

# Sustainable urban neighbourhoods

## Building communities that last

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**This report examines what does and doesn't work in building new communities and shows how to build more homes, better neighbourhoods and stronger communities.**

Building new communities that are physically and socially sustainable is a major challenge if we are to resolve the nation's housing crisis and avoid repeating past mistakes. This report looks at the design of sustainable urban neighbourhoods, it examines how local partners can work better together to foster localism and realise the aspirations of the National Planning Policy Framework and concludes with recommendations for government and other organisations.

The report, which is based on learning from 13 new communities in England:

- identifies the characteristics of a sustainable urban neighbourhood;
- stresses the importance of a large spatial planning framework to underpin community building;
- shows the importance of local vision and leadership; and
- highlights good practice in design, local governance, community facilities, management of public space, retail provision and long-term stewardship.

# SUNN

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Sustainable  
Urban  
Neighbourhoods  
Network



1. Ancoats and New Islington, Manchester



2. Derwenthorpe, York



3. Dickens Heath, Solihull



4. Grand Union Village, Northolt



5. Graylingwell Park, Chichester



6. Ironstone, Lawley Village, Telford



7. Lightmoor Village, Telford



8. Newhall, Harlow



12. Walker Riverside, Newcastle



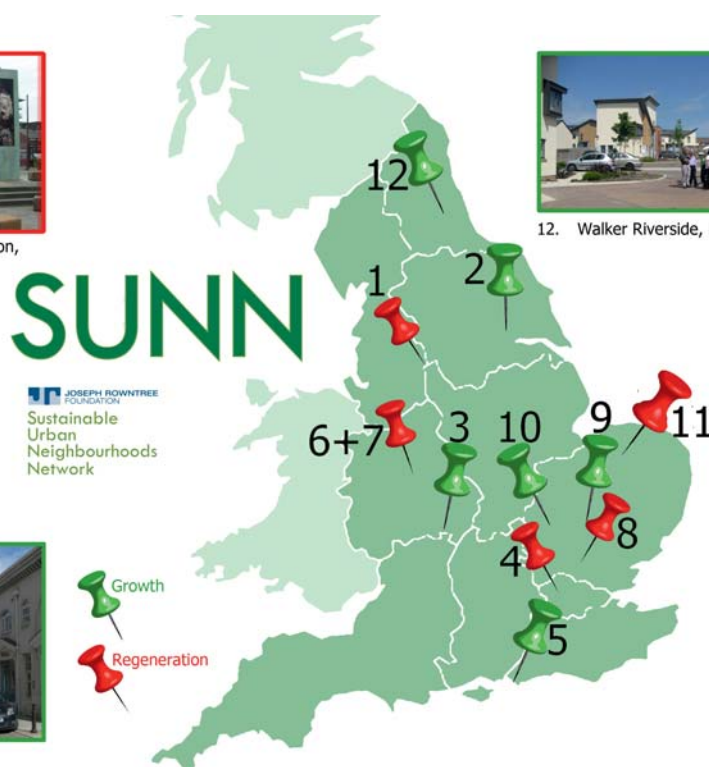
11. Yours South Lynn, King's Lynn



10. Upton, Northampton



9. Orchard Park, Cambridge



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# Executive summary

This is a report of the Sustainable Urban Neighbourhoods Network (SUNN), which was established in 2009 to explore first hand the experience of developing new urban neighbourhoods in England. Based on 'looking and learning' in thirteen new communities in ten English towns and cities, the report shows how to build more homes, better neighbourhoods and stronger communities in both growth and regeneration areas.

Most SUNN new communities are urban extensions, mainly on brownfield sites, but some also involve estate renewal. Each community is at least partially constructed and new residents have moved in<sup>1</sup>, giving a sound empirical base for drawing conclusions based on full and frank discussion within SUNN about what works and what doesn't in the development of sustainable urban neighbourhoods. Table 1 (see page 13) gives a list of member neighbourhoods. Representatives from the neighbourhoods that participate in SUNN include local councillors, local government officers, architects and planners, land owners and developers, community activists and staff from housing associations.

In the introductory chapter, a sustainable urban neighbourhood is defined as having the following characteristics. It:

- has a wide enough choice of housing and facilities to ensure long-term value and create a balanced community over time;
- is well connected to jobs and services by foot, bike and public transport;
- has places of different character that stand the test of time and appeal to different markets;
- is designed to conserve resources;
- benefits from hands-on management and long-term stewardship by responsible local organisations, both during development and after residents have moved in.

The remainder of the report contains three chapters. Chapter 1 looks at the design of sustainable urban neighbourhoods, summarising what SUNN learnt from a review of existing research and during our field visits. This learning is summarised in a series of 'tests and guidelines' detailed below. Chapter 2 continues this format but focuses on how local partners in the development process can work better together to foster localism and realise the aspirations of the National Planning Policy Framework. Chapter 3 sets out recommendations for government and other organisations arising from the analysis.

## Designing sustainable urban neighbourhoods

A sustainable neighbourhood is one that has value as a place to live over many generations. The lesson of the boom in estate construction in the 1960s and 1970s was that it was all too possible to get this wrong. We therefore examined how new communities were designed and laid out and have brought the conclusions together under four themes:

- healthier and stronger communities;

- safer streets and living places;
- a greater choice of homes;
- environmental features that add value to living in a new neighbourhood.

The conclusions form a series of tests and guidelines for good practice that can be used to assess and improve developments.

## Tests and guidelines

### **1 How far will the new neighbourhood offer its residents a better quality of life and strengthen both the community and the surrounding area?**

- Balanced neighbourhoods are needed that cater for a range of incomes and ages, and not just a mix of tenures.
- New communities should be designed and managed to improve everyone's quality of life through stewardship.
- A 'total cost assessment' of neighbourhood building would take on board the social benefits of people not having to travel far to jobs and services, and the value of community development and early provision of facilities.

### **2 Is the layout more conducive to safe walking and cycling than conventional suburbs, and does it result in less use of the private car?**

- Getting the location right on a transport corridor and close to jobs and services is vital.
- The 'heart' of new communities in terms of shops and facilities may need to be on the edge, off a main road, to combine local and passing trade and deliver retail vitality.
- Parking provision should be planned from the outset, with enough parking provided and rented out through permits.
- Cycling has a much greater role to play and needs priority from the start.
- Communal space needs to be well managed and maintained.

### **3 How well does the design appeal to all possible markets?**

- Civic leadership is needed to promote new development and improve design standards.
- Design codes can ensure later phases are not 'dumbed down'.
- Development agreements provide a greater degree of flexibility than masterplans.
- Within larger developments, easy-to-develop serviced sites of, say, 60–80 homes will maximise choice and stimulate higher build quality.

#### **4 Will the development have a positive environmental impact?**

- Sustainability appraisals can ensure running costs are affordable to those on average incomes.
- Sustainability plans should offer developers a menu of proven options.
- Green loans or mortgages could help create a market that is currently missing for homes that really cut energy costs (and hence carbon emissions).

### **Working together better**

Developers, planning authorities and local communities need to work together in a less adversarial way if we are to build new communities that improve quality of life. This means changing the way developments are procured, and learning from places that build better and faster. Four additional tests help ensure new communities respond to long-term demand, reduce development risks, cut construction waste and build truly affordable homes.

#### **1 Is there a local management body with the incentives and resources to anticipate and respond to neighbourhood problems as they arise?**

- In neighbourhood design and management, natural boundaries should be used that are logical to local people.
- Management plans should show how new communities are to be integrated with the surrounding area.
- Community or parish councils have real potential to deliver ‘localism’ and offer greater permanence than neighbourhood forums.
- Local champions, such as portfolio holders, should spell out the benefits of new communities and stand up for them.

#### **2 Are the risks and returns fairly shared, and is the public sector doing all it can to reduce development uncertainties and join up investment?**

- Growth should be focused where it is viable and there is sufficient infrastructure already or planned.
- Land should be regarded as equity, with public land provision forcing higher quality standards.
- Joint venture companies or public–private partnerships should pre-install infrastructure to enable sites to be parcelled out.

#### **3 Is waste of all kinds being minimised?**

- New building technology should be pre-tested in national laboratories and the field to reduce risk and deliver intended benefits.
- Modular construction approaches and a more sophisticated domestic supply chain should be supported.



- Both the location of new development and the application of building regulations should reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions when evaluated in a holistic manner.
- Experience of innovation in the building process should be widely shared.

#### **4 Are there enough rungs on the housing ladder?**

- Local letting plans for social housing can reduce conflicts.
- Sites for new forms of tenure such as co-housing and self-build will foster innovation and community building.
- Market rental has a greater role to play in speeding up occupation.

### **Leading the way**

Chapter 3 summarises seven main messages, with recommendations for restoring confidence in the housing market and getting development moving towards sustainable communities. It stresses the importance of leadership at all levels. The recommendations follow.

#### **1 Agree the spatial framework**

Agreed regional and subregional spatial and transport investment plans are essential to give confidence to developers to bring forward plans for sustainable communities that take years or even decades to come to fruition. The report recommends that the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (DBIS) should work with Local Enterprise Partnerships to agree priority areas for growth and regeneration that can be reinforced in concordats (or City Deals) extending over a number of years.

#### **2 Facilitate public–private development partnerships**

Partnerships bring together the best skills of the private sector in finance and development with the commitment of the public and voluntary sectors to long-term community development and sustainability. The Homes and Communities Agency should issue straightforward guidance on setting up public–private development partnerships for agreed priority areas that will simplify the process and avoid unnecessary legal costs.

#### **3 Mobilise public undesignated land**

Land cost is a key constraint and in appropriate places the easiest way to encourage house building is to use publicly owned land to secure the best possible outcomes for both local people and the wider community. Sustainable urban neighbourhoods can create value out of neglected land and will pay off over a business or property cycle. Hence, development must be kick-started by putting more land into joint ventures on a ‘build now, pay later’ basis. The report recommends that the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors and The Housing Forum, with support from DCLG, should promote better and more rigorous approaches to land valuation and disposal to get larger sites moving, following the government’s Housing Strategy.<sup>2</sup>

#### **4 Attract private funding for infrastructure**

To support community building and private investment, advance infrastructure is needed in terms of public transport provision, energy, waste, water and green space. The report recommends that the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (along with the Department of Energy and Climate

Change) should ensure enough funding is available for local infrastructure, particularly where long-term energy consumption can be reduced.

## **5 Open up housing markets**

The process of seeking planning permission and procurement needs to be streamlined. Strong advance planning is required, with local leadership taking responsibility for approving housing sites (which make good sense) and then empowering small-scale house builders, registered providers and self-builders to move on site and build with maximum efficiency. This means, for the optimum sites, a presumption in favour of sustainable development allocated in an outline masterplan. The report recommends that The Housing Forum, with support from the Local Government Association, should promote 'housing careers' to enable more people to get on the housing ladder, while boosting social sustainability and stewardship.

## **6 Endow community stewardship**

To ensure community development is not neglected and to build up social capital, development agreements need to cover the way the new community is managed. Social infrastructure is in practice as important as physical infrastructure, and so should be budgeted for accordingly. The report recommends that DCLG should work with Locality (the former Development Trusts Association) and the Association of Parish Councils to facilitate community trusts in new developments.

## **7 Learn from what works**

To ensure the necessary skills and attitudes are in place, investment must be made in training and education. Websites, good practice guides and conferences, however well done, are no substitute for people sharing experiences and looking and learning first hand. Bodies that were supposed to achieve this, such as the regional centres of excellence, have largely disappeared. The report therefore recommends that The Housing Forum, along with the Local Government Association, with backing from the house building industry, should support local networks in sharing experience.

Our provision of new housing has lagged far behind demand over the last couple of decades, both in terms of quantity and quality, as successive reviews have pointed out (see, for example, Barker Review, 2006; Callcutt Review, 2007). The coalition government wants to promote new housing and to shift control towards local neighbourhoods but without knowing quite what is to replace planning guidance or how to get building going again.

In the face of this uncertainty, this report shows how to build more homes, better neighbourhoods and stronger communities. The findings are based on direct experience of thirteen new communities in ten different English towns and cities that have come together since 2009 to 'look and learn' in a Sustainable Urban Neighbourhoods Network (SUNN). The learning from study tours and workshop discussions within SUNN is set against a background of other research on sustainable communities commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) and other organisations. The earlier *Interim Report* argued for a different approach to spatial planning, urban design and long-term stewardship.

## Looking and learning

SUNN has been a two-year project to exchange experience between 13 new communities in the front line of house building in different parts of the country. It followed a feasibility study by Carley and Falk (2009) that showed that faster innovation was needed to build the housing the country required. New methods of looking and learning from direct experience were suggested through the formation of a network to build skills and capacity.

The agenda and working methods were agreed at a launch meeting in JRF's late-19th-century model garden suburb, New Earswick in York.

## The main features of SUNN

- Network members are involved in innovative new housing schemes that have been started but are not yet complete.
- Members are committed to working together over a two-year period.
- Visits to new communities are hosted by members, with a study tour and facilitated workshops.
- There is full and frank discussion of what does and does not work in community building.
- A research team prepares briefing material and follow-up reports (see [www.urbed.co.uk](http://www.urbed.co.uk) for reports of visits).

Common issues identified at the first meeting included engaging the community, improving design and the introduction of new technology, and providing local leadership. The network went on to explore thornier issues of development finance and project management as the financial crisis deepened. We have also examined ways of adding value and cutting costs, and this report includes a number of case studies (Boxes 1–16) as well as images of good practice (Figures 1–18), drawn from our visits, that show what is possible.

Most SUNN members are urban extensions on brownfield sites but there are also several examples of estate renewal. The locations range from historic cities to new towns and metropolitan cities. However, economic conditions vary substantially, which greatly broadens the range of learning generated within SUNN. For example, in New Islington, Manchester and Walker Riverside, Newcastle the challenge is to redevelop former council estates near the city centre, on sites requiring remediation, to attract a wider range of residents. In Cambridge and Chichester, by contrast, the challenge is to accommodate an expanding population on the edge of the city on sites that were partially green fields. All are trying to develop new homes in a period of austerity and financial turmoil.

