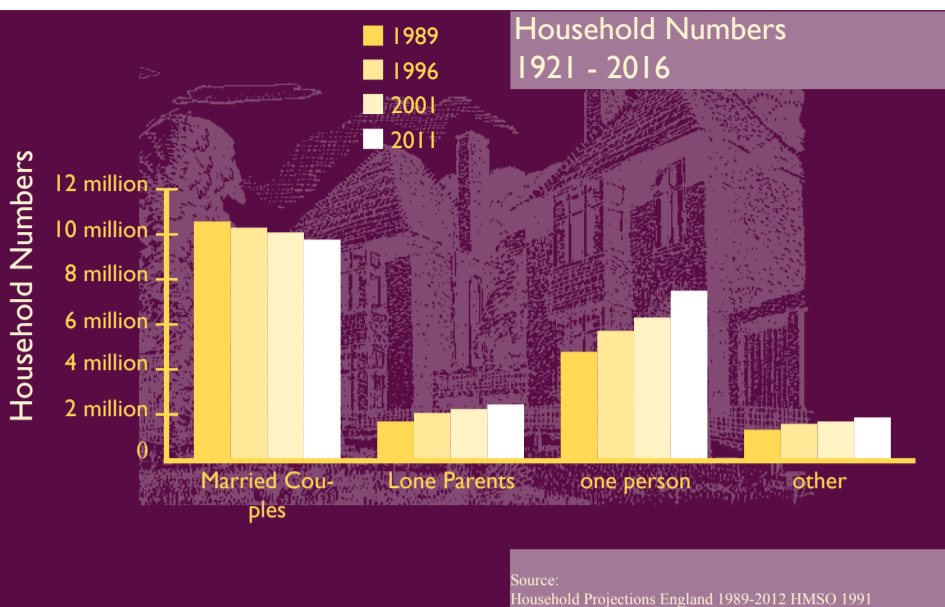
The most common household type is below pensionable age and childless. Yet most of the housing industry regards them as a niche market, assuming that most people will buy a house when they have a family and settle down. The reality is that more people are delaying having a family and enjoying a more affluent life style in their 20's. Their housing requirements at this childless stage of life are likely to be very different to those of families. They may value activity and vitality over peace and privacy, proximity to facilities over space and gardens. This is the market which city centre housing developers have tapped and the demographic figures suggest that it may be far larger than planners and developers have so far appreciated.

The other great area of household growth is pensioners who now make up 30% of all households. It would be a mistake to suggest that most pensioners either need or want to live in sheltered accommodation. Most are healthy and independent and can expect to live for as many years in this state as they did as a family. Whilst many pensioners may aspire to a modern bungalow a short walk from the shops, most end up living in their old family home. Over the years this is likely to become less well suited to their needs with the garden, so good for children, becoming a chore to maintain and the peace and quiet, once so welcome, becoming the backdrop to loneliness. Developers like McCarthy and Stone who specialise in housing for the elderly are increasingly building urban apartment blocks in smaller towns. Their brochures emphasise not seclusion and privacy but community and access to facilities.

The forces behind demographic change

The decline of the traditional family has been a cause of consternation to politicians but the mechanisms behind demographic change are varied and complex. The evolution of the large 19th century household to the small 20th century family was driven by two parallel trends. For the middle classes the reduction in household size was not due to falling birth rates but a reduction in servants and other household members. The working class household got smaller as there was less need to insure against infant mortality with large families. Improved access to housing reduced overcrowding and extended families no longer lived under the same roof. Housing evolved in response to these changes. Working class housing expanded from the terrace to the council semi whilst middle class housing shrunk from the Victorian villa to a very similar private semi.

The change from the 20th to the 21st century household is likely to be just as dramatic. However this does not herald the disintegration of family life and all that traditionalists hold dear. In Victorian times people stayed at home until their marriage before starting a family and continuing child rearing into their late 30's. This would put them into their dotage before all of their children left home leaving a few years of retirement before their allotted three score years and ten. Today people are leaving home earlier to live single or certainly childless lives in their 20s before settling down and having a modest brood in their 30's. Their off-spring are likely to have flown the nest by their 50's leaving them with a third of their life ahead of them as what the marketing people now call, 'empty nesters'. Combine this with the growing divorce rate, increasing life expectancy, and the growing number of single parents and the trend of declining household size and increasing household numbers becomes stronger still.

