



Towns & Cities Partners in Urban Renaissance

Project Report

“...the start of a sustainable urban renaissance is underway across England. It is no longer necessary to go as far as Barcelona to be inspired by the potential of urban areas to meet the demands of 21st century living...”
A conclusion from the Partners in Urban Renaissance project







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Credits

“Renaissance has to cross sectoral and professional boundaries and to focus on strengths and opportunities rather than weaknesses and threats.”

Dr Nicholas Falk (URBED)

The publication of this Report coincides with the Government’s Urban Summit on 31 October and 1 November 2002 in Birmingham. It brings together the findings and recommendations of the **Partners in Urban Renaissance** project that was launched in October 2001. The project has involved 24 partner towns and cities across England and has sought to ‘take the pulse’ of urban renaissance delivery following the November 2000 Urban White Paper, *Our Towns and Cities: The Future*.

The project has been led by the Urban Policy Unit of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister using an action research approach with consultants URBED. The method adopted has been innovative in a number of ways. It included **visits** to all 24 partners by the UPU/URBED team and by Ministers, **symposia** at which issues of common concern were discussed with senior policy advisors from ODPM, other departments, organisations and agencies, eight **workshops** with adult citizens and two workshops involving young citizens from the partner towns and cities, twelve workshops involving property and investor interests, four Looking and Listening focus groups, and six events aimed at **breaking down the barriers** to progress.

Reaching conclusions and making recommendations from such a broad work programme and partnership is not a simple task. To get the full flavour of how 24 very different places are doing in making urban renaissance a reality, all five Reports of the **Partners in Urban Renaissance** project should be read. The five documents in the family are:

- **Project Report**

- **Partner Profiles**

- **Case Studies (54 in total)**

- **Workshops Report**

- **Breaking Down the Barriers Report**

We set out in this summary the key issues from the Workshops Report and the findings and recommendations of this Project Report:

Citizens’ Workshops Adult citizens agree on the national priorities (health, education, employment) but consider that a different set of local priorities are equally important to their quality of life. In particular they want:

- Better maintenance and management of public places – this links directly to issues of safety, crime, drug abuse, drug dealing

- Encouragement of social enterprise for local environmental maintenance

- More use of public space with positive experiences such as celebrations, events, festivals

- Fast responses – for example, temporary hoarding, keeping people informed about developments, finding short-term uses – to provide confidence where derelict housing and wasteland give out the wrong messages

- Active encouragement of more diverse activities and gathering places for families and older people in town and city centres

- More service provision in the evening – drop-in health centres, greater use of school facilities

- Better management of the evening economy – especially better public transport to help safe dispersal of young people at the end of evenings

- Public transport discounts for local people to access local facilities and attractions

- More visible and transparent information about what ‘the money’ is spent on

- Involvement of more young people in the development and provision of facilities for them

- Greater involvement of students in the development of their ‘temporary’ home town or city

- To be asked about the outcomes of change for them

- Feedback on the results of consultations and explanations of why particular decisions are taken

Young People’s Workshops The issues and concerns raised by young people in their teens and early twenties were very similar to those raised by adult citizens. In particular they are equally concerned about crime, drug abuse, drug dealing, quality of public space and affordable transport to get to and from education establishments and leisure facilities. Interestingly for this age group there was also considerable concern about affordable housing. In particular young people want:

- Better communication between young people, Government and businesses – through youth parliaments and other forums
- A Government that listens to young people with more young people at the heart of decision making
- Inclusion of young people in recruitment of youth service providers
- Greater involvement of the police with young people
- A tougher line on people who sell and take drugs
- Better information on drugs; a clamp down on places where drugs are sold and taken
- Affordable, reliable transport, efficient and widespread
- An integral role in the delivery of urban renaissance and consultation processes – and not treated as an add-on or a tick-in-the-box
- Proper facilities for law-abiding young people and not to be “tarred with the same brush as those who misbehave” – (adult citizens felt equally strongly about this issue)

Property Workshops Those who took part in these workshops felt strongly that such forums should be more widely and regularly convened in towns and cities. They are committed to supporting the urban renaissance agenda and consider that it should be a priority for Government. The main conclusions from these workshops were:

- Training and education are important to urban renaissance – especially addressing the skills necessary to deliver renaissance. In the north the issue is skills shortage; in the south the issue is affordable housing for those with skills
- Public grant regimes need to be less bureaucratic and not tied by European ‘State aid’ rules
- The planning system needs to be more efficient and quicker to respond. Section 106 Agreements need to reflect market conditions and local authorities need to make more use of Compulsory Purchase Orders – which the private sector is willing to underwrite
- Utilities are slow to deliver infrastructure provision
- Towns and cities need leaders who will champion their communities and push changes through
- Better partnership arrangements have to be established between the public and private sectors
- Policing needs to be improved to make people in towns and cities feel safer
- More land needs to be brought forward for development

The Project Report finds that the concept of urban renaissance (a holistic approach encompassing the physical, social, economic and environmental aspects of regeneration) has taken root. It finds that there is a quiet revolution of change going on across the 24 partner towns and cities and that it is no longer necessary to have to visit continental European cities to see sustainable and quality improvements to urban living. The biggest ‘buts’ are that progress is patchy and significant barriers to progress remain.

The key issues and barriers, many of which reflect the outcomes of the workshops, are:

Issues
The need for positive leadership and attracting and retaining staff
Developing the right skills and motivating all concerned
Engaging all sectors
Encouraging new employment for local people
Providing reliable, safe and fast public transport
Maximising the role of arts, culture and sport
Enhancing the quality and maintenance of the public realm
Broadening the range of housing available
Barriers
Reducing crime and physical decay
Encouraging enterprise development and job creation
Making planning more responsive and transparent
Finding new roles for historic buildings and industrial areas
Knitting regeneration areas into the wider community
Upgrading accessibility
Financing new infrastructure

There are inherent actions for national and local politicians, policy advisors and urban renaissance practitioners in these issues and barriers. However, we also make the following overarching recommendations as a result of our work with the 24 partner towns and cities that, if implemented, will enable faster and more effective progress towards the delivery of urban renaissance:

Use all the arms of government Urban renaissance requires an holistic approach. There must be more effective and inherent cross-cutting policy development and implementation from the ‘centre’ – Whitehall – and from local government. And, as the **Partners in Urban Renaissance** project has proved, civil servants should ‘get out more’; doing so delivers a dual outcome – practitioners in the field truly welcome the opportunity to discuss issues face to face and policy advisors in the civil service learn first hand about actual outcomes (good and bad) from particular policies

Relax controls on pathfinders The Government is committed to giving more financial freedom to local authorities who prove they can deliver. This process needs to be speeded up and perhaps piloted amongst the 24 partner towns and cities

Give focus and priority to improving the public realm Its importance in the quality of urban life and in investment decisions should not be underestimated

Engage Regional Development Agencies more in the delivery of urban renaissance There is a perception that their focus is too heavily weighted towards economic regeneration but, as the **Partners in Urban Renaissance** project has shown, economic regeneration cannot be divorced from other aspects of urban renaissance

‘Arcs of opportunity’ should be supported and promoted by national and local government alongside action to tackle poor neighbourhoods. The ‘worst-first’ approach on its own does not deliver the best or most effective benefits for the town or city as a whole

continues

Programmes of support should be linked within targeted areas A critical mass of investment is often needed to secure renaissance. The plethora of initiatives and partnerships can mitigate against this and should be rationalised in designated areas

Mobilise land owned by utilities and public agencies For decades people have complained about lack of progress in developing major brownfield sites in public ownership. English Partnerships' new responsibility should help achieve progress and the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment should publicise good and bad practice

Urban renaissance should be popularised A concerted effort should be made to promote good news stories – not just flagship projects but also smaller projects that represent good practice, and that raise standards – in order to encourage greater community involvement

The future An urban renaissance is underway across England as our 24 partner towns and cities have proved – detailed in the Case Studies. A particularly marked success has been the revival of centres of major cities for urban living, but small and medium sized towns and cities are also achieving successes. However they have a long way to go before the flight of their population to the suburbs and beyond is truly reversed. At present the renaissance is largely driven by young single people who enjoy the excitement of town and city centres, and professionals who value the vitality and amenities. The challenge is:

How can these trends be extended to other, less fashionable parts of towns and cities?

How can families with children be attracted to stay or move into towns and cities?

How can towns and cities become places where people of all types and ages want to live out of choice, not necessity – and will they be able to afford to do so?

The **Partners in Urban Renaissance** project has shown that attitudes to living in urban areas are starting to change but while commitment to making towns and cities better places is growing, real barriers to renaissance – many of them of our own making – still exist. If progress is to be maintained then central and local government must work together and try new actions to find a new balance of responsibilities that will let urban areas develop as places where people want to be. England is a small country with a large population. Achieving sustainable renaissance for the 80% of the population who live in urban areas is essential for the economic and social success of the country. If we are to live in a more sustainable way in the future, towns and cities must be seen and treated as assets, and not as liabilities.

“If there’s a problem with drug-use or graffiti in a park, they close it down, but the problem just goes elsewhere...”

Young People’s Workshop

Introduction The Urban White Paper, *Our Towns and Cities: The Future* committed the Government to work with towns and cities to gain a better understanding of how they are delivering urban renaissance, of what the barriers to progress are and how they might be resolved. Government also wanted to find better ways of working in partnership with places and local authorities wanted more direct access to Government. This commitment led to a year-long action research project with 24 towns and cities, a cross-section of major urban areas in England. Ministers launched the project in October 2001 as:

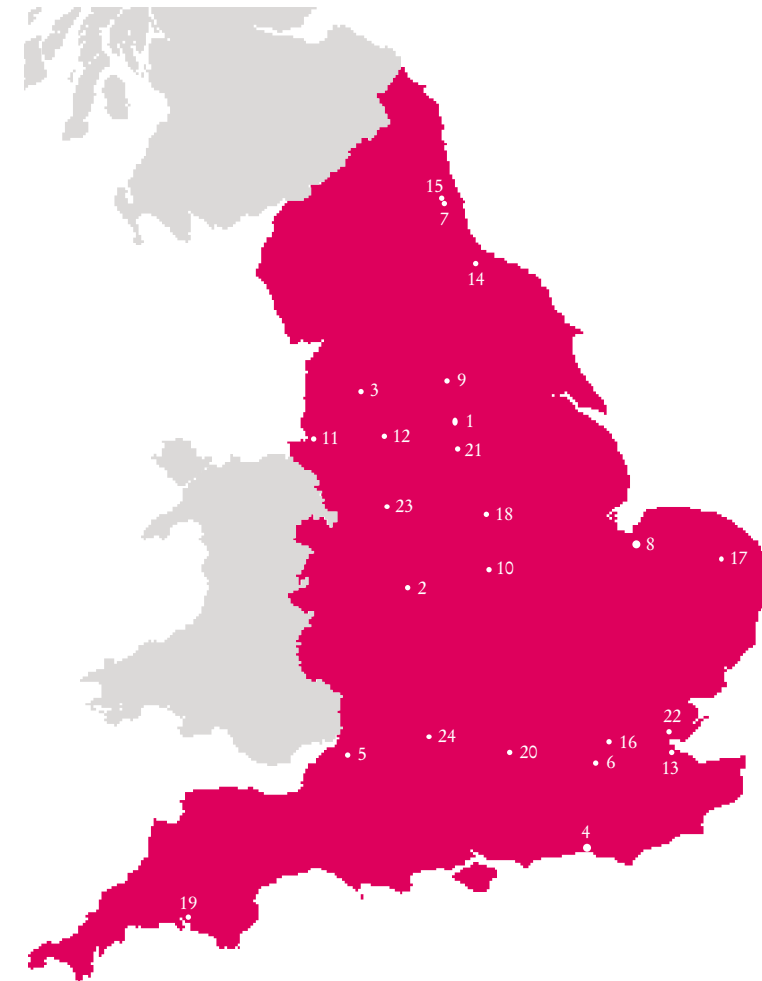
Towns & Cities: Partners in Urban Renaissance

The project has been led by the Urban Policy Unit of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and consultants URBED (Urban and Economic Development Group), with support from King Sturge and MORI and with academic inputs. ODPM Ministers have been involved throughout the project, undertaking visits to the partner towns and cities, attending a symposium and receiving regular updates of progress.

The locations of the 24 places, together with information on where the Citizens’, Young People’s and Property Workshops were held, are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

- 1 Barnsley
- 2 Birmingham
- 3 Blackburn with Darwen
- 4 Brighton & Hove
- 5 Bristol
- 6 Croydon
- 7 Gateshead
- 8 King’s Lynn
- 9 Leeds
- 10 Leicester
- 11 Liverpool
- 12 Manchester
- 13 Medway
- 14 Middlesbrough
- 15 Newcastle
- 16 Newham
- 17 Norwich
- 18 Nottingham
- 19 Plymouth
- 20 Reading
- 21 Sheffield
- 22 Southend-on-Sea
- 23 Stoke-on-Trent
- 24 Swindon



^{1.1} **The brief** “(We want) towns and cities and suburbs which offer a high quality of life and opportunity for all, not just the few... people shaping the future... living in attractive, well-kept towns and cities... good design and planning which makes it practical to live in a more environmentally sustainable way... towns and cities able to create and share prosperity... and good quality services.” Urban White Paper, *Our Towns and Cities: The Future*

The aims of the project were:

To find out how the partner towns and cities are achieving urban renaissance

To find out what people living and working in towns and cities think

To showcase some examples of good practice

To identify barriers to progress

To draw some general conclusions on what is driving change in England’s major urban areas

The project did not set out to be a piece of academic research on urban renaissance, or to develop or present a comprehensive set of indicators or statistics on urban renaissance. Its focus has clearly been on understanding and learning about what is happening in ‘real’ places – that is, in the 24 partner towns and cities.