## The sustainable urban neighbourhood

The government committed itself to the overworked term ‘sustainable development’ in the draft National Planning Policy Framework but without defining what it means. In SUNN we have used the term ‘sustainable urban neighbourhood’ to refer to new communities that are built to last – in social and economic terms as well as in physical terms. As investment finance is increasingly hard to come by, it is crucial that what is built will stand the test of time. To count as a sustainable urban neighbourhood (Rudlin and Falk, 2009) a new settlement will have five basic ingredients. It:

- **has a wide choice of housing and facilities** to ensure long-term value and to create a balanced community over time. A neighbourhood with some common facilities requires a minimum of between 500 and 1,000 units, with homes catering for a range of incomes and ages;
- **is well connected to jobs and services** by foot and bike as well as by other modes of transport in order to cut travel time and costs. Creating connectivity (so that people do not have to depend on their cars and can be economically active) requires a location on a transport corridor or close to a town or city centre;
- **has places of different character** that appeal to different markets. Creating character or a sense of place requires a minimum net density of 30 units to the hectare, as in the garden cities and some of the new towns (Alexander, 2009). Higher densities can support better infrastructure but call for higher-quality design (Bretherton and Pleace, 2008);
- **is designed to save resources** and ensure that neighbourhoods are well looked after, and do not ‘cost the earth’. Climate-proofing a development will include provision of green infrastructure to promote biodiversity and reduce environmental impact, as well as measures to save energy;
- **benefits from hands-on management and long-term stewardship** by responsible local organisations, such as housing associations, development trusts or parish councils, both during development and after residents have moved in.

## This report

The remainder of this report contains three chapters. Chapter 1 looks at the design of sustainable urban neighbourhoods, summarising what SUNN learnt from a review of existing research and during our field visits. Chapter 2 continues this format but focuses on how local partners in the development process can work better together to foster localism and realise the aspirations of the National Planning Policy Framework. Chapter 3 sets out recommendations for government arising from the analysis. These have been informed by discussions with experts (for example, BSHF, 2011; and various events held by the Town and Country Planning Association about the National Planning Policy Framework) and by a study tour to three new settlements in the Netherlands to explore different approaches to housing delivery.

## SUNN members

(See also Appendix I for image profiles of network meetings and Appendix II for a list of participants.)

**Table 1: SUNN member neighbourhoods**

Neighbourhood/Town	Planning authority	Homes planned	Area (hectares gross)	Units completed towards end of 2011
Ancoats, Manchester (see also New Islington below)	Manchester City Council	1,800	8	632
Derwenthorpe, York	York City Council	540	21	0
Dickens Heath, Solihull	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council	1,672	57	1,615
Grand Union Village, Northolt	Ealing and Hillingdon London Borough Councils	962	22	800
Graylingwell Park, Chichester	Chichester District Council	750	36	110
Ironstone, Lawley Village, Telford	Telford and Wrekin Borough Council	3,300	107	410
Lightmoor Village, Telford	Telford and Wrekin Borough Council	800	72	192
New Islington, Manchester	Manchester City Council	1,400	13	179
Newhall, Harlow	Harlow Council	3,500	110	500
Orchard Park, Cambridge	South Cambridgeshire District Council	1,120	32	739
Upton, Northampton	Northampton Borough Council	1,400	37	245
Walker Riverside, Newcastle	Newcastle City Council	1,067	35	184
Yours South Lynn, King's Lynn	Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk	109 (900 South Lynn Millennium Community)	49	109

# 1 Designing sustainable urban neighbourhoods

A sustainable neighbourhood is one that has value as a place to live over many generations. The lesson of the boom in estate construction in the 1960s and 1970s was that it was all too possible to get this wrong.

Despite volumes of advice and some exciting new architecture, we are not yet building enough new neighbourhoods that improve what we inherited from previous generations. Although we know a great deal about what we ought to be doing, we are not putting it into practice. Guided walks round the new communities in SUNN and subsequent discussions have discovered better ways of building healthier communities, with safer streets and living places, a greater choice of homes and environmental features that add value to living in a new neighbourhood. Our findings have been turned into a series of tests and guidelines that can be used to assess proposals and improve the way neighbourhoods are planned and designed.

## Healthier communities

### What we know

Consumer surveys have highlighted dissatisfaction in the UK with how we live, particularly wellbeing on housing estates, and with what people can afford to pay (Cole, 1996):

- Problems arise when too many children of the same age are housed together (Page, 1993).
- Some of the UK's children are among the least happy in the industrialised nations, in contrast to the Netherlands and Denmark, which have the happiest (UNICEF, 2007).
- Stressed adults work away from home for long hours to pay the mortgage and other bills (Falk, 2010).
- Isolated older people sometimes live in fear, and in houses that no longer suit their needs (HAPPI, 2009).
- Levels of community involvement are falling as many people are short of time, despite evidence that we are quite civil to each other (Griffith, *et al.*, 2011).

Some of these problems result from inequalities in both wealth and earnings, which are much greater than in northern European countries such as Germany, Finland and the Netherlands (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). Others stem from not building enough houses and from poor neighbourhood design. We have some of the highest house price inflation levels in Europe, combined with a relatively low rate of house building over the last three decades. Private house building stayed relatively constant after public house building fell, leaving a big gap to be filled (Barker, 2006).

With a lack of lower rungs on the housing ladder, buying a home has become an impossible dream for many people (Hills, 2007). The value of housing as a proportion of net personal wealth is estimated to have increased from 18 per cent in 1960 to over 39 per cent in 2008, and a report from JRF's Housing Task Force showed how inflated house prices hurt the wider economy and social wellbeing (Stephens, 2011). House prices have outstripped earnings since around 1990, making it difficult for younger persons in work to buy at the same time as some older people have bigger houses than they need. (Griffith, 2011)<sup>3</sup>. As a report for the Intergenerational Foundation puts it:

*This is not just a question of ownership or the value of housing assets, but also one of the use of housing stock. The "family home" is increasingly being held in the hands of people who are not raising families.*

Wilkinson and Pickett show clear links between inequality and various forms of social malaise and ill-health, such as teenage pregnancy and alcohol abuse (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). Work on health by the Marmot Review (2011) and on spatial inequalities by Dorling and Thomas (2011) argue for mixed neighbourhoods rather than polarised ones as a means of tackling inequalities. People feel best in places where they interact with others and where 'social capital' is built up through a variety of informal transactions and meeting points (Woodcraft *et al.*, 2011). Research for JRF found that 'Place matters and as a rule neighbourhood mattered most to people where both the economic legacy and future prospects for their community were least favourable' (Batty, *et al.*, 2011).

Arguments that Britain's society has broken down are supported by a narrow majority of the population. Indeed, many people are coming back to live in the centres of towns and cities that have undergone a renaissance.<sup>4</sup> However, even if population loss has slowed, the flight out of towns and cities has continued and we are not building enough of the places where people prefer to live (Diacon, *et al.*, 2011). Many people not only want more space and better prospects for their children but also want less aggravation, such as noise (for example, CAGE, 2005). The riots in August 2011 may be another sign that all is not well in our communities. We have to build many more homes but must also avoid creating an underclass that feels excluded (Falk and Simmons, 2011).

In recent years, affordable homes have been partly funded from the profits made on house sales through agreements between developers and local authorities as part of the planning process ('Section 106 Agreements') but this is no longer viable in many places. Cutbacks in the funding available to the Homes and Communities Agency have further reduced the supply (Monk, *et al.*, 2006). Social infrastructure is therefore vulnerable – and particularly if there is no-one to stick up for it. As a report on community ownership points out, 'Communities must be prepared and ready to take responsibility for resources. Building common understanding takes time.' (Woodin, *et al.*, 2010) A related report concluded that 'the community infrastructure of a new place is as important a contributor to its future success, and its economic value, as the housing itself and other aspects of physical design.' (Taylor, 2011)

In terms of neighbourhood design, mixed communities bring a number of benefits, and studies of their viability 'were overwhelmingly judged successful' (JRF, 2006). For example, they allow people to move home without moving neighbourhood, as their circumstances change, and they enable children from different backgrounds to grow up together. Of course, not everyone wants to be active in their community but all want to avoid conflict. However, success depends on investment in both social development and social infrastructure, which are often neglected (URBED, 2008). It can also be influenced by good urban design (Barton, *et al.*, 2010).

Achieving a social mix may cost a little more (Cheshire, 2007). But as the Young Foundation report points out (Woodcraft, *et al.*, 2011), the provision of good levels of social infrastructure in Milton Keynes has been budgeted at £700 per new dwelling. This is less than 5 per cent of what might be spent on achieving Level 6 of the Code for Sustainable Homes and so should easily be affordable as part of a tariff or Community Infrastructure Levy, while the costs of building green homes are falling.



## What we found

SUNN has addressed three key issues that particularly affect new communities. First, how do we engage communities not just at the time when housing is designed but also in the ongoing running of the neighbourhood and community facilities? Second, how do we create communities that work over time and do not become stigmatised? And third, how do we create a proper heart to the community when resources are tight and people no longer shop and mix as they once did?

Strong new communities, such as Orchard Park in Cambridge or Lightmoor Village in Telford, have benefited from good management from the start. The local school or health centre can play a key role in building a sense of community and local pride, and therefore needs to be in place early on so it acts as a community hub in bringing strangers together. The primary school at Orchard Park opened in the first year by drawing on children from the wider locality. It has a community wing and actively encourages two-way community involvement. New residents also help support neighbouring facilities such as shops and pubs that will welcome extra trade, as planned in Derwenthorpe in York. The Nar Sure Start Children's Centre in Yours South Lynn provides support for families with children under the age of five living in south and central King's Lynn. It offers a range of activities including childcare, a child health clinic, job information, access to higher education or just somebody to talk to.

The problems of a 'broken society' are rooted in neighbourhoods that have lost their balance, where people do not know their neighbours or have friends and where people are 'uncivil to each other' (Griffith, *et al.*, 2011<sup>6</sup>). This can occur even where communities are consulted at the start and there are policies for housing mix. Grand Union Village in Northolt showed how much the letting practices of both social and private landlords can change the mix from what was planned. (Ealing Council is reviewing its allocation policies for social rent prior to redeveloping council estates near Grand Union Village to ensure stronger communities are developed.)

Conflicts can then easily arise – over parking, rubbish disposal or where children can play, for example. Such conflicts affect the value of the community. Community centres are not enough and it would be better to avoid problems springing up in the first place.

### Figure 1: Primary schools can act as community hubs



Above: Orchard Park, Cambridge

Right: Yours South Lynn, King's Lynn



Above: Lightmoor Village, Telford



## Box 1: Golden Transfers Scheme

Ealing Council's Cabinet meeting of 24 June 2008 introduced the concept of the Golden Transfers Scheme. Its intention was to provide incentives for tenants to maintain a good tenancy record. Before this scheme, tenants could apply for a transfer but would not have been successful without some housing need. Now, to qualify for a transfer under the new scheme, tenants have to have a clear rent account for 12 months before application, have no record of any other breaches of their tenancy agreement for the previous 24 months and no anti-social behaviour record. 10 per cent of allocations annually go to council tenants under this scheme.

More recently the council was successful in bidding for funding to build 80 new homes within the borough. This is the first time in over 20 years that any council-owned homes have been built. The new homes are spread over four sites and are a mixture of one-, two-, three- and four-bedroom flats and houses, with some of the properties specially adapted for wheelchair use.

Ealing Council has used this opportunity to make better use of its existing stock. It has used most of these new homes for council tenants who were underoccupying their homes or whose homes were overcrowded. It has also provided 10 per cent of the new lettings as part of a lettings policy for local tenants in the same ward as the new schemes.

For these homes, the council has only considered tenants with a clear rent account and with no previous history of anti-social behaviour. For the ground floor or wheelchair homes available, it has given first priority to urgent medical cases waiting for that type of accommodation.

*It was interesting to speak first hand about the difficulties in building cohesive communities, and discover how universal they seem to be ... don't build a whole close of affordable family homes with four or five bedrooms and expect upwards of 30–40 children to be quiet and get on without conflict.*

SUNN participant

Within SUNN there are a variety of excellent models of long-term stewardship. For example, at Grand Union Village in London, an estate management company works for the property owners in parallel with a community development trust. At its best, a well-managed new community offers new residents a better lifestyle, giving rise to real enthusiasm for the neighbourhood. Careful onsite management boosts morale even when dealing with seemingly intractable problems such as parking provision. A key lesson is that

**Figure 2: Residents complain about car parking**



local authorities, registered providers and the private sector, working in partnership, can deliver stewardship functions so long as the organisational framework is put in place before the first residents move in. This fits within an emerging 'Big Society' agenda of working together rather than expecting the local council to do it all.

Careful estate management pays off for all and needs to be properly funded from the start through stewardship mechanisms that go beyond the usual role of the developer. Imaginative small ideas, such as personalising individual brick pavements in a park in Walker Riverside, Newcastle, or planting a tree each time a child is born in Lightmoor Village, help build social capital at relatively low cost. A community trust with a stake in the overall value of the new community can help add value to bricks and mortar.

## **Box 2: Fostering stewardship in Lightmoor Village, Telford**

Lightmoor Village is to be a second Bournville, the highly successful Birmingham garden village managed by the Bournville Village Trust (BVT). As in the original 100-year-old pioneering estate, BVT in Telford is in it 'for the long haul' and BVT's enviable reputation, together with the idea of living in such a community, boosts sales. BVT is paying particular attention to providing social facilities that strengthen quality of life: for example, the heart of the community is a new primary school. Facilities such as playing fields, changing rooms and an IT suite are owned and managed by BVT for the benefit of the neighbourhood. The school buildings are rented to the local authority during the day and there are separate entrances for children and the local community.

To underpin BVT's long-term stewardship, owner-occupiers sign a deed of covenant which commits them to an annual maintenance charge. The agreement extends a degree of environmental control over the estate. For example, green spaces cannot be paved for car parking. Residents who do not pay the maintenance charge can be taken to small claims court and have a contravention of covenant order attached to their property title which would make the property difficult to sell. BVT also offers extra services such as grass cutting and window washing, which provide extra income. An apprentice scheme employs local people to train as plumbers and gardeners.

Three stewardship officers work hard to ensure every new resident understands the benefits and responsibilities of stewardship. Current funding for these posts comes from a combination of charges and subsidies from BVT and developers; the service charge will cover costs after an initial five years of subsidy. BVT recognises that stewardship is about more than physical maintenance. For example, it has launched a football team at Lightmoor Village which attracted around 150 residents to its first match.

The high costs of replacing the housing estates that have failed, such as the Cardroom Estate in Manchester, make it all the more important to build places that endure and that are future proofed. (Future proofing is discussed in Rudlin and Falk, 2009.) Similarly, the high costs of dealing with family breakdown and petty crime show the value of creating active communities where neighbours help each other and do not have to depend on police or social workers.

SUNN uses the term 'balanced community' to suggest positive management and avoidance of problems that distress residents and undermine community. Although the term may be hard to define, signs of imbalance are easily recognised, such as concentrations of poverty, crime or anti-social behaviour, neighbourhood stigma, depressed property values, social tensions, overconcentration of houses in multiple occupation, excessive turnover of residents, neglected communal areas and so on.

