

Towns & Cities
Partners in Urban Renaissance

4

Workshops Report

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“We should be consulted prior to changes being made... now we just get told afterwards” “We should have more meetings like this...” “We need feedback and explanations of decisions.”

Citizens’ Workshop

“We want to attend more things like this... it’s interesting to see what other cities are doing and compare with your own city...”

Young People’s Workshop

“There could be greater communication between public and private sectors and there needs to be a mechanism to promote dialogue.” Property Workshop





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^{1.1} Towns and Cities: Partners in Urban Renaissance project has been led by the Urban Policy Unit of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister working with consultants URBED and with support from MORI and King Sturge. The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) also made a significant contribution to the project through Breaking Down the Barriers events. The project meets the Government's commitment in the Urban White Paper, *Our Towns and Cities: The Future* to work with selected towns and cities to monitor, help and support progress across all aspects of their urban renaissance – physical, economic, social and environmental. In that respect the project is unique because it does not focus on a single issue but takes a holistic look at urban renaissance.

The 24 partner towns and cities involved in the project are Newcastle, Gateshead, Middlesbrough, Barnsley, Leeds, Sheffield, Liverpool, Manchester, Stoke, Birmingham, Nottingham, Leicester, Norwich, King's Lynn, Bristol, Plymouth, Swindon, Reading, Newham, Medway, Southend-on-Sea, Croydon, Brighton & Hove and Blackburn with Darwen. The partners represent a regional spread of places across England and a range of different urban renaissance challenges.

The project began in October 2001 and its findings are being presented at the Government's Urban Summit in Birmingham on 31 October – 1 November 2002.

^{1.2} This report The Urban White Paper identifies five elements needed for a sustainable urban renaissance. These include not only those related to the physical environment (such as people living in attractive, safe, well kept towns and cities, and good design and planning), and those related to jobs and services (such as people creating and sharing prosperity, good quality services), but also to involving people in the process – people shaping the future.

The Partners in Urban Renaissance project has therefore looked at the progress made by the partner towns and cities primarily from the perspectives of four key stakeholders: local authorities, local adult residents, young people, and the property sector. The views of each of the four groups were obtained through visits and meetings (local authorities), and through workshops (local adult residents, young people, and the property sector). The different views expressed by these groups offer a valuable insight into opinion about the extent of change in our towns and cities and the extent of the progress towards delivery of urban renaissance.

This report (Workshops Report) deals specifically with the views and opinions of local adult residents, young people and the property sector. It is a sister document to four other reports that cover other aspects of the Towns & Cities: Partners in Urban Renaissance project. The five documents in the family are:

[Project Report](#)

[Partner Profiles](#)

[Case Studies](#)

[Workshops Report](#)

[Breaking Down the Barriers Report](#)

The five reports are interrelated and, together, they provide a full picture of the project's cross-cutting approach to urban renaissance and the outcomes of our work with the 24 partners.

“We should be consulted prior to changes being made... now we just get told afterwards” “We should have more meetings like this...” “We need feedback and explanations of decisions.”
Citizens' Workshop

2.1 Background In this section of the Workshops Report we distill findings from the Citizens' Workshops run between January and July 2002, and draw some conclusions. It also uses findings from the Looking and Listening focus groups, held in early 2002, that contributed to the Government's cross-cutting review on public space, and it uses findings from responses to two questions included in the MORI Omnibus survey in June 2002.

The material is presented under the following headings:

Method summarises the different ways in which opinions about towns and cities were gathered from local residents

Interpreting qualitative research contains advice and notes of caution from MORI

Analysing perceptions presents the findings within a framework of the eight renaissance dimensions developed during the course of the Partners in Urban Renaissance project, and tests these against conventional wisdoms. The eight are community engagement, pride of place, harmonious communities, networks of enterprise, integrated transport, thriving centres, quality services and valued neighbourhoods. They are discussed in detail in the Project Report

Conclusions and recommendations pulls together the main findings and makes some recommendations to meet identified issues and concerns

2.2 Method (i) Omnibus survey MORI's Omnibus survey is a regular survey of the general public. In June 2002 a nationally representative quota sample of 2,063 adults (aged 15+) were interviewed throughout Great Britain in 195 sampling points. Two questions relating to the [Partners in Urban Renaissance](#) project were asked:

Do you think your town or city has become a better place to live, a worse place to live, or has it stayed about the same over the last five years?

What are the reasons for thinking your town or city has improved or got worse?

While the MORI survey covers Great Britain, the Partners in Urban Renaissance project covers towns and cities in England only, and by definition, concentrates on urban dwellers. MORI advise that the findings from the survey for England closely reflect those of the findings for Great Britain.

(ii) Citizens' Workshops The purpose of each one day workshop was to provide a perspective from a cross-section of local residents – as opposed to experts or just those living in the most disadvantaged areas and just those buying new houses – all of whom have been subject to much other research. In particular, participants were asked the following key questions:

Are your towns and cities becoming better places to live?
What can be done to make your towns and cities better places to live?
What do you think of recent local initiatives (many introduced as a consequence of central Government policy)?

Locations In total, eight Citizens' Workshops were conducted – two pilots in Norwich and Newham, followed by workshops in Blackburn with Darwen, Plymouth, Newcastle, Leicester, Reading and Leeds.

Workshop structure and organisation Up to 20 participants, who received a small financial incentive for their time, were recruited to reflect a cross section of citizens in terms of gender, race, age and socio-economic factors. They were drawn from different parts of the selected town or city – to include some living in the centre, on the edge and in the wider urban area. Participants were recruited on the basis of whether or not they were able to provide an opinion on a simple question about a national issue. Those unable to were not recruited.

The six hour workshops were divided into sessions that involved completing a short questionnaire (allowing broad comparisons between places to be made), brainstorming ideas and views, identifying priorities, role-playing and a presentation about the [Partners in Urban Renaissance](#) project. The presentation enabled the introduction of the eight dimensions of renaissance identified during the project:

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

In addition to sharing views on each of the eight dimensions above, the workshop participants were asked their views on:

The perceived identity of their town or city
What they considered to be the good and bad things about their town or city
Whether their town or city was changing, and if this change was positive or negative
Whether towns and cities in general are perceived to be getting better or worse, and how their town or city compares with other places
Factors that contribute to making a town or city a good place to live, including which are the most important
Local initiatives identified in their town or city that were considered successful
Priorities for improving their town or city

A final role-playing exercise invited participants to produce an action plan to improve the town or city and an itinerary for visitors, designed to show 'the good' and avoid 'the bad' areas and services in their town or city.

(iii) Looking and Listening focus groups These focus groups were undertaken to inform the Government's cross-cutting review on public space and liveability. The main concern of the work was the views of local residents in relation to their local environment with particular emphasis on public spaces and places.

Locations Four of the 24 partner towns and cities were selected to take part in the research – Grimethorpe (Barnsley), Hulme and Moss Side (Manchester), Swindon and Brighton & Hove.

Focus group structure and organisation The approach combined the elements of photographic evidence and focus group discussion. *'These are the things that everyday make a difference'* is the title of a 17 minute video made of the focus group discussions.

Participants were recruited from different types of housing area. Social housing was the focus in Grimethorpe, a former mining village near Barnsley known to have difficult problems of urban decline. Hulme and Moss Side (Manchester) provided an area where major redevelopment (using a design guide) has taken place. In Swindon, in the 'affluent' South West, modern peripheral housing estates on the edge of town were the focus. Town centre housing (some of which has been undergoing gentrification) was chosen in Brighton & Hove, a city that is very much on its way up. In Manchester the target was young people. A cross-section of people was recruited in the other three areas based on type of accommodation, age, gender and area.

Each participant was given a disposable camera and asked to take photographs showing general likes and dislikes about their local environment, as well as likes and dislikes relating to particular journeys such as those made to work, college, schools, shops, or the local park. The resulting photographs were used to create collages in the focus groups, together with drawings and annotations, and to explore residents' views of their local areas. Alongside this task, participants discussed a broad range of issues about where they live but with the focus on public space.

2.3 Interpreting qualitative research MORI note that:

Qualitative research involves an interactive process between the moderators carrying out the research and those being researched. It provides a way of probing the underlying attitudes of participants, and obtaining an understanding of the issues of importance. The real value of qualitative research is that it allows insight into attitudes, and the reasons for these, which could not be probed in as much depth with a structured questionnaire. However, it must be remembered that qualitative research is designed to be illustrative rather than statistically representative. In addition, it is important to bear in mind that we are dealing with perceptions rather than facts, though to residents these perceptions are facts.

Throughout this section of the Workshops Report use is made of verbatim comments from group participants. These have been selected to exemplify a particular view of a body of participants, although it is important to remember that the views expressed do not always represent the views of the groups as a whole.

Other considerations that were noted in the Citizens' Workshops and in similar research undertaken by MORI:

Participants in a group situation tend to bounce their ideas off one another, resulting in lively and heightened discussions of the issues raised.

Strong views and strong individuals can dominate and challenge the views of other participants. In order to negate this effect as much as possible, the groups were split into mini 'buzz groups' for parts of the day, in order to ensure that everyone had the opportunity to participate in the discussion.

Group situations tend initially to provide a forum for top-of-mind complaints to be aired, before more considered views and opinions are expressed. Conversely in some places we found that participants were keen to 'defend' and therefore to present their town or city in a 'good light' to outsiders, before expressing more negative views. Further for some, with little or no choice about where they live, it was necessary for their 'psychological comfort' to be reasonably positive about their town or city.

Older people tend to be more conservative about change than younger people, and especially wary of recent change, with the past being seen perhaps in an unrealistically positive light.

Finally, in terms of the quantitative data referred to in this report, it should be remembered that a sample, and not the entire population, was interviewed. In consequence, all results are subject to sampling tolerances, which means that not all differences are statistically significant. It is also worth emphasising that the survey deals with respondent perceptions rather than facts. In particular, these perceptions are likely to be affected by respondent expectations, which may vary between sub-groups.

2.4 Analysing perceptions Summarising the views of over 100 people from workshops in eight locations is a complex task. We have therefore sought not only to find out what people think, but also to contrast it with some conventional wisdom within the framework of the eight dimensions of renaissance.

(i) The MORI Omnibus survey Answers to the MORI Omnibus survey questions provided a starting point for looking at towns and cities as places of choice for people to live in. Much has been made of the concept of 'urban flight' and of people wanting to escape the city for a rural lifestyle, with an apparent preference for free-standing bungalows.

The Omnibus survey provides a general picture about how people feel about towns and cities in 2002. Significantly more think they have become worse than better in the last five years (37% compared with 24%), although 37% feel they have stayed about the same. However, to set this in context, this finding is broadly similar to the 2000–2001 Survey of English Housing (Office of National Statistics), where householders were asked whether they thought their area had got better or worse over the last two years, using a slightly different scale of change. Again, more felt that their area had got worse rather than better (27% compared with 13%), although the majority (60%) did not feel it had changed much.

However, a number of differences emerged among respondents to the Omnibus survey:

It is the higher AB income group or 'middle classes' who are more positive about changes in their towns and cities (34% compared to 18% C2DEs); ABs account for 22% of the population nationally but a smaller proportion in the 24 partner towns and cities. Similarly, those with higher household incomes and higher academic achievements are also more likely to be positive.

Age also has an impact; people over 45 are more likely to say that their town or city has got worse than 15–24 year olds (42% and 25% respectively).