^{1.2} **Method** “Analysis has focused on what we ought to do, and rather less on the equally important question of how we are going to do it.” Review of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s Area Regeneration Programme

There is already a wealth of academic research into the state of urban areas. The big issue is not gathering more evidence on what is wrong, but finding out how to make faster progress in bringing about the renaissance of urban areas. This project has tried to break new ground by crossing boundaries using a number of methods within an action research approach, and the Urban Policy Unit/URBED team has engaged with a range of stakeholders to establish their views on what is really happening and how to bring about change:

A literature review sought to understand the main trends and drivers of change, drawing on, for example, the Economic and Social Research Council’s (ESRC) *Cities: Competitiveness and Cohesion* research programme

Initial visits were made to all the 24 partner towns and cities to meet key officers (and councillors in some areas), and to visit urban renaissance projects and places – successful and unsuccessful. Follow-up visits were made by ODPM Ministers to enable them to see at first hand how urban renaissance is being delivered

Three symposia (in Birmingham, Gateshead and Reading) brought all the partners together to share experience, to agree a common framework for the project, and to discuss specific issues of concern including community cohesion, housing, planning and transport. Study tours of Gateshead and Reading were also part of the symposia programme

An e-mail bulletin was sent to partners periodically to keep them in touch with progress

continues

Workshops were held in most partner towns and cities (these are detailed in the Workshops Report):

Citizens' Workshops were run by MORI, with input from URBED, in eight of the partner towns and cities to provide a perspective from local residents living in different parts of their town or city and having different backgrounds. Questions were also added to MORI's Omnibus survey (involving over 2,000 people throughout the UK in June 2002) to find out whether people thought the place where they live is getting better or worse, and why →

Looking and Listening focus groups were run by MORI and URBED in four of the partner towns and cities to inform the Government's cross-cutting review on public spaces and to gauge attitudes. The four groups were filmed and the resulting video – *These are the things that everyday make a difference* – was discussed with Ministers and civil servants, and made available to the project's partners

Young People's Workshops were held in London and Middlesbrough and brought together young people from seven partner towns and cities to discuss what they thought was good and bad about where they live

Property Workshops were run by King Sturge and URBED in 12 partner towns and cities with property developers and professionals. Discussions were informed by King Sturge's research into property values in each market segment

Breaking Down the Barriers events were run by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) in four of the partner towns and cities and by URBED in two of the partner towns and cities. These events brought Government policy advisors together with local and national professionals and practitioners to address specific issues that partners had raised as problematic. Figure 2

Figure 2 Breaking Down the Barriers events

	Topic	Location and Lead Partner	Other Partners in Attendance
19/09/02	Regeneration of post-industrial sites in an historic town	Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent	Barnsley, Norwich
19/09/02	Job creation, enterprise development and property holdings	Croydon	Nottingham, Plymouth Swindon
23/09/02	Assembling the land	Medway	Plymouth, Southend-on-Sea, Newham, King's Lynn
27/09/02	Countering the effects of major transport infrastructure severance on regeneration projects	Middlesbrough	Birmingham, Leicester, Reading
02/10/02	Understanding and managing the impact of physical decay on criminal activity	Blackburn with Darwen	Gateshead
02/10/02	Financing infrastructure	Leeds	Nottingham, Manchester

Two events were organised by partners themselves – the first, organised and hosted by Sheffield and facilitated by the District Audit Office, addressed urban renaissance performance indicators. Delegates included the National Audit Office and the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit. Sheffield, Norwich and Newham subsequently undertook collaborative work on an indicator model. The second, organised and hosted by Newham, addressed the feasibility of implementing recommendations in Nicholas Schoon's book *The Chosen City*. This event was chaired by Lord (Richard) Best, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and attended by the author Nicholas Schoon.

Steering Group A small Steering Group gave the UPU/URBED team direction. In addition, in May 2002, a presentation was given to, and discussion held with, the ODPM's Urban Sounding Board to refine the analytical framework and emerging findings.

Innovations The project has sought to make progress in four main ways:

A team approach involving experienced consultants and researchers working alongside policy advisors from the ODPM's Urban Policy Unit which benefited from secondments from the Home Group and from Manchester City Council

Qualitative research (by MORI) into attitudes to change together with previous urban renaissance research

Building bridges between policy advisors and makers, local professionals and practitioners, and Government's Regional Offices

Sharing experiences across the 24 partner towns and cities

Constraints to the project included diverse expectations, limited comparable local area statistics, a large and varied group of places, and limited time to build the partnership and trust between all involved.

1.3 The Project Report This Report takes account of previous research → but concentrates on findings based on the evidence from our work with the 24 partner towns and cities from October 2001 to October 2002 – including listening to literally hundreds of people and seeing many urban renaissance projects across the partner towns and cities.

The report provides a snapshot of urban renaissance delivery in different places across England. It sets out checklists of good practice to help draw up strategies and action plans and, together with the other four reports, it should inform policy development and the setting of policy priorities in the future.

We are extremely grateful to all who contributed to the **Partners in Urban Renaissance** project →. Inevitably interpretations of our work will differ. The Urban Policy Unit/URBED team has done its best to check findings with the 24 partner towns and cities but accepts responsibility for any mistakes or omissions that remain.

Contents of the Project Report The Project Report is set out in the following sections:

In section 2 **Setting the scene** we look at the context of urban renaissance. What is it? Why do we need urban policy?

In section 3 **Challenges** we review the development of urban areas drawing on key research into urban trends and dynamics

In section 4 **Perspectives** we try to establish how well our towns and cities are doing, based on our visits and on the Partner Profiles, contrasting what we found with the views expressed in the Workshops

In section 5 **Five steps to success** we review how the 24 partners are addressing the challenges they face and we put forward five steps that seem to underlie successful transformation – illustrated in the Case Studies

In section 6 **Eight dimensions of renaissance** we divide the Urban White Paper themes into key dimensions that our work shows are required if a town or city is to make sustainable progress towards urban renaissance – these are also illustrated in the Case Studies

Finally, in section 7 **Conclusions and Recommendations** we identify lessons from the project based on our findings, including work on Breaking Down the Barriers, to inform the future work of central and local government, policy advisors, policy makers, professionals, practitioners and others interested in urban renaissance

“It’s nice to have a nice-looking town centre, but if you have to go back to your council estate and it’s horrible then it doesn’t matter...”

Citizens’ Workshop

Setting the scene “Renaissance is wider than regeneration in that it has an added spiritual dimension, and it should reach beyond the city centre.” Delegate at the project’s first symposium in Birmingham, December 2001

2.1 What is renaissance? All the partner towns and cities are excited by the idea of changing attitudes to living in urban areas by securing a higher quality of life that makes the most of each place’s assets. The big new idea in the Urban White Paper (November 2000) was to stop seeing urban areas just as concentrations of problems. Instead towns and cities began to be seen as the solution to the fundamental challenges of how to accommodate a growing population by developing more sustainable forms of housing and transport than the earlier ‘solutions’ of suburban housing estates. Making our towns and cities places where people live out of choice, not necessity, is seen as crucial to enhancing most people’s quality of life and to creating a more equal society. The spin-offs from high-quality, high-density living in environmentally-friendly places and buildings could also help reduce the resources we take from our planet. Our findings, including the successes set out in the Partner Profiles and Case Studies, show that the start of a sustainable urban renaissance is underway across England. It is no longer necessary to go as far as Barcelona to be inspired by the potential of urban areas to meet the demands of 21st century living.

2.2 Why do we need urban policy? Eighty per cent of us live in towns and cities with populations of over 10,000. That is reason enough to have policies which promote and support quality of life, choice, and opportunities.

The various ‘inner-city’ policies and initiatives of the 1980s and early 90s produced some advances in regeneration after the ravages of the economic downturn of that period. However, our meetings with the 24 partner towns and cities indicated that further progress cannot be made in such crucial urban renaissance fields as education, health or employment without treating the wider urban areas as a whole. Local authorities point out that Government policy has often missed the spatial dimension, resulting in separate initiatives addressing particular issues. For example, although high mortality and high unemployment are often to be found in the same part of a town or city, the causes are subject to different policies and different funding regimes each with their own separate bureaucracy. The view that problems can be solved simply through improving individual chances of securing better education or health is too narrow.

However, an holistic approach to urban renaissance requires a broader perspective than many professionals (or politicians) have historically brought to bear. The ESRC’s *Cities: Competitiveness and Cohesion* research programme into urban competitiveness and cohesion suggested that cities have become weak because of lack of good champions, and fragmentation of government.

The task of urban policy is to overcome the tendency of policy advisors and policy makers to operate within traditional silos (health, education, employment, regeneration, culture), cut off from the reality that they are all inter-related and not mutually exclusive. The Government’s new policy and focus on Local Strategic Partnerships and Community Strategies should help counter this silo approach since both are cross-cutting and adopt a broad, bottom-up approach to the full urban renaissance agenda. This needs to be matched by a more holistic approach at the regional and national levels.

“Since the industrial revolution we have lost ownership of our towns and cities, allowing them to be spoilt by poor design, economic dispersal and social polarisation. The beginning of the 21st century is a moment of change... We need a vision that will drive the urban renaissance.” Lord Rogers of Riverside, introduction to *Towards an Urban Renaissance*

Challenges Are our towns and cities becoming places to live in out of choice? Evolution is slow, and it is very hard to get a picture of what is actually going on. While the national media is full of stories about what is happening to companies and to famous people, very little space is given over to dealing with the state of our towns and cities.

In 1999 the Urban Task Force report with its 105 recommendations, made the case for an holistic approach that goes beyond any one project, programme or department. The idea of a magic solution or 'one size fitting all' is rightly dismissed as naïve. However scepticism remains as to whether real progress is possible; some doubt whether design or the spatial dimensions really matter. Evidence is therefore needed to show that urban renaissance is not just an empty phrase, and that visions can be turned into reality. In reviewing the huge literature on urban renaissance, dynamics and trends a number of challenges and unresolved issues for the 21st century stand out, which are quite different from those that have faced the UK over the previous 50 years – in the 1950s the response to the post World War II challenge was **reconstruction**, the 1960s saw **revitalisation**, in the 1970s it was **renewal**, in the 1980s, **redevelopment**, in the 1990s **regeneration** and, at the start of the 21st century the focus is shifting towards **renaissance**.

^{3.1} Working in a global marketplace “Boosting and restoring the competitiveness of a city which is in difficulty is an extremely challenging and time-consuming business... to break out of a cycle of relative decline requires concerted action by different stakeholders.” Introduction to the ESRC *Cities: Competitiveness and Cohesion* report

Our towns and cities now compete for investment internationally. Urban policy is dealing with a much more complex and dynamic set of forces than it did even a quarter of a century ago. The 1977 Urban White Paper, and previous experiments with community development projects, focused attention on the inner city, and the problems arising from the decline of traditional industry. Today, employers operate in a faster moving, global economy that demands ever-higher standards, and where information and services are often transferred over the Internet. Residents have rising expectations shaped in part by foreign travel and television programmes. The general public is also more aware of the need for more sustainable development, for example, as a result of traffic congestion and pollution. The design of new development has to pass many more tests. Many of us live in a much more multicultural society, and one which does not listen for long to experts or authority. Drug addiction as well as racial bigotry tears some communities apart, while in others rising prices squeeze out all but the most affluent. Government is expected to meet demands for vastly improved local services – including the maintenance of streets and open spaces, in addition to education and health. Government is also expected to re-establish the positives of urban living, including truly integrated rapid transit, thriving centres, and stylish new housing that matches the standard set by the best places.

^{3.2} Seeing the big picture “How we live our lives is shaped by where we live our lives... Previous governments failed to stem urban decline because they only addressed part of the problem, and ignored the underlying causes. Often, they forgot that urban policies are not just about bricks and mortar, but about improving the prosperity and quality of life for the people who live there. Towns and cities need to be looked at as a whole in an integrated way.” Urban White Paper, *Our Towns and Cities: The Future*

Comparisons between the European ideal of ‘compact cities’ and what is actually happening in England show that there are major gaps that can no longer be addressed simply by concentrating on small areas or single issues. For example the European ideal suggests places that are confident rather than places with which people are dissatisfied and which people cannot wait to leave; it suggests places that are compact rather than sprawling and with polarised car-based suburbs; it suggests places that are convivial rather than boring with intimidating centres.

The inner or Victorian areas of British cities have experienced problems for decades but it was not until the 1970s that experts ‘discovered’ the inner city. The spectre of whole areas being abandoned as in American cities alerted UK policy makers to the vicious circle of economic decline, physical decay and social polarisation as traditional industries and local employment opportunities contracted. Area-based regeneration projects, and an alphabet soup of special programmes, including environmental improvements, have subsequently tackled the problems of developing derelict land in many of these areas.

Partnerships between Government and selected local authorities were followed in the late 1980s and early 90s by Urban Development Corporations (UDC) in some major cities as a means of promoting private investment. In addition ‘Challenge Funding’ programmes were used to stimulate local partnerships. What tended to matter most in assessment of bids for these funds and in assessment of UDC proposals were the level of financial leverage and the number of jobs created. Little attention was paid to factors like design and sustainability or to linking initiatives to what was going on in the wider area. The results were sometimes impressive, with iconic schemes like London Docklands and Salford Quays, but generally they have not overcome the basic spatial inequalities that make English regions so different from many of their European counterparts. If we are ever to build enough quality housing, cut traffic, or make people feel safer, a wider focus on urban quality and the whole conurbation is needed.

^{3.3} Reversing the urban exodus “There have been systematic and persistent trends in urban Britain in which the major conurbations have been the main losers, while smaller cities in the south of the country and the New Towns have been the main beneficiaries.” ESRC *Cities: Competitiveness and Cohesion* report

Experts consider that two of the most fundamental indicators of the state of our towns and cities are population change and employment change. The general trend has been for the smaller towns and rural areas to gain population at the expense of the central parts of cities and industrial towns through a kind of cascade. This is actually much more important than the problem of North-South drift (which gets more publicity) as most people move relatively short distances, and not very often. As in the USA, new jobs have tended to be created on the outskirts of towns, as new business and retail parks have been built alongside motorway intersections, as in Blackburn with Darwen for example. As a result of the flight of people and jobs from the cities, many urban areas contain residues of problems that past policies have not resolved. But they may also now have the seeds of their own recovery and reinvention as young people, black and minority ethnic groups, and creative enterprises find good reasons for moving into areas that were previously being abandoned.

The Urban Task Force argued that the drivers of change in the 21st century – ‘the technical revolution... the ecological threat... and the social transformation associated with increased life expectancy and new lifestyles’ – all favour living in cities, thus reversing the trends that applied throughout the 20th century. At present, while the main urban areas have the need and potential to accommodate more people, there have been strong trends working against them.

^{3.4} Narrowing the gaps “Society is dividing before our eyes, opening up new social futures for the working population ... it is this segmentation of the labour market that is sculpting the new and ugly shape of British Society.” Will Hutton, *The State We're In*

Will Hutton, Chief Executive, the Work Foundation, talks of the 30:30:40 society, in which only 40% are advantaged, 30% are being marginalised or are insecure, and 30% of the adult population are either unemployed or economically inactive. These ‘three nations’ live in very different worlds.

A major priority of public policy is to narrow the differences within urban areas that leaves many of those living in disadvantaged areas behind – in Leeds this has been called the ‘two speed economy’. However the anatomy of urban deprivation, and the so-called ‘geography of misery’, are now much more complex, and extend far beyond the narrow boundaries of the Victorian inner city. As many of the 1960s tower blocks have been demolished, and some even turned into desirable apartments, the most disadvantaged areas have become much less obvious. They now include peripheral council estates, built on garden city principles but cut off from jobs and other opportunities as in the northern parts of Nottingham. In some areas, particularly the North West, terraced houses are being ‘abandoned’ at an alarming rate. In Manchester for example, a terraced house in the south of the city may be worth as much as £200,000 whereas a similar house in the north of the city has fallen in value from £30,000 five ago years ago to less than £5,000 in 2002.

The more attractive places tend to be on the periphery, away from where industry used to be, and where most of the modern housing has been built. There are however, also inner areas that have been ‘gentrified’ and where ‘stylish singles’ now predominate, as well as some excessively large concentrations of council housing on the rural outskirts.