A balanced community should attract a full range of households including young people, families and elderly people. But in addition to being well designed from the outset, a balanced community needs to have the management mechanisms in place to monitor and address problems as they arise. Balance

requires good ongoing management of the physical environment, including public space, shops, educational and other facilities. It can also require social development to raise local aspirations and ability to participate in the labour market, for example through training schemes and apprenticeships.

*It's important to plan for community governance, green/public space and built environment (like the Cambridge Quality Charter).*

SUNN participant

In prosperous areas such as Cambridge, high property prices enable investment in social infrastructure and development. However, in former industrial areas, such as inner-city Newcastle, property values are too low to support development of any kind, yet further investment is crucial to protect the investment that has already been made and avoid the costs of social collapse. The House of Commons Select Committee on Regeneration points to the successful redevelopment of Hulme in Manchester to show the value of sufficient public investment up front, long-term vision and, above all, commitment and continuity (House of Commons, 2011).

### **Box 3: Investing in neighbourhood renewal at Walker Riverside, Newcastle**

During a SUNN visit to Newcastle, members saw the importance of the significant amounts of Housing Market Renewal funding allocated to the Walker Riverside development. The withdrawal of this funding half-way through its 15-year programme puts previous investment at risk, yet evidence shows that the market is not yet ready to step in without public sector funding.

### **Figure 3: The opportunities at Walker Riverside are going to waste**



*(continued overleaf)*



### *Box 3 continued*

The government's New Homes Bonus scheme and the new Affordable Housing Programme 2011–15 do not help places such as Newcastle, particularly its regeneration areas. The facility for landlords to set rents at up to 80 per cent of local market rents means there is virtually no new borrowing capability in Walker Riverside, where market rents are very low. The 'discounted land' approach, which subsidises new housing by providing land at below market values, is not much use in Walker, where market and ground conditions mean that sites already have low values. And the New Homes Bonus, paid on net new homes, does not apply in Newcastle and elsewhere when parts of the development programme are still necessarily in the demolition phase. Cross-subsidising regeneration across a range of sites is sometimes possible for a national developer, but not for registered providers operating in areas suffering from economic decline.

The closure of local agencies involved in the delivery of schemes, such as the Housing Renewal Pathfinder or Bridging NewcastleGateshead, has threatened valuable work in changing perceptions and tackling social problems. It has further angered local people who have had to live with demolition and unfulfilled plans.

The coalition government is pinning its hopes of stimulating the housing market on cutting red tape but this will be not enough to get the country building again. To meet the aspirations of the National Planning Policy Framework for sustainable development, a number of tests need to be met.

## **Test 1: How far will the new neighbourhood offer its residents a better quality of life and strengthen both the community and the surrounding area?**

### **Guidelines**

- **Balanced neighbourhoods** are the key to people enjoying where they live and feeling comfortable. A good choice of homes that cater for a range of incomes, together with provision of neighbourhood facilities, will encourage people to stay in the area when their circumstances change because they build up long-term economic value and social capital.
- Careful design, letting and management policies will create '**lifetime neighbourhoods**' that attract people of all ages and incomes. Housing design should be 'tenure blind' to avoid stigmatisation. Local letting policies will avoid conflicts between those who have bought their properties and those who are renting, and ensure support for those who are vulnerable.
- **Total cost** approaches to neighbourhood budgeting, as part of the move towards localism, will value people living close to existing infrastructure and discourage further costly sprawl, particularly where the local economy is weak and people cannot afford to travel far. Funding must be provided for community development and facilities in the first five years.

## **Safer streets and living places**

### **What we know**

One criticism of new housing estates is the way that public or communal space is laid out. Evaluations for the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment and other evaluations of new housing estates have been particularly critical of the public realm, which often looks hard and unwelcoming (CABE, 2007).

Many new housing estates attract residents who are out at work most of the time. It is unrealistic to expect much in the way of local jobs or services, such as shops, or for local employment to generate activity during the day. But it should be possible for children to play together and for people not to depend on their cars for short trips.

Streets designed to foster traffic flows, or to stop crime through cul-de-sacs, which make escape more problematic, reduce the permeability of neighbourhoods and thus the pleasure of walking. This helps explain why too few people in the UK walk or cycle to local amenities, thus encouraging obesity. Public open space, including children's play areas, often looks arid and uncared for, with little of the greenery found in traditional villages where people prefer to live (Samuels, 2005). Most new estates are regarded as dormitories, with streets that seem dead most of the time despite planners' efforts to secure a mix of uses.

It is relatively inexpensive to design and build good-quality landscapes and to ensure they are provided in masterplans and design codes. However, particularly where public space is extensively landscaped, the service charge can exceed what most people are willing to pay, especially in the case of tenants on low incomes in social housing and those house purchasers who have gone into debt to move in. There are often problems with who takes responsibility for what. And difficulties arise because of the time it takes to build a new community compared with the short-term perspective of most house builders (URBED, 2008).

In every new community, there is an issue of how to deal with cars. Despite the freedoms offered by the *Manual for Streets*, and good practice guides on parking (DfT, 2007), traffic engineers and planners grapple with competing concerns for safety and traffic speed, and the interests of walkers and cyclists come second to those of the car driver.

Developers want to appeal to house buyers. Making public transport pay is difficult in low-density suburbs where many people work in places that are not served by buses or trains and that are too far away to reach by cycle, making car use inevitable.<sup>6</sup> Cars easily proliferate and take over whatever hard public space is available. SUNN therefore considered how to improve public space, how to encourage people to use more sustainable modes of travel and minimise car use, and how to design and manage parking. The network also looked at the related issue of the extent to which local shopping can be viable.

## What we found

Even where design codes had been drawn up, the public realm often lets the development down, partly because highway or utility engineers are not so interested in the way things look, and overrule designers, and partly because of poor urban design.

*[There is a] risk of open space becoming dead space if it is not situated on a natural desire line.*

SUNN participant

Yet, as we saw vividly in Ancoats in Manchester, investment in a high-quality public realm can transform the look of a place. It can therefore boost consumer demand for what was previously seen as a poor location and start to change travel behaviour as well as attract private investment.

### Box 4: Creating high-quality public space and taming traffic at Ancoats, Manchester

Close to the city centre, the renewal of a historic industrial area next to a failed council estate has been achieved through a major investment in the public realm, including new canals in neighbouring New Islington. Before regeneration got underway, the road system was a convoluted one-way system  
(continued overleaf)

#### *Box 4 continued*

with an excess of signage. One-way streets encouraged 'rat running', particularly by van drivers who would rip through at up to 50 miles per hour. Ancoat's urban designers recognised that the neighbourhood's grid pattern needed to be retained and enhanced to keep the area's character but speeding traffic needed to be tamed. Achieving the desired urban quality required substantial advocacy by its proponents to avoid it being diluted.

There are three components. First, a new public square was constructed at the heart of the community on the site of some run-down sheds. Second, the design pays careful attention to the quality of the historic streetscape and signage is kept to a minimum. Paving materials identify a hierarchy of road types, and streetscape design encourages slower driving. Open-access intersections foster slower speeds through a degree of uncertainty. Third, an arts programme celebrates the area's long history, reinforcing a sense of community between old and new residents.

Street parking will reduce some roadways down to a single carriageway, which should slow traffic down. But, as many buildings and sites remain undeveloped, the strategy will only take effect once more residents have moved in.

The Ancoats public realm scheme has succeeded, though more tree planting could have softened the area's hard surfaces. With the benefit of hindsight, it would have been better to mark out street parking areas with planting and/or bollards. Trees in moveable tubs would have allowed a test of whether a parking scheme was going to achieve the outcome intended without the need to resurface the road if the design was not successful.

**Figure 4: Highway design improves wellbeing and the area's image**



Much of the criticism of new estates is levelled at the way public spaces are dominated by cars, including cars parked on pavements. Parking is a real challenge because reducing the number of car-parking spaces does not necessarily lead to fewer cars on site. Professional thinking has gone from providing separate pavements and garages to designing parking courtyards at the rear of properties or

underground. However, SUNN's experience is that people will park wherever they can. It is common for local authorities and developers to minimise the space allocated for parking in the mistaken belief that this will encourage the use of other modes of travel. Yet when parents are asked why children do not cycle or walk to school, they point to the danger created by cars. Something is fundamentally wrong.

*Selling new homes with low levels of car parking was difficult in the face of a strong second-hand market of older homes with front and back gardens that could accommodate several cars.*

SUNN participant

### Box 5: Achieving successful Home Zones and play areas at King's Lynn and Cambridge

Most SUNN communities incorporate Home Zones – streets where people and vehicles use the same road space equally – but not all were equally successful. Both Yours South Lynn and Orchard Park, Cambridge for example, felt their Home Zones were not as successful as they ought to be because they are too timid in design and do not slow cars to a walking pace. With hindsight, trees and play equipment in the road space would have made it clear that it is indeed a shared space.

But there is another reason why not many children play in the street in Yours South Lynn, which is that a highly popular, secure shared outdoor space has been provided in the area enclosed by the new blocks of flats. This area is demarcated into child-friendly and adult zones, is only accessible from the flats themselves and is overlooked by the flats so that parents can watch with confidence as children play. Meanwhile, a car club run by a community trust is helping to reduce car levels in the community.

It was clear from the study tour to the Netherlands, where the ideas of Home Zones and shared space were pioneered, that Britain generally lags behind the rest of northern Europe in traffic management. Priority is given to cars, with public transport and cycling being 'poor relations'. Our visit to Houten and Vathorst showed how to create, in new developments, the kind of natural environment that people value in smaller towns and villages. For example, it should be safe and attractive for children to walk or cycle unattended, yet even in the best of our neighbourhoods it is still hard for a child to get around on a bike. The planned new town of Northstowe, or the central cycle path at Orchard Park, are rare exceptions.

Even where design guides had been adopted, over-intrusive roads act as barriers to movement and are expensive to build. For example, the widening and realignment of a main road in Telford, built in advance of Ironstone Lawley, cost approximately £10 million with an overall infrastructure budget for the scheme of £70 million.

**Figure 5: Environments designed with children in mind**



School in Houten



Home Zone in Yours South Lynn



Sustainable urban neighbourhoods ‘tame’ the car, without a loss of personal freedom, and create child-friendly environments that also reduce carbon emissions.

### Box 6: Keeping the car in its place at Houten, the Netherlands

Houten is a prosperous new town, developed as a suburb of Utrecht, and is one of the most popular places to live in the Netherlands. The extension was too small to support a high-quality public transport system of its own. When it was decided to grow the population from 40,000 to 70,000, the first step was therefore to build a temporary tram line alongside the railway that runs through the town. Some ten years later, after doubling the railway tracks, a new station on the main line has opened alongside a new shopping centre, and the tram has closed.

As most people work outside Houten, from the start the masterplan made it attractive to cycle or walk to the railway station, which is what most people do every day. As in the rest of the Netherlands, cyclists have priority over cars at intersections, and a separate system of cycle ways makes it safe for people of all ages to get on their bikes. Space under the main station is now given over to a cycle park and repair facility, where one can also hire bikes inexpensively. A school with housing above it is only accessible by bike or on foot. Most of the parking is on the street, often in side streets that are separate from the cycle ways.

**Figure 6: Houten Rail Station cycle park, hire and repair facility**



**Figure 7: A safe environment for cycling**





*Cars must not be allowed to dominate the built environment, and an 'intelligent' parking management scheme needs to be in force from day one of the first resident occupying their home, and should be spelt out in the sales brochure.*

SUNN participant

*I discovered to my surprise that underpasses really can work ... it was all fairly obvious: natural light, raise the road slightly, remove vegetation that interferes with sightlines, and make it continuous so you do not lose momentum cycling round corners and up slopes.*

SUNN participant

### **Box 7: Managing parking at Grand Union Village, Northolt**

In Grand Union Village, residents were ignoring well-laid plans for undercroft parking (enclosed but at ground level) and using the street and pavements instead. Five years after the first residents moved in, redress of the situation has required a multi-agency initiative of yellow lines, permits and booklets. The lesson is that it should have been done a long time ago, before residents got into bad habits.

Within any parking scheme, a balance has to be struck between catering for individual convenience and providing an attractive environment:

- Parking arrangements not only matter greatly to residents but also largely shape what places look and feel like, and how pleasant they are to walk around.
- Parking demands in new communities can be reduced by having a greater social mix, including a larger number of older people.
- The design should be clear enough to indicate how space is to be used without the need for signs or yellow lines.
- Rear parking courtyards tend not to work unless densities are below 30 units to the hectare (equivalent to twelve to the acre). Conventional on-street parking seems to work better. Parking courtyards should be accessible to pedestrians and cyclists.
- Parking under a green communal area (or undercroft) means that housing does not have to be surrounded by an excessive amount of surface parking but this is only likely to be viable at densities of over 90 units to the hectare (that is, four storeys or more) where land values are relatively high and where parking controls are respected.

In terms of retail viability, instead of locating social and commercial services together and close to bus routes, as in a traditional small town or village, they tend to be spread around new neighbourhoods, which reduces their vitality and viability. Perhaps in the process of trying to satisfy different interests, or create an attractive-looking masterplan, the basic economics of what drives successful places have been forgotten.

In most new communities, for obvious reasons, shops and complementary community facilities are located together to increase footfall and are placed in the geographic centre of new communities – the traditional village or high-street model. This is the approach taken in Dickens Heath, which provides extensive retail premises of varying sizes in a pedestrian-friendly environment in the centre of the community. Adjacent are a new village hall, library and medical and dental surgery, all intended to increase footfall and make local retailing viable. The conception and execution were laudable.

But SUNN's experience, including pressing problems of low retail vitality in Dickens Heath and other locations, suggests that in the current harsh retail environment this approach may not be workable. Dickens Heath, for example, seemed to have everything going for it in terms of a healthy village centre: prosperous residents in SUNN's only free-standing community. Unfortunately, shop vacancy rates and turnover are high – and while the community is free-standing, car ownership rates are high and the development is not far from several out-of-town malls and free-standing superstores.

In these circumstances it is unsurprising that Dickens Heath's retail environment is suffering. Locally, SUNN members learnt that the Dickens Heath 'high street' suffers from insufficient parking, which pits shoppers against residents for a very limited number of spaces. But the alternative of providing ample free parking, which is typical of most out-of-town provision, is unthinkable in the centre of a new community. The Dickens Heath case confirms SUNN's views that local retailing may only be viable if both local and passing trade have easy access to shops, that in every case early masterplanning should include a sophisticated retail strategy, and local retail plans should be made within the context of a subregional retail strategy.

## Test 2: How far will the layout achieve higher levels of walking and cycling than conventional suburbs, and result in lower use of the private car?