The reasons for things getting better are generally seen in terms of improved local facilities and amenities, particularly shops and shopping centres (40% of those positive about change). The reasons associated with places getting worse are increased crime such as muggings, burglaries, vandalism etc. (43%). This backs up findings from the MORI Political Monitor where crime is regarded as the third most important issue facing Britain today (31%), and cleanliness (13%) also rates quite highly. Surprisingly perhaps, young people are most concerned about crime (61% aged 15–24), while older people are relatively more worried about the state of local amenities and shops along with poor public transport.

(ii) Citizens' Workshops A slightly more positive picture emerged from those who took part in the eight workshops. Using responses to a self-completion questionnaire given to each participant at the beginning of the workshop, most thought that more people wanted to live in their town and city with the exception of Blackburn with Darwen. Historic towns and regional capitals were felt to have improved, specifically Norwich and Newcastle. In two places where a physical transformation has taken place, Reading and Newham, opinions were divided.

In Norwich, Newcastle, Plymouth, Leeds and Leicester people were generally proud of where they lived, but there was less pride among those living in Newham, Reading and Blackburn with Darwen. This in part reflects feelings about what outsiders think about the town or city, but also reflects residents' views regarding the character of the area, with people feeling the town or city had little identity or that it had lost its original sense of purpose. Interestingly, in Leeds participants said that Leeds had a strong identity in their initial responses to the questionnaire, but when probed further during the workshop found it difficult to express and articulate what that identity was:

“I think Leeds struggles with an identity – when you think of places like Manchester and Liverpool which have got a music scene, that sort of creates the identity. Leeds is trying, but... there's no kind of role model, there's nobody who's from Leeds and who's cool.”

“It's got a lot to do with students, a lot of the shops and bars and stuff are geared towards younger people, but a lot of the young people that are in Leeds aren't even from Leeds, so they're all pulling in different directions, trying to do different things. There's no script to it... I sort of feel it's turned into an overflow for London, people who can't afford to live in London move to Leeds.”

“Up and coming – vibrant, modern and trendy... the flip side is that people say it's down and out – an awful lot of jobs or employers in Leeds are in the service sector. As far as manufacturing goes there's virtually none left.”

Image was also considered important from a postcode discrimination perspective when seeking employment. For example, one person from Newham, whilst not strictly from Docklands, said that they lived in Docklands during a job interview.

“I use the Docklands image when going for a job.”

The critical question is whether people want to move out of their town or city. Norwich, Newcastle, Leeds (despite the above concerns about identity) and Plymouth stood out as places where people were most keen to stay, with an equal split elsewhere. Some people living in these towns and cities, however, felt they had no choice about moving – they were anchored there by family, employment or historic commitments. One exception was Leeds where there were more proactive responses from the younger group about why they lived, had moved to, or chosen to remain there, suggesting that at least some aspects of the council's strategic vision was working, and also that there were opportunities for all levels of career development within the city.

The eight dimensions of renaissance During the workshops we explored views about each of eight dimensions of renaissance, and these are expressed below as responses to conventional wisdom in terms of agreement or disagreement.

Dimension (i): Community engagement Some years ago the view was that planning and design are highly skilled professions, and well-intentioned councils should build cities. From there the view shifted to one that placed the market at the forefront; it knew best. Now the view is that trust should be placed in the community. Asking the people is in vogue, with the suggestion that people generally should be involved both in planning how their cities should develop, and how local services are run. In many instances consultation is now mandatory, and is carried out with more or less commitment, enthusiasm and positive results.

But is this what people actually want? We found that the idea of community engagement was very much endorsed: almost all responding to the self-completion questionnaire thought that if local residents had more say in the future of their town, it would be a better place to live.

The majority of people were unhappy with the amount of information they currently received about their town or city (though there were significant variations depending on whether the area was undergoing regeneration).

It takes a great deal of effort to make a difference. At face value nearly everyone wants to be involved. However, when probed most people do not feel in a position to make a decision, saying how ‘there are those who are being paid to do so’, and people do expect experts and elected representatives to take the final responsibility.

However, residents generally would like to be involved at the informing and consulting stages, depicted by the Ladder of Involvement below, but are less keen on participating at higher levels of action (except perhaps in very local matters such as looking after local public spaces). Attitudes also vary according to people's situation, with older people generally being more interested in being involved.

"...people not responsible as can only say what they want, not actually do it." Plymouth

"I'd like to be involved but I think the people who would be a very small minority and I don't know how you'd reach out to everyone." Blackburn with Darwen

"No, I don't want to get that involved. I don't mind going and joining in and putting my bit in, but I don't want to be there as the mainstay, making all the phone calls." Plymouth

"Council invites need to be more friendly, not formal, and you need incentives. A strategy is needed, since residents aren't too knowledgeable about planning and delivery. They can be asked what they think [and give suggestions and options] after a strategy / idea from the council has been suggested." Reading

Ladder of Involvement
Supporting
Acting together
Deciding together
Consulting
Informing

Many people are also sceptical, often on the basis of past experience, that their opinions will be listened to, and there is little trust in councils generally – or in planners. Trust in authority is hard to build up but is easily destroyed.

"We should be consulted prior to changes being made – now [we] just get told afterwards." Leicester

"There's also a perception that people don't want to be involved, that it's the council's job. Even when people speak up, the council don't listen, council has already made its decisions; meetings just paper-dress the issues." Reading

"It doesn't matter what you say, you know for a fact they're going to ignore it." Newcastle

"Council produces a load of mumbo jumbo that no-one understands [re: council spending]." Newcastle

"Those who make decisions on how to spend the money should be more accessible." Newcastle

"The planners are a problem – they consult because they have to but they don't want to hear." Norwich

Local leadership can make a difference however.

"There is a real community spirit feeling in Devonport, due to involvement with NDC. You need a leader though, it's very important. It should be our responsibility to set up residents groups etc." Plymouth

There is also apathy when it comes to getting people involved in actually implementing change. Though most people say they want to be involved in decisions about how their town should change, there are questions of how far they are willing to put in time and effort, unless they have a particular grievance or expect to influence results. There is also the question of the value people place on their time, for example students in Norwich were openly influenced by the financial incentive to attend the workshop.

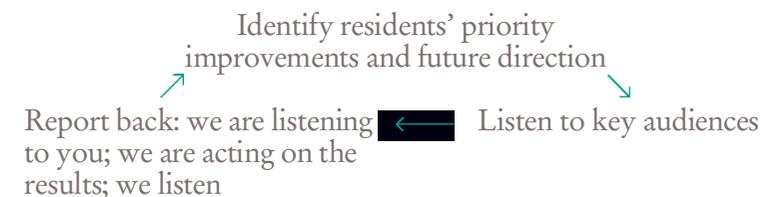
"What would maintain my interest is if I saw something that was going to impact on my life and make a difference to my life." Blackburn with Darwen

Most importantly what came out in discussion was the lack of feedback, as shown in the MORI Consultation Cycle below.

"A good thing would be to get them people that decided at that Council meeting to come here now and see us and tell us why they put those metal trees up, what the thoughts are behind it." Blackburn with Darwen

"...there should be meetings to tell you what they have done." Newham

MORI Consultation Cycle



Organising and running these events enabled a number of lessons to be learned about such engagement. Participants took the workshops very seriously, gave considered and sophisticated opinions and were pleased to participate.

The workshops reached a wide range of people, and provided a good example of how to gain opinion. They showed the value of a process that is fun and facilitated by independent people with no vested interest. Respecting people's views is an essential aspect of making the process work.

Using a questionnaire at the beginning of the workshop was useful to take account of individual opinion without it being influenced by group pressures, and to ensure the views of those who were less forthcoming were included.

The workshops also showed that it can be difficult to get to middle class people (social groups AB), as in Newham, for whom free time is very important, but it can be a good way to reach other groups that may be under-represented such as students in Norwich.

The workshops also provided the opportunity to test local opinion on projects that were considered successes by the local authority and experts – the two sets of views were not always compatible. The workshops demonstrated that ordinary people are interested in their town or city, and could make a useful contribution by expressing their views.

Nearly everyone said how much they had enjoyed the event, and that they felt they had been listened to. A number expressed disappointment that there would be no follow on and were interested in how the material generated would be used.

“We should have more meetings like this in Blackburn.” “These sessions are good.”

Dimension (ii): Pride of place (public realm that is clean, safe and welcoming) The conventional view is while the environment matters, it is not as important as other public priorities such as better health and educational facilities. The look of places is seen as a largely middle class concern (perhaps reflecting the membership of most civic societies), and one that does not interest the young. What is needed are better looking public buildings, and more public spaces.

MORI's Political Monitor confirms that as far as the nation is concerned, people do in fact think that health, education and other public services are the big issues. However, when it comes to the local level MORI's 2001 research for the Audit Commission on quality of life indicators shows that people are concerned about the impact on their quality of life of general liveability issues. These include cleanliness, things for young people to do, and safety – quite different to the key national issues. Participants in the Looking and Listening focus groups also identified these key national issues as being important, but also made links with local concerns, for example, an older man in Brighton & Hove described how lack of pavement maintenance had resulted in his suffering from a fall and needing to stay in hospital.

Through the workshops we found there is a recognition that the quality of design matters. For example, young people in Manchester identified the Hulme Arch and the Homes for Change / Work for Change complex as good design while respondents in Newcastle were very appreciative of the Millennium Bridge as an iconic design. Some residents in Newham described how they liked the 'eye-catching' design of the University of East London, which they felt helped to overcome a somewhat negative image of their area, along with also helping to raise educational standards of the local residents.

Attractive public space or architecture, and also flagship / landmark developments add to the quality of life both through direct enjoyment and pride. When we asked people about what they would show visitors, they highlighted buildings of architectural and historic interest. Such buildings are also seen to help to distinguish and differentiate a town or city, which was felt to be intrinsically linked with developing a specific identity for a particular place.

Public art (referred to in a number of places) met with mixed responses. A number saw it as 'tinsel' and believed that there were higher priorities on which money should be spent, while others said that it brightened up and differentiated their place.

There was a definite feeling among some respondents that new attractions, such as the Oracle in Reading, were appreciated, and helped to bring money into the area – although others were concerned that this type of project can be at the expense of existing areas that are in need of redevelopment and are only aimed at those with money.

"They've got purple and blue and orange buildings, there's loads of different colours and quite a bit of white mixed in between to make it nice... looks a bit freaky but it's actually doing something isn't it, it's actually doing something for the good." Stratford Picture House, Newham

"It's fantastic. It's very easy to look at, it's so pleasing. It makes me proud, it gives you a tingle... Everybody talks about it, likes it... In a short time it's become nearly as iconic as the Tyne Bridge... it's functional as well – it's putting Newcastle on the map... It gives you a feeling of pride in the city, and if you haven't got that then you're not going to achieve anything else." Newcastle

"Can we stop spending money on those silly metal statues – are they supposed to be tulips or what?.. who decided to put these giant triangles on the roundabouts, who signed the cheques, who approved it?" Leicester

"That bumble bee thing, with all the bees on – it's brilliant, that is lovely... I think it's nice, modern art – we should have more of it, it looks attractive and people will come to the area." Blackburn with Darwen

"I'd say the Oracle is a thing to be proud of, it puts us on the map." Reading

"If public places are good it inspires people to keep their own places clean." Leicester

A main concern tended to be maintenance of the public realm such as dealing effectively with litter and vandalism. Dog mess and drug syringes as well as poor lighting were particular complaints, and seen as health hazards especially for children.

“There’s dumped rubbish everywhere in East Ham – rubbish from the shops mainly piled outside so they can collect it.” Newham

All classes and ages expressed concern that places should be clean, safe and welcoming, even though they may not participate in civic affairs, and expect the council to be responsible.