3.5 Mobilising the wealth of cities “The ideal city is a living organism, which is continuously changing and adapting itself to the new demands of life.” J Tanghe, S Vlaeminck and J Berghoef, Foreword to *Living Cities*

Our major urban areas have to fight back by making the most of their economic, social and physical capital. The Core Cities → see themselves as the dynamos of their regional economies. Towns and cities are essentially organic and should not be seen just as a set of problems or machines to be fixed with a ‘toolkit’ of short-term projects. Dispersal and urban sprawl increase car use, and affect property values, and ultimately people’s savings. Professor Michael Porter of Harvard University has pointed out that cities should be seen as major potential markets for business. Hence renaissance should benefit all and is too important to be left to the public sector alone. Towns and cities contribute to the ‘wealth of nations’ by providing, among other benefits:

- _____ A cultural identity which comes from their history, including landmark buildings, streets, and waterways, as well as public institutions such as theatres and libraries
- _____ A stock of property which represents a major source of individual, business and institutional savings
- _____ A melting pot which absorbs all kinds of people, and enables young people and those from elsewhere to get started, make their way, and establish their identity
- _____ An economic catalyst which creates new markets, business opportunities and jobs, and which helps add value through specialised expertise
- _____ Sustainable development which helps conserve natural resources by reducing the need to consume energy and materials

→ The Core Cities group comprises Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham and Sheffield. It was established to promote the crucial and distinctive role that major cities play in regional and national economies.

3.6 Securing urban renaissance “The chief function of the city is to convert power into form, energy into culture, dead matter into living symbols of art, biological creations into social creatures.” Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*

Renaissance is a new way of looking at towns and cities for most people. The idea of an urban renaissance was first promulgated in 1980 through the Council of Europe, with conferences on how to save historic cities. It was inspired originally by the success of Italian and Dutch towns, which had prospered over centuries, and by historic English towns with their heritage of streets and squares from the Georgian era. The policy of comprehensive redevelopment that dominated the post-war period had left a legacy of unloved concrete structures and neglected Victorian areas. The switch to conservation, renewal and improvement programmes for areas of 19th century housing underlay the comparative success of cities like Norwich, as well as the gentrification of many of London’s inner areas. Could other towns and cities recover their attractions as places to live?

In 1999 The Urban Task Force put forward the idea of an urban renaissance to tackle the twin problems of urban exodus and derelict land. The Urban White Paper, *Our Towns and Cities: The Future*, picked up this concept and went far beyond the 1977 White Paper by emphasising:

- _____ Sustainable development – places that would stand the test of time
- _____ Urban design – places of beauty that are a pleasure to be in
- _____ Social inclusion or neighbourhood renewal – closing the gaps in access to opportunities and quality of life

The Urban White Paper represented a shift in thinking from a reliance on top-down planning and special programmes, to partnerships that bring in all the stakeholders, that secure community engagement in the process and that upgrade mainstream services. We now have the beginnings of regional government and most of the main urban areas have unitary status. But in order to achieve more holistic results, renaissance has to cross sectoral and professional boundaries, and to focus on strengths and opportunities rather than weaknesses and threats.

^{3.7} Drawing inspiration from elsewhere “Livability cannot be measured in indices, benchmarks or the number of golf courses per 100,000 people. Livability stems from the arduous team work required to improve a system... regions – led by vibrant central cities – create livability through participative planning.” *Towards Livable Communities: a report 1975–2000*, Partners for livable communities, USA.

Can towns and cities reinvent themselves? All the 24 partner towns and cities are well aware of the warning signs of property abandonment, crime linked to drug addiction, and traffic congestion. They want to avoid becoming like American doughnuts with holes in their middles. Meanwhile the centres of many American cities are making a comeback by increasing levels of security and attracting people back to live in them. The same idea is now taking hold in many of the partner towns and cities, as well as elsewhere in England.

More people are now also looking to Europe for inspiration. Most of the Core Cities are members of European networks, as are other partners like Croydon and Norwich. A few Regional Development Agencies are also taking account of best European practice. While it is Spanish cities like Bilbao and Barcelona that have received most attention in the UK architectural press, even more inspiration can be drawn from northern cities in Scandinavia and Holland, where there are greater similarities in culture and climate. Dutch and Danish experience of making streets pleasant for walking and cycling has enabled them to counter the growth of car usage, despite rising prosperity, and many English towns and cities, such as Middlesbrough, are drawing on this expertise. The Dutch approach to planning has given rise to the European Spatial Development Perspective and groups of cities collaborating in sub-regional networks. These examples show how new high-density, high-quality urban housing is successfully competing with lower-density suburban estates, partly because such housing supports modern rapid transit systems, and encourages more walking and cycling. Examples are now emerging in England and not just in the northern cities but also in parts of the South East as our Case Studies illustrate.

“Our aim is to make urban living a positive experience for the many, not the few; to bring all areas up to the standard of the best; and to deliver a lasting urban renaissance.”

John Prescott, Foreword to
Our Towns and Cities: The Future

Perspectives In section 3 of this Report (Challenges) we have shown that England's major urban areas are engaged in a long-term battle on many fronts, including economic and social, to re-establish and maintain their attractiveness to residents and investors alike. Our work with the 24 partner towns and cities has found that there is a quiet revolution going on with some successes that match best practice in Europe and America.

Before drawing conclusions from such widely different places, and with many different types of evidence, it is helpful first to consider:

Where are the trends pointing?
How are the partners doing in relation to others?
Can places be categorised into 'types'?
How is change being managed and what is the general picture?
Do visions matter in delivering change?
Is sustainable change feasible?
What are the views of other stakeholders – young and adult citizens, property/investor interests and local authorities?
How can progress be made more effective?
What drives renaissance?

4.1 Where are the trends pointing? As regeneration takes a generation (or a couple of decades) according to some of the Case Studies →, it is helpful to see how much has changed in the life of English towns and cities over such a period.

A number of underlying trends affect all of the 24 partner towns and cities. They are also reflected in the Citizens' Workshop discussions:→

Post-industrialisation Cities and industrial towns have lost their traditional economic base but are generating new kinds of jobs, for example in tourism and the evening economy. Over the last 20 years the numbers of non-manual workers have risen from about half to two-thirds of the working population. The main growth has been in part-time jobs and in women going back to work.

Household change The family is no longer the basic unit, leading to new markets for apartment living. Half the household population is now singles, and the numbers have risen by 50% over the last 20 years. Moreover single person households account for 75% of projected household growth reflecting also the growing numbers of elderly people and family break-ups.

Urban flight We found that people are coming back to live in the centres of big cities like Manchester, and also areas like Stratford (Newham). However places like Blackburn with Darwen and Stoke-on-Trent continue to see people move out to neighbouring areas. In England over the last 20 years three million have gone to live in homes in the suburbs. Such sprawl adds to congestion with suburban dwellers travelling into towns and cities and ultimately is self-defeating. However, developers are building at half the density that is now recommended, and therefore only accommodating a fraction of the forecast demand for new houses, with house building at its lowest level since 1924.

continues

Insecurity A major reason for wanting to leave towns and cities is growing concern and perceptions about crime and aggression. This is partly a result of publicity given to street crime and crime to support drug addiction. It can be made worse by the lack of people on the streets for example, in the West End of Newcastle, and also in some of the suburbs of Swindon. The Looking and Listening focus groups found that poor urban design is one cause of people feeling insecure, another is places that are no longer overlooked by anyone. The Citizens' Workshops also revealed major concerns about empty buildings and the need to attend to the basic problems first, like cleaner streets.

Unequal mobility Dispersal of jobs, retailing and population, combined with more car usage is a formula for increased congestion and pollution. Over the last 20 years passenger miles by car have gone up by about 50%. Retail spending on comparison goods such as clothing and durable goods is concentrated in the 200 largest retail centres, whose share of the market has gone up from 50 to about 75%. Local centres accessible on foot have seen their sales decline and this was a major cause of concern to the more elderly participants in the Citizens' Workshops. Also residents on limited incomes often cannot afford the cost of travel to new centres. There is also a concern that good jobs in city centres are being taken by those living outside their boundaries. In Birmingham, 37% of jobs are taken by people commuting in from outside the metropolitan area.

Polarisation Research by the Centre for Analysing Social Exclusion shows that all the English regions have much greater disparities than their European counterparts. The disparities grew during the previous 'free market era', and are only gradually being narrowed. It suggests that they stem from the combination of a weak economy, poor schooling and extreme differences in income. They also reflect real differences in the nature, quality and distribution of the housing stock.

continues

Loss of local control Mergers and acquisitions have sapped local autonomy. Remote financial institutions have ended up owning commercial property and controlling investment in some urban areas. Compared with the optimism after World War II, many planners say they feel powerless to shape change and secure quality, particularly where demand is weak. There is also a real concern in the regions that London dominates investment and that many of its problems stem from overheating.

Anne Power and Lord Rogers of Riverside also bring out these trends in *Cities for a small country*.

4.2 How are the partners doing in relation to others?

The performance of a town or city can be judged from many different perspectives, it all depends on where you stand and what indicators you chose to use. Moreover, there is no general agreement on what the headline indicators for urban renaissance should be. Rankings are often unfair and averages are misleading. Administrative boundaries can also influence apparent performance – for example, while Leeds performs well in comparison to others on many indicators this is partly because the city council’s boundary is relatively widely drawn and takes in rural and countryside areas as well as the city itself. The complex anatomy of towns and cities requires separate information on their centres, inner areas and different types of suburb but there is no ready source of small-area data or statistics.

As we said in the introduction to this Report, we did not set out to produce a new, comprehensive set of indicators. We wanted to take the pulse of urban renaissance in different places around England by looking at developments and changes, and listening to people in those places. In many ways, given the differences between every town and city, what matters most is change over time in individual places. The question should be – “is a particular town or city a better place to live, work and play now than it was, say ten or fifteen years ago?” Consequently, in the Partner Profiles we have set out a range of illustrative data for each of the partners, rather than making direct comparisons between them. Of the data used – population, employment, unemployment, income support claimants, life expectancy and ethnicity are available from the Office of National Statistics; education is available from the Department for Education and Skills; and house prices are available from the Land Registry. These categories are generally accepted as relevant measures of urban renaissance (or decline) but they are not necessarily comprehensive.

In drawing any overall conclusions from our work with the partner towns and cities, from existing indicators and from the Workshops→, it seems that:

Major urban areas are not achieving their full potential despite positive trends across a number of indicators.

Core Cities however are getting better. Loss of population seems to be slowing down, they have become centres for government and services such as law and accountancy, and they have benefited from the growth of their universities. The ‘knowledge economy’ is boosting their spending power – in Sheffield for example the university is thought to bring in about £500 million per year to the city’s economy. Their shopping offer has become notably stronger, attracting new private investment on a major scale – although this is often in contrast to other towns and cities in the same region.

The rapid decline of traditional industries in the 1970s and 80s had a much greater negative impact on northern towns and cities than those in the south. Although, some southern towns – for example Plymouth and Medway – were also particularly adversely affected. The overall outcome was a widening of what is termed the North–South divide. These towns and cities are achieving some successes in turning around their centres and in developing new industries, especially in the service and new technology sectors. However it is questionable, given their starting point in comparison with others, that they will ever be able to close that wider North–South divide.

continues

Despite some positive trends, the main urban areas still score poorly on those indicators that particularly affect where people want to live – education and housing. Families especially are influenced by the education offer; it is a major factor in their decisions to move out of a town or city. Although there are some positive trends – for example, Birmingham’s school results have been praised by the Audit Commission – the majority of the 24 partner towns and cities have lower rates of educational attainment than the rest of the country. It is not, therefore just the most disadvantaged areas that under-achieve in education. In terms of housing, the ideal is a supply across all price bands including the highest. Indeed the relatively small proportion of homes in the higher price category (2% in Manchester for example compared with 15% nationally) indicates how much the major cities’ profiles differ from that of the country as a whole. This is why Newcastle, in its ‘Going for Growth’ strategy is keen to secure more executive housing in the city.

In terms of aspects of economic performance, English towns and cities tend to lag behind their European counterparts in rates of innovation and wealth creation. A better understanding of what factors and conditions encourage private investment in particular areas will help towns and cities exploit their potential and narrow the gaps within England and with Europe. ODPM’s Urban Policy Unit is working with the Core Cities group (all of whom are involved in the **Partners in Urban Renaissance** project), HM Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry to gain a better understanding of the factors and conditions that encourage private investment. The outcome of this work should assist not only the Core Cities, but other towns and cities too. An interim report from this work will be launched at the Urban Summit in October 2002, and the final report will be published in Spring 2003.

In addition the Property Workshops → highlighted the lack of skills in industrial towns and cities (largely but not solely in the north) as a major constraint to investment and renaissance. They also highlighted the high risks and costs to the private sector of bringing brownfield land back into use which were not entirely recognised by the Government’s current grant regimes.

^{4.3} **Can places be categorised into types?** Every place is different, and no one size fits all in terms of delivering urban renaissance, but it can be helpful in trying to identify issues, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and ways forward to group similar places together. During our work with the 24 partner towns and cities, and as the Partner Profiles bring out, we have found some common factors among the Core Cities, among the towns and cities undergoing industrial restructuring (primarily but not solely in the north), and among the southern towns and cities:

Core Cities see one of their main challenges now as connecting poorer, peripheral neighbourhoods to the new opportunities in their centres, and many are having to address housing market failure. They are best positioned to attract major inward investment to their centres because of their relatively large shopping offer, their cultural resources, and their knowledge base. In addition to performing well against other English cities, they are also keen to do so against their European counterparts – for example in their public transport systems. The Core Cities also provide many examples of good quality urban design, featuring in a number of ‘good practice’ guides and publications.

Restructuring industrial towns and cities, such as Stoke-on-Trent, face particular challenges in improving their skills base and in raising public funding for infrastructure projects. However, they share with the Southern towns and cities issues such as improving their cultural offer, reusing their heritage buildings and waterways, dealing with urban and rural populations, reducing the physical barriers of 1960s – 80s road infrastructure and Victorian rail infrastructure, and generally improving their image.

Southern towns and cities, such as Reading, face different challenges as well, especially in providing sufficient affordable housing (as a result of escalating prices and scarcity of brownfield sites) and managing traffic congestion. Many also need support in masterplanning and urban design.

^{4.4} How is change being managed and what is the general picture? “Physical transformation is only part of the regeneration process; everything is interrelated; the trickle-down effect does not always work.” *Urban Regeneration Handbook*, BURAs

Our work with the 24 partner towns and cities revealed a great enthusiasm among local authorities for the idea of urban renaissance. Most want to go beyond regeneration but are concerned that funds tend to be concentrated on renewing the worst areas, and on economic development. They are more interested in learning from each other rather than just being given directives or audits, and want more freedom and flexibility. The participants in the Citizens’, Young People’s and Property Workshops all wanted to make urban living a better experience for everyone, suggesting that concentrating public spending largely on small areas – albeit the most deprived – is perhaps potentially self-defeating.

Ministers and the UPU/URBED team heard about and saw success stories in all the partner towns and cities – and so, clearly at one level urban policy is working. But the contrasts between the centres of the Core Cities and the rest of the urban area in their regions have widened.

Compared with a couple of decades ago, the centres of the Core Cities have been transformed, and there has been a growth in the evening economy in most towns and cities. Entire ‘quarters’ have been rediscovered, repaired and recreated, which is the essence of urban renaissance. City centre living is becoming fashionable again. There are some places whose design quality rivals the icons of Bilbao or the best US downtown areas. Furthermore, a cross-sectoral approach is being taken, working through partnerships, as a result of successive bidding for funds and, more recently, as a result of the Government’s Local Strategic Partnerships policy. Though many complain about the complexity of funding regimes, and the number of partnerships, surprisingly few local authorities seemed to be completely overwhelmed by the task. Local authorities are approaching the same task in very different ways, and though it is still far from clear what works best, long-term, top-level commitment is an essential. In a few places the Regional Development Agencies are actively promoting and supporting the urban renaissance agenda. However the achievements are still patchy. Community engagement is still in its infancy in most places, and even where it has been applied most, there are criticisms, such as a lack of accountability and responsiveness.