### Guidelines

- **Getting the location right**, close to jobs and services and on good transport links, will cut the time spent commuting and leave more time for leisure and family. This is particularly important where many of the initial residents are likely to be young working families. The planning brief should include a thorough retail and employment strategy, which takes account of the subregional context.
- The **'heart' of a new community could in future be on its edge** to ensure enough demand for shops and services by combining local and passing trade. Co-locating these with a new school, health centre and sports activities means that overheads are shared. As they provide the catalysts for healthy communities, facilities should be provided early on, in temporary premises if necessary.
- **Enough parking spaces** must be provided but rented out through parking permits to keep cars under control. Well-designed spaces with covenants in leases, plus a welcome pack, should ensure that residents understand how the neighbourhood is intended to work. Car sharing and car clubs need to be properly promoted, for example through a community trust.
- **Cycling** has a much greater role to play through properly designed cycle ways to local shops and services such as stations. Adequate space to store bikes outside homes is essential. There must be enough room for pedestrians and cyclists to interact safely and without making movement difficult for older and infirm people.
- **Communal space** should be well managed and maintained by the community, with an appropriate governance structure, or be parcelled out into individual gardens and allotments. Maximum advantage should be taken of natural assets such as water or trees. Community councils can maintain high standards of stewardship but care must be taken to keep charges affordable (which is where an endowment and voluntary action can help).

## Good design and greater choice of homes

### What we know

Most house buyers in the UK (86 per cent) opt for an old or second-hand product and do not even consider buying a new home, unlike their purchases of cars or electrical gadgets.<sup>7</sup> Buyers are also very status conscious. This is different from on the Continent where there is a stronger stress on creating the 'socially integrative city' and sustainable neighbourhoods (Scanlon and Whitehead, 2008).

The Royal Institute of British Architects research into attitudes to new homes for its Homewise campaign shows that there are major concerns about insufficient space inside, and Britain builds some of the smallest new homes in Europe (RIBA, 2011). User surveys have also established complaints over transmitted noise, and higher densities do not suit all families (Mulholland, 2003). People over the age of 60 rarely move home and often occupy more space than they can afford to run in family homes that would better suit those with young children (Griffith, 2011). The market is stuck.

The cost of new housing has priced out younger first-time buyers, so that people are more often in their 40s when they make their first purchase. As a result, young children are growing up in unsuitable rented homes. New homes are also often too small for family use, and go instead to buy-to-let investors or housing associations, which has tipped the balance away from the very people needed to build a sense of community.

In terms of design, a high proportion of new homes are designed to look as if they were Victorian, with false gables and artificial slate roofs. Relatively few look built for the 21st century, with good outdoor space such as balconies, good storage space both inside and outside, natural lighting and measures to cut energy consumption. Research on residents' attitudes to high-density living shows that good modern design can mitigate many of the perceived negative aspects of higher densities (Bretherton and Pleace, 2008). If innovative architecture and design create a sense of space and light in new homes, residents are often pleasantly unaware that they are living at high densities.

If new communities attracted a full range of age and income groups, it would avoid the kinds of pressures found in Cambourne in Cambridge where some young mothers felt isolated, suffering from 'new town blues' (Goh and Bailey, 2007).<sup>8</sup> Demographic research at a ward level suggests there are five main categories of household, from 'wealthy achievers' to the 'hard pressed', and 17 subgroups and some 56 different types, all with different preferences and requirements.<sup>9</sup> Communal space can help create stronger communities provided that design is 'tenure blind'. A key issue is therefore how to use planning to achieve places that not only offer a much greater choice, but also look and function better, and attract a wider range of residents as a result.

### What we found

We found it was generally hard to tell the type of tenure by looking at the homes from the outside. However, as most of the homes in major developments are built by volume house builders, they tend to look similar and there is a bias towards traditional designs. The greatest variety we saw was in Dickens Heath, which included some stunning waterside housing, as well as a memorable village centre, with housing built around green squares with parking below.

**Figure 8: New communities take time to evolve**



New Earswick, York

**Figure 9: Garden square housing with parking beneath**



Dickens Heath, Solihull

**Figure 10: Waterside housing**



Dickens Heath, Solihull



## Box 8: Achieving innovative design at Graylingwell Park, Chichester

Graylingwell was a redundant hospital in 36 hectares of wooded parkland about 20 minutes' walk from the city centre. The site was taken over by the Homes and Communities Agency (then English Partnerships) as one of 96 sites from the National Health Service and was marketed as a mixed-use development opportunity in 2005/6. English Partnerships insisted on higher quality and more exacting sustainability standards than the council would normally have expected, and this has since become the benchmark for other schemes in the area.

Linden Homes took on the role as the lead joint venture partner to project manage the site through acquisition and planning, with support from a multidisciplinary team of consultants. Originally proposed for business development, with permission for 154 dwellings, work on the local plan led to a Supplementary Planning Document for a number of major sites, with inputs from a local forum. The resulting application was for a new 'quarter' of 750 dwellings, of which 40 per cent were to be affordable, as well as commercial and community facilities, and a care home.

The public realm is particularly extensive, with sports pitches and changing rooms, orchards and allotments, tree planting and landscaping. A major feature is the commitment to creating the largest zero-carbon development in the UK, with a combined heat and power (CHP) plant in the old water tower. Approximately 150 dwellings are being carved out of the existing buildings, including the administration building, which has already been converted into five luxury apartments.

There is access to extensive mature parkland. Footpaths connect the development to adjacent existing neighbourhoods, with both new and existing communities encouraged to join in and use the community development trust facilities and activities. Homes are quite spacious, typically over 100 m<sup>2</sup>.

The scheme is attracting families into the social housing, and attracting households that are downsizing into the homes for sale. Some of these households come from outside the area. The scheme is selling well despite the general financial situation. It is being praised by English Heritage as one of the UK's 20 best schemes in historic places, and is winning design, community engagement and sustainability awards.

Graylingwell Park in Chichester shows that, with imagination, it is possible to design two-storey terraced housing that looks different, making a feature of solar panels and providing front gardens where vegetables can be grown. Another distinctive design, in Newcastle's Walker Riverside, was undertaken by the housing association, Places for People, but needed additional grants. The resulting low-energy housing in a Home Zone has created somewhere special. Meanwhile, the iconic apartment block called Chips in New Islington is hard to replicate. On the whole, developments on large sites in the UK are undertaken by volume house builders who also put in the infrastructure and use standard house types where they know the costs and values.

Among SUNN members, there was lively consideration of whether English house buyers would ever find contemporary designs as acceptable as neo-vernacular approaches, and discussion of the cost implications of the different styles. Contemporary designs could be less expensive to build because less detailing is required; modern, cost-effective materials, such as UPVC windows, can be used more honestly. Modern designs are also more amenable to modular building techniques, although these require contractors to have specific experience of modular methods.

Neo-vernacular design may be driven by councillors attempting to make new developments more acceptable to their constituents, or by developers who assume 'this is what sells' or by valuers playing safe. Design guides may be based on an analysis of what is traditional in terms of road layout or materials, rather than what is needed to attract home buyers as a whole. Modernistic but failed council estates from earlier decades have harmed the reputation of contemporary design.

**Figure 11: Distinctive-looking designs add value**



Above: Chips, New Islington  
Right: Graylingwell Park



Above: Walker Riverside



There are also cost implications to design. For example, in Orchard Park in Cambridge the local authority and developer worked closely together to ensure that the design guide for the area was financially realistic from the developer's point of view. This resulted in a common vision and enabled design changes to be agreed that reduced costs. The Charter for Quality Growth and a quality panel of outside experts ensures that the basic principles are retained.

Some question the need for prescriptive guidance, while others think it is essential to raising quality standards. A distinction needs to be drawn between a design 'guide' and a design 'code', with the latter providing more precise criteria when construction tenders are being sought. Both may have mandatory and discretionary elements, and may be used to assess designs. A variation is a planning brief, written specifically for one development.

All three start with a vision of what the development is expected to achieve but the results often fail to measure up to expectations. In contrast, places such as Vathorst in Amersfoort in the Netherlands show that it is possible to set out the basic principles in one large masterplan or model, with individual blocks each having their own character (PRP, 2008). As a result, the development looks more distinctive and there is a much faster building rate, with many builders competing to attract sales. Newhall in Harlow shows how diversity of choice can be secured when a private landowner insists on quality through design codes and competitions.



**Figure 12: Quality housing broadens Newhall, Harlow's appeal**



The Homes and Communities Agency has achieved a high quality of design on some publicly owned sites such as Upton in Northampton (a former new town) and Graylingwell (a former hospital site on the edge of a historic town). A volume house builder at Graylingwell Park has shown how the traditional terrace can be reinvented to meet contemporary needs, without adding significantly to the costs of construction (see Figure 13).

**Figure 13: Houses at Graylingwell Park have green appeal**



Our visit to the Netherlands showed how to offer a much greater choice by funding the infrastructure at low rates of interest and by dividing up large sites into smaller plots. This used to happen in developments such as Metroland in north-west London but has since fallen out of use (Jackson, 2006). New communities in the UK are still on a small scale compared with the Netherlands where the housing stock has increased by 7.6 per cent over the last decade, largely through planned urban extensions (Falk, 2011).

Amersfoort pioneered the principle at Vathorst that neighbourhoods of 500 homes should reflect the balance of incomes in the wider area. An even greater choice is offered in Almere Poort, a former new town north of Amsterdam, where people acquire sites from the local authority to commission their own homes and have a 'passport' to ensure the masterplan and building line are respected (see Figure 14).

### Test 3: How well does the development framework ensure the designs appeal to different potential markets?

#### Guidelines

- **Civic leadership** is needed both to build new neighbourhoods and to improve their design standards. Community planning events can then secure local agreement to the basic principles. Building trust takes time but will pay off in creating places that everyone values.
- **Development frameworks** enable agreements between landowners, developers and the planning authority over phasing and outcomes, thus allowing a greater degree of flexibility than masterplans. A design panel to help resolve conflicts and ensure quality is maintained.
- **Design codes** agreed between the developer and local planning authority should be as clear as possible, for example by using photographs or drawings and taking advantage of published design guidance, to ensure that later phases are not 'dumbed down'.

Figure 14: Almere Poort is a DIY community





- **Easy-to-develop serviced sites** make it easier to ensure the choice that both customers and communities want. In some developments, to promote variety in housing provision, large sites can be split into different blocks of, say, 60–80 homes, built by a variety of builders in phases. Competitions in the first phase can test innovations and promote early interest.

## Environmental features

### What we know

The climate is changing and raw material costs are rising rapidly (Stern, 2006). Fast-growing economies such as China are competing for a diminishing stock of natural resources (for example, CABI, 2008). Most homes are not future proofed to deal with shortages of energy, water and waste-disposal sites. We lag far behind countries such as Germany, the Netherlands and even France in building places that meet eco-town standards (PRP, 2008). There is no shortage of ambitious plans and policies, such as the Energy Plan and the Green Deal, but implementation has been painfully slow – even before the downturn. Hopes for using what the G20 Summit in London called ‘green recovery’ to create new industries such as solar power are being dashed by government cutbacks.

Rapidly rising fuel and other utility bills will increase the demand for affordable modern housing even without pressures to reduce carbon emissions. The energy industry regulator has warned that fuel bills could double, while the cost of upgrading ageing power stations and inadequate distribution systems has been put at over £200 billion (McKinsey and Company, 2010). It is therefore vital to find ways of saving energy without adding some £25–30,000 to the cost of construction to meet Level 6 of the Code for Sustainable Homes (DCLG, 2008). It is going to be essential to link new developments with upgrading existing housing if fuel poverty is to be reduced and social divides narrowed (URBED, 2011a).

While resource-saving technologies such as CHP have been extensively used in Germany and other parts of northern Europe, there have been problems in doing something similar in the UK on any scale. The Green Deal encourages householders to upgrade their own homes but there has been little financial incentive for house builders to put large-scale innovations like CHP into practice (although the renewable heat initiative should make a big difference). The question which ought to be addressed is how best to raise environmental standards and increase the value households put on new homes without adding much to their costs.

### What we found

Few neighbourhoods match what we saw in our study tour to the Netherlands. British house builders are either unaware of what is now feasible or are deterred by the complexities and lack of ongoing government support. Also the promised economies from energy innovations can fail to materialise, as JRF found with an experimental housing scheme at New Earswick.

There can be community resistance to measures that are taken for granted on the Continent, such as local power plants or wind turbines. A further problem found at Northstowe in Cambridge is that CHP is hard to finance without a commercial load during the day and faster development rates. This points to the importance of developing more than just housing on major sites, and having low-cost finance for sustainable infrastructure.

Although cities such as Manchester, Newcastle and London are trying to follow European good practice, in some cases tapping into European funding streams, initiatives are suffering from the closure of regional development agencies and the Sustainable Development Commission and the slow progress on the promised Green Investment Bank. Infrastructure generally costs the same throughout the country, while property values differ greatly, so any innovation has to help sales (see Box 10).

### Box 9: Saving energy at Elm Tree Mews, New Earswick and Temple Avenue Project, York – precursors to Derwenthorpe

Elm Tree Mews was the first specific venture into sustainable housing by the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust and JRF. Designed in 2005/06 to meet the EcoHomes ‘very good’ standard, it was expected to achieve Level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes when construction was finished in 2008. A sophisticated timber-panel system for fabric insulation, a communal ground-sourced heat pump system and solar water heating were the key sustainable elements. The project was monitored before and after occupation to establish the ‘as built’ (reality) performance of the building, rather than relying on the ‘as designed’ (predicted) performance.

Although residents were pleased with lower heating bills, actual heat loss was 54 per cent higher than predicted at the design stage according to research undertaken by Leeds Metropolitan University. The main reason is that architects/consultants, builders and occupiers have all been engaged in unfamiliar activities which have not delivered results as expected. The difference between predicted and actual heat retention was attributed to issues in design, supply chain, construction and ‘operation’ of the houses after occupation.

The learning from Elm Tree Mews was applied in the subsequent Temple Avenue Project, which served as a pilot for assessing appropriate construction methods at Derwenthorpe. This experiment saw the construction of two modern houses, built with different energy-efficient construction methods. One house used modular, structural insulated panels (SIPs); the other was a more traditional block-work ‘thin-bed’ masonry method with a high-tech glue in the place of the usual mortar. This results in a much thinner bond between blocks and a more airtight seal to reduce heat loss. Both produced a far greater heat retention than at Elm Tree Mews, proving that lessons on design processes, supply chain issues and building methods had been learnt. The modular approach performed slightly better in terms of heat loss but the ‘thin-bed’ approach was selected as Derwenthorpe’s Phase I construction method for two reasons: first, volume house builders were familiar with the methods and needed less retraining and specialised equipment, making it more practical; and second, the SIPs’ modest additional heat retention wasn’t considered to be worth the 10% additional cost of its construction method, though some of the more complicated roofs at Derwenthorpe are utilising the SIPs system.

