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But would you live there?

Shaping attitudes to urban living

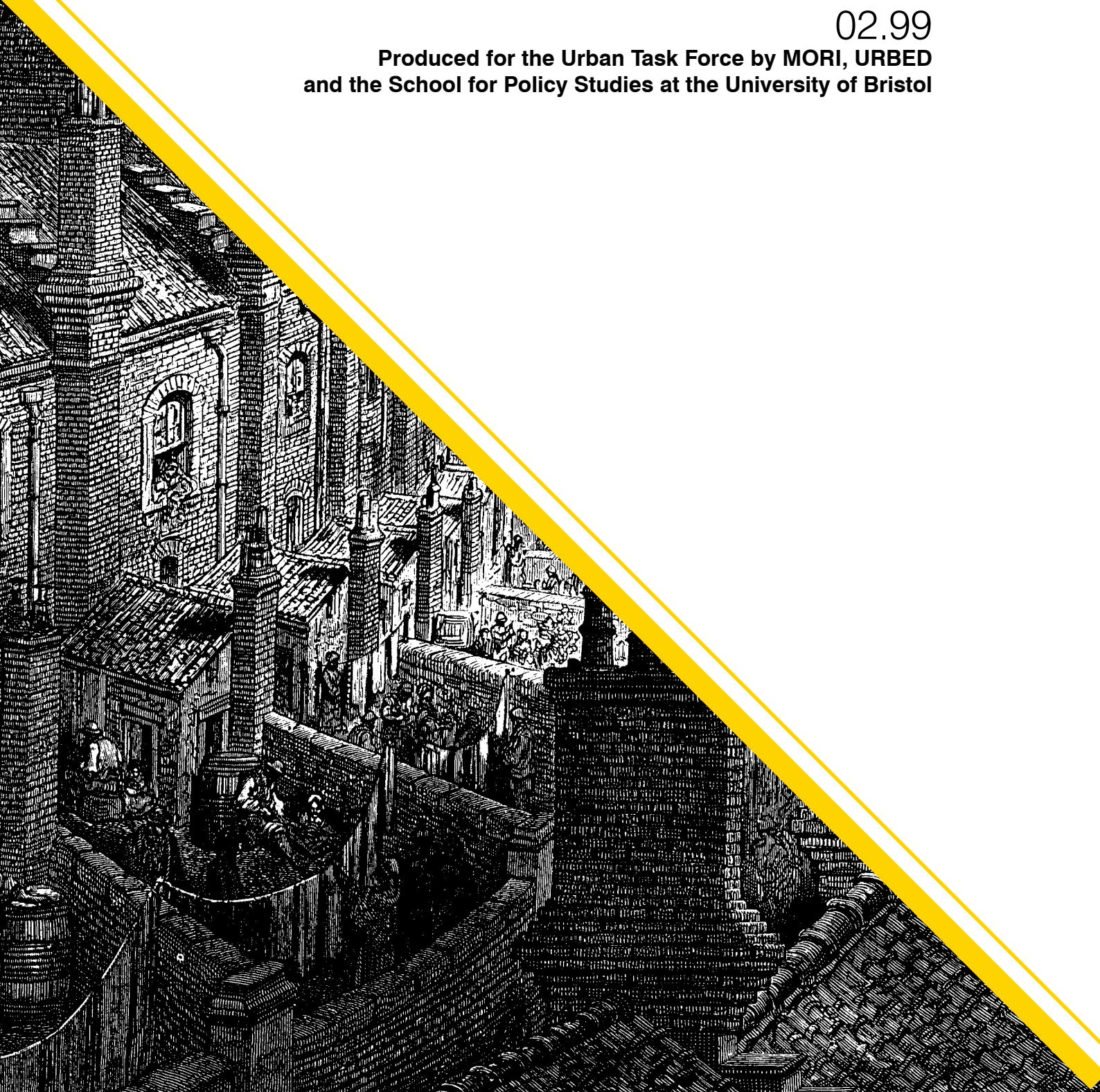
02.99

Produced for the Urban Task Force by MORI, URBED
and the School for Policy Studies at the University of Bristol

But would you live there? Shaping attitudes to urban living

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Preface

I warmly welcome this report, which is the first of several independent studies commissioned by the Urban Task Force, in association with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

Over the past eight months we have consistently argued that people must be the driving force for an urban renaissance. If it is really going to work, and if our towns and cities are once again to flourish as economic, social and cultural powerhouses, we need to create environments in which people *want* to live, work and relax. But to do this effectively means that we need to have a much clearer understanding of the range of factors which influence behaviour.

This study helps us to respond to this very real need. As such, it is a vital part of our more detailed work on public attitudes focusing, as it does, on the enormous range of different information sources which colour peoples views on town and city living.

Clearly this study represents only a small part of our work in progress. It is nonetheless significant. By stepping beyond the traditional opinion poll this research begins to explore how views and opinions are formed and shaped. It offers us – and you – the chance to re-think how hearts and minds can be won in the battle for the future of our towns and cities.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. L. R.', with a stylized, cursive flourish.

Lord Rogers of Riverside
Chairman
Urban Task Force

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01

Introduction and summary

In which we describe why the research was commissioned and how it has been undertaken. We then the main points in the report chapter by chapter and outline the main conclusions.

The question about the proportion of household growth that can be accommodated within urban areas has reignited a welcome element of passion in the planning debate. The need to accommodate 4 million or so additional households over the next two decades has stimulated a wide-ranging discussion about the future of our towns and cities and how they are planned and developed. As importantly, it has required policy makers to focus much more clearly on public needs and aspirations in relation to where people do and do not want to live. The reason for the passion is that the impetus of current policy to encourage more housebuilding in urban areas appears to run counter to the expressed desires of the British public and indeed to a housebuilding industry which reflects and shapes these desires.

However well justified it might be, a

We need to have a much clearer understanding of the factors which influence public attitudes to urban areas so that we are better placed to use these factors to encourage people to consider urban living

policy which is out of tune with public opinion will never be effective. We therefore need to have a much clearer understanding of the factors which influence public attitudes to urban areas so that we are better placed to use these factors to encourage people to consider urban living. This has been the aim of this research.

The research

At the centre of this debate is the Urban Task Force, one of a number of high level task forces set up by the current Government to address critical issues underpinning the success – or otherwise – of the UK economy. The Urban Task Force, which was launched on the 14th July 1998 has been asked to make practical recommendations to Government about how urban areas can be revitalised, with particular reference to increasing the amount and attractiveness of housing in urban areas. As part of this the Task Force is exploring how to make ‘the city a place of choice’ and to better understand how the general public’s attitudes to urban living develop. In particular this project, which was commissioned to develop this debate, seeks to explore the following questions:

- What sources of information colour peoples

attitudes to cities and towns? How do they work? Who controls them?

- To what degree do people's opinions of urban areas change as they are given more information and their level of knowledge increases?

Summary of findings

The residential preferences of the British public have been subject to a great deal of research. This we review in **Chapter 2** as background to our work. We review research into the sort of housing and areas that people choose as the ideal place to live along with migration patterns and the push and pull factors which influence them. We also review some of the more recent surveys of people living in central urban areas. We conclude that 'niche' markets have grown to such an extent that they represent a fragmentation of the housing market and that we could be at the cusp of a fundamental change in UK residential aspirations.

However while we know a great deal about what people like and dislike about their housing and neighbourhoods we know very little about how these views are formed and shaped, whether they are amenable to being changed and if so how this might be achieved. The first part of the project therefore involved a literature review by the Centre for Urban Studies at the University of Bristol, which is reviewed in **Chapter 3**. This found very little direct research into this area but draws upon work in the fields of tourism, residential marketing and place marketing. It also reviews a range of information sources on urban areas and, drawing upon cognitive psychology and media studies, suggests how people reconcile these often conflicting messages. The literature review suggested range of people who are likely to be persuadable about urban living and therefore informed the recruitment for the workshops as well as raising

a number of issues that we were able to explore through the workshop discussions.

The main part of the research consisted of three 'Citizens Workshops' (extended focus groups) in Manchester, Bristol and London. The methodology for these groups is described in **Chapter 4** and a summary of the discussions in **Chapter 5**. The workshops took place over an entire Saturday and sought to test people's reactions to different sources of information. The morning therefore concentrated on current attitudes following which participants were given a presentation on urban living along with marketing material. The afternoon then concentrated on their reactions to these messages and culminated in them preparing their own marketing strategy for urban areas.

The themes to emerge from these workshops were then discussed in a series of interviews with professionals involved in shaping attitudes to urban areas including private and social housebuilders, estate agents and journalists. These interviews, which are described in **Chapter 6**, largely reinforced the findings of the workshops.

Key themes to emerge

In **Chapter 7** we outline five key themes to emerge from the research and suggest their implications for policy-makers. The key themes are:

- **The lack of a shared language:** People have very different understandings of words like urban, suburban, city and inner city. We conclude that attitudinal research based upon views about different types of area needed to be treated with caution and that the words used in promotional material need to be chosen carefully.
- **Generic views and real places:** People's generic attitudes to urban and suburban areas can be very different to their views of specific areas that they know or even areas that they see on a photograph. We conclude that images of real urban areas are much more powerful than the most sumptuous general images because people can relate to them and believe that things can change.
- **The sophisticated consumer:** People are able to spot when they are being sold something

While we know a great deal about what people like and dislike about their housing and neighbourhoods we know very little about how these views are formed and shaped

and to distrust the information that they are given as a result. They are least likely to trust information and promotional material from public agencies partly because of a lack of trust and partly because it appears less sophisticated than that of private companies.

- **Open to argument:** We do however believe that people can be persuaded to live in urban areas. Their views about where they live are based upon a balance of what might be called suburban and urban aspirations. There is scope to tap into their urban aspirations to tip the balance of individual decisions more firmly in favour of urban areas.
- **An aversion to risk:** Unlike the early pioneers of urban living, the people at the workshops were averse to risk. They were not attracted by the excitement of urban living or by contemporary design. Rather they wanted to be assured that urban areas were not risky and it was safe for them to buy and live there.

It should be remembered that these findings are not based on quantitative statistical evidence. They are based on a small sample of a cross-section of residents and are illustrative rather than statistically representative. Furthermore, throughout this report we are recording perceptions, not facts. Participants may hold views that are based on incorrect information; these perceptions are reported here. This report should be read with these notes of caution in mind. With these caveats we conclude from this research that there is scope to 'sell' the idea of urban living to a wider range of people and that initiatives to promote urban areas could usefully form part of the Task Force's recommendations.

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In this report we deal only with residential preferences which are, of course only part of a wider picture. It is just as important to persuade businesses and investors to return to urban areas as well as encouraging the retail and leisure markets in towns and cities. These issues were beyond the remit of this study but could usefully form the basis for future work.

This work forms part of a series of independent research projects commissioned by the Urban Task Force. These studies combined with an intensive programme of public consultation, study tours and site visits both in the UK and overseas will be reflected in the Urban Task Force's Final Report which will be published in the early summer.

We are grateful to all of the people who have contributed to this work. We are particularly grateful to the people who contributed through the workshops and the opinion-former interviews. The work has been undertaken by David Rudlin from URBED who is responsible for this report, Mike Everett and Bobby Duffy from MORI, and by Gary Bridge from Bristol. It has been co-ordinated for the Urban Task Force by Miffa Salter.

02

Background to the research

In which we review the importance of attitudes to the urban environment and look at research into residential preferences, migration patterns and quality of life. We go on to look at some of the more recent studies of people living in central urban areas and suggest that, far from being a niche market, these may represent a more fundamental fragmentation of the housing market.

The debate about whether, and how, to increase the proportion of housing built in urban areas raises three fundamental questions:

- **Is it desirable?** Do the benefits of accommodating additional homes in urban areas - including saving green fields, reducing car travel, and revitalising urban areas – outweigh the disbenefits?
- **Is it practical?** Even if we decide that it is desirable is it physically possible to accommodate household growth in urban areas? This question has been extensively covered elsewhere¹ and will not trouble us here.
- **Is it feasible?** Even if it is desirable and practical can housebuilders be persuaded to build there and can people be attracted to live there?

Public attitudes to living in urban areas are therefore central to the debate about household growth. If the British public really cannot be ‘sold’ the idea that they should live in an urban area they will not do so and developers, for want of a market, will not build there. We need to make urban areas a ‘place of residential choice’ in the words of the Urban Task Force prospectus. We must therefore concern ourselves not just with current attitudes to urban areas but with whether they are susceptible to being changed and how this might best be achieved.