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Future trends

So while household numbers will rise by 4.4 million, married couples will actually decline from 10.5 million to 9.9 million. The vast majority of the increase will be single person households which are predicted to rise from 3.5 million to 5.1 million making up more than 80% of the increase. The question is what sort of housing will these people aspire to? The recent debate has suggested that they will remain loyal to suburbia. Surveys such as that recently carried out by the House Builders Federation[2] suggest that the majority of people still yearn for suburbia in both the form and location of their home. This was however a survey of people who had recently bought such housing.

As part of the TCPA enquiry *"The People: Where will they go?"* Professor Alan Hooper suggested that: *"..an unreflective response which matches smaller households to smaller dwellings at high densities in concentrated urban areas is not likely to result in a sustainable form of development"*[3]. The first part of this point is well made, rising incomes make it dangerous to assume that smaller households will opt for smaller units. However there is no reason why large apartments or even houses cannot exist in urban areas at high densities. But the assumption is that people will not want to live in urban areas. As Michael Brehemny has said: *"Clearly there are groups of people - of particular ages, occupations and levels of income - who may choose high density urban living. Likewise there are high density urban areas - usually historically and architecturally interesting and socially exclusive - that remain popular through time. However these people and these areas are very much the exception*[4]. Professor Peter Hall has gone further in a recent Guardian article comparing policies to make people live in cities to Stalinist Russia[5]. Yet the suburban semi was developed for the nuclear family and it is possible that something very different may be demanded by future households. It is unlikely that all childless households would choose to live in urban areas but it is reasonable to assume that a proportion would, maybe a significant proportion. This is already happening in towns and cities up and down the country. The new urban residents of Crown Street in Glasgow, Whitworth Street in Manchester, Bradford, Newcastle and Nottingham are not sacrificing their living standards to live in cramped flats or squalid urban areas. They have recognised the value of urban living and if more urban areas could harness these qualities it is possible that many others would follow their lead by returning to cities.

1. **Burnett** - A Social History of Housing 1815 - 1985 - Mehuen - 1986
2. **The Housebuilders Federation** - Families Matter - 1996
3. **Professor Alan Hooper** - Housing Requirements and housing Provision: The Strategic Issues - TCPA - Jan 1996
4. **M. Jenkins, E. Burton & K. Williams (Eds)** - The Compact City: A Sustainable Urban Form? - Spon, 1996
5. **Peter Hall** - A Long Way From Home - The Guardian - 4 Dec 1996

The Villages Initiative (Stoke on Trent)
We have recently completed a project, working with Levitt Bernstien Associates to develop a strategy for a large council estate in Stoke as part of an SRB project. The Bentilee area is a 5000 property estate built in the 1950's in the garden city venacular. It is only a couple of miles from the centre of Stoke but is bounded by countryside and feels very isolated. Applying the SUN principles, our strategy showed how the area could be transformed by creating 8 village centres to break up the scale of the estate and develop local identities.

London Fields (Hackney)
We are currently working for the LB Hackney and a local partnership to develop proposals for live/work and mixed use development in London Fields. The area has become a focus for artists many of whom are squatting council property. The strategy seeks to use this as a basis for economic development whilst not undermining the council's policy towards squatters.