^{4.5} Do visions matter in delivering change? “(urban renaissance) requires shared pride and vision, confidence and identity...” Comments at the first Partners in Urban Renaissance symposium, Birmingham 2001

A clear focus on priorities is needed because demands always outstrip resources, and public funds need to be used to pump-prime rather than displace private investment. Visions help to get everyone working together, providing they are well communicated. Almost all the local authorities we visited had clearly articulated visions and strategies, though they had been produced in quite different ways. They realised the need for balanced incremental development, in which each success widens the options for the next stage. Those places that had made most progress also had well-developed systems for generating visions and communicating the results. They also had effective and focused leadership and supportive private sectors. Their visions went beyond conventional land use planning. They were part of a process of building concordats among public agencies and others to mobilise funding. They helped to implement partnership working for areas undergoing change, such as town and city centres, waterfronts, or old industrial quarters. While it is often strong leadership that gets the praise for success stories, behind it is the patient process of building a shared vision and a phased strategy capable of being implemented over many years as some of the Case Studies show.

^{4.6} Is sustainable change achievable? ‘Sustainability’ is a concept that is not widely or easily understood. Most people in towns and cities equate it with ‘environmental issues’ – including avoiding waste of resources, making the lot of the pedestrian better as opposed to catering for the car, and improving the quality of public space. Sustainable urban renaissance is achievable but it requires an holistic approach across the physical, economic and social aspects of life in urban areas as well as the environmental. The process should begin with public space and the needs of pedestrians. These are things that our workshop participants particularly identified with in terms of creating places where people really want to be. Some public space projects were considered to be cosmetic but we found plenty of examples of places where the benefits would be long-term – or sustainable. The public sector budget is usually not sufficient to achieve sustainability compared to the total investment usually required for significant areas. It is therefore crucial to mobilise private investment – sometimes by making a start using public funding in the first phase of any renaissance project. An example is Bede Island, a former scrap yard in the centre of Leicester where initial improvements to public space were funded by the public sector and made it possible to negotiate higher standards in the next phase being undertaken by a private housebuilder.

An important ‘social’ consideration in achieving sustainable renaissance is ensuring that benefits (for example of improved urban design, improved public space, improved town and city centres) can be spread and the gaps between the better off and the less well-off narrowed. The alternative is alienation, social exclusion and, potentially, conflicts and disorder. An important message from local authorities that are tackling social exclusion, such as Sheffield and Plymouth, is the importance of taking community participation beyond consultation and giving local groups a stake in the process plus plenty of support.

Facilities for young people are also crucial to sustainability. The involvement of young people in the provision and use of facilities can help turn around marginalised communities, as happened in King’s Lynn for example, and [Stoke-on-Trent’s Young People’s Local Strategic Partnership](#)→. It is clear from the [Young People’s Workshops](#)→ that there is a great enthusiasm for involvement in the urban renaissance debate and in the delivery of urban renaissance; young people care as much about their town or city as adults do and are keen to make a positive contribution – not just as an interest group but as an integral part of the process and the practice.

In delivering sustainable renaissance thought also needs to be given to the overall approach. *Cities for a small country* argues for starting with the centre and working outwards – as in Manchester and Birmingham for example, But we also found examples where the regeneration of the fringe areas into attractive places to live, as in Brighton & Hove, had created confidence for the next stage of renaissance process. This can be more effective than the traditional ‘worst first’ approach.

^{4.7} What are the views of different stakeholders? – young and adult citizens, property/investor interests and local authorities? “The real role and contribution of urban regeneration is far more than can be expressed simply in terms of the input of finance or the output of Treasury-approved deliverables.” *Urban Regeneration Handbook*, BURA

Practitioners are agreed that best practice involves partnership, strategy and sustainability. The starting point is finding some common ground among all the stakeholders. We therefore sought to go beyond official statistics and accounts, through a series of workshops.

What do young and adult citizens want? With MORI we ran workshops in eight of the partner towns and cities, plus four *Looking and Listening* focus groups on public realm issues and two Young People’s Workshops. Despite some general pessimism about urban areas, and taking account of the differences between each place, we found great cause for hope. Young people say they would like to do more and ways need to be found of harnessing their energy and participation in the renaissance agenda particularly. There is considerable consensus on the basic importance of a well-maintained public realm, the idea of ‘pride of place’ and the importance of community engagement. There are three further points. First, local residents really do care about their town or city, and what happens to it. They particularly like places with a strong identity or history, such as Norwich and Newcastle. However, they can also be supportive of modern architecture where the scheme produces real public benefits. Second, young people tend to be more positive than older generations, and deep-seated attitudes are changing as a result for example, of foreign travel and education. However, they too are concerned about the dangers posed by drugs, and want more places they can call their own. Third, people are very concerned about the amount of control they have over their lives. They become angry when they perceive benefits going to others, while everyday problems in their neighbourhood are neglected. They would often prefer to leave decisions to experts (contrary to much received wisdom), but they want to be consulted, and to have feedback. This means there is a need to raise aspirations in some areas. It is also important to bear in mind, in respect of people’s views, that whether a place is going up or down depends on who they compare themselves with.

What do investors want? Investors and developers basically want to make money, but encouragingly there is real interest from many different areas of the private sector in the potential for urban renaissance, and for what some call 'new property products'. This was reflected in high rates of participation and positive views expressed at most of the Workshops. While there are still relatively few good examples of mixed-use, high-density, high-quality design development, ideas which have been pioneered in the centre of the Core Cities are beginning to spread. A major concern is that some local authorities and Regional Development Agencies are not making full use of their powers, such as Compulsory Purchase Orders, to assemble complex sites. They do not think grant regimes reflect the realities and cost of brownfield development especially in areas of low demand. Local authorities are also sometimes spreading development too thinly by not concentrating on where the best prospects are. Local developers see themselves as the best people to act as the drivers for change, and are worried that they may get squeezed out by national organisations. They argue that to compete with out-of-town development some relaxation of standards is needed in places where the market is weak. Access to grant aid funding also needs to be greatly simplified. Urban Regeneration Companies may provide the necessary vision, but will they be able to mobilise the resources to sustain partnerships and hence deliver results?

More detailed accounts of the views of young and adult citizens and property/investor interests can be found in the Workshops Report.

What do local authorities want? The greatest concern of the partners is for more financial autonomy – 'free the 24' was a popular slogan. Some felt that the profusion of partnerships and the many different funding sources are making the urban renaissance process unnecessarily complicated. They welcomed the opportunity not only to find out what others were doing, but also to put their views across to the 'centre' – Whitehall. There is a dilemma that the very authorities that are often most receptive to the idea of urban renaissance are in locations with the least potential for viable property development, as measured by land values. Furthermore, there is also a dilemma that pressing for quality can simply force development out of town into the next district. Another challenge is effective communication between local authority, communities and the private sector. Low turnout at elections suggests disengagement but there are other channels – Local Strategic Partnerships, Community Strategies, local Chambers of Commerce, and so on. However, we found several cases where the local authority thought they had good relationships with citizens and the property sector, but the workshops indicated real divisions. The workshops showed the difficulties of building trust without changes to the way resources are raised and allocated.

^{4.8} How can progress be more effective? “Cities evolve organically: learning, maturing, adapting... Glasgow, Birmingham and Manchester are recreating themselves this way, small area by small area.” Anne Power and Lord Rogers, *Cities for a small country*

How do cities learn? One of the reasons why business is sometimes credited with being better at development than central and local government is the private sector’s apparent ability to concentrate on a limited number of objectives, and to back them with whatever resources are needed. What is called the ‘learning curve’ means that over time organisations become more efficient at what they do. The key to renaissance seems to be ‘persistence, persistence and persistence’. The most successful places put a stress on learning from elsewhere. Thus Norwich, which, incidentally, was the first city to take traffic out of its centre, was inspired by other European cities to draw up a masterplan for its riverside. Newham engaged consultants who had been involved in repositioning Barcelona. Birmingham drew initial support from leading urban designers from the USA. The 24 towns and cities are now becoming a learning network, with Norwich drawing on experience in Leeds of upgrading public squares, Sheffield, Newham and Norwich in dialogue about how best to assess performance, the Breaking Down the Barriers events bringing together partners with similar challenges, and the symposia enabling discussion and debate on common policy issues. All this indicates a real attitude change over the last 25 years. Though the models are not as plentiful or well documented as they should be, the Case Studies show that a renaissance is underway, and that ‘learning by doing’ is the best way of building capacity.

Where does the impetus come from? The virtuous spiral of renaissance depends on co-ordinated efforts over many years, and so it is hard to isolate any one driving force. Yet some lessons can be drawn from the Case Studies, particularly those that involve transforming an entire area or quarter. There are a number of catalysts for renaissance:

Universities not only bring in young people from outside, who may then stay on, and who occupy houses that might otherwise have been abandoned, but also can develop significant sites near the city centre, for example Leeds and Plymouth

Professional services such as law and accountancy that have concentrated and expanded in the regional capitals, along with Government functions, can provide tenants for well-designed new office blocks in new well located quarters, for example Newcastle

Young professionals who want to live closer to the centre and its leisure attractions, can be customers for new apartment buildings, and conversions of old buildings into loft apartments, for example Stratford and Manchester

Black and minority ethnic groups who have moved into 19th century housing left behind by those moving to the suburbs, can provide the missing ingredient of entrepreneurship, for example Leicester and Stratford

Community groups who want to stop decline can provide a positive force particularly if they promote the reuse of neglected assets, for example Sheffield and Reading

^{4.9} What drives renaissance? In getting the process going, and producing a step change from regeneration to renaissance, certain types of ‘physical’ opportunity stand out – the rediscovery of water fronts, the adaptive re-use of buildings, the creation of entertainment quarters and new arts facilities, the reconnection of streets and squares to form a high public quality realm, and the development of stylish new arts facilities.

There are also a number of approaches to the process of urban renaissance – although there is, of course, no single model applicable in all cases – and lessons in this respect can be drawn from different types of success stories across the 24 partner towns and cities. In brief, the starting point is **recognition** of the need for radical change, possibly sparked off by a visit abroad, the loss of a major employer, or the opportunity to attract new investment. While the impetus sometimes comes from a change of politicians or senior officers, in some cases it can be traced to individuals within the wider community. After some **research and reflection**, including comparisons with other places, there usually seems to be some kind of event to develop or crystallise the vision. This will tend to focus initially on a distinct area or corridor, for example a waterway, or the main town centre, where change is possible and needed. Whether the vision or masterplan receives a great deal of publicity or not, the next stage is the **resolution** to implement projects that help to build confidence and show the way. Individually they may not add up to much but over time they change attitudes, and help to attract investment from outside. Initially, for example the pioneers can be small local enterprises looking for better premises. The first new housing can look out of place in retrospect because developers lack confidence, which is why **repair** (including repair to public space) is so important early on. Community groups sometimes act as pioneers, but may lack vision. They may be more supportive if the whole process is seen as one of **rediscovery** rather than as imposing something from outside. In time local developers and community enterprises tend to be displaced by national and international organisations.

Though there are differences between the main interest groups, there are also some important areas of common ground. Rising house prices and land values play a key role in starting the engine of urban renaissance as can be seen from research into changing attitudes to urban living, such as *‘But Would You Live There?’* →. However, development on its own is of little value unless communities feel engaged and the gaps are narrowed. There is a danger of some parts of English towns and cities following a model in which poorer people or businesses are displaced by development without compensation, and the gaps widen rather than narrow. There are plenty of examples of successful Single Regeneration Budget projects, where those getting jobs have left the neighbourhood to be replaced by those who are less fortunate and have less choice. Industrial towns are losing the more able, who tend to seek their fortunes in the centres of the Core Cities, or in the suburbs of smaller towns. However, public sector financial regimes tend to prevent successful places from reinvesting the result of higher land values in improving infrastructure or the environment. One authority talked of ‘perverse incentives’, whereby, in their view, central Government rewards failure rather than success.

It is worth considering the adoption of the continental model, where increased land values feed back into the local authority’s resources. This enables the attractiveness of existing areas to be enhanced and maintained. Renaissance would then create many more jobs, at the same time as it builds confidence and self-esteem.

The Case Studies, one of the four other documents supporting this Project Report, sets out success stories where elements of these physical opportunities and approaches to the process of urban renaissance are reflected. The examples set out below briefly tell the story of urban renaissance in four very different places. The stories highlight a number of common themes, despite the differences between the places, and a number of the approaches raised in this Perspectives section of the Project Report:

Nottingham grew as a regional shopping centre when a redundant railway station was redeveloped. However its renaissance as a city started with the pedestrianisation of the central area, inspired by experience in Leeds, and the availability of funding from the European Union. Efforts to reuse empty textile factories in the Lace Market, with an initial focus on tourism, were boosted when further educational colleges took over some of the more difficult buildings. The waterfront has taken off as a new leisure quarter, but it was the relocation of a local newspaper, which set the tone for the high standard of new buildings, and also the Inland Revenue who in moving their national headquarters to Nottingham were persuaded to use an internationally known architect.

The rebirth of **Leeds** started in the 1970s after the city was connected to the M1 and a modern road system, thus encouraging office development in the centre. However, its renaissance probably started after the city sought to promote the growth of the evening economy as a way of attracting young people. The universities became very popular, and have expanded in a quarter close to the city centre, while students have taken over 19th century terraces nearby. The rediscovery of the waterfront was given a small boost by the Leeds Development Corporation, but it was local entrepreneurs who brought about the first new uses, such as a Design and Innovation Centre attracting small creative businesses into the area. The Leeds Initiative, which played a key role in creating a sense of partnership, helped build bridges between the private sector and the council, and this has broadened to involve first the universities, followed by the voluntary sector. The Vision for Leeds process helped to articulate priorities, and gave birth to a host of partnerships around specific themes. Notably the city is shifting away from dependence on the car, with a high-quality tram system that will link up disadvantaged inner areas with the centre, while sites that were once reserved for offices, industry or parking have been turned into high-density housing.

In **Newham**, an exciting-looking new bus station, and the rebuilding of the railway station, is being followed by the development of a station on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, after a long campaign to get the route through East London. The strategy for the Stratford Arts Quarter has created a series of attractions that will add up to a new Late Night Zone. In turn young professionals who would previously not have considered East London are moving in to the old terraced houses, and also former council blocks that have been converted into apartments, pushing up house prices. This in turn has caused the developers of the railway lands to change their scheme so it is now anchored on housing and a new regional shopping centre, rather than offices.

The starting point for the renaissance of Reading, which had suffered from the closure of traditional industries like biscuits and bulbs, was the reopening of the canal through from the River Thames to the River Kennet. This was promoted by a local activist who persuaded the council to require all developments to link up with the canal. The upgrading of the shopping centre, thanks to one of the first Town Centre Management schemes, and high-quality pedestrianisation, and the prevention of out of town competitors, enabled the local authority to secure a high-quality redevelopment of the brewery site that it had acquired. This has become the Oracle, which combines covered shopping with restaurants and bars looking out to the restored canal. In turn, new high-quality business parks have been developed on the periphery. One helpful factor has been the growth of the university, which in turn has helped to develop the sense of partnership and sharing of information between the council and property investors.