Where environmental initiatives have been taken, the lessons are often not being properly shared. Schemes go unevaluated, practitioners lack time for learning and there are few professional associations – for example, the centres of excellence have closed, as have delivery mechanisms such as Inspire East and Cambridgeshire Horizons. In a complex and fast-changing world, open discussions are vital. Our workshops found that there are easier ways to save energy (and hence carbon emissions) than going for complex technical fixes, such as:

- reusing existing buildings and recycling materials from demolition onsite;
- building well-insulated terraced housing and multistorey blocks. For example, the Energy Saving Trust’s guide to sustainable refurbishment (Energy Saving Trust, 2010) recommends ‘build tight and ventilate right’;
- cutting energy costs through an energy centre and a district heating scheme to save wasting heat at both the generation and transmission stage;
- allowing for several energy sources – for example, biomass with gas as a backup.

### Box 10: Greening the landscape through ‘sustainable urban drainage systems’ (SUDS) at Upton, Northants

Upton has generated a lot of interest because the Homes and Communities Agency sought to apply the principles set out in its Urban Design Compendium to the landscape as well as to the homes.

Green ‘swales’ enable water from sudden rainfall to be held and then released gradually. This not only reduces pressure on the sewers but also creates a ‘living landscape’ that adds to the appeal of buying a home in the new settlement. There were initial problems in getting different developers to link up their drainage systems so it is better if the infrastructure is provided before different blocks in the development are built.

**Figure 15: Sustainable Urban Drainage system at Upton**



CHP and other communal heating solutions are very attractive in the right urban situation as they save having to install individual boilers and gas supplies in every home. Obstacles that were identified include the need for higher levels of investment up front, and hence faster building rates, and careful phasing since ducts and pipes need to be installed before houses are built. Also, utilities may be reluctant to share ducts or to provide connections if they feel they risk losing part of their market if they do so. If prospective householders or valuers expect homes to have individual central-heating boilers, it can be hard to convince them of the benefits of alternative forms of provision.

## Box 11: Promoting green living at Graylingwell Park, Chichester

Graylingwell Park is being marketed as one of the first zero-energy schemes in the UK. The homes are being built to Level 6 of the Code for Sustainable Homes and the development as a whole meets Code 4, so is far in advance of general practice. This has been achieved through high levels of insulation in houses that are timber framed and partly timber clad, and through the use of a gas-fired CHP system. This supplies all the homes with heat through insulated pipes and means that the homes are not provided with gas.

All the south-facing homes have photovoltaic (PV) solar panels built into their roofs to generate electricity and the surplus is sold to the national grid along with the output from the CHP system. The energy generated from the PV panels offsets in part the carbon emissions from the gas used in the CHP system. The scheme has set the standard for the nearby barracks site that is being developed by Zero C in partnership with the Homes and Communities Agency (which will only see a return from the land when the homes are sold).

Green living features:

- carbon-neutral footprint – 100 per cent reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions;
- renewable energy solutions and energy-efficient features;
- PV roof panels to reduce energy consumption (specific homes);
- brand-new energy centre providing all heating and hot water;
- Level 4 in the Code for Sustainable Homes;
- sustainable drainage system;
- communal compost heaps and recycling facilities;
- environmentally friendly building materials;
- green travel plan to promote more sustainable modes of transport and encourage a healthier lifestyle, with emphasis on walking and cycling.

Experience from leading-edge schemes in the UK, such as New Islington and Graylingwell Park, has shown how to promote innovation without adding to costs. For example:

- Sustainability plans can achieve higher standards.
- Reducing VAT would encourage recycling of buildings – Urban Splash has led a campaign on this.
- It is valuable to have an independent body onsite to promote the personal economic benefits of different lifestyles – for example, giving up car ownership in favour of car-club membership.



- Better marketing is needed to promote green homes and green neighbourhoods. For example, energy performance certificates can be used as a marketing device, as in the Netherlands, now that buildings have to be tested for air tightness. This mirrors the way that appliance manufacturers provide energy ratings at the point of sale.
- Visitor information centres, as in Graylingwell Park, explain the benefits and ensure residents know how to use unfamiliar systems.

### Box 12: Saving energy at New Islington, Manchester

As Manchester's designated 'millennium village', New Islington has sought to test high environmental standards. A plan commissioned by the developers, Urban Splash, set targets and provided ideas and sources of information for helping to achieve them, relating to:

- primary energy consumption – through CHP, higher fabric insulation standards (U values) and better lighting and boiler standards;
- embodied energy – through the use of the BRE's *Green Guide to Specification*;
- mains water consumption – through the use of borehole sources and draining rainwater into an adjacent canal;
- waste management – through pre-sorted waste collection for recycling, with separation facilities in every dwelling;
- defects – through the use of modular construction and prefabrication where appropriate;
- dwelling size – through a mix, with minimum sizes for small two-bed homes of 65 m<sup>2</sup>, larger two-bed homes of 80 m<sup>2</sup> and three-bed homes of 100 m<sup>2</sup>;
- day lighting – through buildings arranged in fingers around the sun's path to minimise shadowing;
- noise proofing – through better insulation;
- construction waste – through crushing and recycling materials from demolition onsite, and through prefabrication;
- site safety – through attention at the tendering stage;
- information technology – through access to the internet in all the main rooms.

## Test 4: How much of a positive impact will the development have in environmental as well as economic and social terms?

### Guidelines

- **Sustainability appraisals** ensure that running costs for new homes will be affordable for those on average incomes. The standards or code sought should depend on local market conditions and need not be uniform. The focus should be on the entire block or neighbourhood rather than the individual home.
- **Sustainability plans** should offer a menu of options to house builders, with energy performance certificates being used to market the benefits of new homes. The support of estate agents and housing associations is also required to ensure new residents know how both the development and their home are supposed to work.
- **‘Green loans’**, as part of the government’s Mortgage Indemnity Scheme, would provide bigger loans for installations that cut running costs (rather as the Green Deal does for existing homes and PVs). These could make use of support from one of the financial institutions that are being asked to invest in private rented housing.<sup>10</sup> Some of the cost should be factored off the land value to ensure homes remain affordable.

Sustainable urban neighbourhoods help change behaviour in growth areas, and regenerate older areas by projecting a green image that residents will come to value.

## 2 Working together better

Developing better neighbourhoods depends, above all, on working together better (Berkeley Group, 2011). SUNN members, who include developers and housing associations, various kinds of planners, and housing practitioners and councillors, believe we need to overhaul the way we procure major new developments. The old model for house building is broken. There are plenty of proposals for what needs to be done and the difficulty is often deciding where to start (for example, Housing Forum, 2010).

This section examines how the barriers to sustainable neighbourhoods can be overcome progressively by working in a less adversarial way to add value to new housing and control the costs and risks in the way that the best developments in the past have done.

Working together better means tackling the basic problems of ineffectual local plans, dysfunctional finance and waste in the way we build and allocate housing. There are four messages: meet long-term demand, reduce development risks, cut construction waste and make housing more affordable.

**Figure 16: Pulling together – Taylor Woodrow sculpture at Grand Union Village**



## Respond to long-term demand

*Speaking from personal experience as chairman of my own town council's planning committee ... planning at the neighbourhood level takes a huge amount of effort and time. The results need to have some clout not just be stuck on a district council shelf to gather dust.*

SUNN participant

## What we know

Planning is in turmoil. The localism agenda stresses the importance of engaging communities in neighbourhood planning, which is likely to take up more time when developers are already finding it hard to make any scheme viable (Conservative Party, 2009). Achieving positive participation is contentious and difficult, and requires better local leadership and follow-through. The countries in Europe with the strongest economies and cities are all ones where local authorities lead the development process and where planning is not a political football (Cadell, *et al.*, 2008). Working together means responding to long-term demand, not short-term financial pressures or special interest groups.

*Someone needs to mount a campaign to tackle the 'no development anywhere near me' mania that seems to have gripped so many people. The need for and benefits of new housing go almost completely unsung.*

SUNN participant

There are innumerable guides about how to engage communities and a variety of useful techniques (Wates, 2000). The real issue is how to turn opposition or apathy into support and this cannot be done through planning alone.

## What we found

Consultation efforts, such as Enquiry by Design approaches, can easily be sabotaged by a few determined local residents – as happened, for example, at the Millennium Village at Telford, causing considerable delay and expense. JRF's experience of promoting Derwenthorpe, which took ten years to secure planning permission, suggests there are three stages of community engagement that need different levels of expert input (Carley and Bayley, 2009).

### Assessing capacity and need

Early in the planning process, it is important for councils and groups of councils to determine aspirations for housing provision that impact on both present and future generations, and the most appropriate locations for new neighbourhoods.<sup>11</sup> Much of the work will already have been done at the Options stage of producing the Core Strategy for the local plan. But without local leadership, the debate ends up at the site level. This makes developers unfairly responsible for leading public debate and can put the interests of the few above those of young families needing housing, and above those of future generations.

The New Homes Bonus on its own will not be enough to convince communities to support growth in their local areas. Instead, district councils need to establish requirements for owner occupation, intermediate tenures and rented accommodation, and related infrastructure. There should be broad agreement that new housing is needed and where it ought to go. This can benefit from informed discussions about the future role and shape of towns facing pressures of growth or regeneration.

### Agreeing design principles

Once locations for new housing are agreed, a second stage is to involve residents in helping to make new and old blend harmoniously. The kind of community planning weekend used at Graylingwell Park in



Chichester worked well because the local authority had already done its homework. The process led to local residents championing the proposals when they came before the planning committee. In South Cambridgeshire there are regular meetings with community councils to talk about planning and these involve not just local people but also scrutiny members and portfolio holders. As a result of meetings of the Northstowe Parish Forum for several years before the beginning of construction work, there is now a great degree of community tolerance.

This can only succeed when the debate is no longer about whether housing ought to be built but rather about how to improve its design. Developers should be involved at this stage to avoid unrealistic aspirations that cannot be met. It also helps to look and learn from relevant examples. There is plenty of good guidance available on different ways of laying out new housing so there is no need to start from a blank sheet (for example, Homes and Communities Agency, 2000; Academy of Urbanism, 2011).<sup>12</sup>

It is essential to be honest about the factors that can be influenced by the participation process and the factors that cannot. Residents will turn out to discuss central issues that affect day-to-day life, such as parking or schooling, but have no interest in vague discussions designed to 'rubber stamp' what has already been decided. This amounts to little more than public relations. Trust needs to grow between old and new residents and between developers and registered social landlords. Capacity building needs to be properly resourced, particularly in areas undergoing regeneration. Scotland provides a good model.

### **Box 13: Supporting community councils in Scotland**

The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 established a key role for community councils (identical to English parish councils). The legislation and its pursuant guidance established a statutory responsibility on local authorities and all other key players, such as the NHS and the police, to work with communities (Carley, 2004). It also set up a nationwide research and learning process, backed by a strategic framework on community development and empowerment that enables neighbourhood organisations the length and breadth of Scotland to meet and learn from each other. Discussions within SUNN suggest that such support for community development and empowerment is lacking in England. Could England's National Association for Local Councils play a similar role in supporting 'localism' in our governance process?

### **Building community pride**

Next, it is important to work with new residents to foster a sense of community and long-term stewardship. This level of participation extends beyond physical design to encompass work with nearby communities. In Yours South Lynn, King's Lynn, for example, the developer provided a skilled community steward for three years to work with existing and new residents to develop their life skills. Activities included setting up community-building social events, playgroups for children, home care and cooking lessons, and a community bank.

There are many other ways to empower communities. Parish councils are active in both Dickens Heath and Orchard Park, and Bedfordshire Pilgrims Housing Association provides ongoing community development at Orchard Park. In areas where greater support is needed, there are neighbourhood management budgets as in Ancoats in Manchester. Community development trusts have been set up at London's Grand Union Village and in Graylingwell Park.

*Greater resources need to be invested in social capital and long-term stewardship.*

SUNN participant

If it is to represent the interests of future residents, a trust should be set up early in the development so that new residents can be elected on to it as they move in. It is then an ideal vehicle for securing grants

for community building, for example through arts projects, and for taking advantage of asset transfer opportunities. One option is a modest community charge to cover management of the public realm and community assets, such as a public hall. Another is a property endowment that provides an annual income, or a covenant through a service charge, as in Grand Union Village and stewardship arrangements in Telford.

The closure of local delivery agencies, such as at Walker Riverside in Newcastle, has threatened valuable work in changing perceptions and tackling social problems. It has also angered local people who have to live with demolition and unfulfilled plans. This experience reinforces the need for bodies with long-term sources of funding and expertise, a point stressed in SUNN's evidence to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) on neighbourhood planning and the Localism Bill (Carley and Falk, 2011). The National Planning Policy Framework says little on large-scale developments and the role of local authorities and registered providers in helping developers start and complete the sites for which they have planning permission needs to be valued.

Development of major or strategic sites cannot be effectively delivered by remote or temporary bodies. Part of the success of Dutch initiatives in building communities so rapidly comes from having appropriate and responsive mechanisms to deliver agreed long-term plans. In the USA, evening 'planning academies' link citizens and professionals in developing the local skills base. Similarly, charrettes or different forms of action planning have been successfully tried out in many parts of the UK, such as at Graylingwell Park.

**Figure 17: The parish council wanted Dickens Heath to be like a traditional Warwickshire village**



## Test 1: Is there a local management body with the incentives and resources to anticipate and respond to problems as they arise?

### Guidelines

- Neighbourhoods should reflect **spatial boundaries** that make sense to local people, and where growth or regeneration is required. These may be oriented to a central shopping area or, in smaller neighbourhoods, to a school or community centre.
- Masterplans should be matched by **management plans** to show how the new and surrounding communities are to be integrated, and what the service charges and other costs are likely to be. The principles for quality growth should be agreed with service providers, such as the police and health service, and published so that developers (and residents) know what is expected.
- **Statutory parish councils** have more permanence and authority than informal neighbourhood forums – too many of which have come and gone in England over the past three decades.<sup>13</sup> Members of community councils need help in developing planning skills. The skills of professional planners should not be ignored but directed to working with neighbourhoods.
- **Local champions** are needed to promote sustainable urban neighbourhoods, not just housing estates. In many areas, particularly deprived urban areas, neighbourhood planning has to address social and economic issues. Councillors need to spell out the economic and social benefits of new housing, such as better services, public transport, shops and access to jobs and training opportunities for younger people.
- **Continuity** is essential and neighbourhood planning needs to resolve the relationship between participatory and representative democratic processes. Parish councillors or neighbourhood forum representatives have to work with local authority elected members and officers over the long term to achieve neighbourhood aspirations without being hijacked by a single issue or interested party.