The SUN Continues
We have recently received confirmation from the DoE that funding for the SUN Initiative from the Environmental Action Fund will continue for a second year.
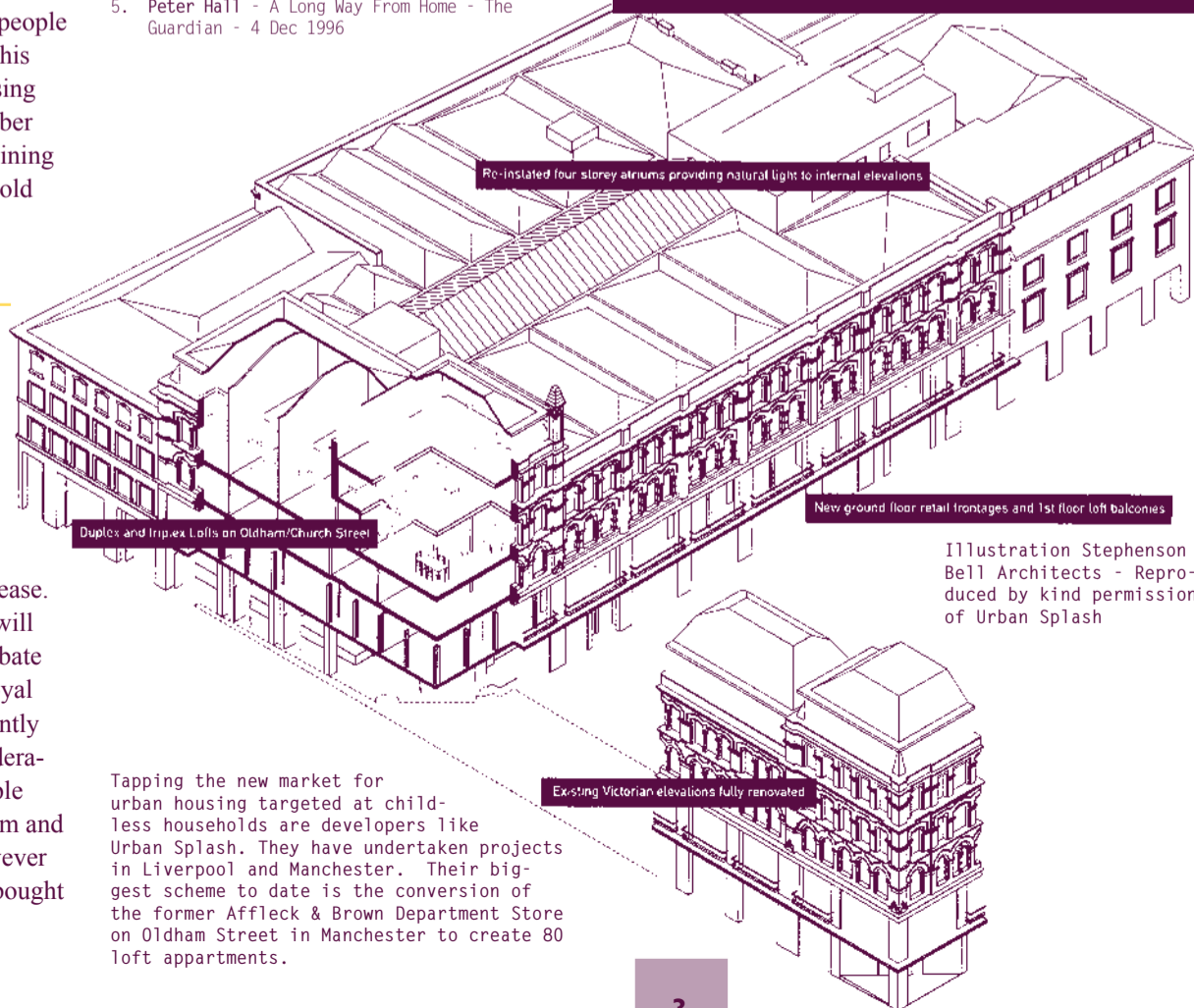

Re-instated four storey atriums providing natural light to internal elevations

Duplex and triplex Lofts on Oldham/Church Street

New ground floor retail frontages and 1st floor loft balconies

Existing Victorian elevations fully renovated

Illustration Stephenson Bell Architects - Reproduced by kind permission of Urban Splash

Tapping the new market for urban housing targeted at childless households are developers like Urban Splash. They have undertaken projects in Liverpool and Manchester. Their biggest scheme to date is the conversion of the former Affleck & Brown Department Store on Oldham Street in Manchester to create 80 loft apartments.