“I think when you go to somewhere you look at what you see and you take your opinion from what you see. And if you see somewhere that looks clean, you see somewhere that looks nice – it’s like when you go to sit down in a restaurant, if that restaurant looks dirty you’re not going to sit down and eat. It’s the same if you go into a town.” Blackburn with Darwen

“They do all this stuff, they make this nice play area, this nice nature reserve and stuff like that, and then it’s just left. It’s overgrown – it’s a good thing at the time but they don’t want to maintain it.” Leicester

Clean and attractive places are also associated with feelings of safety.

“We really want reassurance that we’re going to get home safe when there’s no street lighting or cameras.” Newham

People recognised that groups of young people ‘hanging around’, were seen as intimidating, and that this was partly due to a lack of affordable pursuits for example sports, and also to poor public transport. They saw youth provision as a priority as did those who took part in the Young People’s Workshops.

“In certain areas there is a tendency to sort of criminalise young people, but there really is very little for young people to do and they’re curfewed – if groups of young people are together the police immediately come along and break them up and assume they’re going to get up to no good. So it’s important that there are public spaces for young people to gather and do productive things.” Newcastle

“Why can’t they have canteens and cafés and stuff, so if you’ve got the fields open for them to play sport on, just have the canteen open so they can get a squash or whatever and have somewhere to hang out.” Newcastle

“Trust is important, you know – if young people do feel they’re trusted and valued and that they’ve got initiatives targeted at them and for them and that they’re part of the whole process of developing them, then they’re going to respect that and they’re not going to abuse it.” Newcastle

People were concerned about the state of their town being interpreted by visitors as being reflective of local residents. This was a particular problem for the industrial towns such as Barnsley and Blackburn with Darwen. However, whereas many people recognised improvements, such as in the centre of Leeds or Newcastle, they did not necessarily believe that benefits always filtered down to the places where they lived, with concerns that many improvements were only cosmetic and did not address some of the more fundamental problems, such as poor housing and service provision. This view was particularly prevalent in Blackburn with Darwen.

“If people are proud of the place they live in, it’s easier for them to feel proud of themselves, and they’re much more likely to be an active part of the community.” Reading

“It’s also about psychologically what it feels like to live in a horrible environment, you know? I think it has, I think it certainly has a psychological effect on me. It affects health, it affects all kinds of things.” Blackburn with Darwen

“Someone I know who moved to Buckinghamshire really doesn’t like coming back up here and what she says is that as she drives more towards the north and towards Blackburn the more depressed she becomes.” Blackburn with Darwen

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

“I think there’s real extremes in Leeds at the moment because compared to 10/15 years ago there wasn’t really an area that was rich – now there are areas that have been really developed well, and the centre is booming, but then you’ve got the other areas which are still really poor.” Leeds

“It’s great to have all this great housing in the city centre and stuff but as long as you’re not pouring money into that at the expense of somewhere like Walker which nobody’s ever going to visit in a million years – but people have got to live there.” Newcastle

“They’re not building council houses anymore, all they’re doing is regenerating what’s already there. They’re just sticking Elastoplast over it for the time being.” Newcastle

Dimension (iii): Harmonious communities (places that minimise stress and disorder) The conventional views are often expressed as:

Safety and security are a growing concern across the country
It is the fear of crime, rather than the reality, which stops many people from wanting to live in inner areas
Older people are scared to go out at night
Crime is the product of criminals who need to be caught and taught a lesson
Life is more stressful for everyone: people are either time or money rich and each brings its own problems
The desire to escape other people is one of the reasons why English people say they want to move to the country, and is clearly reflected in surveys of why so many people want to leave ‘disadvantaged areas’

Through the Citizens’ Workshops, while we found some agreement with these views, a more complex picture emerged. People in all places expressed concern at crime-related issues. In some of the most prosperous places, such as Reading and Norwich, fears for personal safety after dark were the biggest concern for older people. However while older people do indeed have fears about going out at night, responses to the MORI Omnibus question show younger people as more likely to focus on crime as a reason for towns and cities getting worse than older people. One reason may be that young people are more likely to put themselves into situations where they are likely to experience crime, such as at night in the city centre.

“I don't feel safe after a certain time in the evening. There are no police about.” Plymouth

“I think Leeds city centre at night is really bad – I'm talking about Friday, Saturday nights in the centre of Leeds. And I find that I'm going in less and less now because of this... it's drink related but there's times when I feel very intimidated by things I'm seeing, although I've lived here all my life and I'm not usually phased by stuff.” Leeds

In almost every town and city there was an issue over the growth of bars and clubs, believed to result in an evening culture of drinking and related aggression. This was often linked to the increase in the number of students the town or city has absorbed in recent years, and was a particular concern in Newcastle, Plymouth and Leeds. It was also felt by some that the crowds of young people that gather on Friday and Saturday evenings in the centre of towns and cities can give rise to the perception that places are not being managed properly.

“The town centre doesn't work at night; it's not safe; people get too drunk too quickly; too many pubs on certain roads – I think we need later licences.” Reading

However in Newcastle, which has one of the liveliest youth scenes, and where facilities are more spread out, there did not appear to be a problem, and in Norwich different groups seem to use different parts of the town at night. Concentration of bars and pubs in one area causes problems.

“I think it's fine, it's more that it's just quite loud at night 'cos of all the clubs and stuff, but I wouldn't say that it was dangerous.” Newcastle

The lack of family entertainment (especially for those less well off), facilities and activities for younger teenagers and places for older people to go was highlighted, the latter particularly in Swindon.

There was evidence that the natural environment – trees and water and well cared for green open spaces – can have a calming effect. People in Blackburn with Darwen wanted their canal brought back to life, and in Reading there was general enthusiasm for the restoration of the Kennet and Avon canal. However people in Newham who wanted more greenery were unaware of the new Thames Barrier Park, and were not convinced about the potential for restoring the River Lea which, for example, was associated with rats.

Public spaces were valued by many as important areas where the stresses of urban life could be alleviated, especially open spaces where sport and recreational activities could take place.

“There's a really nice park over the road and it's really well maintained, and we go and sit there on a Sunday afternoon just for half an hour to ourselves, and it just refreshes you so much, it's really nice.” Leeds

“There's not enough in the way of sports facilities, where people can actually wind down if they are stressed out. If you want to go to a gym it costs you a fortune – now that it's the summer and you want to play football in Roundhay Park they take the nets down... that annoys the hell out of me. They put up those big bloody concrete blocks, it's just ridiculous. It's supposed to protect the grass but bloody hell.” Leeds

A wish to move to quieter, greener, more tranquil areas was confirmed by a number of participants when asked where they would most like to live, although a number cited other towns and cities, or wanted to stay in their town but move to 'better' areas. We found that some people preferred having other people close by, while others like the 'anonymity' or freedom afforded by city life. Many, however, like the idea of living in a village in the countryside. Reasons for this included more peace and quiet, less crime, moving to be closer to family and friends and because of the perception that people are more involved with each other. Either way there is value in and need for a 'community'.

"It's too hectic, I'd like something a bit more soothing, a nice village with a couple of pubs in it and some nice little country walks, that would do me." Leicester

"Most people might move not far from Newcastle, but to better housing, a nice area – the likes of Morpeth or a village outside the city." Newcastle

"I'd like to live in a village – neighbours and neighbourhoods are important." Leicester

"I want to move to a place that's small enough to be able to actually meet people which you don't do in a big city quite so easily." Reading

"Ideally I'd like somewhere where I could leave my bloody front door open and know damn well that nobody's going to walk through it and nick my stuff. Where I can park a push bike with a padlock on it, without coming back 20 minutes later and having it stolen. I'd like to live somewhere where there's a community spirit that involves all the community and not just certain groups, and I'd also like to live somewhere where I don't see heroin and crack cocaine being dealt openly on my street." Reading

"I'd like the West Country or Gloucester – it's a slower pace of life, with friendlier people who actually smile at you in the street, and less pollution." Reading

"I would choose to live in the city, not in a village – there's employment and that's what people look for." Leicester

"I'd like to live in Brighton, I think it's the best place in England basically – the weather, the actual place itself. It's a nice town, all the shops are nice, the people are nice, it's really laid back. It's got a good music scene and it's got the sea." Leeds

"You feel more safe when you know everyone's around." Blackburn with Darwen

People found stress was also created by factors such as traffic and 'territorial segregation' e.g. conflict between estates, as well as noticeable divisions between 'haves' and 'have-nots'.

"I think you need to have exclusive housing to an extent, but I do think that they're making some areas like the Quayside a little bit not accessible for everybody and it does cause some friction between neighbourhoods." Newcastle

"You'll find a lot of violence is linked one community to the other, estate to estate will clash, and it's not racial, it's gangs basically." Blackburn with Darwen

In addition to 'haves and have nots', segregation was also raised as an issue with regard to people from different ethnic groups and backgrounds. People of all groups and backgrounds felt racism to be quite wrong, and most valued the 'multicultural' nature of urban living.

However, there were some notably different attitudes towards the segregation of black and minority ethnic (BME) residents in towns and cities. Although many agreed that housing estates and local areas should be mixed, some participants – particularly those in areas with a small BME population – displayed a nimbyish ('not in my back yard') attitude towards the suggestion of multicultural living, saying they supported the theory of integration but were apprehensive about how it would work in practice.

Many residents in Blackburn with Darwen, where there is a high BME population, believed that the theme of 'harmonious communities' was the most important one for their town to tackle, feeling it would provide a stable foundation upon which further development could take place.

"If racial problems were sorted out and harmonious it would make you proud." Blackburn with Darwen

"I think if you do mix with a different culture or a different religion you've got something to gain from them and they've got something to gain from you... I think Leicester's a lot richer for being multicultural." Leicester

Crime and anti-social behaviour are often seen as interchangeable and, for many, public places are seen as stressful, particularly those where young people gather and appear to be taking over the street. Graffiti and vandalism also add to feelings of insecurity and lack of personal safety, as do dirty streets, litter – particularly drug related paraphernalia, poor lighting and other signs of lack of care and management.

"There are syringes where children are and needles on the waterfront – they get sucked into filter boxes." Plymouth

Theme (v): Networks of enterprises (dynamic and diversified local economies) In terms of improving the economic base of towns and cities the conventional wisdom has been that it is essential to attract inward investment or a single large employer. We need to attract manufacturers to create well-paid jobs to employ local people. We want a knowledge economy and need to attract new technology, and there is therefore a need to provide greenfield sites in the form of business parks. The future lies with information technology and call-centres. Warehousing and distribution are a bad use of space.

While politicians applaud the importance of small business and encourage entrepreneurship, in practice those with most education tend to seek out jobs in large and relatively secure organisations that offer better pay and conditions and career prospects. Small businesses tend to be associated with immigrant groups acting out of necessity rather than choice.

What we found from the workshops however is that some respondents voiced concerns about their town or city being too dependent on one industry, such as information technology. This stemmed from worries about possible future problems should the industry collapse – with the collapse of manufacturing in the north of the country cited as an example of what can happen if a town or city becomes too dependent on one industry or skill base. However, large employers moving to a town or city were generally welcomed, so long as they were involved in a variety of industry sectors – indeed, in Newcastle respondents suggested that a Government department should be uprooted and moved to the city.

"I don't think there's a wide variety of businesses in Reading, it's all IT and insurance." Reading

"My theory is they should bring an entire Government department, say for Work and Pensions or whatever, all the civil servants and the appropriate Minister and bring them to Newcastle. They can tele-commute or whatever, but the important thing is that it would have the knock-on effect of bringing the support staff that a big Government Ministry needs." Newcastle

2 Citizens' Workshops

Attitudes towards business parks, often associated with a knowledge-based economy and large new employers, were mixed. Some respondents felt too many business parks were being created, seeing them as irrelevant to their lives, while in other areas people saw them contributing effectively to the local economy. In many instances, residents felt that the business parks should develop a more holistic mixed-use approach – although these positive views about mixed developments did not always extend to town/city centre businesses (which tended to be primarily in the service or retail sectors such as bars and restaurants).