“A vision for the future is fine but it needs milestones through which to see physical as well as socio-economic and skills change...”

Property Workshop

Five steps to success While recognising that all towns and cities are different, our work with the 24 partners has shown that some successful common approaches can be identified. In order to learn lessons from these approaches we have, in this section, developed and grouped them into a number of processes – or steps towards renaissance.

There is no magic formula for renaissance, rather there are many variants. To many practitioners the basic principles will seem common sense. We do not set out to provide a comprehensive blueprint, but rather to understand common themes and describe some of the extensive good practice that is evident around the country. The processes that we have identified, particularly from the visits and the literature review, are set out under five headings that can form a series of steps which build on one another. They are:

-
- Developing the vision

 - Building a concordat

 - Carrying out a phased strategy

 - Orchestrating investment

 - Maintaining the momentum

Many examples of good practice are referred to in this section of the Report. Where a full case study on a particular project or theme is included in the Case Studies report, the place name is highlighted. The wider context to many of these renaissance success stories is also set out in the Partner Profiles.

^{5.1} Developing the vision Facing up to reality and seeing the potential together is the first step.

The idea of vision is as old as Solomon. Organisations that have vision literally have a clear idea and can see where they are going; they are not blinded by barriers or diverted by day-to-day upsets. Though leadership is vital, with power so divided, a clearly articulated and shared vision helps to set priorities, and to mobilise the resources needed to change direction. As one partner said, “shared pride and vision... (perceptions and attitudes are key to) confidence and identity. Town and cities should identify their own character and place in the urban hierarchy”.

A succession of government guidance has encouraged the development of visions and strategies for town and city centres, and for neighbourhood renewal, and they have formed an important element in bidding for resources. But there are many more examples where the vision never gelled, or was lost in fruitless arguments, consultancy reports that gathered dust, or simply lacked the capacity to convince anyone.

Experience Visioning is not something that can be left to experts, it has to engage all the stakeholders. Hence action planning, involving brainstorming techniques, is increasingly being used. The **Leeds Initiative** held six round table conferences plus surveys, and followed it up five years later to kick-off work on their Community Strategy. The impetus originally came from the invitation from Government to produce a City Pride Prospectus. In Croydon, the impetus for Croydon 20-20 was to change the image of a ‘1960s concrete car park’ and the process was largely funded by private landowners with a stake in the town centre, which has helped improve public-private relations. Some authorities have drawn up visions that encompass the whole city, and tried to engage the wider community. Action planning processes with community participation have also been used successfully in **Newham** in East London (Newham 2010) and **Brighton & Hove**.

Good practice The process of developing the vision is as important as the results, and may include:

Analysing trends to understand the drivers for change and their impact on the place in question
Commissioning opinion surveys or holding focus groups with different interests
Mapping indicators, using Geographic Information Systems, to show up disparities
Benchmarking the town, or parts of it, against comparable places in this country and abroad, using readily available indicators
Identifying strategic themes that will move the area forward
Organising events such as round table conferences, visioning weekends, planning for real events to identify strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats
Publishing drafts with an inspiring theme for comment
Using the local media and information technology such as a website to generate discussion

The lessons are that the vision and strategy has to match the context, as one size does not fit all. A good approach is to start with the big picture, building on strengths, and making connections with new development and sources of investment. It also helps to focus on themes or areas where results can most readily be shown. An independent facilitator can help, but in the end the vision must be homemade. An existing partnership may take responsibility for the process, or the process itself can help build up the partnership. The resulting document (or CD-ROM in the case of Newham) should set specific and measurable targets. The visioning process needs to be followed up, and repeated periodically as the context changes. It should be bold but tempered by realism – not everyone can play in the Premier League, and towns and cities need to develop market niches.

5.2 Building a concordat Partnerships mean nothing without commitment of resources. As changing attitudes can take several decades, and the private sector is risk averse, the local authority needs to take the lead in getting the different parts of the public sector to work together for the common good. It needs to commit the initial ‘pump-priming’ resources towards turning the vision into reality.

The ever changing tapestry of Government and local initiatives can lead to cynicism. Formal commitments are needed to overcome the sceptics, and MORI has found that even designation of a priority area can cause people to believe things are getting better. As one partner commented, urban renaissance is “a long-term process; there is a need to accept there will be economic downturns without losing confidence”. The French have gone for ‘contrats de villes’ to bind both central and local government to a common purpose. We have used the word concordat to mean an understanding, which may involve a formal or legalised partnership, so that the different arms of government and others are committed to working together for a defined period of years before reviewing the arrangements.

Experience There are a growing number of examples, including several City Challenge projects that show how a concerted effort to invest public resources can make a huge difference. The concordat needs to start with tying in the local authority’s own departments as in the Leeds Initiative. It may comprise several agencies working together, as in the case of Newcastle’s Grainger Town Partnership, or extend into joint local authority working, as in the collaboration between Gateshead and Newcastle over the waterfront and European Capital of Culture 2008 bid. Concordats can also involve partnerships with the private sector. The Bristol Initiative launched a series of distinct partnerships, such as the Cultural Development Partnership, which helped to turn the heart of Bristol around and which improved relations between the Chamber of Commerce and the council. The Croydon Marketing and Development Company is charged with creating links with the private sector. Norwich provides an interesting example of how a local authority without access to European Structural Funds has benefited from being part of cross-national networks involving similar cities. The experience of Urban Regeneration Companies will be interesting and we found that both Sheffield and Leicester are exerting an influence through the good relationships they have with the council and other agencies (unlike some of the earlier Urban Development Corporations in the early 1990s).

Good practice It takes time to build an effective partnership, but there are a number of useful tools:

Setting up forums to bring business interests together
Using visions and strategies to enlist the support of other public agencies
Arranging study tours to find out how others have coped, and to provide inspiration
Organising conferences or ‘away days’ on themes that draw potential partners together
Commissioning joint research with other public organisations
Making and taking on secondments
Working through intermediary and professional associations, such as the English Historic Towns Forum, or the Association of Town Centre Management
Securing support from the Regional Development Agencies and where relevant, other agencies such as English Partnerships and English Heritage
Publishing a statement of intent

In the end a partnership or concordat depends on people rather than formal structures. It does seem essential to employ committed staff to service the partnership and its working groups. As well as a board made up of the local ‘great and good’, who are prepared to put time into working together for a common good, there needs to be a budget to ensure that the wider community is engaged where appropriate. High-quality communications and well-managed periodic meetings are essential to keeping partners on board. It is important to be seen to be making progress.

5.3 Carrying out a phased strategy Setting spatial priorities, working out timing and devising projects should follow on from the vision and concordat. Behind all the grand projects that get press coverage are usually a host of smaller projects that lay the foundations for further investment. Building confidence is crucial to changing an area’s image. Pilot projects that help show the way forward are vital to winning the backing for flagship projects that then turn the area around.

The language of action plans, allocating responsibility with deadlines and budgets is commonplace, but there is a danger of trying to do too much with too little in the way of resources. The challenge is building confidence so that people believe an area is going up not down. The approach needs to be ‘holistic’, as one partner said **“A high-quality environment for urban living is important, but so are better mainstream services, especially education. It includes social and economic aspects as well as physical”**.

Experience Some of the most impressive projects have involved waterfronts, as in the case of Newcastle/Gateshead, Birmingham’s Brindleyplace and Reading’s Oracle Centre where it is perhaps easiest to secure high-quality, high-density, mixed-use development. But the groundwork has usually started with something much more modest, such as restoring the canal or reusing an existing building in an imaginative way. It was Manchester’s success with the Commonwealth Games that secured national coverage. But the quality of design in central **Manchester** dates back to projects in Hulme ten years earlier, and the resulting design guide, which was then adapted to cover the rest of the city. Strong partnerships committed to good urban design also enabled the city to respond swiftly to the challenges created by the IRA bombing in 1996. The way in which one phase leads on to another can also be clearly seen by following through the successive phases of the **Birmingham** Highbury Initiative, which is currently focusing on the suburban neighbourhoods, now that the city centre has its own momentum. **Reading** shows how lifting the quality of a town can progressively lead to higher standards of development and property values. **Newham’s** experience with the Stratford Transport Interchange is another example of how the exciting long-term vision for the Lower Lea Valley arc of opportunity is being progressively turned into reality working outwards from the centre. Each stage widens the options and makes it easier to attract private investment. Newham has been able to monitor progress against agreed objectives, which helps to maintain interest and support.

Good practice Useful ways of building confidence include:

Commissioning a public realm strategy, covering such aspects as lighting, linkages and public art
Making a success of initial projects
Putting on public events, such as concerts or theatrical performances in the streets
Producing and publishing development briefs for key sites covering desired and acceptable uses, densities, and arrangements for access
Drawing up design guides, with examples of the standards that are being sought
Using awards to promote better quality
Publishing newsletters and involving the local media

From the time it takes between identifying the opportunity to collecting awards for achievement, it is clear that the process needs to be carefully phased in ways that produce ‘early wins’. It is also a good idea to celebrate a victory every six months to keep everyone’s spirits up, even when there may be little in reality to show for all the effort. This means starting where it is easiest to show results, rather than concentrating on ‘worst first’. Investing in the ‘software’ of people can be as important as the ‘hardware’. It is important to tackle what concerns people most, rather than assuming benefits will trickle down. Different types of strategies are needed for securing economic development and for tackling social exclusion. However, improving the upkeep of the public realm is fundamental to everyone.

5.4 Orchestrating investment While the initial funds for pump-priming investment often need to come from the public sector, private investment is then crucial if a major amount of refurbishment or renewal is to be carried out. Commercial demand and profitability vary hugely around the country as the property indicators, identified by King Sturge for the Property Workshops, show. But there are some common principles that can help attract investment even in areas where the initial prospects look poor.

Developers need confidence, which can come from projects that stimulate demand. Creating confidence can take years to build, but can be destroyed overnight. Hence appropriate developers need to be involved. In the early days the support of local entrepreneurs and social enterprises will be vital because no national organisation is likely to take an interest. One of the partners commented that “it takes occasional leaps of faith”. An area needs the image of a place that is ‘going somewhere’, rather than sinking into a slough of despond. Another partner pointed out that “public engagement can be achieved through less technical approaches and more of an appeal to hearts and minds”. The Property Workshops brought out the danger of encouraging development in too many places simultaneously, which can deter investors.

Experience It is easiest to attract private investment in southern towns and cities where values are highest. However, the most impressive examples of generating private investment tend to be from the Core Cities, like Nottingham’s Waterfront or the Millennium Quarter in Manchester, where areas that were once avoided by the private sector are now in hot demand. Nottingham shows how securing quality design can add value but also how timing is all-important. There are also more peripheral areas that are attracting inward investment like Medway, where public private partnerships and the careful investment of public funds have opened up areas for quality development that were initially of no interest to the private sector. Other noteworthy examples include the use of land pooling for Bristol Harbourside, the way partnerships have been used to mobilise investment in Croydon Tramlink, and the way an ambitious vision for derelict land in King’s Lynn has generated developer interest where none existed.

Good practice Local authorities can make risky development projects more viable in a number of ways:

Improving maintenance standards
Investing in creating a pride of place, including new or refurbished squares, tree-lined avenues, better lighting
Assembling complex sites, including land-pooling and the use of Compulsory Purchase Orders to relocate non-conforming uses
Setting up public private partnerships for complex projects, including new infrastructure, such as integrated rapid transit
Marketing the place imaginatively, for example using concepts like quarters and zones, corridors and arcs, and initiatives and partnerships
Creating property forums and publicising good news stories
Rediscovering and repairing what is already there
Promoting catalytic projects, including cultural facilities
Controlling the release of development sites

Living communities are essentially organic, not machines, and so they need to be treated with sympathy, rather than fixed with tool-kits. As a consequence the task cannot be entrusted to any one profession. Indeed it calls for a dedicated group of urban practitioners. In time these can build up a track record, which enables more ambitious projects to be taken on elsewhere.

5.5 Maintaining the momentum What matters to both occupiers and investors is long-term demand. Property values depend on continual management and maintenance, backed up by information to show that it is ongoing. Urban renaissance is too important to be a political fad or an academic arguing point.

Mechanisms are therefore needed to help keep activity going and investment flowing after the initial excitement has been forgotten. Of course this involves good project management, but it is much more complex and demanding than simply checking outputs against stated objectives. As one partner pointed out there is “**an opportunity for a new professionalism, particularly the development of new skills and flexibilities**”.

Experience Every successful place involves a mass of different projects, which need to reinforce each other. Much of the innovation has come from the voluntary sector, or people crossing from one sector to another. Some of the most impressive experience comes from places that some had written off, like **Sheffield**, where an Urban Regeneration Company (Sheffield One) is making an impact, along with Sheffield First, which is responsible for building partnerships. Community based or social enterprises have played leading roles in reviving peripheral housing estates, and also in creating new industries. Drawing in people from the world of business can help to cut the red tape and confusion, and Sheffield has introduced a simple system for monitoring performance against objectives. **Barnsley** has generated considerable enthusiasm through the visioning process (supported by the Regional Development Agency, Yorkshire Forward), and the creation of town teams but recognises that the vision now needs to be turned into do-able projects, with an organisation to ensure that the barriers are broken down.

Good practice Ways of keeping going include:
Creating broadly based partnerships that bring together representatives of the main public, private, and community interests
Setting up development trusts to enable community based organisations to build up assets and a sense of engagement
Using Urban Regeneration Companies to bring land interests together, and act entrepreneurially but with the public interest in mind
Tracking performance in terms of outcomes, not just outputs, using a simple matrix of indicators
Acting opportunistically in terms of making sites or buildings available in line with demand within a flexible long-term development framework or masterplan
Celebrating success, including ensuring the process is fun for all
Using town teams and Town Champions to keep up pressure for change

Urban areas are too complex for there to be a single solution, and most areas are at different stages of evolution that call for different responses. When there is ‘market failure’ due to a decline in demand, strong public leadership backed by upfront investment is needed. Consequently while some parts are going through what may later be called a renaissance, others will require renewal to root out unacceptable living conditions and to provide good enough basic services. As the following section illustrates, urban renaissance needs to be judged in economic and social as well as environmental terms, and may sometimes be criticised for failing in terms of design and sustainability goals. Yet by following the five basic management or process steps, and applying the right techniques, given enough time and leadership, it is possible to change an area’s trajectory in ways that will benefit the wider community.

“Its only a minority of young people who spoil it for the rest of us...” Young People’s Workshop

“In certain areas there’s a tendency to criminalise young people, but there is very little for young people to do... it’s important that there are public spaces for young people to gather and do productive things.”
Citizens’ Workshop

6 Eight dimensions of renaissance

Eight dimensions of renaissance Processes are all very well, but it is what happens on the ground that really shapes attitudes and behaviour. So what is needed to make more people feel they are living in towns and cities out of choice rather than necessity? As ever, there is no simple answer and views differ according to age and social class, as the Citizens' Workshops found→. However, the over-riding message is to tackle all the dimensions, rather than relying on just one project or service to do the trick, so that a virtuous spiral is created. This section brings together findings from the Case Studies, visits and workshops, as well as some previous research to put forward checklists of good practice. Starting with the Urban White Paper, we have identified eight dimensions of urban renaissance, which were amplified through the Citizens' Workshops and Case Studies. We have also reviewed available indicators, though as noted earlier in this Report existing indicators need to be treated with care. The eight dimensions of sustainable renaissance are:

Community engagement
Pride of place
Harmonious communities
Networks of enterprise
Integrated transport
Thriving centres
Quality services
Valued neighbourhoods

These are the building blocks for an urban renaissance, and their application is summarised and illustrated below. Other key ideas, such as high-quality design and sustainability are cross-cutting principles that need to be applied generally.