Current attitudes to urban areas

A great deal of research has been undertaken into public attitudes to the home and to different types of urban, suburban and rural environment. For anyone seeking to promote urban repopulation this work makes depressing reading since it suggests that anti-urban sentiments in the British public are deep-rooted and remain as strong as ever. Murie, Forest and Leather² have prepared an excellent summary of this research as part of their ongoing work for the DETR. This can be divided into three main elements:

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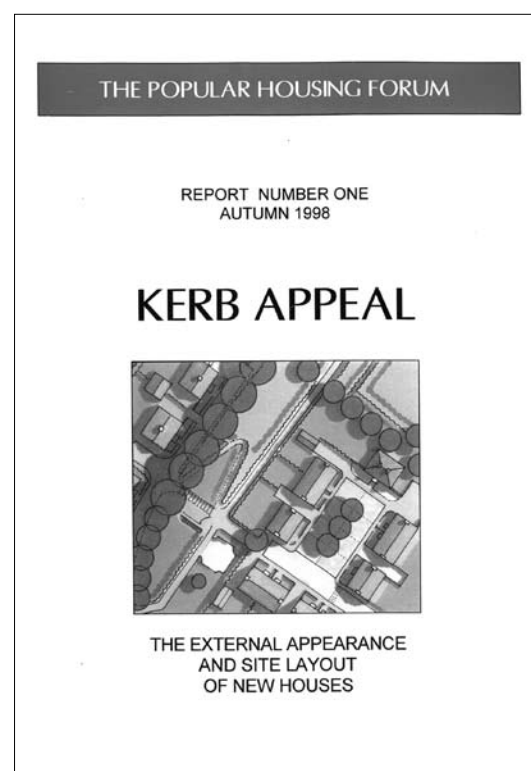
Residential preference: The work on people's attitudes to where they live shows an overwhelming preference for suburban housetypes in suburban (or preferably rural locations). Three of the more recent examples of this work are the report *Kerb Appeal* by BMRB for the Popular Housing Forum³, *Home owners on new estates in the 1990s* by Forest, Kennett and Leather for the Policy Press⁴ and *Towns or Leafier Environments* by Mulholland Associates for the Housebuilders Federation⁵. These preferences relate to lifecycle stages as people become more affluent, move from renting to owning and from being single to starting a family. Each of these life changes tends to prompt a move away from urban areas and towards the sort of area and housing that has become associated with middle-class family life. Indeed work by Shlay⁶ in the US suggests that it is the aspiration for this type of lifestyle rather than the attractions of a particular environment that is driving the process.

Murie et al² suggest that one of the problem with much of this research is that it has focused on people who either live on new estates or who have recently or will soon move house. Because of this the surveys have a tendency to over-represent the views of young, relatively affluent families despite the fact that they account for less than 20% of UK households. Much less is known about the residential aspirations of other groups. A notable exception is the recent Housing Research Foundation report *Home Alone*⁷ on the preferences of single people. This suggested that the views of single people are similar to those of families in that they want internal and external space, to live in a 'good' area, and they prefer houses to flats. The report does however conclude that certain types of single person household, particularly but not exclusively the young, may be much more open to the idea of living in urban locations than other types of household.

Migration patterns: Another significant area of work has explored the exodus of population from urban areas. The phenomena of 'counterurbanisation'⁸ has been apparent for many years. Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow have lost more than a third of their population since 1961 and Inner London has lost almost a million people⁹. Recent work by Champion¹⁰ has provided more detailed insight into the nature of this outward migration. Particularly important is the 'cascade' effect where-

Research into public attitudes to the built environment suggests that anti-urban sentiments in the British public are as deep-rooted as ever

by each urban area loses people to its neighbouring less urban area which, in turn, loses people to the next area and so on down the urban hierarchy out to rural areas. These movements are however partly balanced by population movement in the other direction as people move into urban areas. Urban depopulation has happened because the outward flow has marginally exceeded the inward flow. Greater London, for example lost 36,900 people in 1995 which was the result of 207,600 people leaving the city and 170,000 moving there from elsewhere in the UK. This is significant because it means that some urban areas are attracting almost as many people as they lose. It also suggests that, far from trying to prevent the tide from going out, we need only bring about relatively small changes in these inward and outward movements to transform the net outflow of population to an inward flow. This suggests that over a number of years the task of urban repopulation is achievable.



Reports such as the Popular Housing Forum's *Kerb Appeal* suggest that residential aspirations for suburban environments remain as strong as ever

Push and pull factors: The third area of work has looked at the reasons why people move between areas. Recent work by Burrows and Rhodes¹¹ has looked at what might be called the 'push' factors. They have used the Survey of English Housing (SEH) to map what they have called the 'geography of dissatisfaction' showing that levels of dissatisfaction in inner London and industrial areas are twice those in 'mature', 'rural' and 'prospering' areas. However Champion has shown that it tends to be the more affluent urban areas that experience the greatest population loss. This suggests that dissatisfaction alone does not explain out-migration and that it is those with the means to do so who move out while those in the poorest urban areas become trapped.

Push and pull factors have also been explored in Quality of Life research by Strathclyde University¹². This suggests that people prioritise areas with low crime, good healthcare facilities, low levels of pollution, low cost of living and good shopping and race relations. These quality of life aspirations are not particularly anti-urban. While urban areas tend to have higher crime levels and pollution they may also have a lower cost of living, and better health and shopping facilities. National mapping of quality of life indicators also suggests that the quality of life is greater in the north than in the south. Yet people continue to leave urban areas and to migrate southwards. Four possible reasons have been put forward for this mismatch, a number of which we wanted to explore through this research:

- That people are irrational and incapable of weighing pros and cons. You can appeal to their minds as much as you want but it is their heart that will influence their decision.
- That they have insufficient information on different areas to make an informed decision.
- That in prioritising quality of life they are taking certain things, like a job, for granted and therefore not including them in their priorities.
- That people are constrained by various factors, such as money, from living where they would like.

Market fragmentation

The research on urban attitudes gives a few causes for optimism but the general picture painted is one of a population that is anti-urban both in the areas where it desires to live and in its choice of housing. This however is a mass-market view - it tells us very little about the views of other groups. These are often dismissed as niche markets but in reality they outnumber the young families generally regarded as the mass-market. Three in every four households are childless and more than half of these are below retirement age. When considering the potential to attract people back to urban areas it is these 'niche markets' which are the most interesting.

While there has been less attitudinal work into the residential aspirations of childless households, recent research has been undertaken into the populations already living in central urban areas. Research in Manchester¹³ and Bristol¹⁴ has looked at the nature of the people living in central urban areas and at their motivation for doing so. The first thing that these surveys do is to dispel the assumption that most of the people living in these central urban areas are young. The Bristol survey revealed a wide spread of age groups although this was partly due to the inclusion of some established social housing areas. However the Manchester survey of 311 residents revealed that their average age was 37 and that 19% were over 50. These populations include more males than females and are generally affluent and without family commitments. The surveys do however show that groups such as students and the elderly are also represented and conclude that people tend to underestimate the diversity of urban populations. People were attracted by the convenience of central urban areas but what they liked more was the 'social scene'. Many people are attracted as much by the lifestyle of urban areas as by the neighbourhoods and housing on offer. The majority (61%) had lived there for less than three years and 39% for less than 12 months and while most were generally very satisfied at present, few saw the area as a long-term residential option.

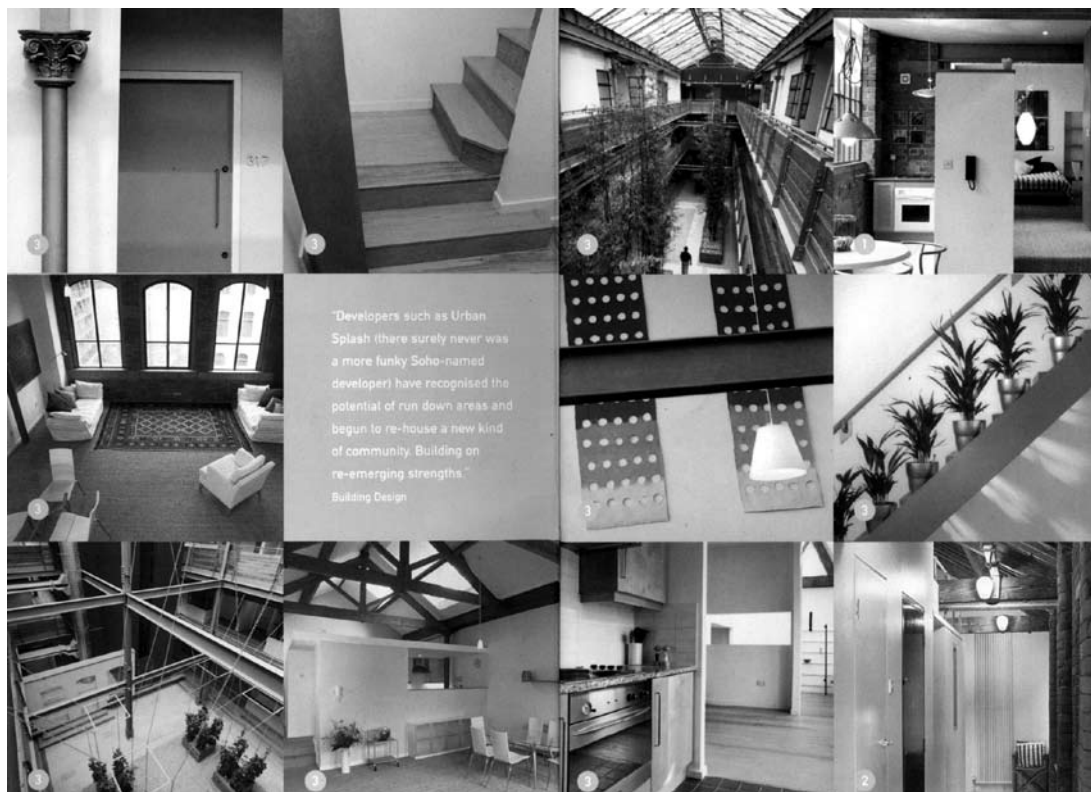
Quality of life research suggests that people prioritise areas with low crime, good healthcare, low pollution, low cost of living and good shopping and race relations. These quality of life aspirations are not particularly anti-urban

The market for this type of urban housing has grown throughout the 1990s while other parts of the new-build housing market have contracted. It is for these reasons that housing market analysts¹⁵ have been urging developers for a number of years to diversify away from suburban family housing to a higher value, urban product to cater for the 80% of future households which are projected to be single people. Is it right therefore to regard the recent growth in urban housing as a niche market? What is happening may be more fundamental – a fragmentation of the housing market or even the emergence of a new mass-market.

It is still too early to conclude whether such a fundamental change is taking place in the housing market, the signs are still too confused.

Is it right to regard the recent growth in urban housing as a niche market? What is happening may be a more fundamental fragmentation of the housing market or even the emergence of a new mass-market

However these trends can be shaped. Just as the Garden City pioneers transformed public attitudes to the ideal residential environment a hundred years ago¹⁶ and created the modern suburb, so the Urban Task Force has the potential to transform attitudes to urban areas. Central to this task is the need to win the hearts and minds of the British public.



Loft apartments by Urban Splash in Manchester and Liverpool. The market for this type of housing has grown to the point where it may no longer be right to regard it as a niche market

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03

Selling the city

In which we review the literature on marketing the city including tourist literature, residential marketing, and place marketing. We contrast this with the messages that people receive through the media, advertising, and popular culture. We then draw upon literature from cognitive psychology and media studies to explore the way that people resolve these conflicting images

As part of this work we have undertaken a literature review of the research that has been done on the way in which people's views of urban areas are formed and the effectiveness of different attempts to change these views. To do this we have had to review a wide range of research in different fields and have identified a number of gaps that may justify further research. The main research that has been undertaken on city marketing has focused on tourism, inward investment and more recently 'place marketing' such as the Glasgow '*Smiles Better*' campaign. In addition to this there is a significant body of work, much from North America and Australia, on urban gentrification and the marketing of new forms of urban housing. This can then be linked to work on cognitive psychology to explore how people respond to marketing and other sources of information and how their views of urban areas are shaped. The literature review will be published separately and a list of the references reviewed is included as Appendix 1. In this chapter we summarise the main issues covered by the review.

Tourist literature has become one of the most sophisticated forms of place marketing

Sales pitches

The literature review looked initially at three main types of information which seeks to sell the city:

Tourist literature: Since the 1970s many urban areas have been working to sell themselves as tourist destinations. This has become one of the best-developed and most sophisticated forms of place marketing. In promoting themselves as tourist destinations towns and cities have sought to create and to project a positive image which may also be relevant if people are to be attracted to live there. The trend in tourist literature has been to move away from generic to niche marketing because the tourist market (like the housing market?) is seen to be fragmenting. This niche marketing is able to project very different images of the city to different groups. One of Bristol's leaflets for example is targeted at London club goers and emphasises the excitement and stylishness of the city while another, aimed at an older age group, paints a picture of a cosy provincial city emphasising its solidity, history and access to countryside. These messages can conflict with each other as well as with the reality of the city as experienced by residents. The message can also be undermined by stories in the media or the harsher assessment of international

guides such as the *Lonely Planet* (which is dismissive of many UK cities). As part of the citizens' workshops we therefore wanted to test some of this promotional material on the participants to gauge their reaction.