“They [business parks] don’t bring the sort of work that people down here can do... most of them are computers and high-tech.” Reading

“They’ve landscaped it [the business park] beautifully but it shouldn’t be only for the people who work there... they could have a theatre there or other leisure facilities.” Reading

“Mixed with housing? It depends what hours the people work and what noise is made.” Leicester

“Living next to a corner shop might be acceptable, but next to a nightclub would not.” Norwich

Respondents were generally keen to see small businesses setting up in the town or city centre, feeling that they added character. Brighton & Hove was praised by a number of respondents across the workshops as having a thriving small business community.

“My dad owns his own business – around his area there’s about three or four other small businesses and I suppose they could get together and create a cluster or a mixture of companies, it might work a lot better.” Blackburn with Darwen

“Small businesses all together is a good idea, it cuts down on transport and keeps costs down, they can work together and attach to each other in small units.” Leicester

It was felt that small businesses needed more support, either from the Government, local council or from combining with other small businesses in the area to assist each other. Increasingly high rents were seen as an obstacle to small business formation in a number of places.

“In the country as a whole, small businesses are being helped a lot in many ways – the Government set up schemes, it’s good – but in Newham it’s bad because of the council... We moved in [to new business premises] and after one year they came to revalue the rating structure. Newham Council said that because we were a new business and had been going for a year and were doing well that we should go up a percentage point – we did and we ended up having to close and we lost 16 jobs.” Newham

“They have put the rents so high that people can no longer afford the building – I mean look at all the empty office blocks in the city.” Plymouth

“About three or four years ago I was going to open an after-school business and I went and had a meeting with business enterprise and they were just absolutely useless, they were no help whatsoever. Because I wasn’t supported I didn’t continue – I had a business plan and everything but I wanted advice on grants and things like that.” Newcastle

More generally, there was concern that only low paid jobs were being made available to local people, while ‘outsiders’ took the higher paid new jobs. This was as true of Plymouth as it was of Reading and Newcastle, although some exemplary firms were mentioned who were perceived to actively combat this.

“The Excel Centre ain’t for people who live there – I know someone who’s been trying to get in there for months and months but can’t, no chance.” Newham

“But how much of that employment is for local people or will they just bring new people? You know – is it for local people or just companies relocating?” Newcastle

“But Nissan use local labour and they use local parts now and they export to the world.” Newcastle

“Hewlett Packard have links with local schools.” Reading

Concern about the lack of job security in the current economic climate was also prevalent, particularly among younger respondents. This was seen to impact on pension provision and to affect people's decisions as to whether they could enter the housing market.

“I need to have a guaranteed income for the rest of my life to cover a mortgage and my job's not really stable enough to take that risk – I worked out that if I was to lose my job I'd need to spend every hour that God sends in McDonalds just to pay my mortgage... if you never bought a house, when you retired you'd have to pay rent which has to come out of your pension and apparently a large proportion of the country, probably the same people who can't afford to buy houses, don't have pension schemes, probably 'cos they're paying so much in rent.” Leeds

In some places that were otherwise attractive, such as Newcastle, young people recognised the trade-off between their quality of life versus their career development and progression (and what they could earn). A number of students said that although they wanted to stay in the town or city where they had studied, they were having to move away because they could not find career opportunities locally.

“I think it's a great city but I've always just thought I'll have to go down to London for a job [in the media] – there's just not anything like that here.” Newcastle

While students can be seen as a problem in some towns and cities – such as Norwich where they were viewed as “passing through and adding little” – in other places the universities were seen as a source of pride and vitality, and were often associated with high-quality services, such as the health facilities offered by teaching hospitals.

Call-centres were regarded by some, predominantly in the North East, as being the new factories, offering few opportunities for employees. This view was prevalent in Newcastle, although they were also seen as providing jobs and acting as a stepping stone for a city away from its traditional manufacturing roots.

“It's just like the post industrial factory – there's a lack of security in the work, it's awful in the call-centre, you've got to clock in and clock out and they're really strict.” Newcastle

Dimension (v): Integrated transport (well connected cities with suburbs that are knitted together) Over recent years the public transport debate has gained a greater profile and priority. A number of factors including environmental and quality of life issues have underpinned the focus on improving public transport, and encouraging better alternatives to the private car. It is often argued that English people are not willing to use public transport unless they have to (i.e. they do not own a car) while at the other extreme, some argue for car-free towns and cities on a number of grounds. There is also a view that physical access to jobs is less important than training and basic education.

We found that improvements to public transport were recognised in some places, such as the refurbishment of the train stations in Blackburn and Leeds.

“Blackburn train station is better now, it's got cameras now and I feel safer.” Blackburn with Darwen

People generally think public transport is a ‘good idea’ but are very sceptical about the ability to deliver it in an integrated, efficient and cost effective manner. It featured highly in people's action plans in Norwich, Reading and Plymouth, with participants focusing in particular on the need for radial links, particularly to new facilities such as out-of-town hospitals and business parks. Access to the centre, given the high parking charges and congestion experienced when entering by car, was also important.

“Maybe I’m a bit cynical, but I just don’t think it’s possible. I think they need to put so much more money and investment into it, I just don’t believe we’re ever going to have an efficient integrated transport system.” Blackburn with Darwen

“Buses just don’t join together – you go to any Tube station and they very rarely ever stop outside, you’ve got to walk down the road.” Newham

“The industrial estates are on the edge of the city so how do you get there? You have to go into city to get back out to other places.” Plymouth

“They built a new hospital but they haven’t got the access to it – you can’t believe the incompetence.” Norwich

“You’d think they’d have the Metro going somewhere up near the business park – coming home at night it’s normally a nightmare, you’ve got to wait ages for a bus to get home.” Newcastle

“It’s going back to the deprived areas thing again – it’s like ‘right, well, that’s not a desirable part of the city so we’ll just sort of pretend you’re not there, you know, cut you off a bit.’” Newcastle

Local linkages were often seen as much worse than connections with other cities.

“It’s no use having a good outer rail network if [you] can’t get inside Reading to where you want to go – you need to have a bus waiting when you get off the train.” Reading

“I think they need to expand the Metro system out all over instead of just going down one main line... or maybe do what they do in the New York subway, I know it’s a bit bigger, but they’ve got different types of Metro trains that run. So they’ve got an Express one which will only stop at a main stop, and the they’ve got the little local ones that stop everywhere.” Newcastle

People seemed to accept the need for using public transport within the city, including park and ride, providing it was regular, reliable, clean, affordable, and safe. Reliable public transport was seen as essential in order for those dependent on it, such as employees, to keep their jobs.

“You get flu and all kinds of things on buses. You get on a bus and there’s people sneezing and all the windows are shut... they are dirty, disgusting... I have cats and I spend a fortune making sure they don’t get fleas, and then you get on a bus and take them home with you!” Leeds

“It can also have an effect on your job. At my last job I was there for about three years and I nearly got sacked about four times due to the number of occasions I used to turn up 15 minutes late. There would be periods that regardless of what time you set off you’d get there 15 minutes late three times in a week and there’s nothing that you can do about it.” Leeds

“There’s never a level of efficiency that means it’s stress free – if you’re late for work you’ve got to work late, even though you still set off at the same time – it can add three hours to your day.” Blackburn with Darwen

“We need more stringent policing [on public transport] – my son and his friend were robbed on the bus last month... you get some dodgy characters on the trains... there’s got to be regulations about how many people you can get on as well, because sometimes you are just packed in, it’s terrible.” Newham

The price of public transport was an issue in some places.

“Hard to get bus before 9am. Can’t buy return ticket before then either so have two singles.” Plymouth

“Travelling two miles in Norwich [by bus] is two pounds.” Norwich

In cities where new tram systems are being proposed, most respondents had heard about them and were very positive about their benefits in terms of speed and comfort. However, concerns were expressed about the length of time and amount of disruption it would take in order to put these new systems into place.

“I think they should have a tram service – they’ve got a tram in Sheffield and it’s brilliant, really clean and quiet.” Newcastle

“It will work in 10 or 15 years time, it’s just that period between now and then that it will be ten times worse than it currently is whilst they’re building it – if they’re going to build a tram line over the middle of all these roads it’s going to be an absolute nightmare.” Leeds

Concern was also expressed over the growing amount of congestion in towns and cities, and the resulting increase in pollution. Cycle lanes were generally not seen as a viable alternative to the car or public transport in town or city centres, due mainly to concerns about safety.

“I used to cycle in Liverpool and I got knocked off three times in two years, and I thought if it carries on like this I’m going to die soon... it’s all well and good if you’re doing it at three in the afternoon, but what I used to find was that people were asleep, you were constantly getting knocked off by people driving, by golly it was awful. Your life’s in the other person’s hands, literally. Every day I would wake up thinking please let me get to work alright today.” Leeds

“It’s not flat. It’s OK if you’re in Amsterdam or somewhere like that but not if you’re having to cycle up a hill to work in the mornings.” Leeds

Dimension (vi): Thriving centres (vibrant city centres with viable local centres) Conventional wisdom has it that the main function of town centres is now for shopping. While public policy has been concerned to protect the vitality and viability of town centres particularly from out-of-town developments, it has also sought to encourage competition, and there are demands for greater retail productivity. It is said that:

Consumers have voted with their cars to use out-of-town centres and superstores, and that if towns no longer provide what consumers want they should be allowed to die, as so many industrial firms have done

Local centres and parades, as well as independent shops do not matter and have no future

The priority is to improve city centres, as they are seen as ‘the engines of the regional economy’

The state of town and city centres provides an important indicator of the extent of wellbeing and civic pride. It provides a focus for everyone as a place for all.

In the MORI Omnibus survey those who felt their town or city has become a better place to live give improvements in local facilities and amenities, particularly shops and shopping centres, as the main reason for this viewpoint.

“Shopping centres are popular because it’s a clean, safe environment – don’t feel threatened.” Reading

City centre improvements were generally recognised, and on the whole well received, as they were felt to bring in people and generate pride. Improvements were often measured in terms of retail expansion, including shopping choice and the prevalence of new bars, restaurants and clubs. Most participants said they had noticed this happening in their local town or city – with the notable exception of Blackburn with Darwen, where residents tended to criticise their town centre, comparing it unfavourably with the neighbouring cities of Preston and Manchester.

“[Reading Oracle] it's good in terms of its quality and it puts us on the map, it's always packed and it draws people from outside the area and they do bring their money with them, economically I suppose it has helped.” Reading

“Everyone's perception of the city centre is that it's good.” Leeds

“The shops are awful. If people want to go shopping for clothes they very rarely go in Blackburn. If they want a special outfit they would probably go to Manchester or Preston or Bolton.” Blackburn with Darwen

However there was concern about polarisation with improvements believed to be primarily favouring the well off, outsiders, young professionals and retailers (many of which are national chains and not locally based).

“It's [the Oracle] a shopping area that Reading didn't need, it's only for young people, there's nothing for our age group to do there, it's too expensive, everything is expensive there... as for the day to day person in the street I'm not sure that there is a benefit.” Reading

“We want interesting things for down to earth people with down to earth wages.” Leeds

“They don't want the working class in Newham any longer – we're the poor relative with middle class yuppies coming in. There are plenty of facilities, but you've got to have the money to use them.” Newham

While improvements in town and city centres were generally well received, there was a real concern about the state of local centres, such as local towns when compared to a city or regional centre and local suburbs when discussing town centres.

