

the Sustainable URBAN NEIGHBOURHOOD



Initiative

Welcome to the FIFTH issue of SUN DIAL, the journal of the Sustainable Urban Neighbourhood Initiative

In this issue we explore the relationship of transport policy to sustainable urban development. What role might the Sustainable Urban Neighbourhood play in urban transport policy and could the creative use of gridlock be the secret weapon in the drive to reduce the attractions of the car? Also in this issue Andy Hansfords asks whether Housing Co-operatives may hold the key to social sustainability and

INSIDE

- Is there an answer to urban transport problems?
- Could co-ops have the answer?
- Living over the shop

NEXT ISSUE

- Housing in town centres
- A brief for a Sustainable Urban Neighbourhood
- The new found enthusiasm for Foyers: How have they translated from the French?

Models wanted

The SUN Initiative is seeking opportunities to apply the principles of sustainable urban development. In the last few months we have explored the potential for the development of a series of brownfield sites in Blackburn town centre including improvements to Darwen Street (right) which involved downgrading it as a vehicle route to make it more pedestrian friendly. Working with Coventry City Council, we have also been exploring the capacity of town centre sites for housing development (above). This identified land for 355 housing units on seven town centre sites.

We are also working on a model brief for a sustainable urban block and will be testing this through a theoretical design exercise over the coming months. We would be interested to hear from anyone who knows of sites where the brief could be tested, preferably in situations where there is the likelihood of development taking place in the future. To discuss the possibilities, contact David Rudlin at the SUN office.



managing Gridlock

A Sustainable Transport Policy

Back in the Summer, the government invited comments on the development of an integrated transport policy. With the deadline for comments having just passed, the press has been full of comments from pressure groups and organisations representing road transport interests.

In this article we summarise the comments submitted by the SUN Initiative which made a strong link between sustainable forms of urban development, a carrot and stick approach to cutting car use and a reduction in highway capacity



One are the days when the sole aim of transport policy was the fast and efficient movement of goods and people across the country. Whilst this is vital to economic prosperity, it must be weighed against the environmental, social and economic costs of transport. An integrated transport policy must balance the need for mobility with its environmental consequences and in this respect the over riding issue is private car use.

National transport trends result from individual decisions taken every day by people travelling to work, taking their children to school or doing the shopping, as well as companies making deliveries, organising production and managing staff. At present, these decisions are weighted in favor of the car. We may understand that using the car or transporting goods by road is environmentally damaging but these concerns are weighed against the fact that road travel is cheaper, more convenient, comfortable, and quicker than other alternatives. This leaves only an environmentally committed minority prepared to give up their car whilst the rest of us remain guilty car users.

There does however come a point when the cumulative effect of individual decisions is so much congestion that car use is no longer a sensible form of transport. This can be seen in Central London where the delays caused by congestion, the sheer hassle of driving and the difficulty and expense of parking cause most people to leave their cars at home (only 17% of London commuters travel to work by car¹). The problem is that the environmental, social and economic consequences of car-use to society reach unacceptable levels long before conditions

Transport decisions are weighted in favor of the car, leaving only an environmentally committed minority prepared to give up their car whilst the rest of us remain guilty car users

become bad enough to persuade individuals to leave their car at home. The aim of policy must therefore be to lower the pain threshold of car use to a point where people leave their car at home before the consequences to society become unacceptable. We believe that there are four means by which this can be achieved:

Sustainable Urban Development

In recent years much of the debate about car travel has focused on the influence of settlement patterns on the distances that people travel. Seminal research by Newman and Kenworthy in 1989², although much criticised, has been widely used by governments in the UK, US, and Australia to justify policies of urban containment to reduce car use. This was backed up by research by Ecotec in 1993³ which demonstrated a correlation between the density of development and the miles travelled by car.

This research was used by the previous government to justify a policy restricting out-of-town development and channeling new housing, shops, and other facilities into existing towns. While there may have been a political dimension to this policy, in that it diverted development away from the Conservative's

traditional constituency in the Shire Counties, it represented an important step forward in planning policy. The government's recent record in turning down out-of-town shopping development is therefore to be welcomed and it is hoped that it will not retreat from either PPG 13 or the commitments to brownfield housing in the Housing White Paper.