Residential marketing: Much of the literature on the marketing of urban housing has concentrated on gentrification. This research focuses on the marketing of and purchasers for new urban apartments and has therefore tended to concentrate on a fairly narrow section of people who tend to be young, professional, affluent and childless. It is clear from the literature that what is being sold is not so much an apartment or even a convenient location but a bespoke lifestyle. The buyer is pictured as someone with discerning taste, who is cosmopolitan and urbane. This appeals to the ego and self-image of the buyers who are seeking to set themselves apart from the herd as represented by suburbia. At the same time the developments are sold as safe - close to facilities and hustle and bustle but not so close as to cause disturbance. This creates an equivocal attitude towards density and a mix of uses. While both are good in principle as an important part of urbanity, the marketing literature expresses the ability to be able to shut yourself off, when desired, from other uses and other people. While these findings are based on North American and Australian research a review of marketing literature in Bristol shows that exactly the same message is being used here.

Place marketing: The other area of work that has been done on selling the city has looked at place marketing. This is largely aimed not at residents but at business and particularly at business managers who might consider relocation. The early work in this area was in areas like New Towns and London's Docklands, the latter considered to be very effective. More recently place marketing has been used to 'correct' the poor image of declining areas. The best known example is Glasgow with its *Smiles Better* campaign and designation as European City of Culture. These campaigns have a wider aim including tourism, inward investment and, perhaps most importantly increasing confidence in the area.

It is clear that what is being sold is not so much an apartment or even a convenient location but a bespoke lifestyle. The buyer is pictured as someone with discerning taste, who is cosmopolitan and urbane

Research into the Glasgow campaign has shown that it was effective in increasing visitors. Surveys of attitudes towards Glasgow in the South East have also shown a sharp increase in the proportion of people who felt that the city was 'rapidly changing for the better'. However it did not increase the numbers of people who saw Glasgow as a good place to live or work and ongoing tracking surveys suggested that even the positive effects were short-lived.

Place marketing raises issues about the relationship between image and reality. In London Docklands advertising used images from popular television programmes rather than the 'real' East End and were seen as more effective because of it. In contrast some of the backlash against Glasgow's campaign, particularly within the city, may be due to the widening gap between the reality of parts of the city and the image projected to the outside world. In the workshops the presentation given to the participants was designed to explore some of these differences between image and reality and to see how far participants were prepared to accept a positive sales message.

Place marketing by Glasgow Development Agency following the end of Glasgow's Year as European City of Culture in 1990



From City of Culture to City of Europe

Case Study:

MARKETING CENTRAL CITY HOUSING: CREST HOMES IN BRISTOL

Crest Homes is a good example of an urban housing developer who have successfully attracted people into urban areas. In particular they are developing three apartment blocks along the dockside in central Bristol.

Their marketing literature begins by locating the developments in the centre of a historic city while emphasising the convenience of a city lifestyle:

'Bristol - a blend of elegant living, modern amenities and cultural pleasures. Located at the heart of the romantic West Country on the River Avon, the sea port of Bristol offers a superior location for comfortable, easy living. The profusion of Georgian architecture assures an elegant, regal cityscape whilst areas of surrounding countryside and the cast, open space of The Downs add a green, freshness to the tang of salt in the air.'

The city is sold in terms of access to greenery and the marketing strategy is particularly aimed at in-migrants from London. This is what the literature identifies as a 'clean and green' marketing image. But Bristol's cosmopolitan cache is also emphasised:

'Enjoy the very best of international cuisine, the lively beat of musical venues and the cultural diversities of stage and screen.'

Density is dealt with by references to 'compactness', 'convenience' and 'ease of living'. Mixed-use is sold as a positive asset of social opportunities and scenic diversity:

'Escape to a lifestyle of contrasts and choices. Whether you prefer peaceful escapism, old fashioned relaxation, modern amenities or contemporary entertainment, enjoy and enviable lifestyle of contrasts from Quayside view.'

But this is mixed-use at a slight distance, to be engaged with by choice. The emphasis is on the act of looking over the city in its diversity from a position above it and in control. One of Crests press releases sums up the image:

'Last chance for a room with a view at Pooles Wharf: Imagine returning home after a hard day at work to a luxury apartment, only minutes from the office, and settling down to relax, glass in hand, while the sun slowly sets over the water..... For most people this is only a dream, but it can become reality with a new home at Crest Homes (south west's) harbourside development at Poole's Wharf, which is

rapidly becoming one of the most prized residential locations in Bristol docks.'

This must be 'safe diversity' emphasised through ways of looking out on the city and through practical references to security:

'Security and peace of mind. Window locks are fitted to all apartment windows and a security chain, viewer and deadlock is fitted to each apartment front door. There is also private, lower ground parking with remote access control and an audio door entrance system'.

This supports perception surveys which emphasise the mental compartmentalisation of the good and bad images of the city. It points to the fragmentation of the images of the city and consequently the compartmentalised spaces that different social groups inhabit. Centrality and accessibility mean centrality and accessibility only to certain spaces of the city.

The central city is portrayed as a luxury consumption good versus the mass production of the suburbs *'Living at quayside view is unique'*. It also emphasises properties being tailored to the needs of the discriminating individual. In the case of Crest homes this involves marketing the fact that they hold focus groups with prior purchasers to inform the design of new developments and the possibility for current purchaser to influence construction:

'In addition to the impressive specification detailed, Crest Homes provides the ability to co-ordinate various features of

the interior designed finish to enable you to create the apartment of your choice. Please discuss your requirements with the Sales Advisor who, subject to the stage of construction, will be able to assist with the personalisation of your new apartment'

The marketing of housing and development sites takes is linked to the promotion of the good city. Developers will often be involved in wider city marketing through brochures, advertisements in the local and national press, and by seeking to influence city news events to brand themselves and the city. Thus Crest's PR company releases a steady stream of press releases aimed to create the image of Crest as a city patron. A press release issued through their PR company on 10 July 1998 illustrates this broader image creation strategy:

'Crest to bring home Matthew: Crest Homes today announced its sponsorship of the Matthew, a replica of the ship which took John Cabot from Bristol to Newfoundland 500 years ago'.

Other press releases relate to the sponsoring of a competition for local artists and contributions to the support of other city events. The purpose of this information dissemination via the local press is to create a positive image of the developer with the city council and the general public as a whole and thereby reduce potential objections to the nature of the housing developments proposed.



Conflicting messages

Each of these attempts to market the city must be set against other sources of information that people receive and which help to shape their views of urban areas:

The media: In the Quality of Life research quoted in the last chapter, the most important factor influencing people's views of a place is crime. While the British Crime Survey does show that crime levels are higher in urban areas, the possibility of becoming a victim of crime are nowhere near as great as surveys show many people believe. This is largely because of the reporting of crime in the media. Research has been undertaken into the effect of national media coverage of the riots of the early 1980s and also into people's perceptions of 'no-go' areas based on local press coverage. The images of threat, disorder and racist stereotyping painted by the media have become bundled up in the phrase 'inner city'. Some of the literature suggests that this image of the inner city informs public perceptions of the whole city, while other authors argue that it is way of associating problems with the inner city as a discrete, hostile and alien place which is therefore not the problem of other people in other parts of the city.

Advertising: While the local television news may be painting a rather threatening picture of urban areas the adverts which appear in the commercial breaks often convey a very different message. Television along with lifestyle programmes and magazines often use a vibrant exciting image of urban areas to sell products to a youth market. Adverts such as the recent AMEX commercials and style articles about designers and loft apartments have created an image of an urban lifestyle to which many young people aspire. As described above, this lifestyle can then be used by estate agents and developers to sell their housing. In advertising the gulf between image and reality is of course, wider than ever. One of the most influential adverts from the 1980s was for a building society which painted a seductive image of loft living. Yet at the same time the same building society was refusing to lend on loft apartments in Manchester. We therefore wanted to test the extent to which our workshop participants subscribed to this image of an urban lifestyle and whether they saw it as achievable.

Popular culture: Powerful messages about the city are also portrayed by books including those for children, film, television (particularly soaps), music and art. These messages can range from the positive and progressive such as the portrait of San Francisco in Maupin's *Tales of the City*, or the films *Smoke*, or *Blue in the Face* to the more threatening film noir of *L.A. Confidential* or the science fiction nightmare of *Bladerunner*. In England popular culture has reflected our traditionally negative attitudes to the city. From the novels of Dickens, to the kitchen sink dramas of the 1950s and 60s and more recently *Trainspotting* the urban imagery is of poverty, grime and struggle which could be seen as part of a longstanding English tradition of seeing the city as morally corrupt. Even when the images are positive such as the *Full Monty* or *Brassed-Off* the story is of heroic struggle in the face of decline.

Yet in youth culture very different images are projected. Just as Liverpool was sustained through the 1960s by the *Beatles* so it is today by internationally famous clubs like Cream while in



The nightmare of the city of the future? La Défense in Paris is reminiscent of imagery from films like *Blade-runner*

While the local television news may be painting a rather threatening picture of urban areas the adverts which appear in the commercial breaks often convey a very different message

Case Study:

MARKETING MANCHESTER

Since 1961 the City of Manchester lost 226,000 people, just over a third of its population. Like Glasgow it is a city which presents some of the greatest challenges and opportunities for urban repopulation. Yet over the last ten years attitudes to living in Manchester city centre have been transformed and this has spread to parts of the inner city like Hulme. This has been possible because of the improvements to the city centre and because of a new confidence in the city.

Urban transformation

It is hard to pin down the origins of this, Manchester does not have an equivalent to Glasgow's *Smiles Better* Campaign. However it is likely that the city's fortunes turned in what became known as Manchester's *Summer of Love* in 1988. For a period the city was the centre of the UK music scene with bands like the Happy Mondays and Stone Roses. In the Hacienda it also had one of the best known nightclubs in the country. This was particularly powerful since the music and fashion was closely associated with the city, from the Happy Monday's *Madchester* to the now infamous tee shirt proclaiming that 'ON THE SIXTH DAY GOD CREATED MANchester'.

The effect of this was to create a virtuous circle. Manchester was seen as a 'trendy' place to be so that it attracted people who wanted to be associated with that image who in turn reinforced the scene happening in the city. Because the image was initially based upon the music business it was transmitted very effectively to a national and indeed international audience. The city also started to be featured

more on television, something helped by the presence of both Granada and the BBC. There was a particularly powerful series in the early 90s called the *Living Soap* which followed a group of students in Manchester and was credited by the City's Universities with creating a huge demand for places. Series like *GBH*, *Prime Suspect* and *Cracker* while painting a less attractive picture of the city still served to raise its profile. More recently the BBC series *Made in Manchester* and the Radio One DJ Mark Radcliffe have helped to perpetuate the city's new image. It also does no harm that Manchester United have enjoyed a prolonged run of success on the national and European stage over the same period.

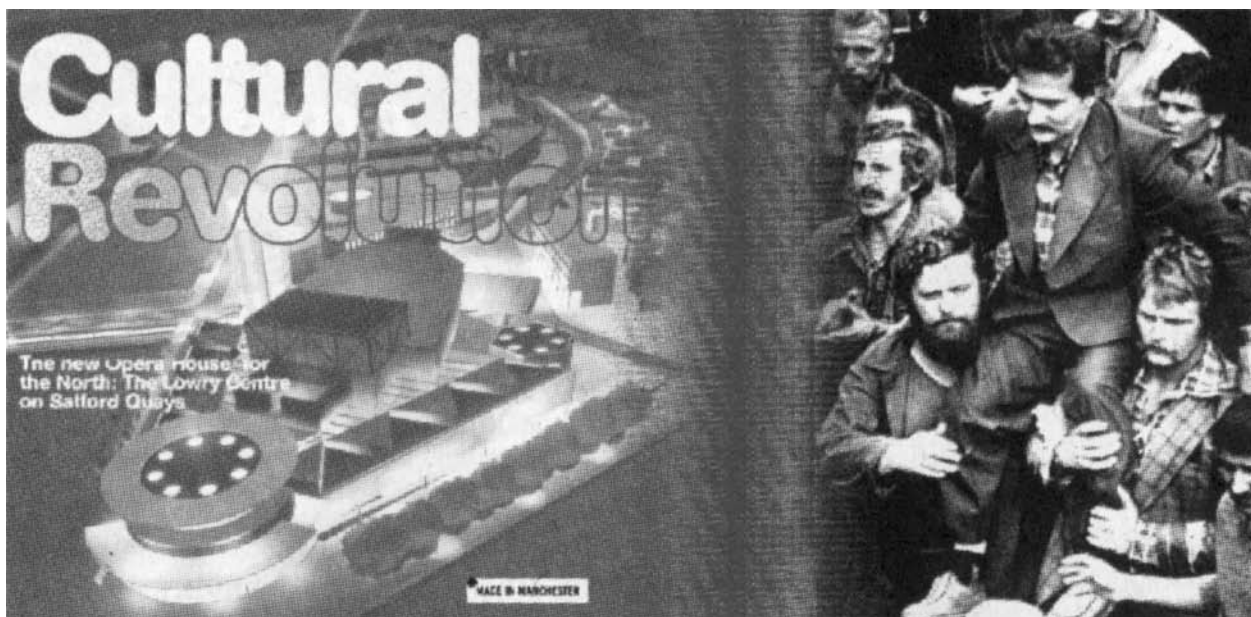
The city has also been very successful in attracting investment. The tram system has given it a continental feel and major new buildings have been completed such as the Bridgewater Concert Hall, the Indoor Arena and the expanded airport. Even the experience of bidding for the Olympics was seen as positive. The Council has been seen as effective and imaginative which in turn has meant that it has attractive good quality staff and been able to forge effective partnerships with the private sector. It was for this reason that the city was able to respond so effectively to the IRA Bomb.