## Reduce development risks

### What we know

One way of getting building going again is to ‘de-risk’ strategic developments. With private confidence at an all-time low, and a deepening recession in the UK, a new business model for housing is needed that reduces development risks. The huge rise in household debt was fuelled by large increases in mortgages. The debt was almost double annual gross domestic product and led to government taking over failing banks (Hammett, 2009). There is no scope for average house prices to rise any further and little chance of reducing the national deficit or increasing public capital spending.

The market swung violently after the credit crunch of 2007 but house prices in the UK have not yet fallen by much (unlike the USA where they fell by 30 per cent). Consequently, finance is no longer readily available to house builders, housing associations or those seeking mortgages. What funding there is seeks out the safest locations, such as small sites in central London, and not places where growth or regeneration is most required or where land is in multiple ownership. Development of many sites with planning permission is stalled. Local authorities may support sites that are politically expedient but unfeasible to develop, such as remote airfields, rather than extensions linked to existing infrastructure (Gallent, *et al.*, 2011).

Without first-time buyers, or buy-to-let investors, the market for housing has slowed right down. Because housing is unaffordable, with large deposits required, most young people cannot get on to the property ladder. Older people (despite their nominal wealth) are often stuck in places that no longer suit their needs, in homes that are expensive to run. Close to 40 per cent of the housing stock in England is underoccupied, and that amount is expected to grow (Griffith, 2011). Tapping the wealth owned by older households is crucial, as Conservative minister David Willetts has argued (Willetts, 2010).

Research into why house builders did not respond to demand revealed fundamental failings in their business models (Callcutt, 2007). The supply of land in the UK is held up not just by a complex planning system but also because the profits on securing planning permission can be greater than those on actually building new homes. John Callcutt, former chairman of a major house builder, argued for changing the business model from a trader to an investor model. Finance and affordable serviced sites, rather than planning, are the main barriers to building more homes (Adams and Leishman, 2008).

Land ownership is highly concentrated in the UK and many of the sites in public ownership, such as old airfields, are in the wrong place for development. The process of developers bidding for limited supplies of land has pushed up prices to unrealistic levels that are well above what developers would pay on the Continent (PRP, 2008, Appendix: 'The Economic Issues'). The big question is how to get the market moving again without risking a loss of quality.

## What we found

House builders now want even higher returns to compensate for the substantially increased risks. For example, a major house builder told us that it would now expect its profit margin to be 30 per cent rather than 20 per cent.

Most people agree on the importance of supplying more 'shovel-ready' sites. There are insufficient incentives to bring suitable sites forward where land owners and developers are waiting for prices to rise. A great deal of effort and expense has been wasted on plans that never come to fruition, which makes planners cynical. Brownfield sites close to town and city centres such as Newcastle are going to waste, with land used for car parking instead of building. As Paul Cheshire has pointed out, the amount of house building in the UK is so poor compared to housing need that radical measures are required, even if they arouse opposition from some quarters (Cheshire, 2011). In many places, developments have been stalled for lack of funding and confidence is eroding. Problems arise around 'book values' and land banking. Developers often feel frustrated by the red tape.

*Rip up public sector procurement procedures ... remove the bureaucratic shackles and change public sector planners and agencies into commercially aware decision-makers, not decision-avoiders.*

SUNN participant

### Box 14: Using creativity to support community development and viability in Orchard Park, Cambridge

In Orchard Park, adverse market conditions stalled development. This gave rise to negative media coverage of the site conditions with which early residents were living and hampered sales. In response, the lead local authority worked quickly to strengthen the local development partnership to address problems, including tidying up the public realm. Even in prosperous areas, local authorities need to work with developers from the outset to ensure financial viability and to have contingency plans, such as 'meanwhile uses' if things go wrong.

*(continued overleaf)*



A related lesson is that early community engagement, as the first residents start to move in, can help counter negative media and local views and thus underwrite viability. Orchard Park used public art as a means of community engagement. Park Arts was established in 2008 to put creative inputs into the process of forming a community at Orchard Park. Along with the local authority's arts officer, the onsite community development officer has supported the group in putting on a number of events in the community to enable residents to meet each other.

**Figure 18: Public art carried out with and by the community provides Orchard Park with a distinctive identity**



Sustainable urban neighbourhoods provide better long-term investments than speculative housing. SUNN members who are firmly in the private sector see the dangers of simply cutting controls.

*Shortcutting the process will end in bad development which will blight the landscape for decades to come. Getting things right first time may take longer but saves time, money and energy in the long run.*

SUNN participant

Instead, land earmarked for development needs to be seen as a residual cost, as the Homes and Communities Agency is starting to do with a 'build now, pay later' policy. Quality needs to be made a priority, as JRF is doing at Derwenthorpe, York, where partnership agreements with landowners ensure that the returns are shared once costs have been recovered. Various joint venture options are being examined in Cambridgeshire where a rolling fund has been created for the southern fringe of the city.

However, the government's requirement to allocate 20 per cent more housing land than needed seriously threatens local authorities' ability to focus on sustainable development.

There are important lessons from the way land is treated in Europe, where planning drives development rather than simply reacting to speculative proposals. Countries that have built more homes and larger homes, such as the Netherlands, have given a much greater role to local authorities in bringing forward sites and installing infrastructure (PRP, 2008). They have also used public development agencies (much as Britain did with the development corporations) or joint venture companies.

### **Box 15: Funding sustainable infrastructure in Vathorst, Amersfoort, the Netherlands**

Where Vathorst differs most from a British housing development is in the use of a joint company to promote the new urban extension. This extension is for 10,000 homes plus a shopping centre and business park on the edge of a historic town, and it is two-thirds complete. The municipality initiated the development by setting up the Vathorst Development Company (OHV) with a consortium of private developers and landowners, each contributing one director. Risks and rewards are shared. The company's chairman was a well-respected alderman who had successfully led two previous urban extensions. The chief executive had worked in property development.

As in most European countries, the Dutch municipalities have set up their own bank, Bank Nederlandse Gemeenten (BNG), which provides funding for drawing up plans, assembling the land from a variety of owners and installing basic infrastructure. To fund the €750 million required for acquiring and servicing all the land, the company borrowed €250 million for a period of 15 years, with interest payable at 5 per cent. A builder was appointed at a fixed price to install all the roads and infrastructure. The land was pooled and sites allocated to different developers. The method of valuing the land was as a percentage of the expected sales value of the house, ranging from 20% for social housing to 30% per cent for housing for sale. Each of the original land owners receives a pro rata payment at an average land price across the new community. Sites for social housing are transferred to the local authority and then passed on to one of the two housing association partners in the development. Two areas are developed at any one time. Putting funds into a new railway station at the start encouraged new residents to use public transport rather than rely on their cars.

The partnership benefits everyone. The scheme was attractive to the private sector because it took out the major risks and ensured that Vathorst would be delivered as planned. It was attractive to the municipality because it gave it more control over quality and enabled the city to outperform its competitors while providing a good stock of affordable housing.

**Figure 19: A new version of old Dutch architecture in Vathorst**



To reduce risks, the different partners in the development process need to contribute what each does best. Local authorities should provide long-term vision and ensure individual developments contribute to quality of life for nearby neighbourhoods and the town as a whole. They can also provide social infrastructure such as schools. Land owners, house builders and social landlords are at the front line of community building, with all its financial, ecological and social challenges, and understand costs and values. Hence, they should be deciding how to deliver the vision. Quality neighbourhoods depend on quality partnerships.

Government intervention is also crucial where house building is stalled as development sites can stay vacant for decades. Collaborative planning is required between adjoining authorities to integrate land use and transport so as to boost economic development and minimise congestion and carbon emissions. Currently, it appears that central government is leaving matters to the market but the market is not very enthusiastic and communities are not geared up to filling the gaps.

Capacity has been lost at an alarming rate. During SUNN's two years, organisations such as Bridging NewcastleGateshead and Harlow Renaissance have closed down and experienced local authority officers have taken early retirement or been made redundant. Regeneration functions have been slashed and private regeneration consultancies have shrunk, closed or merged.

Registered providers such as housing associations, and some local authorities with an asset base, should ensure there is a full range of new housing and foster local resident participation from the beginning. Registered providers such as Bedfordshire Pilgrims Housing Association have community development expertise yet their funding is being cut as a result of the Comprehensive Spending Review. Increasing investment in registered providers is an investment in housing, in employment in the construction industry and in management – and is therefore an investment in economic growth. In the Netherlands half the new housing has been built by housing associations (called housing corporations), often on land made available by local authorities, to avoid developers bidding against each other and pushing up the price of the land (Scanlon and Whitehead, 2008).

## **Test 2: Are the risks and returns shared, and is the public sector doing all it can to reduce uncertainties and join up infrastructure investment?**

### **Guidelines**

- **Concentrate growth** where the infrastructure already exists or is planned, and where there is the demand, to ensure that new homes are delivered as planned. Masterplans should only be commissioned after the strategic land use frameworks and infrastructure investment plans are agreed in order to avoid abortive work.
- **Land as equity** should be used to make housing affordable and thus boost supply. Payment is deferred until homes are occupied or resold. Public land should be used to set higher quality standards, with similar approaches to valuation and procurement as on the Continent.
- **Joint venture companies** or some form of public–private partnership should be used to bring forward larger sites, install higher levels of infrastructure and sell off serviced plots to house builders, housing associations and self-builders.
- **Development finance** should be seen as a 'cocktail', with local authorities raising finance for infrastructure at lower costs than the private sector. Sources include borrowing against the New Homes Bonus, expected proceeds from business rate income (tax increment finance) and the transfer of property assets to a joint company with the private sector.

## Cut construction waste

### What we know

Not only is the house-building process slow, as the Barker and Callcutt reviews established (Barker Review, 2006; Callcutt Review, 2007) but also it is wasteful. The house-building process has hardly changed in the UK over decades, unlike other industries. However, the product is becoming much more complex as, for example, new types of window or heating system are used to cut heating bills and carbon emissions. The components needed to meet higher standards are increasingly imported, adding to our balance of payments deficit. However, if 'green recovery' is properly planned, the housing supply chain could get the economy moving again and create jobs in areas of high unemployment.

Unlike Continental homes, which are often assembled from components made in factories, British homes are frequently built onsite in bad conditions by people who may never work together again. Large amounts of material are thrown away and work frequently has to be redone, with a premium charged for any departure from established ways of building (Rudlin and Falk, 2009). Waste levels are likely to be even worse with technical innovations such as district heating systems or wind turbines. The issue, however, is not how to prefabricate components but rather how to set up projects so that economies of scale can be achieved all the way down the supply chain, without depending excessively on imports.

Value engineering can identify items where money is being spent to little effect or where extra investment would pay off, and lessons from experience need to be applied through a learning curve (Latham, 1994). Unfortunately, results are rarely evaluated and lessons are not passed on, so that we keep repeating the same mistakes.

### What we found

Here are some lessons for construction from SUNN visits.

#### **Speeding up completion**

Costs are often increased by changing requirements during the build process, sometimes as a result of political pressures. It is almost impossible to change layouts after houses have been built, so the layout needs to be right in the first phases and then reviewed. Professional fees can escalate when masterplans and development programmes are repeatedly changed.

Planning (or green belt and village green) inquiries can drag out over years and lead to considerable expenditure on fees for projects that come to nothing. To speed up the process in Northstowe, South Cambridgeshire District Council is establishing a joint team with the county council and using a planning performance agreement with the joint promoters.

#### **Assessing options**

Higher costs can be incurred by local authorities imposing too many requirements on developers without counting the cost or value. For example, a multiplicity of roundabouts to meet outdated highways requirements is not only expensive but makes places less attractive for short trips on foot or by bike.

On the other hand, significant improvements can be made by designing and building new homes and infrastructure together, using a 'leaner' approach to development at all stages, and through joint working between master developer and the local authority team, including open-book accounting.

Innovations such as bio-remediation using natural processes (which saved £750,000 in Grand Union Village) can enable sites to be developed at less cost than removing all the soil, and can make them more viable.

Cambridgeshire County Council is one of the leaders in recycling. At one of the science parks, recycling from construction has reached 90 per cent compared with an industry average of 47 per cent.



### Securing value for money

Expensive technologies such as solar panels and wind turbines are sometimes added as a kind of 'eco-bling' while measures that really cut energy consumption, such as good insulation, are neglected. Potential savings can also be undermined where valuers and lenders shy away from innovation. For example, whereas timber framing is a standard technique in continental Europe and North America, such houses are still 'marked down' in the UK.

In the UK, homes are valued on the basis of the number of rooms not the size of the accommodation. Similarly, homes with their own boilers may be valued higher than those on district heating systems.

We are slow to learn in the UK because the house-building process is outmoded compared with, say, building offices or hotels (where modern methods of construction are the norm). House builders say it does not pay to go for modern construction methods when volumes are low and labour is relatively cheap. We need to find better ways to promote and value neighbourhoods built to higher standards.

### Going to scale

Costs could be reduced further by shifting from current 'brick and block' construction to modular (or 'flat-pack') approaches – for example, by having windows pre-fitted in modular panels at the factory. Modular construction could reduce the price of housing by up to 5 per cent. However, a site needs to be designed for full modular construction from the outset; mixing modular and traditional methods is said to be a recipe for expense and delay.

Achieving savings from modular construction also requires that materials arrive at the site on time and that services are ready. The benefits can only be realised if a development starts and finishes to a set programme, replicating a factory production process. Some private house builders prefer traditional methods because they can control their build programme in line with sales demand. One solution is to rent out any unsold stock for a period, as with buy-to-let investors.

Where development of new communities is faster, as in northern Europe, economies have been secured through the provision of upfront infrastructure using a public-private partnership (PRP, 2008). Sites can then be made available to a wider range of builders, which boosts competition. This also offers potential residents a much greater choice and means they do not have to live in a building site for long. Self-build (or custom-built housing) can certainly cut costs considerably once local authorities have done the groundwork.

## Test 3: Is waste of all kinds being minimised?

### Guidelines

- **Pre-testing of technology** needs to be done at the national level, with financial support for innovation, so that implementation at the local level is of tried and tested technologies not expensive and risky experimentation.
- **Modular construction** of new homes depends on developing a better domestic supply chain and therefore either has to be addressed at a national level to provide sufficient volumes or be left to foreign construction companies.
- Changes that affect all developers through the **building regulations**, such as the Code for Sustainable Homes, are intended to help British companies secure the necessary economies of scale to invest in green technologies. It may be better to allow local authorities to work out the best way of cutting energy consumption in their particular circumstances. For example, aiming for more than

Level 4 in the Code in regeneration areas may represent poor value for money compared with upgrading the existing housing stock. It may simply result in fewer new homes.

- **Sharing of experience** across new communities would aid local implementation and make actual costs for building and running new developments more transparent. Through closer collaboration between the local authority and developer, and through different departments and professionals pulling together as a team, substantial savings can be made without any loss of value.

