

Democracy and development

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BUILDING ON THE PAST

Visions of housing futures

Edited by Peter Malpass and Liz Cairncross

Democracy and development

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Introduction

Earlier chapters have explored a range of factors – affordability, market forces, demographic change and policy action – that affect or are likely to affect housing futures. In this chapter we develop the discussion of consumer preferences begun by Phil Morgan (Chapter Nine), looking at their likely impact in future years. The aim is to report a number of innovative studies that have explored the potential for stakeholders to discuss how towns and cities might develop over time. The chapter outlines novel methodologies for investigating stakeholder views, and reports the findings of studies in different parts of England. An important outcome of the research was the demonstration that consumers of housing and urban environments not only have views but are able to express them in ways that could lead to better policies.

In England, London and the South East are prospering while manufacturing towns in the Midlands and the North have declined. Imbalances of growth and decline mean that there is a shortage of housing in the South and an excess in the North. What is to be done? And how can citizens be involved in decision making? In particular, how can an effective voice be given to the very broad range of stakeholders involved in and affected by the development and regeneration of our towns and cities?

This chapter draws lessons from three housing futures studies conducted by Cambridge Architectural Research (CAR) and Eclipse Research Consultants. The aim of each of them was to create a platform to enable stakeholders to discuss meaningfully the future of their particular neighbourhoods, towns and regions. The first of these studies looked at Cambridge, where housing demand and supply problems are acute as a result of strong economic growth. Cambridge is located in one of the designated growth areas in the South East, and as such it experiences quite different housing market pressures from those in

northern cities, as discussed by Brendan Nevin and Philip Leather in Chapter Five.

Cambridge Futures

Cambridge Futures was a unique example of the marriage of applied research and public policy. Its aim was to provide a forum for considering options that could engage with and gain the support of a wide coalition of interests in the Cambridge region. This forum was used to develop a range of options addressing the concerns of a large consortium of different interests including university academics, councillors and planning officers from the city, district and county council, business people, social landlords, developers, house builders and representatives of community and resident groups.

Prior to the mid-1990s growth and development in the Cambridge region was highly constrained by planning policy dating back to 1950 (Holford and Wright, 1950). In 1993, concerned about the constraints on growth in Cambridge, Peter Carolin, then Head of the Department of Architecture, University of Cambridge, invited six people from the university, the city council and the business community to talk about the problem. This grouping was subsequently enlarged and went on to form Cambridge Futures. It produced seven options for the development of the Cambridge region (www.cambridgefutures.org). The intention was not to make specific recommendations but rather to demonstrate the possibilities, and, in so doing, to generate informed debate and aid the formal planning process.

In 1999, as our contribution to the consortium, CAR surveyed public opinion. A central feature of the survey was to offer resident and non-resident stakeholders a range of options for the development of the Cambridge region, to describe their likely outcomes simply and clearly and to invite members of the general public to express their opinions. The findings have had a significant influence on planning policy in the region (Cambridge Futures, 1999).

The study's main finding was that there was little support for the status quo: 67% of those who completed the survey disliked the minimum growth option and only 18% agreed that "Cambridge and its surroundings should be kept just as they are". The options that won the least support were close to the then current policies of minimum growth in the city and necklace development of surrounding villages that had distorted the growth of the region since 1950.

There was a small effect of people voting according to where they lived. So marginally more people living in the city preferred selected

extension into the green belt, while people living outside the city preferred densification. But this effect was much less than we expected.

People were very concerned about high house prices and their impact on the social balance of the city: 81% of people agreed, "It would be a bad thing if only wealthy people could afford to live in Cambridge". People were also concerned about traffic congestion and favoured options that minimised car use: 59% of people supported some form of road pricing.

Overall the main message was that there was solid support for growth: 78% of people agreed that "The region's high-tech businesses must be allowed to grow". People favoured a balanced mix of development with some growth of the city through densification and selected expansion into the green belt, and growth outside Cambridge based on good public transport links.

The findings also indicated that public opinion responds to balanced and clearly presented information about urban development. As Professor Peter Carolin observed, "The public consultation exercise was a most amazing piece of research, it proved to politicians that the general public is not as stupid as the tabloid press would have us believe" (personal communication).

Cambridge Futures was very influential. As well as having a major impact on development in the Cambridge area and the rest of the eastern region, the study also influenced thinking about how to engage stakeholders in planning the future. Prior to 1996, the four local authorities responsible for planning in the city – East Cambridgeshire, South Cambridgeshire, the City Council and the County Council – refused to confront the issue. The Futures study overcame local politicians' anxiety that the public were opposed to growth, and demonstrated that it was possible to engage a wide range of stakeholders in thinking strategically about the future. It also overcame the initial caution of planning officers who found the independence of Cambridge Futures was useful in rehearsing options before getting locked into the planning process.

By 2000, the logjam that had stifled growth in the region was broken. Peter Studdert, then Director of Environment and Planning at Cambridge City Council, said, "Cambridge Futures convinced people that if options were explained clearly then the general public were much less intransigent about change than might have been supposed... Although there are still matters of dispute, there is general agreement about the need for new land for housing and about development in the green belt" (personal communication).

The Cambridge Futures approach to enrolling stakeholders in local

democratic decision making represented a significant advance in engaging citizens, both opinion formers and the general public, in the planning process at a strategic level. A similar approach might usefully be adopted in other towns and cities and could be very useful in helping people think positively about change, in overcoming fear and opposition to development and in reaching a consensus about the way forward.