Marketing the city

The innovative approach of the public sector has not been reflected in the marketing of the city. It is true that the sections of the council and the former Central Manchester Development Corporation concerned with regeneration have used

design and style as much as the private sector. However this has been separate from activities to promote the city which remain largely targeted either at inward investment or at winning the Olympic or Commonwealth Games. This came to a head in 1996 when *Marketing Manchester*, the organisation responsible for promoting the city, launched its new logo and slogan – '*Manchester: We are up and going*'. This was so far out of step with the spirit of the city that the McEnroe Group ('you can't be serious') was established to campaign that it should be abandoned. This group included people like Tony Wilson of Factory Records, Elliot Rashman (the man behind Simply Red) and Tom Bloxham of Urban Splash. As the opening paragraph of their response asked, why is it that '*the marketing and design which attaches itself to local pop groups, restaurants, and bar culture... is of international standard... while the marketing and design which attaches itself to major items of civic and regional importance is frequently little better than mediocre*'. Their alternative strap line was '*Made in Manchester*' and they used the theme of *revolution* in a series of billboards designed by leading local designers.

The reinvention of Manchester has still a long way to go. Recent population projections have shown that the city's population loss may have slowed to a trickle but is yet to be reversed. The image of the city centre may have changed but much of the inner city is still very depressed, despite regeneration efforts. However Manchester's transformation illustrates how many UK cities are effectively recreating their image.



Manchester bands like the *Happy Mondays*, *New Order* and *Oasis* have projected the city as a centre for youth culture to an international market. To test the impact of these influences the presentation given to the workshops used imagery from films such as *Bladerunner* along with children's books and images for youth culture.

Scripting the city

Other than some research on the impact of place marketing in attracting new businesses, there is very little detailed research evidence on the links between marketing and sources of information and the image of the city held by various sub-groups of the population. This may be an area worthy of further primary research. However some pointers can be gained from the fields of psychology and media studies as to how these conflicting messages are taken on board by different groups.

In the past the approach of cognitive psychology was to explore the differences between what people felt about the city and the reality. However it is increasingly recognised that the reality of urban life is much less important than the way that people experience it. Each person has his or her own reality of the city. Advertisers use this by creating, what psychologists call, different 'scripts' of the city to appeal to different groups. So Bristol can, at the same time, be a hotbed of youth culture and a cosy provincial city depending on who you are and who you are selling to. This relationship between the people giving these messages and those receiving them is collaborative. The new urban middle-classes, for example, are creating an urban lifestyle and this is being reflected and developed by advertisers. As the residential marketing literature shows, this is not an inclusive idea of the city. Quite the opposite, it relies on the idea of there being a select group of urbane cognoscenti.

This suggests that there is no one message or image that can or should be used to sell the idea of urban living. Different ideas about what urban areas are and what they can offer will appeal to different groups. Through the workshops we therefore sought to explore the way that different age groups in particular 'script' the city and how this could be translated into promotional messages that would appeal to them.

Each person has his or her own reality of the city. Advertisers use this by creating what psychologists call, different 'scripts' of the city to appeal to different groups

Conclusions from the literature review

- Some of the most advanced techniques to sell urban areas have been developed by the tourist industry that now tends to target very tailored messages to different groups.
- The residential marketing of urban lifestyle has been largely aimed at young, upwardly mobile 'gentrifiers' and there has been very little work to 'sell' the city to other groups.
- Residential developers sell urban areas using images of lifestyles that appeal to discerning exclusive people wishing to set themselves apart from the 'herd' as represented by suburbia.
- Most of the work on place marketing has sought to 'correct' negative images of the city and promote a positive economic image to attract businesses. Some of these campaigns have been successful in changing perceptions of areas but the effect can be short-lived.
- Many of the messages put out by different groups and by the media conflict and contradict each other.
- While density and a mix of uses are promoted as part of the character of urban areas, advertising also emphasises the ability of residents to cut themselves off from this if desired.
- The media mechanisms of the selling of urban lifestyle is one of collaboration between the consumer and the seller each reinforcing each others' image of the city and urban lifestyles.
- Cities can mean very different things to different people. Advertisers use these different and sometimes conflicting images to appeal to different groups. Yet cities are so complex that many of these images can be true at the same time.
- There is very little research into the links between sources of information on the city and the images held by different groups in the population.

04

Our research approach

In which we describe our research methodology including the choice of workshop location, the way in which participants were recruited and the structure of the events

The brief for the research was to explore in more detail the issues arising from the literature review and to gain a detailed understanding of people's attitudes to urban areas and how they are formed. This is best achieved through a qualitative research approach, of which focus groups are perhaps the most widely known. However, it was decided that focus groups, which normally run for two hours with up to ten participants, would not allow sufficient time to test current attitudes, how they were formed and how they might be changed. We therefore opted for the more intensive technique of a *Citizen's Workshop*, which brings together a slightly larger number of people – in this case between 12 and 14 – for a whole day, in a series of discussions and exercises led by trained moderators. This format allows time to introduce stimulus material, and to gauge reactions to new ideas. In this chapter we describe the three workshops and how they were organised.

Workshops were held in Manchester, Bristol and London. While these cities are unique, it was felt that each had characteristics relevant to other areas

Location of the workshops

With just three workshops it was clearly impossible to cover all of the potential urban areas where people could be attracted to live. It was however decided to have workshops in Manchester, Bristol and London. While each of these cities is unique, it was felt that each had certain characteristics that were relevant to other areas.

Manchester: The first workshop took place in Manchester as representative of a large industrial city that has experienced significant population loss. It is therefore likely to be comparable to other large provincial cities such as Glasgow, Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Newcastle and indeed to smaller places like Coventry, Bradford and Leicester. These cities are characterised by relatively small but attractive city centres where there has been some residential development. In each case this is surrounded by an extensive inner city and a ring of prosperous outer suburbs. As a result house prices in these cities tend to rise the further out of the city you go.

Bristol: The second workshop took place in Bristol which is a more compact but prosperous city with a large city centre. While there are deprived

inner city areas like St. Paul's near the centre of Bristol there are also very desirable central areas like Clifton and many of the poorer areas are on the edge of the city. In contrast to Manchester the tendency is therefore for house prices to fall as you move out of the city. Bristol could therefore be seen as comparable to cities such as Oxford, Cambridge, York, Chester, Bath, and Edinburgh.

London: The third workshop took place in London, which is not comparable to anywhere else in the UK due to its size and history. However since it is three times larger than any other UK city it was impossible to ignore. It is also a much more complex city than any other in the UK with central urban areas which are very desirable, cheek by jowl with areas of deprivation as intense as in any provincial city.

Location of Recruitment

For each city, specific areas were selected to represent both urban and suburban areas. Recruiters were instructed to ensure that residents of each area were represented at the workshop. There is no clear definition of what constitutes urban and suburban areas. However for the purpose of selecting workshop participants we drew a line from the centre of each city to the edge and selected two districts from central areas and two from more peripheral areas. The districts targeted are detailed in the box below.

Location of workshop recruitment		
MANCHESTER		
Urban	■	City Centre
	■	Whalley Range
Suburban	■	Didsbury
	■	Cheadle Hulme
BRISTOL		
Urban	■	Redland
	■	Clifton
Suburban	■	Thornbury
	■	Stoke Bishop
	■	Almondsbury
LONDON		
Urban	■	South Bank/Shad Thames
	■	Clapham
Suburban	■	Carshalton
	■	Worcester Park
	■	Surbiton

The recruitment was targeted at people suggested by the literature review as being *persuadable* in terms of choosing an urban lifestyle

Selection of workshop participants

Participants for the workshops were recruited through a series of face-to-face interviews in their homes by MORI recruiters. In order to ensure that the views of relevant groups of people were represented at the workshops, recruiters were given questionnaires and criteria, drawn up with the Urban Task Force, to select respondents. The following criteria were set:

- exclude those with young children in the household
- ensure a mix of sexes
- a mixed age range, slightly skewed towards younger age groups (aged 18-29)
- a mixture of people from urban/suburban areas
- a mix of 'cityphiles' and 'cityphobes'
- skewed towards higher social grades (ABC1)
- skewed towards people considering moving

The most important element of this is that recruitment was targeted at people suggested by the literature review as being *persuadable* in terms of choosing an urban lifestyle. This meant that we excluded the already *converted* (people already living in city centre apartments) and also those considered *unpersuadable* at present (families with young children).

It is important to stress that in doing this we are not suggesting that urban areas are inappropriate for families. Many of the urban areas from which we selected workshop participants are very popular with families. However migration into urban areas has tended to happen in waves. The first wave is made up of what could be called *urban pioneers* who we excluded from consideration as being the already converted. The following wave consists of *urban settlers* who follow the lead given by the urban pioneers but who may have very dif-

We targeted the main potential market for urban housing and the most important component of household growth - childless households

ferent motivations. The literature review suggested that both the pioneers and settlers tended not to include young families. As time goes by many of the pioneers and settlers will, of course, start families and will hopefully remain in urban areas when they do. In addition to this future waves of inward migration to urban areas will undoubtedly include more and more families as the environment, services and facilities are improved. It is important to bear in mind this overall journey towards urban

repopulation but our concern here is with the next few steps. This is why we have focused specifically on *urban settlers* and have therefore excluded families with young children. As we described in Chapter 2, it is also true that households without young children make up the majority of UK households at present (in the 1991 census only 30% of all households included children) as well as the vast majority of projected household growth.

The recruitment criteria also included one attitudinal question - 'to what extent do you agree or disagree that you would prefer to live in the city than the suburbs?' This was used to achieve a mix of 'cityphiles' and 'cityphobes'. The detailed breakdown of participants at each workshop is included on the adjacent table.

Structure of the workshops

The workshops took place over consecutive Saturdays in November 1998. The structure for each was planned in advance and a topic guide (drawn up in conjunction with the Task Force) was used as a guide to the discussion as illustrated in the box on the opposite page.

Following a brief introduction to the day, participants in each workshop were split into two smaller groups of 5-8 people in order to help the flow of the discussion. In Manchester and London the split was made by age (with older and younger people separated) while in Bristol the division was according to attitudes towards the city (cityphiles and cityphobes in different groups).

The smaller groups first discussed their general perceptions of urban lifestyles and how these were formed. Following lunch participants were shown a presentation on different aspects of living in the city. This supplemented videos shown over lunch with depictions of urban areas on television along with a city marketing video of Bristol and publicity material from urban housebuilders. The presentation sought to sell the idea of urban living using images of the city in history, of continental cities and attractive urban places in the UK. Images were also used of the city as a focus for the arts, sport, leisure and entertainment along with a series of pictures of new urban housing showing the sort of residential urban environments that can be created.

Reactions to the presentation were tested in the afternoon session to see whether it had

Workshop participants				
	M/C	Bristol	London	Total
Sex				
Male	6	9	6	21
Female	7	6	6	19
Area				
Urban	7	7	5	19
Suburban	6	8	7	21
Age				
18-29	7	6	4	17
30-44	0	3	4	7
45-60	4	6	4	14
61+	2	0	0	2
Social class				
AB 8	5	8	21	
C1 5	10	4	19	
Thinking of moving				
Yes	7	7	5	19
No	6	8	7	21
Number in h/hold				
One 5	5	5	15	
More than one	8	10	7	25
Children				
No children	9	10	9	28
Children left home	4	5	3	12
Attitudes towards City				
Cityphile	6	6	6	18
Cityphobe	7	7	6	20
TOTAL	13	15	12	40

affected the participants' opinions of urban areas. Using the information from the presentation and other materials, participants were then asked to develop a marketing plan to promote urban living. In the final session the two groups were brought together to discuss their different conclusions. In addition to the discussions, participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire at the beginning of the day and another identical questionnaire at the end of the day.

Interviews with Opinion Leaders

Following the workshops, depth interviews were conducted with professionals who have a role in the presentation of images of urban living or locations. The issues to have come out of the workshops were put to these 'opinion formers' to test whether they corresponded to their experience along with wider discussions about how each they were involved in forming images of urban living/locations. Each interview lasted around 30-60 minutes and was conducted by a member of the project team. Twelve interviews were conducted in total among registered social landlords, private house builders, estate agents and journalists in the same three cities (Manchester, Bristol and London)

Structure of the workshops

- Introduction (all participants)
- Discussion 1 - General attitudes to urban lifestyle and how these are formed (smaller groups)
- Lunch
- Presentation – Selling the City (all participants)
- Discussion 2 - Reaction to the presentation and marketing plans (smaller groups)
- Reporting back (all participants)

as the workshops. Interviewees were selected on the basis of suggestions made by the Urban Task Force. As with the citizens' workshops a topic guide for each group of professionals was drawn up in conjunction with the Urban Task Force and was used by the interviewer as a guide.