It has been estimated that at least 70% of energy usage is affected at some point by planning decisions⁴ with key influences

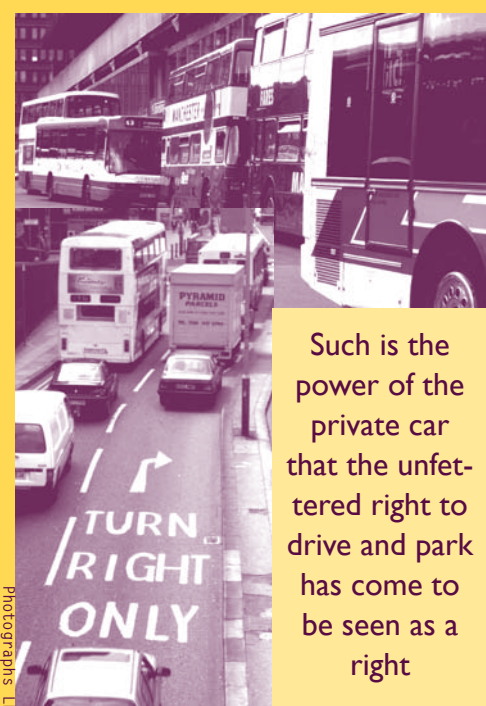
including built form, layout and density. It is commonsense to suggest that housing built in locations remote from services, employment and facilities will become car reliant. Likewise it makes sense to suggest that out-of-town shopping, business parks and leisure facilities will fuel car use, particularly if they lead to the closure of facilities accessible to public transport within towns as demonstrated by the recent research into the impact of the Trafford Centre in Manchester by the Association of Town Centre Management. This has been confirmed by studies which demonstrate that cross town traffic is inextricably linked to the urban layout and the accessibility of facilities⁵. There must therefore be a role for more dense, urban, mixed-use development to reduce journey distances, make public transport more viable and to promote walking and cycling as described in SUN Dial 4.

Government urban containment policy has however been widely criticised⁶. Critics have suggested that it is wrong for the government to force people back into dirty, dangerous and overcrowded cities, that this would lead to 'town cramming', that it is not practical and that, even if it were, the benefits are not as great as have been claimed. Whilst the proposition that higher density development reduces travel has been questioned⁷, this is not the main focus of criticism. The argument is rather that the disbenefits of high density development are so great that they outweigh any environmental or transport benefits that may result. Yet if cities really are so terrible that decent people can no longer live in them, the answer must surely be to reform urban areas rather than to abandon them.

Our view is that there is limited scope for Government to force people to return to cities against their will. However as car use becomes more difficult it is likely that many people will return to cities of their own choice to escape the horror of commuting. There is already evidence that this is happening in London and other provincial cities. There is much that can be done to promote this trend by developing pleasant, safe, mixed use urban areas as proposed by the Urban Villages Forum and the SUN Initiative.

The Stick

The car has given people freedom to live and work where they wish. Road transport has freed industry from locational constraints and the car industry is an important part of the national economy. Such is the power of the private car that the unfettered right to drive and park is seen as a right. People seem prepared to put up with enormous expense, disruption, pollution and even death and injury in pursuit of this right. It is however clear to anyone that projections of car use are unsustainable and will soon start to limit people's freedom to use their car even without government intervention. It is therefore right for the government to ration what has become a limited resource – road space. This will take political courage,



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since measures to limit people's right to use their car will be deeply unpopular.

An important aim of policy should be to reduce emissions from cars and engine size. Options should be explored to promote alternatives such as biofuels and electric powered vehicles. However this will not overcome the problems of congestion and gridlock. It is therefore important to reduce the overall level of car use and the most effective way of doing this is through fiscal measures such as higher fuel taxes, road taxes graded to reflect engine capacity or miles travelled, higher purchase taxes on new cars and the removal of tax relief on the use of company cars and company car parks. It is also important to increase parking charges (including out-of-town facilities) and to introduce tolls on trunk roads and road pricing within towns. This should be linked to changes in planning policy such as maximum rather than minimum parking requirements for new developments, the promotion of car free developments or the encouragement of car sharing or car pooling schemes as in Edinburgh (see SUN Dial 4). It may also be necessary to consider more drastic measures when air quality deteriorates to unacceptable levels as were used recently in Paris's recent smog alert.

In implementing these policies it is vital to ensure that they are applied evenly. Urban road pricing, for example, could drive people (literally) to out-of-town facilities where there are no tolls and where parking is free, hastening the decline of existing centres and reducing facilities accessible by public transport.