## Make housing more affordable

In its housing strategy, the coalition government makes clear its desire to get the UK building again, with the New Build Indemnity Scheme and social housing intended primarily to meet the needs of vulnerable people (DCLG, 2011). Can the strategy tackle the complexity of the problems identified in previous reviews and match our members' direct experience?

### What we know

In terms of new housing, earlier policy statements had stressed the need to boost output. The White Paper on Local Growth concluded by calling for '... house building-enabling infrastructure. It is no accident that investment in housing output in the UK is among the lowest in the developed world.' (DBIS, 2010) The problem is related to the high cost of providing infrastructure in the UK. Calculations in Milton Keynes and in Cambridge suggest that the physical infrastructure costs associated with a new housing unit can exceed the price of the new home, although this is to suggest that only new homes benefit from new infrastructure, particularly in the transport sector if existing provision is insufficient to meet demand (Falk, 2010; PRP, 2008).

The government is hoping that pension funds and insurance companies will invest in infrastructure. However, it is not enough to provide roads and utilities. There is also a vital need to provide up front for social infrastructure, including schools, open spaces and places where people can meet informally. When people move they want a neighbourhood, not just a home.

In terms of social housing, Hanley says housing estates have become 'holding cages for the poor' (2007). Power and Tunstall (1995) blame the problems of failing council estates on 'deindustrialisation, and access to work and education,' rather than on housing design or construction. So it is not enough simply to build more social housing without addressing underlying social issues.

As Working Together points out, 'The UK has one of the highest rates of workless households in Europe, with 1.9 million children living in homes where no-one has a job.' Nearly one million people under the age of 25 are unemployed, and there is a huge task of engaging with the many 'disconnected and disaffected young people'.<sup>14</sup>

Tunstall and Fenton provide a comprehensive review of the benefits from communities that are not separated by tenure or class boundaries (Tunstall and Fenton, 2006). Their report recommends local letting plans as well as choice-based lettings, plus measures such as shops and services to encourage casual interaction. High-quality estate management is essential to attract and retain higher-income families, along with adequate social infrastructure (Silverman, *et al.*, 2006). The Hills Review pointed out that social housing has become residualised:

*... in other parts of Europe, access to social housing is far less concentrated on those in greatest need, with a much wider group of income groups eligible, and as a result the sector as a whole is less stigmatised and its composition less concentrated on the poorest.*

Hills, 2007

While the previous government set a target of provision of 20 per cent social housing, as a percentage of all new housing, the Greater London Authority (through the London Plan) and other local authorities have sought a higher level of affordable housing (which could be social housing for rent, plus shared ownership or intermediate rent). However, Monk found that in the past decade nearly half the new social housing was being part funded through Section 106 contributions (Monk, *et al.*, 2006). Following the credit crunch, the possibilities for Section 106 funding have largely collapsed. To generate the necessary resources, JRF's Housing Task Force concluded that new measures were needed to overcome market volatility, suggesting that taxation of vacant land may be required to 'overcome reluctance by landowners to release land' (Stephens, 2011). A reform of Council Tax and some form of 'partnership insurance' scheme for mortgages would also help

A £400 million funding pot to restart schemes that have stalled and the Mortgage Indemnity Scheme will not be enough to rebuild confidence. A better bet may be to urge local authorities to come forward with locally planned large-scale development'. Some local authorities will be able to borrow against the Housing Revenue Account and may use this to construct new housing or remodel existing housing, although the new 50 per cent Right to Buy discount may limit their ability to do so. There may be institutional investment in rental housing, though Michael Ball's work for the JRF Housing Market Task Force was sceptical of this generating much interest, other than through housing associations (Ball, 2011). Where is there enough ambition locally to grow and take risks?

## What we found

There are huge differences up and down the country according to the state of the housing market. In Newcastle and Manchester, housing associations have been driving renewal but can no longer carry the burden now that grants have been withdrawn. As noted, the Housing Market Renewal Programme was cancelled, with only some limited funding areas available for regeneration. In many places, including Cambridge, Northolt and to some extent Solihull, buy-to-let investors have taken over housing intended for owner-occupiers, creating the danger of overconcentration of transient tenants. John Hills warned about this in his review (2007). Fortunately, in these cases there are robust management arrangements but these by themselves do not deal with the way housing is allocated.

However, new forms of partnership are emerging. In Cambridge, a small number of sites are going to co-housing groups, which creates a chance that a more balanced community will emerge. Consideration is also being given to new forms of financial partnership (Falk, 2010). Generally, the most innovative designs have been promoted by housing associations, particularly as far as energy is concerned. Even where the land is publicly owned by public agencies, there is often pressure to maximise receipts rather than quality.

With prices of housing being as much as eight times average incomes, and with the continuing difficulty of obtaining mortgages, there is little chance of people getting on to the property ladder, let alone climbing up it. Rented housing is therefore going to become more important. Many registered providers say they cannot maintain for more than a couple of years programmes that require them to use their own reserves to make up for the lower grant levels. Lenders suggest the new model may be riskier as there may be higher levels of rent arrears.

The proposed reforms to welfare and the housing benefits system bring new pressures, and many tenants will have to move to cheaper housing in cheaper areas. To speed up the development process, there seems little alternative to expanding the private rented sector, for example through rent-to-buy, as some housing associations are doing with houses they were unable to sell. The coalition government's hopes that letting affordable housing at up to 80 per cent of market rent will change the profile of estates seems unachievable outside a few special situations.

## Box 16: Helping people build their own homes, Almere Poort, the Netherlands

The new city of Almere Poort is already as large as Milton Keynes, and is planned to grow larger. In the past, municipalities in growth areas effectively rolled out a carpet of development. However, the international financial crisis has also led to cutbacks in house building in the Netherlands, and so the municipality has pioneered providing serviced sites for people to commission and build their own homes. In Almere Poort, 2,000 homes have been built and around 5,000 people live there in what is effectively a building site that will eventually provide 14,000 homes.

The idea of 'self-build' was promoted as a way of people getting to own their own home at a time when prices have become unaffordable for many. The city drew up the masterplan, and then dispensed with the need for self-builders to secure planning permission. The basic infrastructure has been put in by the municipality. Individuals, and in some cases groups, agree to buy a plot for which the price is based on size. They appoint an architect, in some cases choosing a design that is already approved, and they select contractors who are usually small builders.

With plots still selling strongly at between three and five each week, these now account for one-third of the housing being developed in the city and, of the completed homes, 800 are 'self-build' homes developed by the owner-occupiers. Final property values are set by the level of comparable sites and the value of the land itself is set at 20 to 30 per cent of the final value, as at Vathorst (Box 15). Social housing plots are sold for €30,000 each, and the sales price is capped at €175,000, so that land represents less than 20 per cent of the total cost. There is a requirement to keep the property as social housing for 25 years.

The UK housing strategy, *Laying the Foundations* (DCLG, 2011), has a case study of Almere Poort saying that 'Almere demonstrates a genuinely workable model for large scale, locally led and affordable self-build development, and is not a development of villas for the wealthy.' Just as importantly, the self-build (or custom-built) scheme has added to the appeal of the new town as a whole, thus strengthening the local economy.

## Test 4: How accessible is the housing ladder?

### Guidelines

- **Local letting plans** should be agreed when registered providers are appointed so that the new supply can enable the local housing market as a whole to function much better. For example, people can take larger or smaller properties to suit their changing circumstances.
- **Co-housing and self-build** should be used not just to make housing more affordable but also to build a sense of community and take forward innovations in saving natural resources. Enough land (say 10 per cent of a large site) needs to be made available for these.
- **Market rental** has a larger role to play, perhaps copying the approach in countries such as Germany or the USA, where it is much easier to move. In these places, the housing owner provides the minimum of services to keep costs affordable. Alternatively, occupants may own and manage a block, called a condominium, to keep down service charges.



# 3 Leading the way

This final section summarises the seven main messages for government, with some straightforward recommendations for restoring confidence and getting development moving again. As has been shown in this report, neighbourhoods can do a lot for themselves, particularly where local authorities are proactive. But there is also a need for government to offer more support in the face of a deepening recession, including freeing up local authorities so they can create the confidence that private developers and investors are looking for.

There is a huge potential market for something better than the current offer, not just in British towns and cities but also in the export markets of Asia and eastern Europe. It is worth remembering that Britain used to lead the world in the way that neighbourhoods were planned. Experts thronged to learn from the squares in Bloomsbury, the garden cities in Hampstead and Letchworth, and the new towns such as Harlow, as well as from urban renewal in industrial cities such as Newcastle.

Napoleon said 'leadership is about giving hope', and achieving sustainable urban neighbourhoods calls for leadership at all levels of governance. Leadership involves overcoming doubts, not simply listening to the crowd. Success should not be measured by positive press mentions but by the value of investment produced by people doing things differently. As the results will take many years to show, we need some beacons to guide the way – which is where this report should help.

There is no single solution. The seven recommendations follow on from the tests in earlier chapters and so should be seen as a sequence of steps. Under each recommendation, action steps have been prioritised as a) immediate, b) medium-term and c) long-term. Together they will create worthwhile jobs and a better quality of life. They will also help offset some of the risks of climate change and escalating energy and other prices. To do all that, we have to change the way we procure housing. As US President Franklin D. Roosevelt said, in tackling the Great Depression, 'Do something. If it works do more of it. If it doesn't, do something else.'

## Agree the spatial framework

To restart home building and secure private investment, planning has to become more proactive. Development control has to become change management, as some local authorities are now recognising. However, the government's attempt to simplify planning guidance could instead cut red tape lengthwise, as local authorities are having to invent their own rules to fill the gaps left by cancellation of planning guidance and regional spatial strategies. Excessive time spent on options appraisals and environmental impact assessments, on sites that should never have come forward, destroys the capacity to provide the positive lead that is needed. The pursuit of expedient sites where there is little opposition, such as with remote airfields, can waste resources in trying to develop unsustainable locations (Gallent, *et al.*, 2011).

An agreed strategic spatial plan is needed for investments that take years to plan and implement, such as power stations, railway stations and schools, and this also applies to new settlements and urban extensions. As quality development depends on good infrastructure, there is a strong case for development plans starting with infrastructure capacity, not just housing need.

By selecting the best locations for sustainable development, and then linking their phasing to agreed infrastructure investment plans, local authorities can generate market confidence (URBED, 2011b). Most of the land use information already exists and local politicians probably have a good idea of

what priorities ought to be, but are scared off by vociferous ‘NIMBYism’, sensationalist local press and by the legalistic nature of planning. It always seems easier to say no, or do nothing. Agreeing community benefits such as infrastructure improvements before starting new developments should help overcome opposition, as it did in the Netherlands (Falk, 2011). A robust assessment of development options is crucial to avoid opting for what seems politically expedient.

### **Recommendations**

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (DBIS) should work with local enterprise partnerships to agree priority areas for growth and regeneration.

- a. DCLG should place time limits on agreeing priority areas for growth and regeneration in each city region or conurbation, and the Growing Places and Get Britain Building Funds will help overcome barriers.
- b. Local authorities should establish a proactive development framework based on strong leadership, a shared vision of future needs and an objective assessment of options for locating new communities.
- c. County councils and unitary authorities should fast-track sustainable urban extensions and help raise funding for infrastructure through local investment plans that are agreed in a concordat with government, drawing on the Planning Advisory Service where necessary to supplement skills (Planning Advisory Service, 2011).

### **Facilitate public–private development partnerships**

To secure the necessary expertise and resources, local authorities need to enter into effective partnerships with landowners, developers or consortia. Partnerships bring together the best skills of the private sector in finance and development with the commitment of the public and voluntary sectors to long-term community development and sustainability. Partnerships or joint venture companies provide a framework for sharing both risks and rewards over the longer term. Crucial skills in design, property and engineering can be pooled by groups of authorities working together and creating dedicated multi-disciplinary teams. Project management expertise can be hired as required.

The partnership may need to be carefully structured so that land is pooled, with public land invested as equity. The structure should avoid funding being counted against the public sector borrowing requirement or the need to advertise through the Journal of the European Union. There are already places in the UK, such as in Croydon, where local authorities have used their property holdings to attract private finance and expertise. In another good example, the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities has been doing pioneering work on energy solutions with the new North West Evergreen Fund for infrastructure.<sup>15</sup>

### **Recommendations**

- a. The Homes and Communities Agency should issue straightforward guidance on setting up public–private development partnerships for agreed priority areas in a way that simplifies the process and avoids unnecessary legal costs. It should use financial incentives to encourage partnership working at all levels in local government, supporting planning teams that are positive about development.
- b. Professional institutes should work together on improving the procurement of sustainable urban neighbourhoods, including commissioning development frameworks, model agreements and

appropriate competitions to reinforce a more realistic approach to sharing risks, which will require a cultural change.

- c. HM Treasury should introduce incentives to overcome negative land values and help public–private partnerships move priority projects forward. This might include cuts in Stamp Duty in areas that have suffered from industrial and population decline, perhaps paid for from charges on land with high values elsewhere or ‘bundling up’ sites. Targeted use of the Mortgage Indemnity Scheme would also help. Equalising Value Added Tax would create a level playing field for development and refurbishment. A charge on land with planning permission for housing would reduce ‘land hoarding’, and an uplift in land value could be used to help fund infrastructure, as in Denmark (Falk, 2011).

## **Mobilise undesignated public land**

To provide a lead in making housing more affordable, and redress any losses in allocating sites for housing, it is important that land in public ownership is used more creatively. Many sites with planning permission remain unbuilt because they are no longer financially viable, and this particularly applies to large strategic sites. Developers who have outbid each other during the good times are in no position to act in the downturn. With low holding costs, there is a danger of good locations for sustainable development being blighted. Land is a major element in development costs and so publicly owned land should be used to raise standards. This includes some council car parks and underused land owned by the utilities and railways.

Sustainable urban neighbourhoods can create value out of neglected land, which will pay off over a business or property cycle (around eleven years). However, the development process needs to be set in motion by putting more land into joint ventures on a ‘build now, pay later’ basis – as the Homes and Communities Agency is starting to do, and as the Housing Strategy proposes.<sup>16</sup> Changing economic circumstances call for new approaches to local authority participation in development and land valuation that reflect the wider public interest. For example, land needs to be properly priced to reflect the real costs of sustainable development, and to take the heat out of speculative land markets. The public sector and its professional advisors should be taking the lead, and not falling back on outdated ‘comparables’.

## **Recommendations**

The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), with support from DCLG, should promote better and more rigorous approaches to land valuation and disposal and procurement practice to get larger sites moving.