The issues to have come out of the workshops were put to 'opinion formers' to test whether they corresponded to their experience

05

Views from the citizens' workshops

In which we describe the discussions at the workshops. We look first at people's views about the places where they live and at the differences between Manchester, Bristol and London. We then look at how people balance priorities, how their opinions are formed and the factors which shape their views.

We described in the last chapter the way in which the citizens' workshops were organised. The nature of such workshops is that they generate a huge amount of material – the transcripts amount to some 400 pages – and that much of this information is unfocused. We must also recognise that the numbers involved in the workshops were very small. Our role has therefore been to sift through this material to draw out themes and conclusions in the context of the literature review and also our wider knowledge of urban areas. In this chapter we therefore describe the discussions that took place at the workshops and in Chapter 7 we develop this into a series of five key themes.

In the following discussion we have sought to capture the flavour of the workshops. Many very good, perceptive points were made by individual participants at the workshops but un-

less they were picked up by a significant number of people and came up again at other workshops they have not been included. While we can make no claim for them being statistically significant, we do believe that they give a valuable insight into the way that people feel about urban areas and how their views might be influenced.

Place specific views

Much of the discussion at the workshops focused on people's views of different types of area and specifically where they currently lived. While it is true that participants had been selected for their 'persuasibility' towards urban living we were nevertheless surprised by how pro urban the tenor of the discussion was. This was true of people living in both suburban and urban areas and also of those classified as 'cityphiles' and 'cityphobes'. Indeed in Bristol, where the group was split on the basis of their attitudes to urban area it was difficult to work out which group contained the 'cityphiles' and which the 'cityphobes'.

It was also true that people have very positive attitudes to the places where they currently live. Indeed in London one of the groups was asked to imagine their ideal urban area and they all chose their current neighbourhood. In addition to these general views the following place specific

We were surprised by how pro-urban the tenor of the discussion was. This was true of people living in both suburban and urban areas and also of those classified as 'cityphiles' and 'cityphobes'

views were evident from the workshops:

Manchester: Most of the participants liked living in Manchester. Many of those in the older age group had lived in the city for most of their lives whereas the younger people had come as students. Most felt that the city had improved greatly over recent years although the older group was very negative about the council, which coloured their views of the city as a whole - *'To me the bad thing about living in Manchester is the Council'*. The things that they liked about Manchester were the facilities available in the city centre but also the vitality and village feel of district centres like Didsbury and Chorlton. They also valued the cultural and ethnic diversity of the city although there were more worries about crime, drugs and prostitution than in the other workshops.

Bristol: Most of the participants in Bristol liked the city. One longstanding resident of a central area felt that it was going downhill because of too many non-Bristol people and students moving in and another who had recently moved to the city found it unfriendly. However the majority view was that it was a good place to live because it had all the facilities of a big city and yet was compact, had lots of open space (because of the Gorge), was well kept and close to the countryside - *'You have the benefits of the country with the city on hand. I can walk to the city centre and I don't have to use my car... ideally you want the*

'You have the benefits of the country with the city on hand. I can walk to the city centre and I don't have to use my car... ideally you want the country in the middle of the

country in the middle of the city'. A number of people compared Bristol favourably to London where they had lived even though their London friends looked down on them for *'living in the sticks'*.

The discussions in Bristol were influenced by Bradley Stoke, a large suburban extension to the city which is locally known as 'sadly broke' because of the levels of negative equity that existed in the early 1990s. This was generally regarded as a poor place to live - indeed one participant had moved from Bradley Stoke into the city centre despite the fact that he worked five minutes away from his old home. These attitudes tended mean that the Bristol workshop was much less positive about suburbia.

London: The uniqueness of London was reflected in the different attitudes of the participants. While most liked where they lived and valued proximity to the facilities that the city could offer, they were

Participants liked Bristol because it had all the facilities of a big city, was compact and yet had lots of open space



With only a couple of exceptions participants relished the diversity of urban areas which is in contrast to most surveys of suburban housebuyers

much more concerned about traffic congestion. Their ideal location seemed to be a local centre like Clapham or Lavender Hill with a village atmosphere and a range of facilities so you did not need to go into the centre. However unlike Manchester and Bristol there was far greater fluidity about attitudes to different areas. This was partly because the turnover of residents undermined communities – *'In a way it is a shame, because I moved there in the first place because it was small with lots of ethnic minorities and character. All the Fulham people have moved over now, and where as before it was very diverse, culturally it is becoming like Little Chelsea'*. Because of this it was felt that your address said much more about you in London than elsewhere – *'you are a reflection of where you live'*. For example Chelsea evoked money, Camden was budding artists while Clapham suggested yuppies.

Balancing priorities

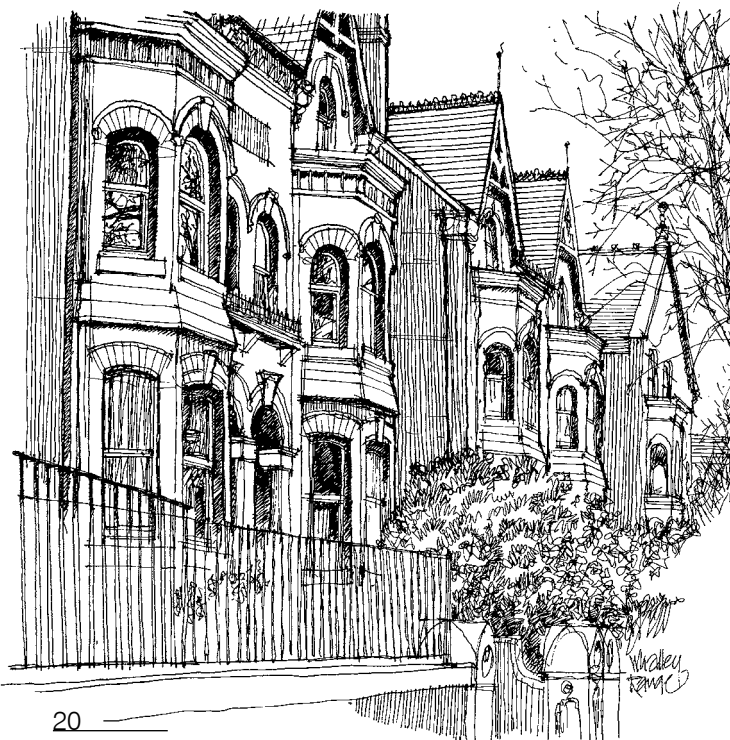
The responses to a range of questions about where they lived, whether they were considering moving and where they would move illustrated a number

of tensions in what participants were looking for from a residential environment:

- They liked access to shops and facilities – *'Places like Chorlton are like a self-contained small Manchester'* – but disliked noise and congestion – *'It was never really dark and there was never any peace or quiet... you had the dawn chorus when you were trying to sleep'* (referring to Fallowfield, Manchester). Suburban areas were regarded as dead and boring – *'it's a ghost town really... culturally it's a ghetto'* (referring to Surbiton).
- They wanted access to the countryside and greenery but also to be able to walk into the city or at least to local facilities – *'Clifton is both on the edge and in the middle'* (Bristol). This highlighted a strong preference for compact or concentrated centres.
- With only a couple of exceptions they relished the diversity of urban areas which is in contrast to most surveys of suburban housebuyers – *'I have an Asian family on one side, I have some hippies on the other and I wouldn't swap them for the world'* (Manchester). While there was undoubtedly some self-censorship going on to avoid causing offence this feeling seemed genuine

In assessing the ideal place to live people would weigh up these competing and often contradictory factors. They accepted that no one area could possibly meet all of their needs and desires. However they tended to feel that in choosing the area where they currently lived they had struck the best possible balance between these competing needs. This was however informed by what they could afford. Most of them conceded that there were areas which were more desirable than where they currently lived (either more suburban or more urban). These areas were however seen as being out of their reach and therefore not even worth considering. They also accepted that there were problems with their current neighbourhoods, be it the disturbance of living in towns or the dullness of the suburb, but felt that these were worth putting up with because they were outweighed by the benefits – *'You pay a price for having all your friends around, and having everything at your fingertips... But at this stage of my life, yes, I am willing to pay that price'* (London)

People liked areas such as Whalley Range in Manchester because they combined what might be called 'suburban' and 'urban' qualities



This suggests that people's residential choices are a balance between what could be called urban and suburban aspirations. This balance is important because for many people it seems it does not take a great deal for it to tip one way or the other.

How attitudes are formed

Quite a lot of discussion at the workshops explored how these attitudes had been formed and the balance between personal experience, the media, advertising, and specific attempts to market urban areas. This included discussions of which messages they most trusted and which campaigns had been the most effective. This confirmed the conclusions of the literature review in that the participants recognised that they were faced with a range of conflicting messages about the city and each had synthesised these messages into their own view or 'script' of the city.

In general the young people were more influenced by advertising imagery and what the Manchester group called the *'Friends'* lifestyle. They recognised that this was a long way from their own experience of living in the city but nevertheless regarded it as powerful aspiration – *'All those American sitcoms, Friends and Seinfeld, they all have huge warehouses. And they haven't got any kids or dependants – so this is what you should aspire to if you are single'* (Manchester). The younger people also seemed to take less notice of negative press coverage, partly because there was a certain cachet of living in apparently 'dangerous' areas and partly because it did not accord with their personal experience – *'It is not like people imagine it to be. If you walk through the streets of St. Paul's at night I could guarantee you would be quite*



PHOTO: BILL HARRIS



PHOTO: JAN CHLEBIK

Images of cultural vitality like New York's China Town (below) and street cafes (above) were viewed very positively. However these were seen as generic images and not relevant to people's daily experience

safe... people who live there are quite normal, just like you and me' (Bristol). In contrast the older group did not relate to media images of urban lifestyles and were more likely to believe negative press coverage. This tended to be because their direct experience of the city, especially at night, was more limited than the younger group.

Reactions to the presentation

The early part of the afternoon was spent discussing reactions to the presentation. The view from the majority of people was that it was a worthy attempt at selling urban living, but that it was just that - a sales job. It was seen to overemphasise the good points and ignore the bad points like crime, congestion, and grime. The participants knew enough about the reality of the city to know that these problems were real and would have been more comforted by a presentation which provided reassurance on these points rather than glossing them over. There was also a feeling that the slides showed the extreme elements of cities whereas most urban areas are dull – *'You were showing the best and then the worst - you didn't show the drab stuff that*

People's residential choices are a balance between what could be called urban and suburban aspirations. For many people it seems it does not take a great deal for this balance to tip one way or the other

They were concerned that the presentation was too generic - there was no point selling the city as a whole, you had to sell Bristol or Manchester, or better still, districts within those cities

PHOTO: JAN CHLEBIK



Images such as this elicited a very mixed reaction. Some felt that the woman was in great danger while other younger women felt that it was representative of their experience

most of us have to live with' (Bristol). For those already sold on the idea of urban living, especially in London, it was preaching to the converted – *'At the time I thought so what, we know all this'* (London) – *'I was a bit biased, it just said what I feel'* (Manchester).

They were also concerned that the presentation was too generic. They felt that there was no point selling the city as a whole, you had to sell Bristol or Manchester, or better still, districts within those cities. The promotional video of Bristol was criticised because it could have been anywhere and failed to emphasise the city's distinctiveness – *'If it hadn't been for the shots of the Balloon Fest, that video could have been any city in the British Isles. There was nothing particular about Bristol'*.

Some of the images created very ambivalent reactions. A picture of New York dominated by neon lights was exciting to some, repellent to others and there was a similar reaction to a football crowd. One picture in particular, of a woman

walking home late at night in stocking feet, was seen by some women as a picture of someone in extreme danger while to other women it summed up their experience of the city – *'I do it all the time, I have walked from Leicester Square to Clapham like that with no problems'* (London).

Housing

The element of the presentation that had the greatest impact was the pictures of urban housing. These seemed to make the idea of urban living more real and attractive to people – *'Towards the end there were some slides of new developments... which showed what the city could be compared to what it is'* (London). This however prompted a number of discussions about contemporary verses traditional design. While some people were excited by modern design (the Cube houses in Rotterdam being particularly popular), most distrusted it. In general the feeling was that new housing was cramped, poorly built and lacked storage. *'What pisses me off about modern buildings is the meanness of the proportions'* (Manchester) – *'There is something about new houses where everything seems just a little bit tacky, planned and a bit shoddy'* (London).

It was also widely felt by participants that new housing lacked 'soul' and was 'samey'. In all three workshops the preference was for traditional design – *'What [the presentation] said to me was that if you took the old and preserved it to the present it is obviously much more pleasing than the new. There is a sense of attachment to old things, as long as they are brought up to date with proper facilities'* (Bristol) – *'My own preference is for the old style house, with interesting rooms and spaces, with high ceilings... there is something more individual about them'* (Manchester) – *'I'd live in a new house providing it looked old'* (London). These views are linked to an aversion to risk that we return to in Chapter 7; people view modern design as inherently more risky than traditional – *'Some of the architecture was quite nice, but I could see it getting dated. Victorian is always going to be nice and classic'* (Bristol).