The Carrot

Studies by the Chartered Institute of Transport⁸ suggest that road pricing and taxation alone will not significantly reduce private car usage. The car is seen as a necessity rather than a luxury – indeed, if there is no alternative it is a necessity – so however expensive it becomes, people will find the money to continue using their car. The stick therefore needs to be balanced with the carrot of improved public transport. Road pricing should be directly linked to investment in public transport,

as illustrated by Ove Arup Economics who have developed a strategy for investment in the London Underground financed by revenue from road pricing⁹.

New development should be accessible to public transport and be sufficient dense to ensure that services are viable. However there is also a need for subsidy and investment in a sector which has been starved of both for many years and where the public sector's powers have been eroded by deregulation. Public transport has become second class transport and is shunned as much because it is shabby, downmarket and dangerous (particularly late at night) as because it is inconvenient. This image must be transformed and we need to learn from Europe where public transport networks are a cause for civic pride.

Buses are the most flexible form of public transport and are in greatest need of improvement. Local authorities require powers to enter into partnerships with operators to guarantee competitive pricing, improved services, better vehicles, through ticketing and an increase in passenger numbers. Light rapid transit or tram systems such as the Metrolink in Manchester dem-

onstrate the potential to transform the image of public transport. They play a symbolic and practical role as a mode 'premium' that commuters tend to favour over bus services¹⁰. The government should continue its commitment to the introduction of such systems and the expansion of existing systems.

Managing road capacity

Even these measures taken together may not solve the problem. However hard the motorist is hit in the pocket and however attractive alternative modes are made there will still be those who refuse to change their travel habits. It is therefore also important to consider the issue of highway capacity. It is now widely accepted that road building generates more traffic. Building roads makes driving easier so encouraging more road use. Traffic then increases to the point where roads once again become congested. This suggests that whatever the capacity of a given road network there will be a tendency for traffic to increase to just below saturation point. Increasing road capacity will therefore simply raise the saturation point.

we need to learn from Europe where public transport networks are a cause for civic pride



Left: As traffic clogs our roads, buses have become a technicolour array of different liveries

Right: But measures to improve public transport such as the Metrolink in Manchester and Oxford's electric bus can provide an attractive alternative to the car



Freiburg Germany

Freiburg has won the accolade of ‘Environmental capital’ in Germany through its work to reduce car dependency by offering cheap alternatives. Its strategy includes:

- An employment location and density policy to maintain the traditional urban structure of the city
- A street-car network with rights of way over cars
- The Regio–Ecoticket, a cheap one–fare pass valid on 2400km of regional rail, street car and bus routes
- High parking charges, resident only parking and park–and–ride
- 30km/hr sped limits throughout the city and road narrowing to reduce car flow
- 400km of cycle routes and parking for 700 cycles

Over the last five years public transport use has increased by 30%. Between 1976 and 1989 car ownership in the city rose by 46% but car use did not increase.

Source Euronet–UWE, 01 17 976 3895
PPG13:A Guide to Better Practice, HMSO, 1996

This effect is not confined to road building. It may also result from measures to reduce car use. In Bristol for example, a park-and-ride scheme succeeded in taking thousands of cars off a major route into town. This improved congestion for a period but gave other people the opportunity to bring their car into town. Within months of the road was as congested as ever. Measures to shift people out of their cars and onto public transport may therefore only free up road capacity for someone else with the resources to pay the tolls and parking charges. This suggests that the only way to reduce the total volume of car use is to reduce highway capacity and thus the saturation point of the road. This will have the reverse affect to what happened in Bristol. Conditions will be intolerable for a few months but as car use becomes more difficult people will stop using their car so that use will fall to just below saturation point. Provided that this is linked to initiatives to relieve pressure through public transport improvements, there is no reason why capacity could not be progressively reduced over time significantly reducing the volume of traffic.

Capacity could be reduced by lowering

Measures to shift people on to public transport may only free up road space for someone else with the resources to pay the charges

speed limits which would also reduce accidents – and improving energy efficiency¹¹. Road pricing could also build in congestion if manual tolls were used instead of electronic systems. Carriageway widths could be reduced to create bus lanes, cycle routes and even street trees. Care would, however, be needed to ensure that trade is not displaced to out-of-town locations.