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Stemming the tide
The Five Estates in Peckham

Southwark Council has recognised that the key to sustainable regeneration lies in encouraging people not to leave urban areas. As Simon Bevan explains, their strategy for the redevelopment of the Five Estates and the use of community sustainability indicators show a possible route by which this might be achieved

The London Borough of Southwark has been given an opportunity to create a new neighbourhood out of one of its most deprived wards, Peckham. The opportunity comes through the country's largest SRB project. Government grant of £60 million combined with other private and public sector investments will give a budget of £250 million over seven years.

Southwark Council has recognised that the key to the unsustainability of areas like Peckham is that people will often move away whenever they get the chance. The five estates which make up what is now the Peckham Partnership used to have a turnover of 25% a year.

The aim of Southwark's SRB bid was to generate 'sustainable regeneration'. It included a vision of Peckham as a place where people want to live, work and shop and to raise employment and educational achievement to the Greater London average - modest aims for such a large regeneration project. The aim is to make the area 'ordinary' rather than one that is distinctive in its appearance (generally considered very ugly), its levels of deprivation and crime and its facilities and public transport links. In reality these are very ambitious aims.

Southwark Council has recently adopted an 'Annual Regeneration Statement' which sets out its vision for the future of the borough. This describes a process whereby providing people with more choice and quality in their environment will encourage them to establish themselves in an area so that communities can develop. This, in turn, should lead to more individual decisions to invest time and money in neighbourhoods - the sustainable regeneration which will lead to more choice and better quality.

The pressures of the Single Regeneration Budget are not entirely conducive to slow and careful regeneration of this kind. A clear outline of the 7 year project had to be presented in order to get the funding and since approval there are pressures to spend according to a strict time table. It is inherently difficult to create a sustainable neighbourhood under such pressure for rapid change. It could be argued that it was pressure for rapid change which led to the creation of such unsustainable neighbourhoods in the first place, with their high densities and a range of experimental building types. The neighbourhood which is being created in Peckham will be mainly low-rise with houses with gardens set in a more conventional street layout, very much in line with the principles being promoted by the SUN Initiative. This change alone will not, of course, make the area sustainable.

A sustainability audit of the Peckham Partnership programme has therefore recently been carried out. It shows that more work is needed to ensure that the Peckham Partnership will meet high standards of sustainable development. To do this Southwark Council is seeking funding from the European Union for a demonstration project under the LIFE programme to show how the development of community sustainability indicators could lead to better community involvement, raised environmental awareness and better decision making. Southwark wants to monitor the effectiveness of the programme by comparing it with other areas for which major regeneration funds are not available. It wants, if possible, to develop a model for the regeneration of inner city areas which does not necessarily require the investment of large amounts of funding in a short space of time on wholesale area renewal.

Community sustainability indicators will provide an essential element of the monitoring and evaluation of the regeneration strategy and will allow benchmarking with other local authorities particularly in measuring the quality of life in the borough.

Efforts to involve people in the planning system, at least in Britain have often been characterised by confrontation and territorial issues. 'Planning for Real' exercises have gone some way towards overcoming this territoriality. Southwark is taking this a step further by helping local communities define the features of the urban environment which indicate an improving quality of life and those which indicate, or result in , a poorer quality of life. By monitoring these indicators we can then have more confidence that our regeneration programmes are successful and sustainable.

The SUN initiative is managed by URBED from its Manchester office by david Rudlin with administration provided by Christina Swensson and Helene Rudlin

This news sheet has been researched, written (unless otherwise credited) and designed by URBED which is a not for profit urban regeneration consultancy set up in 1976 to devise imaginative solutions to the problems of regenerating run down areas. URBED's services include consultancy, project management, urban design and economic development. The SUN Initiative further develops URBED's growing involvement in housing and continues the work of the 21st Century homes project.

41 Old Birley Street, Hulme, Manchester, M15 5RF
tel: 0161 226 5078
fax: 0161 226 7307
e mail: sun@urbed.co.uk

Why NOT get involved?

Our aim is to develop the SUN Initiative as a broadly based network of organisations and individuals interested in sustainable urban development. We do not have a membership but people can get involved in a number of ways...

Mailings: If you did not receive this newsletter by post please contact us and we will add you to our mailing list.
Contributions: We would welcome letters or articles for future issues of this newsletter.
Examples: We are compiling a resource base of good examples of sustainable development both nationally and internationally. We would therefore welcome details of projects that you are involved in.
Sponsorship: We are seeking sponsors for future issues of this newsletter and for exhibition material. Details are available on request.