Community, Identity and Soul

'Soul' was seen as a very desirable attribute that applied to areas as well as buildings, and there was a feeling that places that had developed over a long period in a natural or unplanned way had more soul – *'You can't contrive soul, it takes time'* (London) – *'These loft conversions work because the buildings themselves have a soul. All you are doing is emphasising*

the positive elements of living in that type of space. They have a soul because they are not built by the people in charge of planning at the moment' (Manchester) - 'I think that cities that work are cities with character, that are cosmopolitan. Different sorts of architecture, different sorts of people, different sorts of culture, all sharing the same place' (London). This reflects the desire for places to have their own identity often summed up in the concept of centres having a 'village' feel - 'I moved out of Didsbury partly because I really wanted a place with an identity - I moved into Gatley, which I consider still, despite everything else to be a village' (Manchester) - 'I feel I am in a village but close to the city. There is so much of a sense of community' (London referring to Lavender Hill) - 'I think Clifton has more of a community than lots of other places... it is renowned for it. It is a village within a city' (Bristol).

These ideas of identity and soul are clearly linked to perceptions of community. As with the terms that we discuss in Chapter 7, community means different things to different people. The older participants, who were also more likely to be from suburban areas, tended to emphasise more formal local organisations and knowing neighbours when describing strong communities - *'Yes it has a strong community. It has Surbiton Chamber of Commerce, you have got Surbiton Round Table... Five years ago the local people got together and they closed down the local high street and had a fair' (London) - 'Yes, yes there*



PHOTO: NICHOLAS FALK

is a sense of community - everybody knows one another, when something happens you know what is going on... because you really haven't got anywhere to go' (London).

For younger, more urban participants community was more about shared interests and identity than about knowing individual neighbours well - *'Community is not where you have to know what your neighbour*

There was a positive reaction to pictures of 'real' urban housing such as the 'Cube' housing in Rotterdam. Participants also liked areas with 'soul' and a village identity like Mosely in Birmingham (below)

'Soul' was seen as a very desirable attribute that applied to areas as well as buildings - there was a feeling that places that had developed over a long period in a natural or unplanned way had more soul



The younger group opted to sell the excitement of urban living whereas the older groups took a more conservative approach emphasising traditional values, conventional design, stability and safety

does, you just know that everybody enjoys living (there) for the social life, for the convenience...but it doesn't mean you have to know all your neighbours and what they are doing, and twitch the curtains all the time' (London). There is a strong feeling among younger people in particular that the most successful communities grow up in an organic way. However, not all agree that all planned developments are necessarily soulless – just that they can take longer to develop their own identity – 'Something happens that people mutually agree is a good thing – something that isn't planned... nobody planned Camden Market and it has spread to the type of people that go there and the type of people moving into Camden... Now it is being planned and it is losing it a bit' (London) - 'You can start with a blank sheet and put that there and that there and it can work. But what gives it soul is when people move in' (London). The most critical factors were seen to be the people who live in an area, and in particular the need for longer-term residents who are committed to the area – 'I don't really think there is that type of community, because first of all there are too many transient people in there and possibly the area is too new... people come in, stay for a few years, make a killing and getting out' (London) – 'The area where I live is full of students and that prohibits a community feeling. Students are not really prepared to throw themselves into the life of the street – they are more involved with their own particular lifestyle' (Bristol).

Places like Camden and Deptford (below) were seen as having soul



PHOTO: CHARLIE BAKER

Marketing campaigns

The workshop participants were asked to devise marketing strategies which had the potential to sell the idea of urban living to them. The campaigns reflected the key messages from the earlier discussions. The younger group in Manchester and London opted to sell the excitement of urban living, using marketing imagery of urban lifestyles:

'Fall out of bed and into work...and then they do lunch with their friends, it is a society, it is a community they can live in. In the evenings they would go to the bars and they would have different friends in different bars. And then we would emphasise the famous things that Manchester has that nowhere else has like the GMEX and all the famous artists coming to it... We don't want to completely quash the fact that there is drug use and things, we want to be honest...and mainly convey that if you live in Manchester you have freedom, it is good socialising, you can get a job, it is sexy and you can score!'

However the Bristol groups and the older groups in Manchester and London took a more conservative approach emphasising traditional values, conventional design, stability and safety.

'Firstly, to appeal to an outsider, the name would be important and it would have make you feel proud to belong to it...which would be something olde worlde... so it would give you an identity. Secondly it must have a defined perimeter so that it would be a community in its own right. Thirdly it must have facilities around it – it must have its corner shop where you can buy your milk, cheese and bread. Fourthly you should have somewhere to park your car and your own patch of green'.

Changing perceptions

Participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire at the beginning of the day and another identical questionnaire at the end of the day. The results of the boxed inserts are outlined in the boxed insert.

Whilst only indicative given the number of participants, these results are quite encouraging since they show that people's views did shift during the day. The most significant shift was in the number of people who felt that *cities had become better places to live in recent years*; this suggests that housing is a factor where current attitudes could

be changed most successfully. At the same time there was little change in peoples' views of the positive aspects of the city such as convenience, as well as negative aspects such as living too close to neighbours. This suggests that people are particularly persuadable when given information about the improvements that have taken place in cities and are willing to accept that they are not up-to-date with recent changes. It may be an important issue for the Task Force that any messages should be realistic and concentrate on emphasising recent improvements, which people may not yet be aware of.

The most significant shift was in the number of people who felt that *cities had become better places to live in recent years*

Self completion questionnaire results

	MANCHESTER			BRISTOL			LONDON			TOTAL		
	AGREE AM	AGREE PM	CHANGE	AGREE AM	AGREE PM	CHANGE	AGREE AM	AGREE PM	CHANGE	AGREE AM	AGREE PM	CHANGE
Living in cities means you have less space in your home	5	5	0	8	8	0	5	7	+2	18	20	+2
More people want to live in cities than ever before	3	5	+2	4	5	+1	2	4	+2	9	14	+5
Suburbs are as stylish as the city	3	4	+1	2	1	-1	6	5	-1	11	10	-1
Living in the city means that you have everything on your doorstep	9	9	0	12	13	+1	10	9	-1	31	31	0
Cities are more dangerous \to live in than the suburbs or countryside	8	8	0	6	8	+2	4	4	0	18	20	+2
Cities have become better places to live in recent years	7	11	+4	6	12	+6	3	6	+3	16	29	+13
The quality of housing in cities is the same as the suburbs or countryside	2	4	+2	5	5	0	1	3	+2	8	12	+4
Living in the city is more convenient than living in the suburbs or the countryside	10	10	0	14	14	0	7	8	+1	31	32	+1
Living in the city means that you live too close to your neighbours	2	1	-1	7	5	-2	7	7	0	16	13	-3
Living in the city is more exciting than living outside the city	9	10	+1	10	14	+4	6	9	+3	25	33	+8

06

The opinion formers

In which we describe the views expressed at our interviews with housing developers, estate agents, journalists and the manager of a regeneration agency involved in marketing urban areas. We look first at different approaches to selling urban housing in the private and social sectors before looking at the ways that different organisations promote urban living

As part of the research we followed up the workshops with a series of 12 interviews with opinion-formers in the field of development and urban housing. These included four private and two social housing developers, estate agents, journalists, and the manager of a regeneration agency. The interviewees were agreed in conjunction with the Urban Task Force and each was assured that their comments would not be attributed to them. The aim of the interviews was to get initial reactions to the themes to emerge from the workshops.

Selling urban housing

The majority of the interviewees were developers or agents involved in selling urban housing. Their response uncovered two very different approaches to marketing housing in urban areas:

The market makers: Two of the developers that we spoke to focus their activity on creating a mar-

ket for housing in areas where it does not currently exist. This allows them to acquire land or buildings cheaply and to achieve substantial increases in value as a result of their development. They need a critical mass of at least a hundred units so that they can create an image for the development but are otherwise not overly concerned about proximity to run-down areas that other developers might see as a problem. Innovative marketing, quality design, and price discounting is used to achieve early sales and to generate a momentum for each development so that prices can be increased in the later stages. Both for the developers and the buyers the risks are higher than with traditional housing but so are the potential returns. The marketing literature will emphasise this by suggesting that people are buying into an up and coming area and will also use the sort of bespoke, lifestyle associations highlighted by our literature review.

The market builders: The second type of developer is very different to the market maker. These are more numerous and are often linked to volume housebuilders. They have typically moved into urban areas to diversify their product and will consider both urban and suburban sites. These developers exploit existing markets rather than

There are two very different approaches to marketing housing in urban areas - the market maker and the market builder

creating their own. They prefer to come in after the market makers have done their work and they also tend to avoid proximity to social housing or run down areas. As a result both the developers and their buyers take fewer risks. This is reflected in their house designs which tend to be more traditional and which make use of Georgian or Victorian features. In contrast to the market makers these developers play down the risks of the development emphasising factors such as an established community. In secondary urban locations they are likely to emphasise affordability – ‘all the benefits of urban living at half the price!’. The market makers by contrast are more bullish about the benefits of their development and would seek to generate higher values.

As we describe in the next chapter these different types of developer relate to the different perceptions that people have of the risk of living in urban areas. A range of developers’ literature was made available at the workshops. While the innovative, design led material of the market maker developers was seen as attractive and to be in tune with people’s aspirations about urban lifestyles, it tended to be the more traditional housing of the market builders that participants found most appealing.

While it is true that these two types of urban developer build very different types of housing, both recognised the discontentment voiced at the workshops about the quality of modern housing. They accepted that the public viewed private housing as lacking in variety, being small, poorly built and ‘boxy’. Developers are therefore increasingly seeking to sell housing with interesting or unusual features. This is sometimes achieved with contemporary design however most developers are likely to resort to traditional design features to create variety as well as seeking to increase floor areas.

Indeed the market builders saw traditional design as a powerful tool to overcome their customers’ concerns about urban housing. They had undertaken their own market research and come to very similar conclusions to those voiced at our workshops. By contrast the market makers tended to use contemporary design and argued that it was wrong to design housing through focus groups. In their experience quality, contemporary design was a positive selling point and they suggested that there was a degree of frustration in

While the market maker developers were seen as attractive it tended to be the more traditional housing of the market builders that people found most appealing

the market that many ‘warehouse’ apartments are designed internally to look like traditional homes.

Social housing

These views were also echoed by the social housing developers that we interviewed. They recognise that, if it is to be successful, their housing must be popular with tenants and must be researched and marketed as thoroughly as it would be in the private sector. As with private developers social housing developers tend to split into those who are prepared to innovate and those who are more conservative and who will only follow the lead given by others.

One of the interviewees suggested that, because social housing developers deal mainly with people nominated by local councils, they tend to concentrate on families which some see as less

The Urban Splash fridge making the point that everything you could ever want is within a few minutes of your city centre flat



PHOTO: JOHN KEENAN

PHOTO: NICK BROWN COURTESY HURFORD, SALVI, CARR AND CURRELL & CO



Estate agent literature for Royle Wenlock Basin in London which concentrates as much on marketing the location as it does on the building

relevant to urban areas. They did however suggest that this was wrong and that urban locations were quite suitable for families and also for other priority groups such as the elderly and single parents. Indeed in the interviewees experience urban areas had many advantages for vulnerable groups because they were not isolated from social networks, facilities such as shops and employment.

One of the social housing developers who has been most active in innovative urban housing development suggested that such contemporary buildings were a sign of confidence in the future of their areas and communities. They did not involve tenants in this level of discussion because they felt that they were unlikely to fully understand the design choices. They realised that this could be viewed as patronising, but the outcome had generally been very positive and the tenants were very happy with their properties. This echoes the above views of the private housebuilders who use contemporary design.

Place marketing

A number of the people that we spoke to were involved in shaping attitudes to urban areas, either as a conscious marketing exercise or as journalists. The larger agents have research departments and are used to thinking in terms of marketing concepts like 'Dinkies (double income no children)', and of customers who want a first rung on the housing ladder. In their marketing brochures they are contributing to the campaigns to re-establish urban areas as places to live. They recognise that its 'all about lifestyle these days', with an emphasis on local facilities and social life. Terms such as 'brown field development' are therefore counter-productive. People want something different, 'not just a box', as they want to differentiate themselves or express their own identity. They are likely to emphasise the convenience of the location, its character and the local amenities. In this way they are offering a lifestyle package which corresponds with the aspirations voiced at the workshops. .

We also asked estate agents about the extent to which people seek out urban characteristics such as diversity, vitality and a mixture of uses. Here there seemed to be a difference between London and the other cities. In London people seem to embrace urban living more fully than in Manchester and Bristol. Estate agents are more likely to emphasise the cosmopolitan mix and variety of neighbourhoods in London whereas in the other cities they emphasise the ability to control and escape from these things if desired. As suggested at the London workshop there is also much more fluidity about the most desirable places to live in the capital. There is an entire industry of estate agents, advertisers, style gurus and journalists who

The larger agents are contributing to the campaigns to re-establish urban areas as places to live. They recognise that its 'all about lifestyle these days', with an emphasis on local facilities and social life

thrive off this fluidity which is simply not a feature of other UK cities. The game is to spot the up and coming areas in London and to buy before prices start to rise. In this process publications like the Evening Standard's property section or the Guardian's Space supplement (which is only available in London) can have a significant impact on the market. Because of this people in London view at least some run-down urban areas as good investments. By contrast in other cities the inner city is not seen as somewhere that is going to improve so that new housing is seen as more of a liability than an asset.