An Intergrated Approach

The term ‘an integrated transport policy’ means different things to different people. To transport professionals it often means little more than the co–ordination of timetables and ticketing on public transport. The approach we suggest here is a framework for a truly integrated policy. Each of the four elements must work together. Urban containment alone is not enough. Road pricing or capacity reduction without good public transport will only breed resentment and congestion but public transport investment alone will not counter the attractions of the car. We therefore believe that this four pronged approach should form the foundation for an integrated transport policy.

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Could housing Co-operatives have the answer?

Does a sustainable urban neighbourhood require stability? Does it need, in its social and economic remit, to enable local people to build communities and keep them going? Does it need to recycle community assets? If so, then co-ops might have the answer.

Commitment: Most communities are made of people who were allocated a tenancy, applied for a job, or bought a house, without knowing who their neighbours would be. Housing co-ops are different. Co-op tenants can select their neighbours on the basis of their commitment to the co-op – and to co-operative principles. The stability of the co-op (a micro-neighbourhood, perhaps?) is the primary consideration.

Co-ops empower their members. A sense of stewardship tends to grow up, founded in the commonly-held – or at least collectively managed – asset, their housing. Rent is collected, repairs are made, and homes are allocated according to democratic procedure by co-op members themselves. The confidence and moral ownership gained from this collective self-reliance can have a very positive effect on the social and economic fabric of the entire neighbourhood.

Stability: Housing co-ops are organisations which outlive their individual members. This has clear advantages for a sustainable neighbourhood. *Firstly*, membership of a co-op show a commitment which exceeds that of simply living or working in an area. *Secondly*, the common ownership of assets which are also communally managed and maintained tends to allow those assets a longer life; though our cities have seen so little common ownership that we have to look abroad to see the evidence. *Thirdly*, co-ops are organised around seven principles, which have been evolved over 150 years to protect co-operators and guarantee their sustainability and the quality of their human environment. Thus co-ops bring in three qualities essential to sustainability: the desire to achieve it, the resources to achieve it, and principles for how to achieve it.

Superior performance: So are co-operators really do-gooders bumbling around trying to find a better way to live? This image is about as useful as that of the vegan commune busy wishing away all conflicts. What co-ops are instead about, is owning the real conflicts that arise, and resolving them month by month. The regulatory framework for housing co-ops is the same as for all social housing. Co-ops have to perform

Co-operative housing seems to offer stability, better design, lower investment risk and greater social benefits - along with better value for money for tenants and the taxpayer. On the eve of the 5th national conference of the Confederation of Co-operative Housing Andy Hansford checks the reality of these claims.



The Diggers self-build housing co-operative, Brighton. Designed by Archetype and developed with Chisel

to the same stringent standards as the largest, most sophisticated housing associations. Indeed, as Price Waterhouse concluded in a report for the DoE in 1991¹, many co-ops out-perform the best-run housing associations. They found that on strict value-for-money terms housing co-ops were more efficient and also supplied additional ‘non-quantifiable benefits’. This research confirms what co-ops already know: that they provide good housing and added community and social benefits which is why they attract such commitment from members.

Control: One of the great benefits of co-ops is tenant input into the design of new housing. All co-op homes have been designed, or chosen for purchase, according to a democratic process. Whereas most housing for sale is designed and built speculatively, and social housing developers rarely allocate until homes are already built, co-ops can do the reverse. As developers they can control the process and can pre-allocate properties which are then designed specifically to the needs of future tenants. It is no coincidence that two of the top four prizes at this year's 50th Housing Design Awards went to housing co-ops².

Financially sound: The co-operative model also makes sound financial sense. Uniquely for social housing, borrowing on co-op property can be secured on full vacant possession. Most social landlords can only grant possession with sitting tenants whereas the ‘fully mutual’ status of housing co-ops – all tenants are members, all members are tenants – permits them to offer the full value (as opposed to tenanted value) of properties as security.

A tried and tested model: From the first days of slum clearance, the UK taxpayer has recognised an interest in housing the homeless expressed as public subsidy towards the cost of new homes. Until 1988 subsidy for housing associations was 95%, but has declined to the current 54%. A condition of this subsidy has been the right of government to monitor its investment over the life of the housing. This work is carried out by the Housing Corporation, which monitors the performance of all social landlords including co-ops. Since over 60% of new housing association tenants receive housing benefit, the taxpayer has a second reason for ensuring their money is well spent.