“I'm quite proud of the city really because the history. The city centre is good, although the suburbs are bad... the suburbs need to improve as people live there.” Plymouth

“You wonder if they've concentrated more on the city centre and not so much on the places where the likes of us live.” Leeds

“The cities are sucking the good people out of small towns and just leaving the rest to rot.” Leeds

Dimension (vii): Quality services (health, leisure and education that closes the gaps) The three key service areas in urban environments (and elsewhere) are education, health and transport. The perceived views are that:

The poor delivery of these services is about inefficiency, lack of management expertise and the transfer of services to the private sector that is driven by the profit motive

Anything that matters can be measured

Keeping the streets clean and providing facilities for young people are simple problems and therefore less important or don't matter

The participants in both the Citizens' Workshops and the Looking and Listening focus groups identified the national issues of education, health, and transport as being priorities for improvement in their town or city. Housing and crime were also high priorities, and are considered under the valued neighbourhoods and harmonious communities dimensions. The discussions about health and education provoked the expression of strong views, and not all of these were negative.

Hospitals were seen as providing good care once you were in the system, although waiting times are too long. There were also complaints about the location of the hospitals, which were considered inaccessible in Norwich (an award-winning PFI project) and Plymouth. People feel more care is needed at the planning stage in order to ensure services are fully accessible.

Access to local facilities and services (including schools) is most important.

“I’ve tried getting my child into year five and every school in Blackburn have said they’re full up.”
Blackburn with Darwen

“Schools are closing down because of truancy.” Leeds

While it is a national problem the need for facilities for young people tended to be seen as a local one, with a frequent comment being that “there is nothing for teenagers to do, they need more local facilities.” This lack of facilities was considered a priority in all locations and people felt that solving it would provide a better quality of life for all. Young people often have neither the entrance money needed for leisure or sports facilities nor access to transport.

“We need something for teenagers to do, so they’re not standing on street corners getting drunk and causing chaos.” Plymouth

“If the youngsters are happy and content it means there’s less for us to stress about. It means we can go and do what we need to go and do without stressing about what the kids are doing, who they’re going to attack, what they’re going to wreck.” Plymouth

“We’re in need of youth services. They think that because it’s a different area, the kids are fine, but they’re bored and need help... we need more youth centres – there used to be places for young people to go but where can they go now?” Newcastle

“Newcastle United’s ‘football in the community’ could do a lot more – more links with schools, more accessibility etc.” Newcastle

Leisure pursuits for families can be expensive, such as the Stratford Picture House which had been visited by nearly everyone in the Newham workshop and was liked, but considered to be expensive to visit with a family. People are keen to see results, and to be able to identify how money is being spent by local authorities.

“Show us what you’ve done with the money [to the council].” Plymouth

Dimension (viii): Valued neighbourhoods (strong balanced housing market with choices for all) The prevailing view in England has been that those who can afford it buy somewhere to live, and only those who lack financial resources end up in rented housing. In turn this helped to stigmatise city centre and flat living, except in central London. House builders have stressed the importance of ‘kerb’ appeal in selling new houses, and the prevailing view has been that most households want somewhere of their own, with a garden front and rear, which looks like a variant of the garden suburb. It is also often said that people want to live close to people like themselves. When the housing market has failed, as in many northern and some Midlands urban areas, and, previously, in high-rise blocks of flats, it is often the design of the buildings, or planning that gets the blame.

We found, both from the Citizens’ Workshops and also from the ‘Looking and Listening’ focus groups, that housing is a very emotive issue, and considered a top priority to be got right before other improvements, particularly in areas where the housing stock is perceived to be poor, such as Blackburn with Darwen.

“The council is not responding quickly enough to house repairs. They are letting the housing estates run down... in the context of prioritising where they’re going to spend the money, I still want to see it spent on people’s homes, environments where they live, and then do this kind of stuff [public art].” Blackburn with Darwen

There are examples of improved house design, such as in Manchester and high-density can be acceptable.

“They have done them in an oval so you can't get into the back from the outside... they have a little pathway and everyone will come out the back and you can leave the backdoor open and no one can get in because it is all blocked and the kids can play and they don't have to go on the front. They can stay round the back [safely].” Manchester

“[high-density] is OK provided it is to a good standard – ours are three storeys and anything bigger and you're going to get problems because you've got too many people living in one space... the areas have got to be well maintained and monitored, because what happened with the tower blocks is they were built as affordable places to live for people and then as years have gone by they've become derelict and run down.” Leeds

However new housing is still being built with an emphasis on the physical, without taking into account people and community needs.

“Planners don't think beyond [the house] once it's built, i.e. they plan the building but not beyond.” Leicester

Lack of affordable housing to buy was mentioned by nearly all groups, and there was frustration about:

Children not being able to buy near parents
The difficulty in accessing the private rented sector because of landlord distrust of those on benefit
People entering the housing market having to pay a large sum for a small, basic property especially in the South
The sale of council houses, particularly to private developers, with no visible viable alternative being built
The publicity given to expensive 'landmark' housing schemes causes some resentment as the £1 million apartments are seen as 'not for us'

“I always thought I was going to get a good job and then get [a mortgage for] three and a half times my salary and buy a house, and that house would be somewhere I could live for the rest of my life quite happily, and raise a family. But it's not: basically you're just buying the chance of getting something nice eventually. If you don't take that risk then you've got no chance of getting anywhere.” Leeds

“The big problem you've got here is that the council are so crap at paying housing benefit that more and more private landlords are saying we don't want anyone on housing benefit cos we know for a fact they'll move in and move out before we even see the rent cheque.” Plymouth

“Five years ago a hundred grand would have bought you a house with grounds. It bought me a back to back terrace and that was it.” Leeds

“London sold off loads of its council houses which were bought by people which were then immediately bought by developers and then bulldozed and replaced with new modern buildings... and then they turn round and say there's not enough council houses for people.” Leeds

“The council should be made to build so many houses a year.” Newcastle

“A lot of the houses that are built are priced out of most people in Plymouth's wage bracket so it's almost like they're bringing people down from like London who are on good wages to buy the property – half the time they're buying and renting it out themselves. They're only here for the summer anyway, so once they disappear off for the winter we've got all these empty properties and no-one to live in them, so what good does that do for our economy?” Plymouth

“Having lots of luxury flats which aren't affordable is a change in the wrong direction.” Plymouth

“Houses aren't reasonably priced enough. There are lots of expensive properties being built in desirable locations – quayside etc – but it doesn't really help anyone.” Newcastle

“Even the kids can't get a council house – no-one can afford the new housing, the average salary is far too low.” Newcastle

While some people like living in stylish urban areas, saying 'villages are twee', there was some consternation about over-development 'building on every pocket of land in the town', and in the South there was a feeling that housing development should cease. The problems on housing estates were seen as being caused by a number of different factors, including the people living there, and not just the result of the design or location.

"If you were to pile 15 families who didn't have jobs into Buckingham Palace they would still have the same problems as they would if you piled them into Ebor Gardens. It doesn't make any difference where you put them, if you've got people who have psychological issues going on they're going to manifest themselves." Leeds

There was unhappiness about building new hostels/homeless projects in areas of social housing as this was seen as adding to existing problems.

"It's good [the Foyer] but in the right area. Not near me, near a council estate. Where we are we've got that now, we've got a bail hostel, we've got homeless children – it's like criminals all round our place isn't it?" Blackburn with Darwen

2.5 Conclusions Evidence from the Citizens' Workshops suggests that towns and cities do matter, and that people care about what is happening to them, both young and old, and those from all social classes.

In general there was much ambivalence about change in urban areas perhaps best expressed by a participant in Leeds who said it was both 'up and coming' and 'down and out'. There were also marked differences in how the town or city centre and the outer urban area were viewed. There was particular concern about housing, and much of the evidence gathered about priorities reflected what might have been expected in relation to national issues of crime, drugs, health, education, employment and transport. At a local level people were especially keen to live in areas that were pleasant, clean and free from stress, while at the same time having good local amenities and transport links into the centre.

Community engagement, participation and information was one area where surprisingly strong feelings emerged. This may relate in part to the socio-cultural movement towards a more individualistic approach, and to challenges to the state as being a provider that meets all our needs 'from cradle to grave'. Certainly the government has made a considerable attempt to listen more to people through processes such as focus groups and citizens' juries, but still more needs to be done to assure people that they are not wasting their time in giving opinions. Feedback and reasons for action and inaction are equally important. Different approaches have also evolved in involving communities more in planning, and in particular tenant and resident groups have moved a long way in taking responsibility for the management of estates.

By contrasting what we found with what is often argued, we can see where both policy and action need to focus. The overall impression is that people's quality of life is as important in some respects as how much they earn and own. This was especially true in Brighton & Hove where participants on benefits were as equally enthusiastic as those working. However the level of income is crucial, as it determines whether people can access the available opportunities, and where they live.

In general there seemed to be a difference between people living in towns with ancient roots, and those that are felt to have lost their sense of purpose due to economic change. Reading and Swindon for example demonstrated that economic success alone is insufficient. People in Reading and Swindon worried about coping with the pressures of growth, and especially the resulting lack of community. People everywhere want to live in a place that they are proud of and that is distinctive, which is why the question of identity provoked diverse remedy. People in both Norwich and Newcastle felt they knew where the city was going, and this was linked to major developments or events, for example, the European Capital of Culture 2008 bid, and the feeling that they lived somewhere special and valued by other people. However, in Reading and Leeds a loss of identity was expressed which left many unsure of the future.

Many of the opportunities for future action are already being acted upon using different approaches as illustrated through the Case Studies report. However the summary below provides an overview of where action could be targeted:

Better maintenance and management of public places can result in improved perceptions of safety and provide fewer opportunities for anti-social and criminal behaviour
Encouragement of social enterprise for local environmental maintenance, possibly through organisations such as the Groundwork Trust or resident associations
Optimise the use of public spaces with positive experiences such as celebrations, festivals, events
Fast responses to derelict housing and wasteland are needed to provide confidence, even if it is only about putting up temporary hoarding (which can be used creatively) and keeping people informed about developments, or finding temporary uses for buildings
Active encouragement of more diverse activities and 'gathering places' aimed at families and older people in town and city centres in order to 'dilute' the young person drinking culture

Provision of more services such as drop-in health centres, alternative health provision and personal care services aimed at relieving stress and tackling alcohol abuse, and the greater use of existing resources such as schools
Better management of the evening economy, especially working with public transport to help the safe dispersal of young people at the end of an evening
Off-peak and off-season discounts for local people could provide access to local attractions that are highly priced

In terms of improving information flows and involvement of citizens, people are keen to see where money is being spent, and the more visible this is the better. Small grant programmes should be encouraged to assist local people in cleaning up and removing graffiti. Young people should be more involved, possibly through schools, to say what sort of facilities they need and to help plan and put them in place. The greater involvement of students should be encouraged in the development of their temporary home, especially if it can be related to their curriculum needs. Overall, people need to be able to relate to and see the benefits of change, with the results of consultation fed back and explanations given for decisions taken, especially those that go against what most people want.

At the end of each Citizens' Workshop there was an extraordinary level of 'buzz' with people clearly stimulated and many wanting further involvement. While this might well dissipate fairly quickly it does demonstrate the value of asking people what they think, and valuing their contribution to the development of our towns and cities. When asked at the end of the workshops how important urban renaissance should be to the Government, nearly all participants considered it to be a main priority (out of top, main, minor or no priority at all).