Journalists in London also emphasise the loyalty that people have to where they live, again as we found in the workshops. A London journalist suggested that people are much more likely identify with their local area than with London as a whole. As a result they are fiercely defensive of their neighbourhood, and the papers get very strong reactions to any criticism in their features on particular areas.

As part of the interviews we also explored an attempt to market Hulme in Manchester. Use had been made of billboards on a main commuter route into the city to publicise the fact that the district had changed and that it was somewhere that people might consider living. The regeneration agency accepted that the hostility expressed towards local authorities at the workshops was fairly widespread and that as a result people were outwardly dismissive of the campaign. But it was

The people that we spoke to make their living out of building, selling or writing about the sort of housing that the Urban Task Force is seeking to promote. To them it is no longer a fringe market

nevertheless felt to have been effective because the very fact that the area was being advertised meant that something must be happening, an impression sub-stantiated by the visible improvements that could be seen from the road.

In undertaking the opinion-former interviews we ventured into a world where urban repopulation and urban housing is not just an academic concept. The people that we spoke to make their living out of building, selling or writing about the sort of housing that the Urban Task Force is seeking to promote. To them it is no longer a fringe or a niche market but something which is growing vigorously and which is accepted and understood by a significant proportion of the general public. This would not have been the case even ten years ago and supports the findings of the workshops. In the next chapter we therefore bring together the workshop findings with the interviews and the literature review to outline five key themes that emerge from our research.



PHOTO: MOSS SIDE AND HULME PARTNERSHIP

Bill boards on the main routes though Hulme were very effective in highlighting the fact that the area had changed for the better

07

Conclusions and implications

In which we outline the five main themes to emerge from the citizens' workshops. We suggest that people lack a shared language when talking about urban areas and that their generic views of urban areas are often very different to their views of specific places. They are wary of sales pitches, particularly from the public sector, but are open to being persuaded about living in urban areas so long as their concerns about the risks can be overcome.

In Chapter 5 we reviewed the discussions that took place at the workshops and in the last chapter we described the views expressed as part of the opinion-former interviews. These we bring together in this chapter to describe five key themes to emerge from the research along with the implications for the Urban Task Force. The five themes are:

- The lack of a shared language
- Generic views and real places
- The sceptical consumer
- A willingness to be convinced
- An aversion to risk

It came as a surprise to learn that there was very little shared understanding of what words such as urban, city, and suburban mean, let alone whether they are good or bad

The lack of a shared language

Part of the morning session at the workshops was devoted to a discussion of different terms such as 'urban', 'city', 'inner city', 'suburban' etc. These are all terms that those of us who are involved in urban policy use all of the time and the intention was to get some idea of how positively or negatively they were viewed by the participants. It therefore came as a surprise to learn that there was very little shared understanding of what these words mean, let alone whether they are good or bad. This led us to suggest that non-professionals lack a shared language with which to discuss urban areas.

It is important to stress that role of the Urban Task Force is to encourage more people to live in existing built-up areas whether they be urban or suburban, city centre, inner city or indeed market town. Our concern was therefore not to assess attitudes to these different types of area but rather to the language used. The words discussed were:

Urban: The impression gained from listening to the discussions at the workshops was that many participants had quite positive impressions of urban areas. However reading through the transcripts it is very difficult to find any positive quotes that

use the word *urban*. In response to the question what does urban mean to you one of the Bristol group said - *'Somenbere like Clifton – central position, population density, lots of facilities'* (Bristol). This was not however typical. More common was this comment from the otherwise pro-urban younger group in Manchester - *'(urban is) unpleasant – you have urban cities with factories and smog'*. Or more passionately from the younger London group - *'Urban is smog, it is traffic, it is noise, constant noise, it is malls it is Woolworths, Boots, I don't know, purgatory hell... Train lines overhead, tall buildings, traffic lights that don't work'*.

Some people, particularly the older groups inter-preted the word urban very literally to mean built up area - *'To me the word urban means everything that is not the countryside, to me it includes suburbs too'* (Bristol). Indeed in London both groups felt that the word urban meant self-contained centres in the suburbs - *'An urban areas is where people are not necessarily going into London'* (London older group) or *'Urban means the outskirts of the city really'* (London younger group).

City: It was not that people did not like urban areas, much of the discussion, as we have mentioned was very positive. It is just that in describing these positive aspects people were more likely to use the word *city*. The reaction to the idea of a *city* or *city living* was very positive at all of the workshops - *'City is a positive word... West End, the financial city, sleek buildings'* (London younger group). *'Whereas you would have moved out to the suburbia successful young people might want to move into the city'* (Manchester younger group). In the Manchester and Bristol groups the word *city* was used most often to describe urban areas while the term *city centre* was reserved for the central shopping, entertainment and office area. The Manchester group had a very positive view of the city centre while in Bristol there was much more confusion about where it actually was. London was slightly different in that The City has a specific geographical meaning although for most of the participants it included Westminster and the fringes of the surrounding districts. Like the word urban, there were some people who got hung up on technical definitions of city - *'a city is somenbere with a cathedral'* (Manchester).

Inner city: Whereas the term city was positive, the term *inner city* was seen as very negative by all three workshops - *'The inner city is where it is difficult to park*

While the housing of the market 'maker developers' was seen as attractive, it was the more traditional housing of the 'market builders' that people found most appealing

your car' - *'and where you might not find it when you come back!'* (Manchester older group). *'The inner city is where the people who take the drugs live'* (Bristol) This confirms the finding of the literature review that people bundle up many of the negative aspects of urban areas into the phrase - *'Inner city means crime. It is usually connected to the news'* (Manchester young group). In Bristol it was agreed that St. Paul's was inner city and areas like Toxteth, Moss Side and Hackney were also mentioned even though they felt that the reputation of these areas was probably undeserved. The *inner city* was also seem as being somewhere else - no one would accept that they lived in the inner city. There was also confusion in Bristol and London because many areas in the 'inner city' were quite desirable and many of the areas with 'inner city' characteristics, such as crime, poor housing and social problems, were council the estates on the edge of the city.

Urban lifestyle: While the word *urban* was rarely used in a positive context, there was a very different reaction to the phrase *urban lifestyle*- *'The thing about urban lifestyle is the lifestyle bit is great, it is the urban bit that stinks'* (London). The idea of an

The word urban tended to have quite negative connotations



Policy implications:

Lack of a shared language

- There is a need to be cautious about the use of language. Different people use the words *urban* and *suburban*, *city* and *inner city* to mean very different things. We should therefore treat with care surveys of attitudes to urban and suburban areas since it is possible that respondents have very different understandings of what these words mean.
- When marketing urban areas it is probably better to avoid the use of words like *urban*, *mixed-use* and *density* since these are either not understood or have negative connotations. Much more positive terms are *urban lifestyle* and *city* or *city living*.
- The suggestion in the literature review that urban areas can be sold effectively by contrasting them to the drabness and homogeneity of the suburbs would appear to have a resonance with a wide range of people.
- As the literature review suggested it is possible to sell the same urban areas in completely different ways to different people without these images being false or disputed by residents.

urban lifestyle was viewed, especially by the young, as positive – ‘A lot of my friends have just graduated and you want to be in a flat, you want to be associated with that “Friends” lifestyle’ (Manchester younger group). As one of the Bristol group said ‘*urban lifestyle is a trendy thing, we were buying some paint and the best*

colours in our opinion were the “Urban Life Colours” with this picture of a trendy young couple in a vibrant kitchen’.

In London there was also a positive view of an urban lifestyle but it was seen as something which was more pressurised and required commitment – ‘*everything is a little bit more demanding and requires a little more thought*’.

Suburban: People had clearer idea about the meaning of suburbia. It meant space, large houses, wide streets, peace, quiet and trees. However the reactions were not entirely positive. To many suburbia was also boring, a place where parents lived, lacking in facilities and socially oppressive. ‘*Suburbia just sounds nice... it is leaves falling off trees that get swept up*’ – ‘*that is my idea of hell*’ (London younger group). The Bristol workshop was the most anti-suburban but the young groups in London and Manchester were also negative – ‘*It is very parenty – it is very middle aged, middle-class, safe*’ (Manchester young group). In London there was also a tendency to look down on the suburbs as being ‘*out in the sticks*’.

Density and mixed-use: Participants were also asked what they understood by the terms density and mixed-use. Most people recognised that the former meant there being more people and houses crammed in an area and associated it with congestion, parking problems, and noisy neighbours. However the Bristol and the London groups both recognised that there were desirable high-density areas. They also welcomed the idea of compactness (which was generally seen as a positive word) because it meant that they could be close to facilities but could also get out of an area easily. There was very little understanding of the term mixed-use and it therefore carried few positive or negative connotations.

The word suburban was better understood but seen as slightly dull and ‘parenty’



Different perspectives: What was interesting was that participants could not agree on which parts of the city were urban and suburban. One of the Manchester group for example said - *'When the (MORI) recruiter asked why I lived in the city I said I thought I was living in the suburbs'* (Manchester older group). Places like Whalley Range and Didsbury in Manchester, Clifton in Bristol and Worcester Park in London were described by some people as urban and others as suburban. This was partly because of the way that they had changed. A resident of Worcester Park, for example said that it was once in the sticks yet *'London has spread out and I now feel closer to the city than I have ever been'*. Likewise Didsbury in Manchester was felt by the older group to have been spoilt and by the younger group to have been improved by being taken over by city uses such as bars.

This also reflects the idea that different people create their own 'script' for the city. The older residents, for example in Whalley Range experience a quiet area with plenty of trees, large houses and no pubs and therefore consider it a desirable suburban area with a few *urban* rough edges. By contrast a number of the younger group also lived in Whalley Range and their experience was of a central district, with lots of flats, a multi-cultural population and an occasional crime problem. They considered it an urban (or city) district with some unfortunate suburban characteristics (like having no pubs). Yet they both often lived in the same street and both of these views were correct from their perspective.

Generic views and real places

One of the reasons for this level of disagreement over the meaning of different words is the way that people's views are formed. As the literature review suggested participants seem to form generic views of different types of place which are an amalgam of different experiences and information sources.

The more negative generic views of suburbia for many of the younger people seemed to be based upon their parents' expectations - *'My parents expect me to go to university, get a good job and live in suburbia, I don't intend to'* (Manchester). This was often combined with experience of visiting friends and reinforced by television imagery as in one of the quotes from London - *'I think it is experience ... I have a friend in prime suburbia... not dissimilar to*



Brookside, it is just boredom'. To this was added images from advertising and film - *'American directors grew up in suburbia so many of their films attack those areas and have monsters running around'* (Manchester). The older people by contrast had more positive generic images of suburbia often based upon the period when they first moved there or at least of the way they felt it used to be in the past.

Generic views of urban areas by contrast seem to be more influenced by the media and the messages received through advertising than through personal experience - *'I think the Evening Standard gives a huge impression of London, right or wrong, partly because of the news coverage, but also there is quite a lot of lifestyle coverage. It is the cliché "the Standard*

Generic images of urban areas are shaped by films, the media and even children's books (above right). More powerful however are images of real places

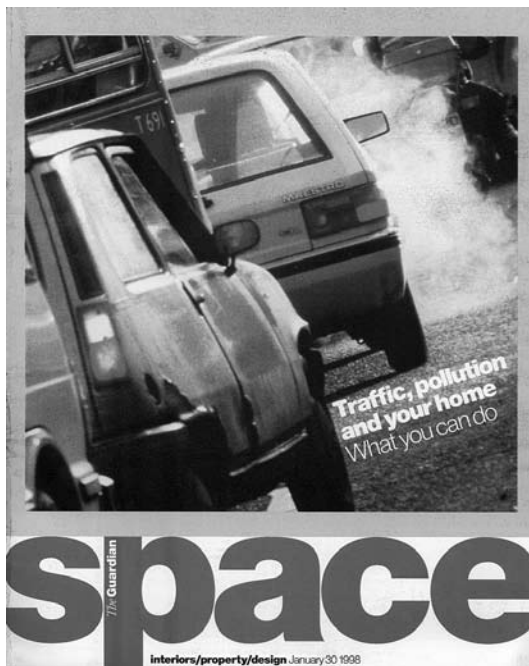
'I think the Evening Standard gives a huge impression of London, right or wrong. Partly because of the news coverage, but also there is quite a lot of lifestyle coverage'

Policy implications:

Generic views and real places

- There is no point in generalised campaigns to sell urban living. The influences that shape people's generic views of urban areas are so diverse and powerful that they are unlikely to be countered by generic advertising.
- The most effective way of promoting urban living is to use examples of real places. People seem to respond well to evidence of how real places have changed rather than to attractive general images, which are not seen as relevant to where they would ever live.