^{6.1} Community engagement “The planners are a problem – they consult because they have to but they don't want to.”
“What would maintain my interest is if I saw something that was going to impact on my life and make a difference.”
Citizens' Workshops

The first dimension or pre-condition for urban renaissance is the participation of local residents and businesses in planning and delivery. Community engagement cuts across all the steps in the process, and it goes beyond conventional consultation as the Case Studies for the preceding section illustrate→. The foundations for successful urban renaissance lie in making people feel they have some control over their lives, and some influence over what happens in their neighbourhood. Both the Citizens' and the Young People's Workshops found that people have strong views, but feel that few people listen, and that conventional approaches to consultation are not seen as changing anything. The turn-out rates at local elections are in the bottom quartile for most of the Core Cities and Restructuring industrial towns and cities. One aspect of living in a disadvantaged area is being cut off from other people, and better-off people enjoy access to others both at work and in their leisure time. We must face up to a deep-rooted cynicism about the political process, combined with a babble of communications that are not getting through. A local authority may believe that it is a model for working in partnership, but evidence from our Workshops suggests that sometimes those living and investing in the area may hold a different view.

Of course conflict and misunderstanding in development are inevitable, but can the gaps be bridged? In some places, where efforts have been made in the past to enable people in communities to contribute to the overall vision through surveys, MORI has found that the issues that concern people at the local level are very different from national or even city priorities. Where communities are actively involved in bringing about environmental improvements, such as the inner suburbs of **Birmingham** in Balsall Heath and Moseley or parts of **Leeds**, a difference can clearly be seen over time. In **Plymouth**, it was the efforts of local women who wanted to improve a particularly poor area of 19th century terraced housing that led to the idea of promoting an urban village in Devonport, an important part of the New Deal for Communities in the area. There are impressive examples of faith communities setting up projects that apply the principles of mutual aid, such as Share IT in **Southend-on-Sea**. Both the arts and sport are being used to reach out to people who would otherwise be missed. Southend is also taking part in Eastern England Arts' 'Art Generates' programme. Leeds, Gateshead and Nottingham were granted Beacon Council status in February 2001 for 'Regenerating Through Culture, Sport and Tourism'. Similarly **Blackburn with Darwen** has set up Community Regeneration Zones with local budgets. But perhaps the most intriguing projects of all are in industrial towns such as **Stoke-on-Trent** with its Young LSP and **Middlesbrough**, with its Young Mayor, where young people are starting to play an active role in expressing their needs and shaping the city's and town's future.

There is an abundance of research and good advice on how to engage resident communities, and general agreement that community participation should start early and be properly resourced. As Rowntree's Local Poverty Commission found, people in disadvantaged areas often lack the time, money and confidence to play an active role. Those taking part in our Citizens' Workshops and in the Looking and Listening focus groups all received a small payment, and enjoyed the process, which may help explain why they worked so productively. Equally important are mechanisms to engage the local business community, including small landlords and their property advisors. Surprisingly little attention has been paid to this, outside a few outstanding successes, such as Reading's Property Forum. Our Property Workshops all pressed for more regular communications.

A checklist of possible good practice drawn from these includes:

Area committees with budgets
Surveys and focus groups to probe into what concerns people most
Action planning using various techniques to secure involvement
Forums that meet periodically to review progress and raise issues for consideration by planners or policy advisors and makers
Development trusts that enable communities to acquire and manage assets
Community arts to raise aspirations and build capacity and confidence among local people
Involvement of livewires or community activists
Resources for capacity building
Special initiatives to involve young people, although their meaningful integration into wider community activities and partnerships is also essential

^{6.2} Pride of place “It (the Millennium Bridge) makes you proud, it makes you tingle... everyone talks about it, likes it.”
Citizens’ Workshops

The most obvious sign of places that are cared for is a public realm that is clean, safe and welcoming. The MORI Omnibus survey brings out the importance of this factor in how people feel about their areas above national issues like education and health. It plays such a key role in making people want to move out, yet so little has been done to address the underlying concerns. The video we produced (*These are things that everyday make a difference*) for the Government’s Cross-Cutting Review on Public Spaces earlier in 2002 clearly shows widespread concern to improve the way public spaces are looked after, and also to design new development so that places are more walkable. People feel better living in places with a strong identity, such as Newcastle, particularly now that the waterfront has been revitalised and made a national success. But while the ‘grand projects’ with National Lottery funding are the ones that get media attention, it is the everyday things that make a difference. In particular both adults and young people agree on the need for better facilities for young people, to provide constructive alternatives and activities away from crime and other anti-social behaviour such as vandalism. Law-abiding young people feel as depressed and intimidated by the behaviour of their less law-abiding contemporaries as older citizens do.

There is no simple indicator of pride of place. The amount of derelict land must have some impact on morale, particularly if there are lots of small sites close to where people live. This is the case in many of our 24 towns and cities, even though such sites are still only a small proportion of the whole urban area. Amenity, such as greenery or views, affects house prices, and views of water and/or trees can add value to property. Yet the efforts that have gone into home improvements and DIY have not been matched by public expenditure on the public realm. Indeed as the area of public space has expanded, with many town centres becoming pedestrianised, the budget for maintenance has actually been cut back. Many studies have lamented the loss of people in authority, such as park keepers and wardens.

New ideas are being tried, such as neighbourhood wardens, and a British version of the US Business Improvement District. Our Case Studies have singled out a range of possible approaches. In **Barnsley’s** Neighbourhood Pride programme, the starting point has been improving the way the council and its contractors maintain public spaces through multi-functional teams for each of the nine Forum areas the district is split into. In **Southend-on-Sea**, which like any resort has an abundance of public space, the excellent way the parks are looked after is encouraging families to move into the surrounding areas. The state of existing buildings can be a real deterrent to investment, which is why the refurbishment and adaptive reuse of **Swindon’s** old railway works is seen as key to the area’s future (though unfortunately the layout of many of the new housing estates and development of commercial ‘oases’ surrounded by deserts of parking has created a car dominated environment).

In some other places, imaginative urban design is being used to change the image, with noticeable results. For example **Brighton & Hove’s** Place to Be initiative has used the exciting boardwalk along the beach to demonstrate the city’s new vision of being a Continental-style resort as part of its urban design policy. **Blackburn with Darwen** has used highly visible public art to make entry to the town centre more memorable, and is one of a number of towns where Groundwork Trusts have been working with community groups to find new uses for derelict land. **Manchester** is using design guides to remake the centre, and knit it into the surrounding areas. Leicester has a strong urban design section and Belgrave Road is a notable example of how groups of incomers can bring dying areas back to life through diversifying the roles of fringe or secondary shopping areas.

6 Eight dimensions of renaissance

Possible ways of developing a pride of place include:

Maintenance audits and the use of indicators to assess street cleanliness and repair

Placechecks, and the use of teams of local people to identify what they like and dislike, using photographs

Employment of more maintenance staff and wardens

Demonstration projects including the upgrading of parks and public squares

Design guides and the use of development briefs that put pedestrians rather than cars first

Development and community trusts that take on the improvement of eyesores, and the reuse of neglected sites

The use of public art and greenery, for example, Britain in Bloom

^{6.3} Harmonious communities “(I want to) live out in the country because it’s quiet and tranquil.” Citizens’ Workshop
“If people with choices choose to live in our urban areas they will help to look after them, reducing road traffic and crime.”
Nicholas Schoon, *The Chosen City*

At the heart of what most people are looking for are places that minimise stress and disorder. Noise and aggression are good reasons for wanting to move away from urban areas. The top reasons given for people thinking their town or city has become a worse place to live are crime-related (muggings, burglaries, vandalism). In addition to the 43% of MORI respondents citing that reason, significant numbers (including young people themselves) mentioned young people hanging around, poor local facilities particularly shops, more litter, and the presence of drugs and drug dealers. There is little point responding with evidence that things are not as bad as people think they are. What changes attitudes is publicising examples where places are being made to feel safer and more harmonious. Significantly, while higher social classes are more concerned about youths hanging around, the greatest concerns about crime are felt by young people (perhaps because they are the most likely to be the victims, and can see what is really going on).

Most of the indicators for security are questionable due to differences in reporting (and indeed a sustained campaign to tackle crime in one of our partner cities actually led to a marked increase, as people felt there was more point in reporting offences). Research into the causes of both crime and racial conflict shows the importance of going beyond the figures and symptoms. For example most crimes are opportunistic rather than planned by professionals. Offences to get money for drugs now account for the bulk of those in prison. Poorer housing areas end up acting as sinks. As most crimes are committed close to home, those living in the poorest areas suffer most, particularly as they often cannot afford to be insured. Some of the worst areas are no longer the inner areas, but the peripheral estates. Racial conflict is much less widespread as a cause of disharmony than crime for example, but equally corrosive. The aggression and damage to property causes those who can to leave, leading to further polarisation, and eventual abandonment.

6 Eight dimensions of renaissance

It is a waste of resources to rebuild areas again and again. Great care also needs to be taken so that – for example – designating areas for Neighbourhood Renewal does not compound the very problems they are intended to tackle through stigmatisation and postcode discrimination. Blackburn with Darwen has crowded inner areas lived in largely by people of minority ethnic background, while larger inter-war houses on the former council estates that would be suitable for larger families had been standing empty→. One citizen commented “different communities need to live together” and “it’s very segregated as well... and that’s probably where the racism stems from”. Self-esteem and individual hope can be raised through sports and culture, as in the case of Gateshead, now known for the Angel of the North and the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, and also in Leeds. In West Everton in North Liverpool, the problems of reaching agreement over developing part of a park as an Urban Village point to the need to work with communities, and to ensure that affordable houses for local people are provided before prices start to rise. The gentrification in Brighton & Hove, which has pushed up house prices, has also created a very vocal community, and their Foyer project shows one way of ensuring that local young people are not squeezed out, but get a helping hand. Brighton & Hove is also a good example of a highly walkable city, thanks to its high densities and permeable pattern of streets and lanes. Many concerns relate to what happens after dark. Nottingham has had to deal with the side effects of a vibrant evening economy, but has concentrated new bars and nightclubs next to offices along the waterfront, where they cause less conflict.

There are no easy answers to what are highly contentious problems, but a possible way forward lies in:

Balanced neighbourhoods that try to avoid the domination of large areas by too many of any one age, race or income group

A variety of housing with no obvious distinctions between what is rented and what is owner occupied

Design of permeable areas in which spaces are over-looked, walking and cycling encouraged, and cul-de-sacs avoided

Better lighting, reinforcing key routes to public transport and local facilities

High levels of noise insulation (linked to measures to make housing more sustainable and less wasteful in terms of energy)

Higher standards of maintenance in areas used by the general public

The use of wardens or rangers to allow instant response and avoid the ‘broken windows’ syndrome

Recruitment and training of local residents to provide community care services (and also pathways into work)

Home Zones, where children can play safely in the street, and well-maintained play areas for children

Community-based arts and sports projects

^{6.4} Networks of enterprise “I use the Docklands image when going for a job” “How much of the new employment is for local people or are they just bringing in people from outside?” Citizens’ Workshops

Dynamic and diversified local economies with ladders of opportunity are essential to stability over the longer term. The growth in the number of jobs over recent years has diverted attention from the longer-term challenge of finding new economic roles and job opportunities for those living in industrial towns and cities. Unemployment could easily rise again, and many of the new jobs, for example, in call-centres, are particularly vulnerable. The Citizens’ Workshop in Newcastle highlighted the problem of the northern region losing population because there was no longer a wide enough range of jobs to keep the most talented. In contrast, the strength of many of the other Core Cities is the attractions they hold for young people on their way up.

The most successful economies are those with high rates of business formation, and where Small and Medium Enterprises play a leading role in the economy and widen the range of jobs available. The Core Cities have higher business formation rates than the national average, but the wealth created in almost all our regions lags behind European levels. This is in part because of a failure to turn new ideas into saleable products. The areas associated with high technology innovation and the knowledge economy in Europe tend to be concentrated around universities and ‘technopoles’, such as in southern Germany or the South of France, but the international success stories also include traditional industrial areas like northern Italy. What these have in common is highly supportive environment. Now that IT and cheap air travel has made the ‘global economy’ a reality, many also believe it is the quality of life or lifestyle that will have most effect on an area’s economic trajectory. Hence housing, economic development and urban regeneration are inter-related.

Inner city areas are no longer the ‘seedbeds for enterprise’ they once were. Barclays Bank has found the highest business formation rates are in places like Bath and Bournemouth that offer the most appealing environments for those with the capital and skills needed to start a viable business. But high rates are also found in London, with Newham doing well, which reflects a combination of a multicultural population, a historic availability of a range of premises (including railway arches), and access to markets. Croydon currently does less well, but is in the top quartile and has been actively encouraging networking →. An outstanding performer among the 24 towns and cities is **Brighton & Hove** for a variety of reasons, including the setting up of an Enterprise Hub supported by the South East England Regional Development Agency.

But can those without much of a tradition of enterprise or immigrant communities fight back? The case studies of both **Sheffield** and **Stoke-on-Trent** show how groups of old buildings can be turned into incubators, and a cluster of enterprises developed around a particular strength. In **Plymouth**, one of several cities aiming to encourage the growth of clusters through City Growth Strategies, there has been collaborative working between the university and the main hospital to encourage the growth of biotechnology businesses in a new science park. The biggest problems affect areas that lack an economic specialism or a tradition of enterprise and that are being priced out of the world market. **Blackburn with Darwen’s** Technology Management Centre provides one possible answer through the provision of shared support services for manufacturing companies. Community enterprise could also have an important role to play, as the case study about community-based partnerships in **Sheffield** illustrates.

6 Eight dimensions of renaissance

Some of the mechanisms that are being used to encourage the birth and survival of Small and Medium Enterprises, including community businesses, are:

Managed workspace and the provision of business incubators or enterprise hubs offering flexible premises on 'easy in easy out' terms, with access to supporting services
The conservation of industrial and commercial areas that offer cheap premises
The development of secondary or fringe shopping areas with incentives for bringing empty shops back into use for other purposes
The use of mentors, business angels and other forms of encouragement to new enterprises with growth potential
Support for networks including the provision of entrepreneurial management skills training and business clubs
Links between centres of knowledge such as universities, hospitals, and large employers, and the development of small enterprises in their supply chains
Support for community enterprise and the social economy

^{6.5} **Integrated transport** “No good having a good outer rail network if you can't get inside Reading when you want to go.” “Maybe I'm a bit cynical... but I just don't believe we're ever going to have an efficient integrated transport system.” Citizens' Workshops

The best means of enabling people to create and share prosperity is well-connected city regions with suburbs that are knitted together. Towns and cities grew up on the back of the quality of their transport links, which enabled their better-off residents to spread into the suburbs and beyond. Growing car usage, longer journeys to work, and the pressures of global competition put a premium on those places that can offer the best connections. Unfortunately most English towns and cities have poorer transport links than mainland Europe, where cycling and the use of public transport is not reserved for the poor or eccentric. They are becoming excessively car-dependent or addicted. Hence there is a huge task in improving the alternatives to the car, particularly for better-off people, who no longer need to get into the town or city centre to meet most of their needs. There is also a major issue of how to link funding for improvements to infrastructure with urban development. Though they can raise property values, increases in business rates go to the Government's central pot for redistribution rather than to the local area from which they derive (This is addressed in the Breaking Down the Barriers Report).