SUN on the
WORLD WIDE WEB
HTTP://WWW.URBED.CO.UK/SUN/

Now up and running, the SUN web site provides information about the aims of the initiative and the work that we are carrying out. If you have access to the World Wide Web, it is an ideal way to keep in touch with us and an easy way to explore the aspects of the sustainable urban neighbourhood that interest you. The web site will continue to evolve as the SUN Initiative develops, being used to disseminate research findings and provide an update on our activities.

The beauty of the web site is the ability to add and amend material continuously including your contributions. Mail can be posted to us from most pages and we encourage you to write to us with your comments. You may have suggestions for future research, perhaps questions about particular issues or a request for further information. You may also wish to tell us about case studies which we should add to our good practice resource base.

Within the next few months we should also be able to offer access to our resource base and case studies database through the site. This will allow you to search for documents and examples on line. This service is currently available by telephoning or calling into our office. Text and in some cases graphics can be printed from the Web site. We are happy for any material on the site to be reproduced provided that full credit is given.

Other Interesting Sites
There is now a huge amount of information available on the World Wide Web on sustainable development. From sites covering global environmental issues to information on individual cities, the Web is an ideal place to cull up to date information, gather statistics and learn from experience across the world. The following is a list of some of the sites that we have found useful, If you know of others please let us know:

http://rudi.herts.ac.uk/
Resource for Urban Design Information (RUDI). Aims to be the prime web provider of urban design material.
http://www.igc.apc.org/greendisk/
Web page of Greendisk - An American journal of Contemporary Environmental Issues.
http://www.greenchannel.com
A service run by Green Channel Communications to promote environmental change through communication of environmental information, products, services and initiatives.
http://www.greenchannel.com/slt/
The Sustainable London Trust web page including a Manifesto for 'Creating a Sustainable London' and links to back up documents for the manifesto.
http://weber.u.Washington. edu/~common/
The web site of the Centre for Sustainable Communities based at the University of Washington.
http://www.iisd1.iisd.ca/contents.htm
The web site of the International Institute of Sustainable Development. Contains a huge resource of information, articles and details of 'hot topics'.
http://www.iisd.ca/linkages/
Linked to the above the Linkages web site provides information on past and up and coming international meetings related to environment and development
http://www.mbnet.mb.ca/linkages/habitat/
Habitat II Web Site with summaries of negotiations, papers presented as well as meeting and action details. See also the full Habitat II site:
http://www.undp.org/un/habitat/
http://oboe.symgrp.com/habitat/html/
The Best Practices Database, an excellent resource which contains proven solutions to common urban problems from around the world.
http://www.sustainable. doe.gov/
Web site run by the United States Department of Energy's Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Development. It contains a menu of information and services on how your community can adopt sustainable development.
http://164.11.12/fbe/euronet/suscity.htm
The European Sustainable Cities - First Report. A report by the Expert Group on the Urban Environment
http://www.wri.org/wri/wr-96-97/pi_txt5.html
An article on the World Resources Institute web site looking at the city and sustainable development.
http://www.municipia.org/
Municipia Web Site: International, multilingual, interactive reference web site for urban decision makers to exchange information on their respective cities
http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/environ/design/design.shtml
A web site run by the Australian Bureau of meteorology about Sustainable Urban Design and Climate.
http://www.context.org/
The web site of the Context Institute's Sustainable Culture Information Service. Includes a library, discussion articles and case studies. For example - reshaping the Urban Design process an article about how Australian officials built consensus for a move away from sprawl and toward urban villages.
http://www.ksp.or.jp/kanagawa/lisc95/e04.html
The site of the World Conference on Local Initiatives for Sustainable Cities.
http://www.orl.arch.ethz.ch/FB_Oekenomie/congress/abstracts/d13.html
A paper on urban densities, local policies and sustainable development.
http://www.preservenet. com/newurb.html
The Preservation Institute in Berkeley promoting a new political agenda which recognises the limits of technology. Pages and links on New Urbanism.