- a. RICS should spread good practice in making sustainable urban neighbourhoods economically viable through changes to land and other major development costs. Ideas such as voluntary purchase agreements and community land trusts will help make housing more affordable, and good practice needs to be disseminated widely (for example, RICS, forthcoming; RICS, 2011).
- b. Local authorities should use different procurement methods, including land pooling and the use of asset-backed vehicles, to draw in private investment, as is starting to happen in places such as Croydon, Oxford and Cambridge (Grace and Ludiman, 2008).
- c. While government and local authorities still own the land, they have the opportunity to work with communities and the private sector to secure the best possible outcomes for local people and our wider housing need. This may mean selling public land at less than market prices so that local communities or a housing association can have a chance to be part of the solution. Selling off public

land is a once-in-a-lifetime move, and the government must ensure the outcome will be something communities can benefit from, and be proud of, over the long term.

## Attract private funding for infrastructure

To overcome legitimate local objections, advance infrastructure provision is often needed. Energy, waste, water, transport and green space are all areas where innovation is needed to match European good practice (PRP, 2008). The monopoly control that national utilities sometimes have over development can be broken by local authorities taking the initiative, as councils such as Birmingham used to do, and by providing the conditions that will make private investment pay off.

Strategic infrastructure investment plans need to be in place at subregional level because they often cross district boundaries. Low-cost long-term loans could be raised by issuing bonds, as housing associations have done, or by tapping the Public Works Loans Board or the proposed Green Infrastructure Bank. By raising investment through a 50–50 public–private partnership, and using similar accounting conventions to other European countries, the loans should not count against the public sector borrowing requirement. This would provide greater fiscal headroom and enable loans to be repaid through land value uplift. Economies can then be secured by putting services into ducts and signing long-term contracts with utilities.

After so many years of debate, it is important to make the concept of the Community Infrastructure Levy work so that investment is properly ‘joined up’ but it will yield little when so little is being built. The promised £20 billion fund for investing pension funds in national infrastructure may not inject funding where it is most needed or be on a scale to tackle a deepening recession. The government’s ‘red tape challenge’ should particularly apply to infrastructure procurement and the way that different utilities and transport providers work with those promoting major developments.

## Recommendations

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (DBIS) with the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) should ensure enough funding is available for local infrastructure to cut long-term energy consumption.

- a. The Building Research Establishment, with the Advisory Team for Large Applications (ATLAS), should promote a menu of options for sustainable infrastructure that will strengthen the domestic supply chain and reduce risks by sharing information on costs and benefits (ATLAS, 2011).
- b. DCLG should issue guidance to remove obstacles to public–private partnerships that are in the wider interest and secure better collaboration between the agencies and utilities to avoid delay to the implementation of agreed plans.
- c. Local authorities should use bonds to tap local as well as institutional funds for putting in sustainable infrastructure, taking advantage of government measures to encourage institutional investment. If these do not provide enough funding, some form of municipal bank may be needed.

## Open up housing markets

To widen consumer choice and get building going again, better designed and more spacious homes and alternative forms of tenure are required, such as rent-to-buy (RIBA, 2011). Rather than relying mainly on the volume house builders, sites need to be opened up to smaller builders, as in Europe, including housing associations and co-housing groups, as well as specialist developers and traditional family firms. By selling off sites on the basis of quality briefs, and at prices that reflect expected sales value,



quality can be assured and higher returns achieved. The Callcutt Review (2007) advocated that 10 per cent of a large site should be made available for self-builders as ‘the best opportunity in the foreseeable future’.

Dividing up large sites into parcels of a hectare or so (60–100 homes) will enable competition between builders, including self-builders. It will also result in a much wider range of homes to choose from, thus speeding up sales, building a more balanced community and improving the return on investment. The whole process of procurement can be improved by avoiding the waste of competitive bidding and schemes that never get beyond planning applications. The UK needs to learn ways of building housing faster, such as flexible development frameworks (not rigid masterplans), design codes for key elements and standardisation of some components. Quality charters, architectural competitions and design panels are all useful ways of involving local interests and defusing opposition that is concerned about poor quality. We also need to learn better ways of providing long-term stewardship.

### **Recommendations**

The Housing Forum, with support from the Local Government Association, should promote ‘housing careers’ that enable more people to get on the housing ladder, while boosting social sustainability and stewardship.

- a. The Housing Forum should promote comparative research into how land is assembled and sold off in the fastest-growing European towns and cities. The aim would be to support smaller developers, such as self-builders and co-operative groups that offer something different, without losing the advantages of public–private partnerships in making sites available.
- b. Local authorities should use the Mortgage Indemnity Scheme announced in the Housing Strategy to encourage banks and building societies to issue ‘green mortgages’ for homes in neighbourhoods that consume less energy, assessed through energy performance certificates.
- c. Local authorities and housing associations should use management agreements to build more balanced communities through a wider range of affordable housing: for example, co-housing, self-build and various forms of supported living.

### **Endow community stewardship**

To build social capital and make a new community work as intended, agreements with developers need to include the way the new community is managed and the level of service charge<sup>17</sup>. Social infrastructure is as important to long-term value as physical infrastructure and should be budgeted for accordingly. By developing community meeting places early and establishing a trust or community council, conflicts can be avoided and a greater sense of community achieved. Neighbourhood management agreements are vital to areas undergoing change.

One option is to add a precept to the community charge and another is to employ a commercial management company. But long-term viability can also be secured by the development agreement requiring some of the land and buildings to be transferred to a land trust, perhaps under the principle of ‘10 per cent for the community’. Such a body can mobilise voluntary effort and raise funds for specific projects under local control far better than either a developer or a local authority. It can also help overcome objections to new development. Where public land is involved, there may be a case for transferring sites for social housing to a community land trust, thus ensuring there is always a balance of people living in the new neighbourhood (that might otherwise be lost through the right-to-buy or to buy-to-let investors).

## Recommendations

DCLG should work with Locality (the former Development Trusts Association) and the Association of Parish Councils on a standard form of agreement to facilitate community trusts in new developments.

- a. Local authorities, in issuing planning briefs, should secure social as well as physical innovation on sites in public ownership, with a remit that could grow as people move in.
- b. Trusts should play a greater role in promoting biodiversity and introducing living landscapes into new developments: for example, by looking after country parks and other forms of green infrastructure.
- c. Revenue funding should be built into initial management plans and budgets, and the outcomes should be assessed in terms of both social and environmental achievements.

## Learn from what works

To ensure the necessary skills and attitudes are in place, investment must also be made in training and education. Websites, good practice guides and conferences, however well done, are no substitute for people sharing their experiences and looking and learning first hand. But often there is neither the time nor budget for learning on the job. Arrangements that were supposed to fill the gaps, such as the regional centres of excellence, have largely disappeared from the scene. So too have many expert staff who have taken early retirement or been made redundant. Meanwhile, young professionals are unable to apply their talents for lack of jobs.

If Britain is to regain the lead it once had, it has to go beyond academic and professional qualifications and start building capacity in multidisciplinary teams. SUNN has been a success because it has been broadly based. Members have taken part for two years, and a wealth of experience has been accumulated. Acknowledged benefits from SUNN members include:

- ‘**Meeting face to face** is very important. Web-based networks are a useful tool but lack the human element and not all are happy to use them. You need to witness different developments and their particular circumstances to fully understand the issues.’
- ‘Gained far more than a remote or virtual process as we met face to face, and were able to **really feel part of a learning and practice development network**.’
- ‘I have learnt a lot, been forced (in a positive way) to **re-evaluate my work with developers and role within development**, and met some very experienced, talented and knowledgeable people. I would almost certainly not have participated in this if it had been done by other means.’
- ‘I have appreciated the **diverse mix of individuals from different backgrounds and with different areas of expertise**.’
- ‘We **directly used the experience** to review the approach towards the local centres and road system in the new masterplan.’
- ‘Great to get in touch with the **issues and solutions from very different parts of the country**.’
- ‘The discussion groups always left me with some **new understanding or ideas**.’
- ‘**Opportunities to see and debate what we are trying to achieve are invaluable**.’

Innovation of this kind should not have to depend on charitable foundations. If the government is serious about building more and better housing, then it should invest in supporting the set-up and continuation of further networks, backed up by the private house builders and housing associations that are committed to taking the lead.

### **Recommendations**

The Housing Forum, with support from the home building industry, should support local networks in sharing experience.

- a. The Government's Housing Design Awards programme, managed by Design for Homes, uniting professional institutions with key organisations such as the Home Builders Federation, should be given greater prominence and used more widely in training.<sup>18</sup>
- b. Study tours run by Design for Homes, the Town and Country Planning Association and others to leading examples in Britain and Europe should be expanded to enable a wider range of participants to be involved, thus helping to overcome skills shortages.
- c. SUNN should be extended to a wider range of communities, focusing on areas where major growth is planned and where there is an appetite for innovation.

# Notes

## Executive summary

- 1 With the exception of Derwenthorpe, which is in the first phase of construction.
- 2 DCLG (2011) *Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England*. London: Department for Communities and Local Government.

## Chapter 1

- 3 For a discussion of the effect of property taxation on underoccupation, see also Stephens, 2011.
- 4 See, for example, places that have won Academy of Urbanism awards: [www.academyofurbanism.org.uk](http://www.academyofurbanism.org.uk)
- 5 *Charm Offensive* (Griffith *et al.*, 2011) included research into the new community of Cambourne, Cambridge, where some people felt unhappy because of the way they were treated by others, because of stress caused by traffic congestion and because of tensions between those who had bought their homes and those in social housing.
- 6 See the results of Marcial Echenique's research for the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council: [www.suburbansolutions.ac.uk](http://www.suburbansolutions.ac.uk)
- 7 See consumer research reviewed by CABI (2005) and RIBA (2011).
- 8 See Platt, S. (2007) *Lessons from Cambourne*, Cambridge: Cambridge Architectural Research and Inspire East.
- 9 See Shelter Housing Insights for Communities: [www.shelter.org.uk/housinginsights](http://www.shelter.org.uk/housinginsights)
- 10 RICS has set up an independent Infrastructure Investment Task Force to help local enterprise partnerships use the government's Growing Places Fund to draw in private investment.

## Chapter 2

- 11 The appropriate area will be the 'functional urban area' or 'travel to work area' which forms the basis for most of the new local enterprise partnerships.
- 12 See also the many case studies of eco-towns at: [www.homesandcommunities.co.uk](http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk)
- 13 Parish councils can also be called town, community, neighbourhood or village councils.
- 14 Working Together: Delivering Growth through Localism: [www.berkeleygroup.co.uk/news/growth-and-localism/chapter-1?news/growth-and-localism/report&](http://www.berkeleygroup.co.uk/news/growth-and-localism/chapter-1?news/growth-and-localism/report&)



## Chapter 3

- 15 See case study in Working Together: Delivering Growth through Localism: [www.berkeleygroup.co.uk/news/growth-and-localism/chapter-1?/news/growth-and-localism/report&](http://www.berkeleygroup.co.uk/news/growth-and-localism/chapter-1?/news/growth-and-localism/report&)
- 16 DCLG (2011) *Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England*. London: Department for Communities and Local Government.
- 17 See for example *Towards Sustainable Communities: Ecotowns Community Worksheet* (March 2008): [www.tcpa.org.uk/data/files/etws\\_community.pdf](http://www.tcpa.org.uk/data/files/etws_community.pdf)
- 18 Design for Homes (2011): [www.designforhomes.org](http://www.designforhomes.org)

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# Appendix I

## Photographic profile

Orchard Park, Cambridge. Visited 15 March 2010.



Above and right: Orchard Park's school acts as a community hub



Left: A hotel contributes a bar and restaurant for community use and shields the development from a busy road



Above: The Circus – one of the four distinct character areas



Above: A valued community centre acts as a second hub

Right: A guided busway links Orchard Park directly with the city centre



Left: A skate park shows commitment to young people





## Walker Riverside, Newcastle. Visited 21 June 2010.



Far left and left: River's Gate, developed with local people using Enquiry by Design techniques



Above and right: River's Gate Home Zone with shared surfaces



Above, centre and far right: Belmont Green has a small neighbourhood park designed with artists and the local community



Left: St Anthony's Tower has been made secure with a concierge at the entrance. A social enterprise runs a café in a new building opposite

Right: Hibernia Village communal garden is another way to reinforce a sense of community





## Lightmoor Village, Telford. Visited 21 October 2010.



Above and right: Bournville Village Trust is building a 'second Bournville', after the one in Birmingham, at Lightmoor



Right and far right: The village centre and care home were under construction opposite the new primary school and community hub



Above, centre and far right: Computer courses and other events are run from the community wing. Sports facilities are shared between the school and community depending on the time of day



Ironstone, Lawley Village, Telford. Visited 21 October 2010.



Top, centre (both) and above: Modern architecture alongside traditional homes



Above: Ironstone Information Centre



## Dickens Heath, Solihull. Visited 12 April 2011.



Above and right: Dickens Heath Village Centre with bars, retail and office space and community facilities



Above and right: Waterside development connecting Dickens Heath to a nature reserve



Left and below left:  
Homes around garden  
square with parking  
underneath

Below: Parking squares  
are softened by tree  
planting





## New Islington Millennium Village, Manchester. Visited 28 June 2011.



Above: 'Chips', a striking block of flats designed by Will Alsop



Above right: Key principles include bringing nature into the city, views over water and sustainable construction

Right: The first phase of social housing in Islington Square gave 23 households the opportunity to select the architect for their homes



Right: Twelve existing homes have been retained on Weybridge Road – after residents fought to keep their homes

Below: Guest Street is a contemporary interpretation of traditional terraced houses, inspired by visits to Amsterdam, and designed to achieve Eco-Homes 'excellent'





## Ancoats Urban Village, Manchester. Visited 28 June 2011.



Above: Imaginative uses of public art include 'peep holes' and the retention of material found on the site



Above left and centre: The public realm strategy seeks to emphasise quality and change road users' behaviour rather than enforce regulations

Left: Sites that are awaiting development have been mothballed and had a face-lift



## Grand Union Village, Northolt, London. Visited 27 September 2011.



Above: Highest housing densities around the marina



Right: The central avenue leading to the new marina



Above: The development has opened up the canal

Below: Residents have access to a car-share club



Above: Grand Union Village's new medical centre



Above and left: Facilities include shops, a crèche, a restaurant and a community centre, which also serve the wider area

# Appendix II

## Participants

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Peter Aviston, Places for People  
Mussa Awaleh, Grand Union Village Resident Association  
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Julie Bhabra, Newcastle City Council  
Cllr Clare Blair, Cambridge City Council  
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Paul Boulter, Taylor Wimpey  
Cathy Bowyer, Grand Union Village Community Development Trust  
Julie Bullen, Newcastle City Council  
Simon Byrd, Trinity Estates  
Eddie Byrne, Walker Riverside resident  
Jane Byrne, Walker Riverside resident  
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