This performance monitoring does not always prevent social housing falling into decay. Examples abound of Council estates which have fallen into decay and even some housing association estates but not so housing co-operatives. Cynics expect that housing co-ops will choose to keep rents low, rather than provide adequate maintenance and repair services. This is not the case and research indicates that rents are kept down because of savings on overheads rather than maintenance and do not impoverish the housing stock. Indeed co-op tenants tend to take pride in their homes more than other tenants, for whom the property is the landlord's problem. Co-ops therefore make grant last longer and charge lower rents (reducing the housing benefit bill) so that the taxpayer gets a better deal twice over.

Uncommonly good: Co-op housing offers stability, stewardship, sustainability and financial efficiency. The muesli stereotypes are starting to look very silly. Why then does such a successful model remain so rare in the UK? From its origins in Rochdale 150 years ago, the growth of co-op housing has left the UK behind. Like many British inventions, the idea has been more successfully applied abroad, especially Africa, Asia, Canada and Scandinavia, and was not re-imported into the UK until the 1970s. One observer attributes this to the feudal nature of land tenure in Britain: councils simply replaced the slum landlords, without overturning the feudal relationship with tenants³.

Yet co-ops are now at something of an impasse regarding new development. New co-operatives can take years to be registered and most give up before completing the obstacle course. Many existing co-ops would like to expand but the heavy finance charges entailed in new development must be largely shouldered by existing tenants. Just as few turkeys would vote for Christmas, there are not many co-op tenants prepared to vote for substantial rent rises to build more housing bringing no direct benefits to themselves but a lot of extra work.

The issue is not whether the housing co-op model should be an essential ingredient in the successful urban (or rural) neighbourhood, nor whether it's able to contribute far beyond its size to the quality of life in sustainable neighbourhoods. The issue is, how is the housing co-op sector to be expanded? How can we encourage the stability and nurturing of community builders, in place of dependence and apathy?

The solution might be to offer a higher rate of government subsidy to new co-op housing reflecting the better deal that housing co-ops offer. Is it so wrong to pay a premium to develop housing that works?

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If Living over the shop is such a good idea and if the potential is so great why is it not more common? **Ann Petherick** from the Living over the shop project at the University of York explains why and suggests how the problems might be overcome

Living over the shop

In every town there are dozens of part-vacant buildings, numerous people who would like to live in them and housing association willing and able to carry out the development. Nationwide it is estimated that Living over the Shop schemes (LOTS) have the potential to create more than half a million new dwellings which could meet the urgent need to provide for an increased number of households as well as the need to renovate neglected buildings. So why is it that an idea with all-party support has led to only around 10 000 homes been created?

The recently published DETR report

"Evaluation of flats over shops" illustrated the difficulties experienced by housing associations and local authorities in their attempts to develop LOTS. This looked at the experience of the Flats over Shop (FOS) funding programme between 1992 and 1995. The report found that almost all failure took place at the initial stage, when owners withdrew from negotiations.

The LOTS approach recognises that creating mixed-use within individual buildings is not simply a matter of building refurbishment, but involves complex issues of commercial valuation, investment criteria and the psychology of ownership. The task of achieving re-use involves

bringing together two groups who know little of each other's methods and motivations: the commercial property world and housing associations.

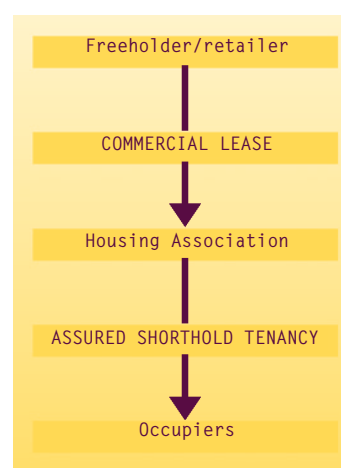
The key to a successful LOTS initiative is the recognition that the majority – around 80% – of retail properties are controlled by national companies, rather than individual shopkeepers, and that decisions about the use of those properties will therefore be taken at national level. Thus, although the issue of under-used buildings affects the local community in every town, and although the housing it could provide would be managed by locally-based organisations, the negotiations with owners have to be at national level. A knowledge of the operation of the commercial property market and commercial valuation is required if negotiations are to be successfully concluded with those for whom housing is not a major concern.