“We want to attend more things like this... it's interesting to see what other cities are doing and compare with your own city...” Young People's Workshop

3.1 Background A number of young people took part in some of the Citizens' Workshops and the Looking and Listening focus groups. We were, however, concerned for people in their teens to contribute directly to the **Partners in Urban Renaissance** project by providing opportunities for them to express their views about where they live, to discuss what is good and bad about their areas, to highlight what could and should be done to make them want to stay in a town or city, and to suggest ways to present their views in the Urban Summit's Youth Fringe Event on 31 October 2002.

Location Two Young People's Workshops were held. The first was held in London in July 2002 involving young people from Stoke-on-Trent, Medway, and Brighton & Hove. This workshop was also attended by the Young Mayor of Middlesbrough. The second was held in Middlesbrough in September 2002 involving young people from Middlesbrough, Leeds, Gateshead and Newcastle. The first workshop was facilitated by RBA Research Ltd, the second was facilitated by the Urban Policy Unit and jointly hosted by Middlesbrough Council.

Participants In both workshops the participants were chosen by the relevant youth services from the partner towns and cities involved. Their choices were informed following discussion with the Urban Policy Unit. Nineteen young people attended the first workshop in London and 22 attended the Middlesbrough Workshop. Ages ranged from 13–22 with the average age being 15.

3.2 Method Arrangements for the first workshop, held on a Saturday in a central London hotel, mirrored those adopted for the Looking and Listening focus groups. The workshop took place in the morning and participants were 'rewarded' with a ride on the London Eye afterwards. Participants were given a disposable camera before their attendance to take photographs of what they liked and disliked about where they lived. Their photographs provided the focus for group discussion on the day. Each group of representatives gave a presentation in a plenary session at the end of the workshop about the 'light' and 'dark' sides of their town or city.

Arrangements for the second workshop in Middlesbrough reflected feedback from participants in the first. It was held over two days allowing an overnight stay at Teesside University with entertainment provided on the evening of the first day. This allowed participants to get to know each other in an informal environment before the working sessions on the second day. Three study tours, led by young people from Middlesbrough were specifically designed to stimulate debate later in the workshop:

Town Centre highlighting what can make a town centre attractive to residents, shoppers, visitors and businesses. The tour travelled to a range of sites within a short radius of the town centre. It highlighted the variety of land uses in close proximity to each other. Participants saw examples of socially and physically regenerated environments, and in contrast, areas that were suffering from deprivation and neglect.

East Middlesbrough focusing particularly on things for young people to do such as open spaces and leisure facilities. This tour covered a number of well-used and well-maintained parks and sports facilities, community centres that provide activities for young people and a leisure centre and café. Many of these facilities were located within or next to housing estates which experienced a range of problems including drugs, anti-social behaviour and a high rate of teenage pregnancy.

South Middlesbrough concentrating on out-of-town amenities and facilities. The tour included a leisure/sports centre adjacent to a busy shopping centre and focused on issues of access to amenities – particularly transport availability and affordability

After the tours, participants split into three mixed groups each addressing a specific question:

Making towns and cities better places to live in: environment, public space, housing and good design

Things for young people to do in towns and cities: alternatives to hanging out on street corners, venues and activities

Leadership and participation: how to engage young people more effectively and what models of leadership work best

3.3 Interpreting qualitative research The same considerations and qualifications apply to the outcomes of the Young People's Workshops as apply to the Citizens' Workshops.

Outcomes The following sections set out separately the outcomes of the two Young People's Workshops. The similarities between these outcomes and those of the Citizens' Workshops are striking especially in terms of the concerns expressed.

3.4 London Workshop In discussion in the working groups, using photographs taken beforehand to illustrate points being made, participants discussed a broad spectrum of issues across the urban renaissance agenda.

The positive aspects A common theme in all areas was the sense of pride in which participants hold their local area for a variety of different reasons. These might be specific local attractions or facilities, or less tangible aspects like the local people, and/or the positive attitude of residents, and local authority services for young people or 'young' businesses.

It is also worth noting that in many cases, the good aspects were tempered by some related negative issues. The presence of a skate park for example is positive, but if there is only one it can be very busy as a result; night clubs are good but can get 'rough' and undesirable and even where there is a good range of leisure facilities, transport links to them are often poor, non-existent, or too expensive.

The negative aspects There were a number of aspects which provoked strong negative views from all participants. Derelict buildings and run down areas (often adjacent to 'nice' areas) graffiti and vandalism, drugs and street crime. These aspects were frequently inter-linked.

As noted above, access issues were of concern to most participants. Whilst this primarily concerned transport and the cost to young people in accessing leisure and education facilities (paying full fare at 16 was a particular bone of contention), access to affordable housing later in life was also a concern especially for those young people in the South East.

What is the ideal town or city in which to live and what changes are needed to achieve the ideal? The table below draws together the views from the London Workshop.

Issue	Ideal
1 Education	More of it for everyone. Mutually respectful relationships between teachers and students, with young people teaching and advising other young people where appropriate
2 Activities, Facilities	Affordable, accessible, developed by and targeted at young people
3 Transport	Affordable, reliable and efficient – both within the town and radiating out to other areas
4 Society	A mixed society with an absence of prejudice, and equality and respect for all
5 Support	Extensive and accessible support for young people (especially for those who are disadvantaged) from trusting, confident and reliable people
6 Crime	More police – but with greater involvement in communities and an understanding of young people. Education about and action against drugs
7 Housing	Quality, affordable housing – assisted by investment of businesses and sponsorship by individuals and trusts
8 Environment	Policies and facilities to raise awareness of, and reduce pollution. More, well-maintained green space
9 Employment	Encourage businesses to the area to provide a better range of jobs with opportunities and flexibility
10 Local and Central Government	A government that consults with young people, and listens to what they have to say. Involvement of young people in decision-making processes
11 Health	A better health service

The next section takes a more detailed look at the ideas put forward under each of the themes in the table:

1 Education
Everyone to stay at school until they are 18
All schools to offer A level courses so there is no need to change schools for sixth form
Keep grammar school system but remove the 'competitive' element from the 11+
All schools should have reasonable but strict discipline
Bigger schools should get more funding
Schools should consult more with pupils and really listen
Young people teach other young people about important issues for example drugs, sex
No conflict between private and state education
No tuition fees
Better education about sexuality, gender, racial equality
More computers and free Internet access at home for students – facilitate opportunity to buy cheap computers from big companies and consider a system that allows students password access to college server
Mutually respectful relationship between students and teachers
Uniforms for all, but 'wearable'
Greater choice about what is studied

2 Activities and facilities
Young people's pubs, clubs and events
Youth and information service
Local shopping facilities
Skate park
Affordable cinema
More discounts for students
Information to everyone about the available services, aim to develop an appreciation of those services and how to look after them
Spaces for young people
Parks and sports facilities
Youth clubs staffed by trained young people
Cheaper activities – maybe offer loyalty cards for free sessions
Youth centre in every council ward
Combination of improved and new provision, working together and consulting with young people

3 Transport
Affordable, reliable transport, efficient and widespread
Based on competition, not monopoly
Subsidised by schools and employers
Running to meet demand
Good bus service – cheaper, more regular and on time
Cycle lanes all over
Cheaper transport outside town

4 Society

A multi-cultural society with no prejudice
Everyone treated equally – particularly by educating people to listen to young people
More responsible roles for young people
Integration of all groups
Champions to promote the successes of towns and cities
Abolition of stereotypes for example those in 'bad areas'
More respect and tolerance for other people
Trust
Privacy

5 Support

Confident, reliable, trusting people who support young people
Young people's 'champions'
'Cool' youth workers
Trusting parents
Help for those addicted to drugs
Focus on the disadvantaged
More counselling services in school, for example on sex education

6 Crime

Awareness and education about all types of drugs
Increased police presence in communities
More CCTV to reduce crime
Get police more involved with young people, improve their understanding of young people, for example the Space Scheme where police take young people to theme parks
Tougher line on people who sell or take drugs – longer sentences
Written constitution so that everyone knows and understands their own rights
Provide lots of information on drugs, and try to get rid of the places where drugs are sold or taken

7 Housing

Affordable, quality housing, well served by facilities
Investment by government and businesses (as moral responsibility)
'Community style' infrastructure
Housing trusts to buy up derelict housing
More refuges for homeless people

8 Environment

Clean environment – implement environmental policies
More trees and green, open spaces
Tidy up areas
Schemes to reduce pollution such as free bicycle loans into and around towns, encouraging car-sharing
More recycling facilities and raised awareness
Better maintenance of green areas

9 Employment
Wider range of relevant and flexible jobs
More jobs – better, more skilled, with career prospects
Investment in big business – to enable job opportunities
Training – to equip people for employment and encourage them to stay in the town
More large companies offering better range of jobs which are adequately paid
Minimum wage starting at age 16
Allowing 15 year olds to work in large shops to gain work experience
10 Local and Central Government
Communication with young people via youth parliaments
Consultation across communities, with youth participation across all sectors
A Government that listens to young people
More young people at the heart of decision-making
Include young people in the recruitment of service providers for young people for example teachers, doctors
Raise awareness amongst young people about local council
Moral economy – businesses and government taking a more moral stance to decision-making
Re-nationalisation of public services
Improved welfare benefits
Need more people involved in the Coalition for Youth (Brighton & Hove)
11 Health
Decent health service – a changed structure, maybe privatised
Better health services – make it more attractive to be a nurse or doctor

Priorities for action It was clear from the discussions that participants found prioritising action to achieve an ideal town especially difficult. Part of the reason for this is the closely interrelated nature of the improvements young people would like to see, where one change directly or indirectly affects another. Where priorities were identified, investment or changes in training and education came close to the top of longer-term actions. This feeds directly into more responsible roles for young people and the ability to obtain better jobs (if or when available) and the need to provide quality, affordable housing.

Of the shorter term priorities and actions, improving facilities and services for young people, and their greater involvement in decision-making, were commonly identified. The knock-on effect of such actions include reducing inequality and improving levels of respect, and, potentially, helping to reduce specific problems related to drugs.

As regards actions that might make young people stay in their towns and cities, in addition to the above, more jobs, generated by investment in business, training and education and affordable housing are all considered key. More effective improvements to and maintenance of the overall environment was identified, as was taking a tougher line on drugs.

^{3.5} The Middlesbrough Workshop As explained earlier, following study tours to different areas of Middlesbrough, participants were split into the three groups. The groups each had a mix of people from the four participating towns and cities to enable comparative discussion on key aspects of the different places.

Participants were encouraged to discuss examples from their own home town, and to reach agreement within the group on good and bad practice. A presentation was prepared and delivered by each group to the full audience, allowing any other participant to raise relevant points. The main points raised and identified within the groups are set out below.

Making towns and cities attractive to live in The quality of an environment can be improved by a family-orientated community spirit, not necessarily by the quality of the bricks and mortar. The continuity of the resident population was perceived as crucial to achieving this, but unfortunately, many areas never get chance to improve because the population is too transient.

Attractive areas are often created by a vibrant youth-orientated environment that high densities of student populations encourage. The appeal of such an environment is that there are many things to do and a mix of services and amenities. One drawback of a concentrated student population is that it can leave large amounts of housing empty for many months of the year, and lower the appeal of residential areas.

All-encompassing out-of-town leisure facilities create a good environment for all groups. However, they are expensive, and would be better supplemented by local leisure facilities that are affordable for families on low incomes.

Areas should not be delineated on local planners' maps and charts, and more consideration should be given to the effects of major infrastructure development, that in some cases in the past have severed communities.