The changing image of towns and cities like Manchester and Croydon is in part attributable to the introduction of trams like those in Continental cities, and **Croydon** Tramlink forms one of our Case Studies. Transport policy aims to integrate different modes, and the idea of 'rapid transit' in which it is faster and more comfortable to go by public transport than by car is starting to take hold particularly in the Core Cities. Instead of traditional public transport, which is generally discredited, rapid transit is far more appealing. Leeds has already done this with its upgraded railway station, guided buses, and planned Supertram routes. **Nottingham's** Big Wheel (Transport Strategy) CD-ROM is an excellent example of how to communicate the benefits of integrated transport imaginatively.

Major roads and railway lines often sever areas with development potential from the wider community→. **Newham's** Stratford Interchange not only shows how development needs to be phased, but provides fine examples of the use of good modern design to change an area's image at the same time as making travel easier. While public attention tends to be concentrated on the high profile projects, like the high-speed lines from London to the Channel Tunnel, or up the West Coast Main Line, experience suggests that the smaller projects can be just as important. **Reading's** Quality Bus Service Corridor shows how passengers can be won back by providing highly reliable services with good waiting facilities and modern buses. Also, as a good example of progressively extending the public realm, **Bristol's** Legible City Initiative has pioneered the use of better signing to make the city centre more comprehensible. King's Lynn has had a major road scheme approved through its Local Transport Plan because of its regeneration benefits in opening up brownfield land rather than simply because of its transport benefits. Southend-on-Sea provides another good example of how to secure support for a far-reaching transport plan.

English towns and cities have a long way to go to catch up with their European counterparts in terms of integrated transport, which includes:

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- Stylish and well-connected transport interchanges in the city centre

 - Frequent, reliable bus and rail services connecting up to the suburbs

 - Planning and design for pedestrian priority in the centres

 - Safer cycling including traffic calming, cycle lanes and parking facilities

 - Quality bus corridors to increase usage and attract people away from their cars

 - Smart ticketing to encourage frequent use of public transport

 - Affordable fares for the young and those in low paid jobs

 - Transport Development Areas of high density buildings around interchanges

 - Development partnerships for new infrastructure

 - Green travel plans negotiated with major employers

 - Community transport services to meet special needs

 - Breaking transport corridors up into a series of environmental 'rooms' with different policies so that the road design and parking policies suit the context

 - Discouraging major roads and reallocating space to other users

^{6.6} Thriving centres “Shopping centres are popular because it’s a clean safe environment... you don’t feel threatened.” “Centres tend to be improved but not the suburbs: suburbs are where people live and need a facelift.” Citizens’ Workshops

To achieve the twin goals of environmental sustainability and social well being, vibrant city centres must operate as a network with viable local centres. The heart and soul of a town or city is its centre. English towns and cities have to cope not only with out-of-town competitors offering free easy parking and extended opening hours, but also with a larger number of centres in closer proximity than on the Continent, and little recent tradition of city living. The MORI Omnibus survey shows that while those in the higher social classes think that the town and city centres have often got better, there are concerns about the state of local centres, particularly among older people who are more likely to depend on them. Even though property developers and investors think towns and cities are getting better, few think they have achieved their potential.→

Though originally it was feared that the out-of-town regional centres would harm the Core Cities, they have all fought back with considerable success, making the most of their full range of attractions, and upgrading their public realm. The damage really seems to have hurt the smaller towns and cities most, particularly the old industrial towns, and also those that have smaller catchment areas. Many have ambitious plans for redeveloping and extending their 1960s covered shopping precincts, but the market may be saturated, with Britain having 31% of Europe’s retail floor space according to a feature on urban regeneration in *The Observer* (July 2002). Centres now need to compete on quality, and not just on the size of their retail offer. Several of the partners complained about institutional investor owners of their shopping centres, such as insurance and pension companies, who lack the incentive to invest in smaller places and tend not to engage readily in discussions about renaissance.

In assessing the 24 partner towns and cities, vacancy figures are misleading. This is because of the amount of space in the pipeline in some of the larger centres. However, figures for retail yield show a marked difference between the attractiveness to investors of the Core Cities and the rest.→ Our Case Studies focus on ways in which town centres could differentiate themselves. Leeds Millennium Square provides an interesting example of extending the public realm through a programme of town squares, largely funded by developing adjoining sites. **Norwich** is one of the best-known examples of the power of conserving the historic fabric, but has also developed an exciting new entertainment area along its river, on land formerly owned by Railtrack among others, as part of a mixed-use retail and housing scheme. **Birmingham’s** strategy has been to create a variety of quarters connected by a high-quality public realm. Middlesbrough has made great advances in town centre management and now runs its services through an independent company. Other relevant Case Studies include the improvement of local centres in Sheffield.

The ingredients for successful town and city centre revitalisation include:

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- Strategies for differentiating the roles of centres and linking them together

 - New uses for vacant shops on the fringe or edge of town centres, such as for leisure

 - Development of culture and entertainment quarters

 - Ethnic specialisation for some local centres

 - Inclusion of new ‘magnets’ such as health or training

 - Co-ordinated management and higher standards of cleanliness and security

 - High-quality public realm with upgraded squares

 - Town centre management evolving into town centre partnerships with property owners

^{6.7} Quality services “We need more youth centres – there used to be places for young people, but where can they go now?” “Show us what you’ve done with the money.”
Citizens’ Workshops

Key roles in closing the gaps between the best and worst urban areas are played by the health, education and leisure services. The Urban White Paper put a renewed stress on improving public services and ‘joined up government’. As people live longer, and also are more likely to live on their own, families with children at school have become the minority of households. While each service is highly specialised, the comments coming out of the Citizens’ and Young People’s Workshops suggest that providers are sometimes too cut-off from customers.

Our Citizens’ Workshop in Newham found real pride in the architecturally striking new university built in the Docklands, as a local facility that children could aspire to. Accessibility also matters and the award-winning Private Finance Initiative funded hospital in Norwich came in for considerable criticism because of its location on the outskirts of the city. Those who have left are often attracted by better educational prospects in the smaller towns and villages surrounding our major urban areas. Surveys of buyers of new houses with children found that 57% put education as the top factor. Research carried out for the Urban Task Force *But Would You Live There?* found in contrast that the ‘urban pioneers’ tended to be young people attracted by the range of leisure facilities and lifestyles available near the centres. Once they have young children, then concerns about the quality of schooling as well as requirements for more space draws them away.

Croydon’s Education Action Zone provides a good example of improving links with local businesses and parents as a means of raising standards. In Leicester the involvement of university students in a health centre in a very disadvantaged area has not only provided them with practical experience, but encouraged much higher standards of primary care. Sometimes new buildings can be used to demonstrate a whole new approach – such as the combined council offices with new housing scheme in King’s Lynn which was one of the finalists in the Prime Minister’s award for design. It is also possible to change the attitudes and behaviour of the customer. In Medway, not only is a new Healthy Living Centre making people more responsible for their own health, but a ‘Children’s University’ is getting young people and their parents to think about what is required to access the jobs of the future. In Middlesbrough help is being provided to get people living on a peripheral estate back into work and schools are also at the heart of regeneration in Newcastle. Self-esteem is developed through participation in arts and sports in Leeds.

A checklist for possible action needs to cover:

Improved or new schools at the same time
as new housing

Specialist schools appealing to the wider
catchment area

Community colleges

‘Healthy living centres’ and group medical centres

Mixed-use development with housing above

Employment services linked to job and
training opportunities

Community arts and sports programmes

^{6.8} Valued neighbourhoods “High density is OK provided it is to a good standard... it needs to be maintained or monitored or it will become the slums of the future.”
“Living next to a corner shop might be acceptable, but not to a night club...” Citizens’ Workshops

Strong balanced housing markets, with choices for all, are as important in the over-heated areas of the South, as in those facing abandonment in the North. Some areas have excessive amounts of empty houses, while other apparently similar areas are buoyant. House prices are escalating in the South while house-building rates remain low. As urban policy has shifted from comprehensive redevelopment to making living in urban areas more appealing, so housing policy must broaden from a focus on the needs of those in the worst housing or the homeless, to a wider concern with creating a more balanced housing market – a conclusion from both the Gateshead Symposium and a seminar organised by Newham to discuss *The Chosen City*.

The **property indicators**→ highlight areas where property values within towns are much lower than in the surrounding area. We have seen that many of the conditions that once drove the middle classes out of the city centres, such as the polluted atmosphere, no longer apply, while there are other factors potentially pulling them back. At the seminar on *The Chosen City*, there was general support for overturning the ‘money-go-round’ that saps cities of much of their talent, and reinforces patterns of social exclusion and unsustainable forms of development. **Planning** also has a key role to play but needs to match the context.→

At this stage in the delivery of urban renaissance there are relatively few success stories of turning once condemned areas into valued neighbourhoods, but there are enough to suggest a way forward. In Manchester, probably the most impressive single example in England today, the industrial quarter of Ancoats is being promoted as an urban village and national house builders have now woken up to the prospects that local developers have pioneered. Developers are coming up with radically different products. Flats were once seen as places for the poor to live, but conversions of old industrial buildings are now being marketed as ‘stylish city centre loft living’. Hulme has been turned from a notorious post-war blunder into a good place to live where grants are no longer needed to secure high-quality high-density private housing. At the other extreme, the suburban inter-war housing areas of Speke Garston in **Liverpool** are once again popular places to live, in no small part due to the efforts of local community associations. As far as industrial towns are concerned **Leicester’s** Bede Island provides an inspiring example of how former scrap-yards can be turned into a mix of uses, including part of the university. As a result, grants are not going to be needed in the next phase. In the South, some of the best examples of renaissance are probably Reading and Brighton & Hove where developers are keen to build more. The mixed-use scheme for the New England Quarter next to Brighton Railway Station provides a good example of how areas that were once considered unsuitable for housing are now being developed as high-density, mixed-use quarters.

Good practice can include:

Urban villages (or Millennium Communities),
with a mix of uses

Design guides for sustainable urban neighbourhoods

New forms of apartments and tenures for
example, private for rent

High-density mixed-use quarters

Pepper-potting social housing

Stabilisation of demand

Public intervention in areas of abandonment
and affordability for key workers

Development of new housing around transport
routes and corridors

“Ideally I’d like to live somewhere where I could leave my bloody front door open and know damn well that nobody’s going to walk through it and nick my stuff... I’d like to live somewhere where there’s a community spirit that involves all the community and not just certain groups, and I’d also like to live somewhere where I don’t see heroin and crack cocaine being dealt openly on my street...” Citizens’ Workshop

Conclusions and recommendations The **Partners in Urban Renaissance** project has found evidence of an on-going process of urban renaissance across England. Different places are at different stages but the tide seems to be turning. Our evidence also shows that there are some common barriers to making faster progress, but that the context and challenges are very different. Grouping our 24 partner towns and cities into places which are ‘**Restructuring**’, or ‘**Southern**’ or ‘**Core Cities**’ has helped us draw general conclusions and make recommendations for central and local government, practitioners and others.

The project set out to look systematically at how urban renaissance is being tackled in 24 towns and cities, to identify good examples of the progress that is being made, and to identify barriers to progress. We have sought evidence from local authorities, local residents, property investors and young people across the partners. The project has also brought central Government, through the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, and local authorities into a new partnership, and begun to make links with some of the other agencies and organisations involved. As well as the lessons from the project itself, it has shown the potential benefits of a new way of working together.

This final section:

Sets out lessons from working together
Draws together the main findings on progress
Identifies some key barriers to urban renaissance
Makes recommendations on what central and local government, practitioners and others can do to speed up the process
Summarises outstanding issues that might provide an agenda for the future

^{7.1} Lessons from working together The **Partners in Urban Renaissance** project has started to change working methods and relationships amongst the partners, and between Government officials, local authorities and other stakeholders. In this respect the significance of the project is that it has covered the widest elements of urban renaissance, exploring and exchanging experience with different parts of central and local government across a range of medium and larger towns and cities, and with other key stakeholders – both in the public and private sectors. As one partner said at the third symposium in Reading in September 2002, “...there are many well-established networks bringing together towns and cities with similar interests and backgrounds – for example the **Core Cities**, the **English Historic Towns Forum** – but the **Partners in Urban Renaissance** project, for the first time, has brought together very different places to debate all aspects of urban renaissance, to identify common concerns and to engage with Government on those concerns”.

Partner towns and cities have been able to draw on the experience and knowledge of one another in addressing particular issues – through symposia, through events they have organised themselves, and through the **Breaking Down the Barriers** workshops. Recognising the constraints of the project, referred to in the introduction to this Project Report, there has been a positive response from the partners reflected in the time and effort committed to arranging productive visits (including those undertaken by Ministers), attending symposia and responding to the evolving outputs. There has been a strong interest in the project from property developers and investors, and from the various groups of young and adult citizens we brought together. Ministers and key policy advisors have benefited from first-hand contact with practitioners across the partners and with the many community and voluntary groups involved. Thus, the project has successfully and productively crossed many of the traditional boundaries of responsibilities and interests.

Further the action research approach adopted for the project and the different components of the method adopted, have provided a wide ranging overview of urban renaissance that is far richer than conventional forms of research.

The concept of the **Partners in Urban Renaissance** project, linking research policy and practice together, potentially has wide ranging appeal and we hope that others with an interest in furthering the delivery of urban renaissance will use it as an inspiration for their work.

The following lessons on working together emerged from the different elements of the initiative:

The workshops, focus groups and symposia show the value of bringing people together to discuss concerns, policies and ideas face to face (even though this takes more resources than electronic communication). They also give the opportunity for practitioners to listen to and question policy advisors and makers directly, and help to build consensus on a number of issues
There were considerable benefits from making visits to all 24 partners, which included discussions with councillors, officers and members of the community as well as tours of projects which illustrated particular achievements and problems
‘Whitehall’ civil servants experienced the towns and cities at first hand, and could identify good examples of aspects of urban renaissance as a result. Ministers were able to see the breadth of the urban renaissance agenda and how different elements linked together
Relationships between Government and local authority officers and councillors were strengthened
However, the process of working together takes considerable effort. It takes time to build up trust, particularly when so many different organisations are involved. Also bringing the right people together to discuss common issues or barriers takes a lot of organising

7.2 Findings on progress towards urban renaissance

The findings essentially provide a snapshot of work in progress in changing urban living from a number of perspectives. Assessing overall progress is essentially subjective because of the lack of up to date comprehensive statistics at the small area level, and the differences between places. However, despite a generally negative view that comes out of the MORI Omnibus survey (June 2002), → real improvements are being made on the ground. The problem is that progress is often very patchy, and is not necessarily engaging or benefiting all parts of the community.

Some general observations The most visible and widely reported progress has been made in the centres of almost all the **Core Cities**, where lively new quarters have emerged, rapid transit systems are in operation or being introduced, and people are starting to move back to live. But, even where significant progress has been made there is evidence of ‘two speed’ cities, with areas of decline and deprivation continuing, or in some cases worsening, only a mile or so away from a booming city centre. The issue of narrowing the gap remains a significant challenge for the Core Cities – and for other towns and cities.