Commercial owners have traditionally been wary of mixed-uses, seeing housing as a management burden and a risk to the investment value of the property. The solution to overcoming these fears lies in an innovative legal arrangement known as "the LOTS mechanism". This is a two stage leasing arrangement in which the owner grants a commercial lease to an intermediary, such as a housing association, and the intermediary then grants an Assured Shorthold Tenancy to the occupier (see diagram below). The fixed term commercial lease ensures that the value is safeguarded. The intermediary then protects the interest of both parties and removes the burden of management from the owner. The basic idea could not be simpler and has proved acceptable to those national retailers and institutional owners who are aware of it but it is not yet widely known.

There are two distinct stages involved in a successful LOTS scheme. The first is the assembly of the parties and negotiation of the terms, and the second is the practical development. In order to succeed on a wide scale, the initiative requires a national, centrally funded clearing house to deal with the assembly and negotiation of schemes. This agency would also provide information and advice, acting in a similar way to the HAMA advice line, funded by the Housing Corporation. Staff would need to be familiar with the objectives and operations of both parties, in order to mediate between them, and to install the confidence which owners need if they are to take part in such an innovative scheme. Once negotiations were complete, the housing association would take over responsibility and carry out the development in the usual way.

Although the re-use of vacant upper floors in town centres is only one part of urban regeneration, it is a vital part if towns are once again to become living places twenty four hours a day. There is widespread and genuine enthusiasm to see housing brought back into town centres and more intensive use made of existing property. Several towns, such as Newcastle, Ripon and Grantham have already achieved remarkable success but the amount achieved so far probably represents less than 2% of the housing potential available. A new approach, and a concerted and coordinated nationwide effort, is needed.

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Left: The LOTS Mechanism leasing arrangements involving a registered housing association acting as intermediary

Far left: Living over the shop in Grantham, a scheme of six flats completed in 1995



creating mixed-use within individual buildings is not simply a matter of building refurbishment, but involves complex issues of commercial valuation, investment criteria and the psychology of ownership

West Hampstead Housing Association

Housing association are playing an increasing role in local regeneration partnerships. One of the growth opportunities is in diversifying the role of town and city centres by bringing people back to live over the shop. While this requires persistence, and can seem unrewarding, it does produce added value since town centres feel safer when people are living there. Residents also like living there, according to research for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation undertaken by Sheffield Hallam University. As the highest proportion of empty property is in the private sector – some 4.3% according to the Empty Homes Agency – housing associations have a major contribution to make to the growing number of town centre partnerships.

One of the pioneers in this has been the West Hampstead Housing Association, who specialise in temporary accommodation. Working in partnership with leading property companies and national multiple chains, as well as small businesses they have sought to create value out of an asset that is often wasted. In the case of Kilburn High Road, West Hampstead have carried out some 15 projects, housing several hundred people, as a result of canvassing for empty property, and negotiating deals, with one project often leading to another. Using commercial leases that enable the owner to regain empty possession, the association has invested in converting and repairing the interior, while the property owner is responsible for external work. A good example is the conversion of space over the Abbey National Building Society to create five units, housing 25 people, on a seven year lease at a rent of £13,000 a year. The scheme cost £107,000 and the owner put in £32,000 which provides a good deal for everyone, as

without the housing association's willingness to take on the responsibilities the property would have stayed empty.

The association also organised a highly successful conference on Living in Town. This highlighted not only the huge potential, but also the practical problems, particularly as far as persuading absentee landlords to support projects. These are often insulated from the problems of vacant property by head leases which place the responsibilities for repairs and rats on an intermediary. They are also wary of mixing uses which could cause hassle and devalue their property.



The Sustainable Urban Neighbourhood Initiative is supported by the Department of the Environment, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS' Environmental Action Fund, a major charitable trust and URBED

The initiative is managed by URBED from its Manchester office by David Rudlin with administration by Helene Rudlin and Nick Dodd.

The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily represent those of the Department of the Environment Transport and the Regions or any of the project's sponsors

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

Why NOT get involved?

The SUN Initiative has been established as a broadly based network of organisations and individuals interested in the sustainable urban development. We do not have a membership but people can get involved in a number of ways...

Mailings: If you did not receive this newsletter by post please contact us and we will add you to our mailing list.

Contributions: We would welcome letters or articles for future issues of this newsletter.

Examples: We are compiling a resource base of good examples of sustainable development nationally and internationally. We would therefore welcome details of projects that might be of interest.

Sponsorship: We are seeking sponsors for future issues of this newsletter and for exhibition material. Details are available on request.

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