“It is not just up to the Government and local authorities to try and regenerate an area. They can provide the foundations but people need to be more aware of their responsibilities within the community: it's not just about housing, it's about the people who make the community.”

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

Things for young people to do in towns and cities A number of good facilities for young people in Middlesbrough had been visited on the tour. Leeds and Newcastle felt that in their cities, there were not enough facilities targeted at young people. This could be due in part to the lack of opportunities for young people to campaign for better facilities or have their voices heard (for example the lack of a local youth assembly in Leeds).

The location of young people's facilities is crucial (for example Teen Shelters, non-alcoholic pubs and youth groups). They have to be accessible and close to other amenities. An example of was given of a non-alcoholic pub which was not well-used due to its poor location.

Non-alcoholic pubs and clubs for under-18s were considered to be extremely important – they enable young people to socialise in a safe environment, which helps them to prepare for adult life. Non-alcoholic pubs should look like ordinary pubs, in visible locations to attract a wide range of young people, and should be run by young people themselves wherever possible.

Successful youth facilities and amenities can be enhanced with 'add-on' services for example careers information, health advice, Connexions advisors, etc. An example was given of a successful youth information shop in a major shopping centre.

There was agreement that it is generally impossible to prevent young people from drinking alcohol. It is therefore better to concentrate on making places where young people may go to drink safer, for example parks.

Short-term solutions to problems were criticised: “if there’s a problem with drug-use or graffiti in a park, they just close it down, but the problem just goes elsewhere”. Rather than close the facility down entirely, which would have the effect of just diverting the problem to a different area, better long-term solutions should be worked towards.

Curriculum or issue-based more formal youth activities are often unappealing to young people, especially those who do not normally participate in organised activities. Less formal activities or clubs tended to be more successful. Poor perceptions of young people were often unfair: “its only a minority of young people who spoil it for the rest of us”. The point was made that groups of adults leaving pubs and nightclubs often cause greater problems with anti-social behaviour.

It is important to gain support of local radio stations and newspapers to highlight positive images of young people, and to support work undertaken to provide young people with things to do. The good example of TFM radio station was provided (Middlesbrough).

Youth organisations and facilities generally suffer from lack of funding, which can mean they are unable to open at key times when young people need access to them for example Friday and Saturday evenings.

Leadership and participation Both local and national youth parliaments campaign on issues that are common to all. It was felt that youth parliaments are at an advantage over adult democracies because issues are debated without political motivation. Youth politics receive little or no recognition however, although things are changing with the advent of the Young Mayor in Middlesbrough and the National Youth Parliament. Young people receive so much negative press that they have a hard time reversing negative public relations, and feel that most young people are disinterested – “apathy rules”, said sarcastically, “it’s a lovely job really!”

Youth participation could be improved if youth project co-ordinators worked full time, and like adult Members of Parliament, Members of Youth Parliaments should receive administrative support. There are quite large differences between youth participation in different local authority areas. For example, youth representatives from Middlesbrough and Gateshead are consulted on all issues related to young people, and in some cases sit on relevant committees, whereas others consider that they are only listened to when there is a box to be ticked.

There is a growing and future role for young people to participate in the civic life of their town or city. The key areas of concern within the public domain include public transportation, affordability, availability and quality of housing and the invasiveness of drugs in society.

^{3.6} **Conclusions** Although we were able to hold only two Young People's Workshops, the events brought a constructive and fresh input to our considerations about urban renaissance in some of the partner towns and cities.

The enthusiasm of the young people taking part, and their very deep desire to be an integral part of the urban renaissance debate and consultation processes cannot be expressed strongly enough. All Government departments are developing processes to ensure that young people's views are taken on board in policy development. From our experience that will be particularly welcomed but care will need to be taken to ensure that, as with adults, it is not just the 'usual suspects' who are caught by these processes but that 'hard to reach' young people are given an opportunity to be involved too.

The outcomes from the workshops reflect a high level of knowledge among the young people who took part about many aspects of the urban renaissance agenda – New Deal for Communities projects in particular seem to have made their mark although both positive and negative views about them were expressed with concern that they run the risk of creating further boundaries and divides between communities.

The main conclusions from the Young People's Workshops are remarkably similar to those from the Citizens' Workshops in terms of main concerns (street crime, drugs, derelict buildings, accessibility, transport, facilities for young people, quality of public realm), and in terms of wanting to be listened to but also wanting feedback.

Our main recommendation is that whilst there are many positive developments in partner towns and cities to involve young people in making their place better – for example through youth forums and youth parliaments – more thought needs to be given to making such involvement mainstream. Effective mechanisms should be provided that enable young people, adults, and the local private sector to come together to debate issues and offer solutions.

“There could be greater communication between public and private sectors and there needs to be a mechanism to promote dialogue.”
Property Workshop

4.1 Background The Urban White Paper identified the importance to urban renaissance of drawing investment and business back into previously developed areas in England’s towns and cities. The White Paper acknowledged that private sector investors often steer clear of inner city and city fringe regeneration projects because they are seen as too risky. If brownfield sites are to be revitalised it was recognised that this perception had to be changed and measures had to be put in place to create conditions for greater private sector involvement.

To create these conditions a number of initiatives have already been taken by the Government. These include the establishment of Priority Sites (a public-private initiative) to develop industrial space where the private sector is unwilling to invest, and the establishment of Urban Regeneration Companies (URCs). The White Paper also supported the establishment of English Cities Fund and other measures to attract long-term institutional investment in regeneration.

Fiscal initiatives have also been put in place – for example exemptions from stamp duty for all property transactions in the most disadvantaged areas, tax relief for residential conversions and tax write-offs for treating contaminated land.

These initiatives, with others covering improvements to the environment of towns and cities and speeding up the planning and compulsory purchase processes, are essential in giving confidence to the private sector to invest and develop in difficult sites and areas.

Purpose of the Property Workshops A fundamental consideration of the **Partners in Urban Renaissance** project has been the experience, perceptions and views of the private sector – especially on those issues where they feel barriers are being created which prevent them being fully involved in carrying forward the urban renaissance agenda. Consequently a series of workshops was held where representatives of the private sector, active or seeking to be active in one of 12 of the partner towns and cities, were invited to participate in a semi-structured discussion. The purpose of the workshops was to focus on:

The key problems and issues of the local property market
The opportunities and obstacles to development and investment
Private sector views on the progress of, and plans for, urban renaissance in their town or city

4.2 Method King Sturge worked with URBED and the Urban Policy Unit of the Office of Deputy Prime Minister to develop the method for the workshops and ran the programme of workshops. Of the 24 partner towns and cities, 12 were chosen to host a Property Workshop. Generally the larger cities were not selected as they already have a well-developed network (Core Cities) and have been much researched. We also sought to obtain a geographical spread of towns and cities with representation from each of the English regions. We also attempted to select places that exhibit a variety of issues, for example the problems of coping with growth (Reading), a seaside resort (Southend-on-Sea), a city in the process of regeneration (Liverpool), a northern industrial town (Middlesbrough) and so on. The 12 selected towns and cities are shown below:

Workshop Venues **Middlesbrough, Barnsley, Blackburn with Darwen, Liverpool, Leicester, Stoke-on-Trent, Southend-on-Sea, Medway, Reading, Plymouth, Croydon, Newham**

Participants invited Local authorities, Government Offices for the Regions, and the Regional Development Agencies, together with King Sturge’s local offices, were invited to submit a list of developers and investors active or wanting to become active in the subject towns and cities. These individuals were sent an invitation together with material explaining the [Partners in Urban Renaissance](#) project and a note explaining the purpose and format of the workshop. In addition we invited representatives from the relevant Government Office for the Region, the Regional Development Agency and a local agent from King Sturge to attend. We intentionally did not invite a representative from the local authority as experience showed that workshops tend to become confrontational and too focused on the private sector’s perceptions of the local authority’s performance, to the exclusion of other issues.

Location and format of Property Workshops We sought neutral ground for the workshops where possible. The duration of the workshops was set at two hours – any longer would reduce attendance by the private sector. Following a welcome and introduction outlining the project, the sessions were split into two. In the first part we presented a profile of the local property market, drawing on an analysis of each sector (see Appendix A). This was then followed by a discussion of the participants’ perception of the market and the opportunities and barriers that this presents. In the second part we outlined the town or city’s vision or strategy and the views of the attendees were sought. The approach to the workshops was generally ‘passive’ i.e. the information was presented and the attendees’ views sought. We resisted the temptation to lead participants by asking their views on specific themes, for example on CPO powers, the planning system or bureaucracy of grant process. However these issues all came up spontaneously in discussion. This was considered to be a better way to conduct the workshops as it revealed the issues about which the private sector have genuine concerns.

At the end of each workshop, with the aim of identifying issues of most significance to participants, they were asked to identify the one message that they would want taken back to Ministers to improve urban renaissance in their town or city.

A questionnaire was also handed out at the start of the event, and attendees asked to complete this before the conclusion. This questionnaire sought to find out the views of participants as to whether each town or city is performing up to its potential, whether it is getting better (a common question also raised in the Citizens’ Workshops), the barriers to private sector investment and the importance of urban renaissance. An analysis of the results is set out below.

Attendance at workshops There were 120 participants in total with attendance at individual workshops ranging from 6 to 14. The table below shows the number of participants.

Property Workshop Participants		
	Number	%
Development Companies	50	41
Investment Companies	14	12
Property Consultants	32	27
Central Government	12	10
Development Agency	8	7
Other	4	3
Total	120	100

Conduct of workshops ‘Chatham House’ rules applied to the workshops to enable full and frank discussions. Developers and investors were enthusiastic in their contribution. They welcomed the opportunity to understand more of what is happening within the town or city involved and especially to make their views known on where they thought improvements could be made. A significant number of private sector participants reported back that they thought the workshops were valuable and they welcomed the opportunity to network and exchange views with each other and the Government Office and Regional Development Agency attendees. In fact there was an overwhelming view from the private sector that further, similar meetings involving the local authority and the Regional Development Agency would be most welcome. The need for greater partnership working and greater consultation with the private sector was a theme running through all the workshops.

4.3 Questionnaire results Fifty six responses were received from nine of the venues where the Property Workshops were held. This is a smaller sample than the Citizens' Workshops, but gives a useful insight into individual's perceptions from the private sector, as well as allowing a cross reference with some responses by citizens.

A large majority felt that England's main towns and cities were becoming more attractive as places to live. This contrasted with only 8% who felt they were getting worse. When asked for examples of towns or cities becoming more attractive to live in, both Manchester and Birmingham received the most mentions.

Do you think Britain's main towns and cities are becoming more attractive as places to live?

Getting better	64%
Few doing well, rest doing poorly	24%
About the same	4%
Getting worse	8%

Clearly of significance to an audience of developers and investors was the question on whether towns and cities are becoming more attractive as places to invest: this split varied markedly between towns.

Are Britain's towns and cities becoming more attractive as places to invest?

Getting better	55%
Few doing well, rest doing poorly	24%
About the same	20%
Getting worse	2%

A very different picture emerges when developers and investors are asked whether their town or city is doing well compared with its potential. The majority of respondents considered that their town or city was performing poorly in comparison with its potential.

How do you think your town/city is doing compared with its potential?

Well	18%
Adequate	28%
Poorly	54%

Participants were asked for their views on how important urban renaissance should be to the Government. The vast majority, 98%, considered that it should either be the Government's top priority or one of its main priorities.