Publications such as the Evening Standard and the Guardian's Space supplement (right) can have a huge effect on attitudes to certain parts of London



is London"... rightly or wrongly it presents an image of London which is very hard to get away from (London) - 'how do we know what urban is other than what we read in the press?' - 'you get impressions from seeing a movie, advertising in London, documentaries, the news' (London). Influences included film - 'Sliding Doors pretty much hit the nail on the head' (London). The media was also important including the Guardian Space magazine and the Manchester Evening News Go supplement and estate agents material - 'I get a lot of estate agents bump... that is where I have got this impression of urban' (London). In Manchester, by contrast generic images of urban lifestyles seemed

more idealised including American television programmes although the local marketing literature from developers like Urban Splash seemed to have manipulated these images very effectively in their marketing.

Negative generic images of urban areas were based upon news media - '*Things get reported and people who don't know the areas immediately label them*' (Manchester older group). They were however reinforced by television drama such as soaps where *Eastenders*, *Coronation Street* and *The Bill* were mentioned - '*Soaps are violent and nasty for dramatic effect things that would only happen once in people's lives are concertina'd in an intense fashion and it becomes reality*' (Manchester older group).

Participants at the workshops therefore had quite clear generic images of urban and sub-urban areas and so diverse were the information sources behind these images that there seems to be little point in trying to influence them. However there was an acceptance that they probably had a false impression of many areas - '*It is only if you live in an area that you can see what it is really like... it is often nothing at all like it is portrayed elsewhere*' (Manchester older group). '*To give fair comment and justice to a place you have to have lived there*' (London Younger group).

Because of this we found that people's generic images were easily overridden by their experience of real places, even when this experience was limited to a photograph. It was therefore quite possible for people to have a negative generic view of urban areas and yet to have very positive views of specific urban places which they knew or were shown. To some these examples were merely the exceptions that proved the rule and to others areas such as Chelsea or even Manchester city centre were so far out of their reach that they were not even worth considering. However the feeling from most of the workshops was that real examples of attractive urban areas rather than generic images of ideal cities were much more effective ways of selling urban living. It was for this reason that they responded to the examples of real urban housing in the slide presentation rather than the more sumptuous general images of cities.

They also reacted to urban areas at different levels and could have quite different views of the city as a whole as compared to the neighbourhood where they lived. Being within and accessible to a large city was seen as a good thing even

though people would admit that they rarely took advantage of the facilities on offer. What was of greater concern was the district where they lived. Here they tended to prize areas which were self-contained 'villages' so that you could avoid going into the city if you wished. This feeling was more pronounced in London than the other cities.

The sophisticated consumer

A further important theme to emerge from this work is that people can spot a sales pitch and by definition are then less inclined to believe what they are told. This relates to the above point about people responding to images of real places. A photograph of an attractive urban area was felt to be less likely to be misleading than a more generic image chosen to paint an area in the best possible light. They are also likely to respond differently to different sources of information:

- The most reliable source of information was friends and personal experience. In Bristol and Manchester most people had some image of most parts of the city because they had passed through it or spoken to people who had lived there. In London people were likely to have a limited view since it is impossible to know all of the city. They would therefore rely on recommendations and, if they were interested, would check areas out - *'I was told by my cousin that it was fairly cheap, I then went down, drove around and loved it'* (about Clapham).
- News stories and documentaries were felt to be true even if they sometimes painted an over dramatic or exaggerated picture - *'Regional news, every single day, you get a very good impression of what is going on in the suburbs and the inner city'*.
- The younger groups were receptive to images of urban lifestyles in advertising, magazines and television. They knew well enough that these images were not real but were attracted to them as lifestyle aspirations rather than as information about urban areas.
- There was a mixed reaction to information from estate agents and housing developers. While this information was treated with a pinch of salt, there was at least a feeling that you knew that you were being sold something.



Housebuilders and agents are becoming much more sophisticated in their marketing of lifestyles (above) and their targeting of specific groups (left). This material generally appealed to the workshop participants. While they knew it was a sales pitch, at least they knew what was being sold.

The older people regarded large developers as 'respectable' and 'trustworthy' while the younger people responded best to developers like Urban Splash or the Manhattan Loft Company who seemed to 'speak their language'. In London there was some worry about the 'hard sell' of estate agents who were seen as too pushy - *'Very glossy, false to me, I don't like estate agents'* (London). Elsewhere people were only exposed to estate agents material when they sought it out and generally regarded it more positively.

- The material that people were least likely to believe was that produced by public agencies.

People can spot a sales pitch and by definition are then less inclined to believe what they are told. Photographs of real areas were felt to be less likely to mislead than more generic images chosen to paint an area in the best possible light

Promotional campaigns such as those for Milton Keynes are unlikely to work for urban areas



Policy implications:

The sophisticated consumer

- Promotional campaigns for urban areas need to be sophisticated and need to learn from the advertising industry. Campaigns like the New Town adverts of the past are unlikely to work.
- Place specific campaigns are likely to be more effective and must be related to real improvements that have taken place.
- Promotion may be best undertaken by developers rather than public agencies. If public campaigns are to be undertaken then it is sensible to down play the role of public agencies.

This was partly because many participants in Bristol, Manchester and parts of London had very negative views of the local council. They therefore assumed that if the council was involved it was not to be trusted. Public sector promotion was also felt to be less professional and it was less clear what was being sold.

This does not necessarily negate the potential for promoting urban living even by the public sector, as suggested by the opinion former interviews. It does however require a more sophisticated approach. It may be relevant to look at the change that took place in industry twenty or so years ago

when they transformed their 'sales departments' into 'marketing departments'. Rather than a direct sales pitch companies have adopted a much broader approach which associates their products with certain images, lifestyles and values. It is likely that something similar would be effective with urban living.

Open to argument:

One of the main aims of this research has been to assess whether people can be persuaded to reappraise urban areas. The research reviewed in Chapter 2 shows that, given a choice, people will tend to move down the urban hierarchy away from urban areas. While the research puts forward some reasons why this happens it does not illuminate the thought processes behind these decisions. While many people may prefer less urban locations, the research also fails to illuminate is how strongly these view are held and whether people are prepared to consider other options. One of our most important conclusions is therefore the fact that attitudes can be changed.

It should, of course be remembered that the workshops were targeted at households without children and at groups considered to be persuadable in terms of living in urban areas. We did have a mix of cityphiles and cityphobes and of people currently living in urban and suburban areas. However both the discussions at the workshops and the self-completion questionnaires at the beginning and end of the sessions suggested that attitudes could be changed. It is therefore an important conclusion that a diverse group can be 'sold' the idea of urban living.

The reason for this is partly that the anti-urban sentiments expressed at the workshops were not as strong as we might have expected from previous research. This combined with the fact that quite strong anti-suburban sentiments were also expressed. As we have suggested, people's attitudes towards where they live are informed by a wide variety of influences, some of them contradictory. In deciding where to live people seek to balance these contradictory messages. They may like the space and peace of the suburbs but still miss the vitality and convenience of urban areas. This balance of factors is likely to change at different times of their life and with different household circumstances. The workshops suggested that with many younger people the balance was tipped firmly in favour of urban living. However many of these young people accepted that they were likely to move out of the city when they had children. As people grew older the balance tended to shift in favour of more suburban lifestyles although there were a number of suggestions that the balance might tip back in later life - *'Yes older people have sold up and moved to a flat. It is easier to maintain, they don't have to worry about the lawn or about friends getting to them because they are going to have everything on their doorstep'* (London).

An aversion to risk

The last theme to emerge from the workshops was people's attitudes to risk. As we suggested in Chapter 4, experience of people moving into urban areas suggests that this happens in waves. Just as we described two different types of developer in the last chapter so there are different types of people who move into urban areas. The first wave of, what we have called *urban pioneers* are prepared to take risks. They are the groups of single professionals or maybe artists who are prepared to be the first to move into an area or to experiment with new types of living environment such as lofts or live-work units. The experience of the more innovative urban developers is that this group want the full package. They welcome contemporary design, a mix of uses and even *'gritty'* urban environments. In selecting the participants for the workshops we were not interested in this group. The feeling was that they had already been 'sold' on the idea of urban living and that we needed to know more about the people who might form the second and third waves of people attracted into urban areas. There

Policy implications:

Open to argument

- Rather than being hardened urbanites or suburbanites people's views about different types of area are the result of a balance of factors. This balance is susceptible to being tipped one way or another and the task of attracting more people back to urban areas is achievable.
- There is the potential to build upon many existing positive attitudes that people have towards urban lifestyles as well as a relatively high level of discontent towards what are regarded as suburbs lifestyles.

was indeed only one participant at the London workshops that could be described as an 'urban pioneer'.

We have suggested that these second and third wave people could be called *urban settlers* and an important conclusion from the workshops is that these people appear to have very different views to the 'urban pioneers'. As we have said, these 'urban settlers' can see many advantages to urban living and can be persuaded. But they do have worries and these worries increase as they get older. They also worry that the 'safe' urban areas tend to be out of their price range and that they can only afford more marginal areas where the risks are even greater. These risks included the following:



People were worried about the risk of living in urban areas especially where dereliction cast doubt over the future of adjacent sites

PHOTO: IAN BEAZLEY

Policy implications:

An aversion to risk

- The people likely to make up the second wave of those moving into urban areas are risk averse. Any campaign to attract them should seek to overcome these risks and to provide reassurance to them through the way that the development is sold.
- It is probably counter-productive to stress the excitement of urban living since this will scare people away.
- It is clear that people will initially opt for traditional design and are wary about many aspects of new development. However contemporary design can have an important role in selling urban housing

- **Crime and personal safety:** This however was not expressed as strongly as previous surveys would have suggested and was less of an issue for the young.
- **Social housing:** Proximity to social housing particularly to large 'estates' was seen as a problem. Although many people suggested that these areas had an undeserved reputation they still worried about living next door.
- **Being followers not leaders:** There was concern about whether other people would live in the area. They are more likely to move into areas where there is an established population of 'respectable people'.
- **Brown field land:** None of the participants expressed concerns about issues such as contamination. However there were worries about living next to vacant land because of uncertainty over its future use.
- **Public services:** This worry was reinforced in the older groups by a deep mistrust of urban councils and town planners. This reflects one

of the attractions of suburban forms to people who want to create their own little world and can minimise reliance on outside agencies. In urban areas they feel much more dependent on public services and political decisions such as town planning. Until they have greater faith in these services urban living is likely to be a risk.

- **Noise and disturbance:** People worried about disturbance from neighbours, especially in flats, and also about levels of sound insulation. There was generally less concern about disturbance from different uses.
- **Lack of space:** Many people seemed to associate poor quality, cramped, mean accommodation with new development and this was seen as a particular problem in urban flats.

This aversion to risk translated into some very conservative attitudes to design. There seemed to be a view that living in urban areas is quite risky enough and that all other risks should be minimised. As the opinion-former interviews show, many urban housebuilders understand this well which is why they make such use of Georgian and Victorian design styles. These views were particularly strongly expressed in the Manchester workshop, which was held in the Homes for Change building in Hulme. This is a mixed-use building of contemporary design and while the reaction of the younger age group was mixed the older group disliked it intensely. This initially coloured their attitudes to urban living generally, however they were much more positive when discussing developments in Hulme by Bellway. This reaction was not confined to Manchester, or indeed to the older people and the same views were expressed in Bristol and London. We should however treat this finding with care. As Urban Splash suggested to us, you can not design buildings by focus group. Their experience is that when properly marketed contemporary design can be a very powerful selling point particularly when linked to the generic images that people have of urban lifestyles.

Conclusions

Because population has been drifting away from the urban areas of Britain for more than a century there is a tendency to believe that this movement is inevitable. Our research suggests that it is not.

Throughout the twentieth century Britain's urban exodus has been driven by lifestyle aspirations which have prioritised suburban environments. As urban areas have been drained of population and investment they have declined and the problems of decline have persuaded more people to leave the city creating a vicious circle of urban depopulation.

The challenge facing the Urban Task Force and the Government is to break into this vicious circle. The findings of this research give some cause for optimism that this is possible. This study suggests that, despite a century of urban decline, there remains - or at least has been rekindled - a desire for urban living in the hearts of many British people. While people value what might be called the suburban characteristics of peace and quiet, space, safety and greenery they also miss urban characteristics such as convenience, diversity, life and variety. Many people have returned to live in urban areas over the last ten years and our work suggests there are many more who could also be persuaded to do so and that initiatives to promote urban areas could usefully form part of the Task Force's recommendations.

However we conclude that straightforward advertising campaigns of the kind used in New Towns are unlikely to be effective. What is needed is a more subtle and concerted effort by all of the public and private players involved in urban areas to build upon the public's positive associations with urban area and to challenge their negative preconceptions. The latter can only be done with evidence of the improvements that have taken place. In doing this we need to change the image of urban areas from one of failure and decline to one of opportunity and growth. There are many regeneration agencies and private developers who are already doing this very successfully. The Task Force needs to find ways to build upon and co-ordinate these local efforts to effect a wider change in the way that we in Britain view our towns and cities.

Despite a century of urban decline, there remains - or at least has been rekindled - a desire for urban living in the hearts of many British people

Appendix 1

Literature reviewed for the study

As part of the study a literature review was undertaken by Gary Bridge at the Centre for Urban Studies at the University of Bristol. The literature review is summarised in Chapter 3 and is to be separately published (details can be obtained from the Urban Task Force). The following is a list of the material that was reviewed.

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