Despite the higher income levels in the **Southern** towns and cities, which are reflected in higher land values and house prices in many places, the picture is more mixed. There are particular concerns about how to secure the higher quality needed to stop urban sprawl, but also some excellent examples of good design and high-density developments if only the lessons could be spread more effectively. Southern towns are also struggling with affordable housing provision for key workers and others.

The picture in the **Restructuring** towns and cities, particularly but not exclusively in the North, is very different. Problems of housing abandonment are clearly evident in some areas, while others are thriving. Housing abandonment is not, of course, the preserve of Restructuring towns and cities. Many of the Core Cities are affected too and while the Government is addressing the issue through the Housing Market Renewal initiative, many more pockets and neighbourhoods on the brink of collapse need careful monitoring. A particular issue with the Restructuring group of towns and cities is identifying and developing a vision for the future and the all-important strategy for its delivery.

7.3 Some specific issues arising:

The importance of positive leadership was emphasised, particularly in the Property Workshops but also in the symposia. Leadership can emerge from different sectors and at different levels. However the proliferation of partnerships and initiatives makes it hard to maintain the momentum, particularly when policies and structures seem to be continually changing. Furthermore, the most successful partnerships involve winning teams, not just a few well-known stars. Partners identified a growing problem in attracting and retaining staff, partly because of a generally negative image of local government as a career, and partly due to **a lack of direct control over resources**.

Developing the skills required to devise and deliver urban renaissance strategies is crucial, but so too is motivating all concerned. This will be particularly important if the new mechanisms of Community Strategies and Local Strategic Partnerships are to be made to work as intended.

The development of Local Strategic Partnerships has highlighted the importance of ensuring that **all sectors are engaged**. We found a desire for greater involvement among business people, adult and young citizens alike. Their views can be tapped in different ways, but they need more feedback on a regular basis.

Encouraging new employment in towns and cities is integral to urban renaissance, and we found some impressive projects, particularly as far as support for small enterprise is concerned, and in the growth of higher education. But our Citizens' Workshops expressed concern that many of the new jobs, as well as town centre housing, were for better-off incomers, and not for **'local people'**. The Property Workshops also highlighted a local **skills gap**, which can deter investment. Unless the economic base of towns and cities is strengthened the disparities will grow.

Reliable, safe and fast public transport is one of the best ways of tackling social exclusion, as well as making towns and cities more sustainable and more liveable. We saw projects that are helping to overcome physical and psychological isolation, by linking up peripheral estates with new job opportunities. The Young People's Workshops also emphasised the need for affordable transport that would enable young people to pursue a wider range of leisure, educational and employment opportunities. But we also found a tendency for new developments to be sited in locations that were not highly accessible. It also seems unrealistic to enforce the same standards for new developments throughout the country, given very different densities of development.

Arts, culture, entertainment and sport are playing important roles in urban renaissance across all types of towns and cities, although again affordability and accessibility can be barriers for the less well-off. A symbolic expression of renaissance in many places is the creation or renewal of public squares and spaces. While iconic buildings, festivals, exhibitions and events can bring life to town centres, and change their image to the outside world, they can also create a sense of resentment if action is not also taken to improve the standards of the environment closer to home.

The quality and maintenance of the public realm are crucial to renaissance.

If towns and cities are to be places where people choose to live, **a full range of housing** should be available to meet each stage in the lifecycles of their residents. There is a stark difference between towns and cities in the North that are experiencing a collapse of the housing market in some areas, and those in the South, where there is a lack of affordable housing, and concerns about over-development. Higher density and mixed-use schemes are much more acceptable in the Core Cities and some of the Southern towns and cities. The greatest challenge is how to broaden the range of housing in the Restructuring towns and cities, given the high risks and relatively low house prices.

A further issue is how the Southern towns and cities are to secure **higher design standards**, and much more consideration needs to be given to how a shift away from a car-based culture can be achieved.

^{7.4} **Barriers to progress** The 24 partner towns and cities identified major barriers to making faster progress towards urban renaissance. Work was progressed on a number of these, both through discussions at the symposia, and through Breaking Down the Barriers Workshops that brought together local authority officers from relevant places, policy advisors and makers and outside experts. Some preliminary conclusions are set out below:

Reducing crime and physical decay A fundamental concern of both adult and young citizens is making places feel safer. In part this is about minimising anti-social behaviour, but there is a much more intractable problem related to drugs, and drug-related crime. The discussion at the Gateshead Symposium (March 2002) showed that community cohesion needs to be given a higher priority if urban renaissance is not to be stalled.

Encouraging enterprise development and job creation Most authorities recognise the importance of encouraging indigenous growth rather than relying on inward investment, which may be transient, but the Learning and Skills Councils may miss out on encouraging entrepreneurship. There is potential to simplify access to the support available in some areas by taking a regional approach. Securing an increase in the supply of premises calls for changes in the business rating system so as to penalise those who keep buildings empty, and so as to provide incentives for new firms to occupy space in areas of high vacancy.

Making planning more responsive The planning system is not always considered by those ‘on the ground’ to be supportive of the urban renaissance agenda. Developers want a faster response, more transparency and more certainty, and the revision of the planning system towards Local Development Frameworks is intended to achieve this. However, policy advisors need to be sure that what is intended is actually delivered locally and need to recognise that competition between neighbouring local authorities can be counter-productive. It is also the case that a regional perspective is required in a number of places.

Finding new roles for historic industrial areas While there are impressive case studies of revitalising old industrial quarters in the Core Cities these have taken decades to achieve. Many Restructuring towns and cities have interesting areas in them but the risks for the private sector, are too high for the likely returns.

Knitting regeneration areas into the wider community A combination of railway lines, waterways and ring roads can often cut off the areas with the most development potential from the rest of the town or city. These need to be developed in ways that do not compete with the town or city centre, and better ways are needed of crossing the divides.

Upgrading accessibility Many towns and cities are concerned about being seen as peripheral, and investment in both highways and inter-city transport is therefore crucial to attracting quality jobs and good housing. There is also a view that development in the North could help reduce pressures in parts of the South. Discussion at the Reading Symposium (September 2002) highlighted the fact that the way transport projects are evaluated is perceived as missing out their impact on regeneration and renaissance. There is also an issue about how transport hubs and railway lands can contribute to urban renaissance more widely than just in London.

Financing new infrastructure The challenge of identifying sufficient local sources of finance and the high costs of opening up major sites, is making it difficult to take advantage of opportunities created by industrial restructuring. This is a particular problem in places that are not covered by European Structural Funds. Some of the partner towns and cities are considering options such as the use of infrastructure bonds, and variants of the USA’s Business Improvement District.

Recommendations In essence the two previous sections of this Report (Specific issues arising, and Barriers to progress) carry their own inherent recommendations for national and local politicians and governments and their policy advisors, and for urban renaissance practitioners in respect of:

Issues
Positive leadership and attracting and retaining staff
Developing the right skills and motivating all concerned
Engaging all sectors
Encouraging new employment for local people
The provision of reliable, safe and fast public transport
Maximising the role of arts, culture and sport
The quality and maintenance of the public realm
Broadening the range of housing available
Barriers
Reducing crime and physical decay
Encouraging enterprise development and job creation
Making planning more responsive
Finding new roles for historic buildings and industrial areas
Knitting regeneration areas into the wider community
Upgrading accessibility
Financing new infrastructure

In addition we make the following overarching recommendations also to national and local politicians and governments and their policy advisors and makers, and to practitioners and others. We consider that, if implemented they will have a positive impact on all the major barriers to progress:

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- (i) **Use all the arms of government** Delivering sustainable urban renaissance, including changing attitudes, requires continuing and concerted action on all aspects of urban living – that is housing, transport, employment, education, healthcare, crime and anti-social behaviour and the environment. It is crucial to secure support at regional, local and national levels across government and its agencies – for example, the Housing Corporation, the Regional Development Agencies, English Partnerships and English Heritage. At the highest level in Government, the Social Exclusion and Regeneration Cabinet Committee brings together the relevant Secretaries of State including the Deputy Prime Minister. However co-operative working across departments below that level is far from universal or effective, and there is little evidence that policy advisors in different departments pay regard to the spatial dimension of urban policy. In addition, as the **Partners in Urban Renaissance** project showed, there is considerable mutual benefit to be had from a more outward facing approach by those working at the centre. Similar concerns apply to the local government structure where health and education in particular tend not to be integral to the urban renaissance agenda in many places. We recommend, therefore, that ODPM considers establishing an Urban Renaissance Forum with representation from across Whitehall involving Directors, Divisional Managers and Team Leaders to discuss how to deliver more effective joining-up of policies impacting on towns and cities, to implement new processes and practices and to monitor change. We also recommend that local authorities and the Local Government Association consider a similar approach to encourage and deliver more effective joining-up at that level
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continues

(ii) **Relax controls on pathfinders** One of the best incentives for collaboration is the reduction of controls. In this respect the Comprehensive Performance Assessment regime is intended to help group local authorities according to their performance. Collaborative partnerships, such as this project or the Beacon Council initiative, should be backed-up by changes that give local authorities more freedom over budgets and over the use of those budgets to support urban renaissance. A related issue is the balance of funding for local authorities. At present 25% of their revenue funding is raised locally and the remaining 75% comes from Government grant and redistributed business rates. In its Local Government White Paper (December 2001), Government promised a review and consideration of reform options. We recommend that Government continues to give priority to reforming local authority finances and to reforming control over those finances and considers using a 'pathfinder' approach (for example, with some or all of the 24 partner towns and cities) where changes need to be tested and refined.

(iii) **Improve the public realm** Higher standards of maintenance, better quality design and improved lighting all have a direct effect on attitudes and pride of place. Good public realm and positive attitudes about a place can, in turn, encourage private investment. Acknowledging the 'resource' argument usually proffered, we nevertheless recommend that local authorities give priority to this neglected area and allocate funds that reflect the size and importance of the public realm. Local authorities should also ensure that strategies for community engagement are used to prioritise how improvements are made, and to ensure that local communities play their part.

(iv) **Engage Regional Development Agencies in urban renaissance** The RDAs have an important role to play not just in assisting with land assembly and making sites ready for private investment, but also in raising skills through Regional Centres of Excellence. Currently there are disparities in the level of support being given to the urban renaissance agenda across the RDA network, and there is some confusion in all quarters about the extent of interest they should be taking. We recommend that ODPM and the Department for Trade and Industry recognise more explicitly RDAs' important role in the delivery of urban renaissance through the targets they are set and through the corporate planning guidance issued to them. We also recommend that RDAs' themselves take the lead from those of their group who are giving urban renaissance a high profile backed by the resources to deliver.

(v) **Promote arcs of opportunity, as well as tackling problem areas** Urban policy has traditionally targeted the most disadvantaged areas concentrating on 'worst first' and paid less attention to places that are at risk or just on the up-turn where significant results and knock-on effects can be achieved with limited public funds. A continuing and strong focus on disadvantaged areas clearly must remain a priority for Government but we recommend that, through its agencies including RDAs, it should also define and support areas of opportunity or growth and help local authorities commission masterplans – especially where the defined areas cross administrative boundaries.

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(vi) **Programmes of support should be linked within priority areas** Where there is a commitment to tackle a really disadvantaged area, it is vital to secure a critical mass of investment and to sustain higher standards in key services. Bringing together the range of initiatives and partnerships usually operating in such areas would be a good start so that there is one point of responsibility and one partnership responsible for delivering a range of programmes. This could be backed up by consideration of financial incentives to trigger private sector investment. We recommend that the ODPM's Urban Policy Unit should undertake further work on the feasibility of such an approach.

(vii) **Mobilise land owned by utilities and public agencies** For decades people have complained about lack of progress in developing major brownfield sites such as railway lands, gas works and old unused hospitals. English Partnerships' new role announced by the Deputy Prime Minister in Summer 2002 should assist positive progress in the re-use of these brownfield sites. They represent a public resource and one that should enable the principles of urban renaissance to be applied on a significant scale – as with the Millennium Communities programme. There is also a particular opportunity around transport hubs for creating demonstration projects. We recommend that the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment should take steps to identify and publicise good and bad practice in the re-use of public lands, with a focus on transport hubs.

(viii) **Popularise renaissance** More good news stories are needed to change attitudes, and the process of renaissance needs to be made more fun and more inclusive (as was made clear in the **Partners in Urban Renaissance** project's workshops with adult and young citizens and with property and investor interests). As well as the big flagship projects, which already secure media coverage, publicity is needed for smaller but nonetheless significant projects. We recommend that Government, local authorities and other agencies should extend the process of identifying, publishing and promoting examples of good practice. This will not only help raise the profile of urban renaissance but will also encourage greater community involvement as their achievements get recognition.

7.5 Unresolved issues for urban renaissance Inevitably the **Partners in Urban Renaissance** project has raised a number of issues for which it is difficult to make recommendations without further work and consultation with partners. We set these out briefly below:

(i) **Building skills and experience** Attracting and retaining good people is essential. However there continues to be a shortage of people who understand how to manage the development process as well as a shortage of experience and skills across the urban renaissance agenda – from planning, to transport professionals and project managers. Devices like secondments and study tours could help, as could Regional Centres of Excellence proposed in the Urban White paper but yet to be delivered across all regions. Work is needed on how to support and encourage learning networks, and on how to encourage the growth of capable ‘urban practitioners’, perhaps drawing on the success of MBA programmes in the private sector.

(ii) **Measuring success, particularly quality** One reason why more resources are not devoted to improving urban quality is the difficulty of measuring outcomes as opposed to outputs. Changes in attitudes seem important, and ways are needed of monitoring them over time. Also in order to benchmark towns and cities against comparable places, meaningful indicators need to be available for different types of area, as they are beginning to be for town centres. There is an issue of how to choose a limited number of ‘headline indicators’ from the hundreds potentially available. The Urban Policy Unit’s work on urban indicators will inform this debate, and a progress report will be available at the Urban Summit.

(iii) **Assessing the impact of investment on renaissance** There is currently no way of knowing how far major transport infrastructure projects are affecting property values or changing attitudes to living and working in urban areas. At present the main stress is still on congestion and safety, and it is hard to justify extra spending, for example to open up jobs for those who are excluded, or to change the image of an area. With a huge programme of investment in public transport underway, work is needed on how to gauge the regeneration and renaissance potential.

(iv) **Incentivising financial institutions** In the end developers build what financial institutions are prepared to fund, and they are concerned about risks and returns. As well as resolving the ongoing issue of gap funding, there is a more complex issue of how far both planning and fiscal incentives can be used to create a more level playing field between complex but highly accessible urban sites, and simpler ones on the periphery that are only accessible by car.

The **Partners in Urban Renaissance** project has shown that attitudes to living in urban areas are starting to change but while commitment to making towns and cities better places is growing, real barriers to renaissance – many of them of our own making – still exist. If progress is to be maintained then central and local government must work together and try new actions to find a new balance of responsibilities that will let urban areas develop as places where people want to be. England is a small country with a large population. Achieving sustainable renaissance for the 80% of the population who live in urban areas is essential for the economic and social success of the country. If we are to live in a more sustainable way in the future, towns and cities must be seen and treated as assets, and not as liabilities.

“For all the thousands of people that do town planning at uni, I don’t know where they all are now...”

Young People’s Workshop

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