4.4 Main issues arising The following are common issues that arose across the 12 workshops.

Communication There appears to be a real interest from the private sector in the regeneration of towns and cities. This was reflected in the attendance at the workshops and the contribution from participants. The property sector welcomed the opportunity to discuss the regeneration of the communities in which they were involved. Few of the towns and cities had a 'property forum' at which views could be exchanged between the private and public sectors. Many developers and investors believed that for an urban renaissance to work, the private and public sectors had to work in a 'true' partnership. In a number of the towns and cities it appeared that developers and investors of major schemes were finding it difficult to gain access to key local government officials – for example Chief Executives, Directors of Development. When access is gained and officials convinced of the importance of the project, developers found that junior staff do not always follow through this support and the project meets with bureaucracy and delay.

Impact of the Urban White Paper There is a belief that 'the tide is turning' in the regeneration of large cities, with Manchester, Leeds, Newcastle and Birmingham being cited by participants as models of urban regeneration. This is backed up by the result of the questionnaire. It was recognised however that much work is still required to kick-start the regeneration or renaissance in smaller towns. Specifically the private sector identified that action was still required by the Government on speeding up the planning system and cutting red tape when applying for grants.

Mixed-use development Developers and investors now seem to accept the need to develop mixed-use schemes. The main concern seems to be that management issues for each of the uses need to be thought out and resolved before a scheme can be funded and development commenced.

Driving force of regeneration As a general rule it appears that the early players in the regeneration of an area are local developers. This is not surprising as they will know and understand the local market and be able to assess the risks of development. They also have a more limited choice of where to invest and can play a long game waiting for the right conditions. However there was a fear in a number of the workshops that well publicised masterplanning exercises might lead to 'outsiders' being brought in to drive development and that local developers will be frozen out.

Urban Regeneration Companies Although it is too early to judge the success or otherwise of Urban Regeneration Companies, views on them extended from enthusiasm, especially for increased partnership working in Leicester, to frustration that they did not have the powers to 'make things happen' in Liverpool. At several workshops developers supported the reintroduction of Urban Development Corporations with planning, grant giving and CPO powers.

Public sector assistance Grant assistance was universally seen as being essential to enable development to take place in brownfield areas where values were low and costs high. The private sector were particularly critical of what they perceived to be the failure of the replacement to the *Partnership Investment Programme*, the bureaucracy involved in the European application process and the barrier of 'state aid' regulations. Regional Development Agencies were criticised for focusing too much on direct development, that is carrying out development themselves whilst denying the private sector funding for similar schemes. There was not much enthusiasm for tax incentives, but this may reflect a lack of experience or understanding.

Compulsory purchase orders (CPOs) In several northern towns the lack of quality development sites was seen as a significant barrier to regeneration. Sites were too small and needed assembling and landowners had inflated expectations of the value of their sites. It was felt that the proposed changes to CPO powers were long overdue. However it was important that local authorities use these powers effectively. Developers in general would be willing to underwrite the cost of such action where appropriate. There was concern that property speculation in regeneration areas could be a barrier to early development, highlighting the need for the local authority or the Regional Development Agency to take early CPO action.

Planning One of the most mentioned issues at the workshops was that the planning system takes too long and has so many uncertainties that it is deterring new development. Section 106 Agreements, especially relating to social housing requirements, were identified as a major disincentive to new private sector developments in many towns and cities where a residential market had not yet been established in the town or city centre. It was felt that this requirement should be waived by planning authorities until values have been raised and a thriving market created.

Sensitivity to the property market Local authorities and Development Agencies have to be more sensitive to the property market if they are to be successful in encouraging major developments. In several towns we heard of the corrosive effect of the council promoting more than one major development irrespective of their similarities or the state of the market. The resulting uncertainties for developers and investors can lead to long delays at best and scheme abandonment at worst.

Out-of-town development Many developers acknowledge that their schemes to develop out-of-town business parks are undermining the urban renaissance agenda by drawing development away from town centres. However, they feel that they are forced by low parking ratios, poor public transport and a lack of town centre sites to follow this course. It was felt that fundamental differences between towns and cities in levels of demand call for different policies in different places.

Labour availability In thriving areas of the South East, development is being lost through the lack of an available workforce: Reading's problems appear particularly severe. Rising house prices are often blamed. There is anecdotal evidence of workforces being bussed in from long distances. Yet equally, in high unemployment areas of the North, development opportunities are being lost for a lack of trained labour. In Barnsley, the private sector identified the need to improve the town's skills base as fundamental to the regeneration of the town.

Image and leadership Across almost all the workshops it was considered that presenting the right image was fundamental to the renaissance of a town or city and attracting inward investment. The perceived reasons for poor image ranged from confusion with place names as in Medway and Stoke city centre, unattractive gateways to Reading, the public transport links to Southend (the 'misery line') and Barnsley's mining image. Linked to image was the need for residents to have pride in their town or city and the need for a shared vision. Strong leadership from an individual within the town or city, a 'project champion' was also identified as a major advantage, especially if that person was within the council and could 'bang heads together' to expedite progress.

Car parking Car parking was seen as a major issue in encouraging development within towns and city centres. It was questioned whether PPG13 was entirely relevant to towns and cities in the North where public transport did not provide a realistic alternative to the car. It was felt that this was acting as a 'brake' on town centre development. In the more congested South it was suggested that a holistic approach be taken to the management of car parking, for example by pooling all available car parking spaces and operating a flexible and variable charging system to ensure car parking was used efficiently.

Infrastructure The improvement of infrastructure was identified in a number of workshops as being fundamental to renaissance. In Liverpool the improvement of links between the city centre and the motorway network was mentioned. In several workshops the slowness of utilities to service land was raised. In Newham, the high cost of placing high voltage power lines underground was holding back regeneration of the Canning Town area. Utilities expect developers to fully fund such initiatives, however low land values work against this. It was suggested that tax incentives similar to those introduced for contaminated land should be introduced.

4.5 Conclusions The aim of the Property Workshops was to understand private sector perceptions of the Government’s urban renaissance agenda, whether our towns and cities are improving as places to invest in, and what the barriers are to participants becoming more involved in regenerating these areas.

The workshops show that the urban renaissance agenda has the support of the private sector. The overwhelming majority of developers and investors consider that urban renaissance should be either the top or one of the main priorities of Government. It is clear from the workshops that the majority of the private sector does consider that progress is being made towards this goal.

A majority of the developers and investors who participated believe that our towns and cities are becoming more attractive to live and invest in. Many factors have contributed to this: a stable economic situation, low interest rates, a booming housing market, changing lifestyles and the growing popularity of city centre living, massive investment in leisure and cultural facilities, a growing 24 hour economy as well as a number of Government fiscal and legislative initiatives. However almost one in four consider that progress is patchy, with only a few towns and cities doing well and the rest poorly. As expected, progress seems to be slowest in the northern towns and in those southern towns that have experienced a major shrinkage and restructuring of their traditional industries. Manchester and Birmingham were overwhelmingly mentioned as successful models of regeneration.

In the view of developers and investors the progress towards urban renaissance is far from complete. A majority of participants considered that their town or city has a lot more potential for regeneration and that much still needs to be done. A number of barriers to urban renaissance were identified by participants, which include:

A lack of training and education
Grant assistance needs to be less bureaucratic and should not be tied by European Commission ‘state aid’ regulations
The planning system needs to be more efficient and quicker to respond
Utilities were slow to deliver infrastructure provision
Local authorities need to make more use of their CPO powers
Towns and cities need leaders who will champion their community and push changes through
Better partnership arrangements have to be established between the public and private sectors
Policing needs to be improved to make people feel safer
Section 106 Agreements need to be made clearer
More land needs to be brought forward for development

Central and local government has, and is, taking action on many of the above barriers. However these barriers are still regarded as significant by many of the developers and investors that attended the workshops. If the urban renaissance agenda is to gain further momentum and if it is to be achieved more evenly across different towns and cities it is important that further action is taken.

Introduction To focus and stimulate discussions at the Property Workshops a number of indicators of the property market were collected and presented to participants as a profile of the local market. These property indicators are a useful measure of the performance of a town or city. The indicators used were:

New semi-detached house prices
Industrial land values
Office rents
Retail yields

The indicators were collected for each of the 24 partner towns and cities and not just the 12 workshop venues. We have assembled this information and have attempted to identify any patterns that emerge.

Findings The indicators confirm the generally recognised north/south divide in England but show that the situation is much more complex. From the analysis of the indicators and other work we have broadly identified three categories:

Restructuring Towns	Core Cities	Southern Towns and Cities
Middlesbrough	Newcastle	Croydon
Blackburn with Darwen	Leeds	Newham
Stoke-on-Trent	Manchester	Reading
Barnsley	Liverpool	Swindon
Gateshead	Birmingham	Brighton & Hove
Leicester	Nottingham	Norwich
Plymouth	Bristol	Southend-on-Sea
Medway	Sheffield	Kings Lynn

There are clearly differences between towns and cities within each category but the general trend is that restructuring towns and cities are still struggling in varying degrees to cope with the decline of their traditional industries and to establish a mixed economic base.

(i) New Semi-detached house prices It can be argued that in towns and cities where house prices are higher than in the surrounding area, urban renaissance is happening. This is the case in the following places:

Birmingham	Leeds	Norwich
Brighton & Hove	Newcastle	Sheffield

The most obvious example is Brighton & Hove where the prices are 164% of the national average (compared to 120% in East Sussex). Although the prices for semi-detached houses in Leeds are still below the national average they are almost 20% higher than in the surrounding region. This could be seen as evidence that Leeds is becoming a strong centre of urban regeneration (although it also reflects the inclusion of prosperous suburbs within its broad boundaries). The same is the case in Newcastle and to a lesser extent in Norwich.

On the other side, industrial towns like Stoke-on-Trent or Barnsley are struggling to generate urban renaissance with semi-detached house prices half the national average, but with slightly higher prices in the surrounding region.

(ii) **Industrial land value** The evidence illustrates that industrial demand is strongest in the South East. Reading shows the highest land values, three times the national average. The urban centres in the Midlands, Birmingham and Leicester (and Nottingham) show industrial land values above the national average while the land values in their surrounding areas are below the national average, suggesting they are indeed regional dynamos. Leeds, Bristol and Swindon are also performing well, with values reflecting their general economic success.

In contrast, Norwich and Plymouth show low land values in relation to industrial values in their surrounding area. The worst performing region is the North East, again reflecting the contraction of manufacturing and the lack of other demand for land.

(iii) **Office rents** The level of office rents confirms Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester as the dominating cities. Major regeneration schemes have taken place that have led for example in Leeds to the attraction of a broad range of financial services and institutions. However, in Manchester an over-supply of office floorspace in the 1990s led to many vacant offices in the Salford Quays area. Rents in the city centre for new space therefore present only part of the picture. Of the eight Core Cities rent levels in Liverpool are relatively low.

(iv) **Retail yields** This gives a very broad indication of the relative health of the shopping centre. The retail yields demonstrate that amongst the Core Cities Manchester is performing best in contrast to say Sheffield.

Conclusions To understand the extent of urban renaissance it is important to look at all the property markets of a town or city. Three variations can be identified:

Category	House Prices	Industrial Land Values	Office Rents
A	+	+	+
B	+	+	-
C	-	-	-

A relationship between house prices and industrial land values and office rents seems to be evident. High house prices only occur if the economic activity of a town or city supports sufficient employment opportunities to create a strong demand for new housing.

Category 'A' clearly describes centres such as Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds that have all experienced major regeneration schemes and are developing into attractive and thriving regional centres. Category 'B' describes towns or cities with a strong industrial base but low office rents, for example Swindon, Croydon. Category 'C' describes most northern industrial towns and cities that suffer from low house prices due to a lack of employment opportunities in either industry or offices.

In turn these influence spending power, and consequently retail demand, and eventually investor interest.