Housing Futures in South East England

Two ideas came out of Cambridge Futures. The first is that the public respond positively to clear options for change. The second is that a consortium of interest groups, if broadly based, working together can be a very powerful agent of change. The significant lesson to be drawn from Cambridge Futures is that, over the four years that the consortium met, the prevailing mindset about future development in the region completely swung from constraint to managed growth.

As a direct result of the success of Cambridge Futures, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation supported a wider survey of public opinion in the South East by CAR to canvass public reaction to building new houses in the region. Called Housing Futures, this study also found that the public were less opposed to growth than had been supposed. The study, published in 2004, tested the public's reaction to new housing in three towns in the South East: Aylesbury, Maidenhead and Medway (JRF, 2004). It attempted to answer two questions. First, if the consequences are explained clearly, what are people's reactions to different development options such as densification or extension into open land? And, second, what preferences do people have for different housing types and densities?

CAR developed the content of the survey with planners, housing providers and other interested parties in each of the three towns, together with a number of national experts in housing and planning. The main effort went into public exhibitions in shopping centres, libraries and hospitals. The survey was computer based and described the likely outcomes of each option in terms of housing supply, house prices, traffic congestion, loss of open land and access to services. There was a paper version for people who did not want to use one of the laptops. In total, over 1,400 people completed the survey and the pattern of age, employment and tenure of respondents in each town was similar to the 2001 Census.

The findings show that no single development option was favoured. Three development options were marginally more liked than disliked.

These were new town, urban extension and densification. Two options – village growth and new settlement – were less liked. The difference between new town and new settlement is one of size. New towns were defined as having at least 20,000 homes and new settlements as having 4,000 or less. Because the new town, urban extension and densification options were almost equally favoured, there seemed to be no blanket opposition to land being used for development, nor was there a strong preference for the use of brownfield over open land. The survey suggests that a balanced pattern of settlement for new housing in the South East would meet with most approval. The appropriate form of development would depend on the specific locality, but, overall, it was suggested spreading new development by building 25% of new homes in each of the three favoured options: infill, urban extension and new town and the remaining 25% in existing villages and new settlements.

The survey also asked about house type and density. Lower-density detached and semi-detached houses were the preferred house type. Although most people were opposed to high-density flats being built in their area, a substantial proportion (47%) found medium-density terraces acceptable and higher-density flats were acceptable to a minority (21%). Like the general population, most first-time buyers would like to live in a detached or semi-detached house. But a significant proportion would be prepared to live in higher-density flats (30%). The survey suggested a mix of new housing, with about 45% lower-density detached and semi-detached, 35% medium-density terraces and only about 20% higher-density flats. This mix of density would still meet the government's target of 30–50 dwellings per hectare.

The survey also tested people's general attitudes to growth and change. Respondents were almost evenly divided about whether they liked or disliked a policy of minimum growth and 31% were undecided. The evidence suggests that people would support new development in the South East if they were convinced that growth could be achieved without sacrificing quality of life. But people perceived the main problem to be affordability, not housing shortage. This is interesting given the evidence in the Barker Report (2004), which shows that the rate of housing completions has been declining steadily since 1967. This is almost entirely due to the demise of local authority housing. The rate of private sector new build has remained steady but the supply of social housing has dropped steadily, from about 50% of total completions up to the mid- to late 1970s to about 12% in 2002. The Barker Report makes a strong case for increasing the supply of housing

in the South East, but the message from Housing Futures is that the public still need to be convinced.

From talking to hundreds of people in the three towns, we know that people realise the negative effects of high house prices. The majority of us have a home and we are all 'nimbys' (Not-In-My-Backyard) to some extent. But high house prices affect everyone and people realise this. If we have children and their school cannot recruit good teachers, or if our local police force cannot retain experienced officers, then we are all affected. People make trade-offs between the benefits of growth and the impact on quality of life. In particular they favour options that reduce the distance to services. Although approval for new town development may, to some extent, be motivated by 'nimbyism', people also value the infrastructure that comes with larger-scale, planned development. Overall, marginally more people were in favour of change than were opposed to it. Only a third of people agreed that their town and surroundings should be kept the same and 40% agreed that their region must be allowed to grow. But over two thirds of respondents thought that, "Quality of housing is more important than quantity". This raises questions about what people mean by quality.

In summary there is opposition to housing development, but less than policy makers may have imagined. The public would, however, prefer housing development to be spread. They want some densification on brownfield sites but would like to see the majority of new housing on new open land. They also want a mix of house types, with about half of them detached or semi-detached with family gardens.

In conclusion, getting the public to engage with problems at a strategic level through proactive consultation was highly effective. When presented with information about a range of options, people made reasoned choices and compromises. Watching people rapt in thought, considering their answers carefully, one could not



Photograph 10.1:
Housing Futures survey

help conclude that they took the process seriously and that their answers were significant.

Urban Futures in Burnley and Luton

The final study was undertaken for Building Futures, a joint venture between the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) and the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). Called Urban Futures, it was conducted by CAR in collaboration with Eclipse Research Consultants (CABE and RIBA, 2005).

Over the next 20 years, many towns and cities will undergo considerable change, growing or declining, whether planned or unplanned. Government initiatives like the Sustainable Communities plan and housing market renewal are accelerating the rate of change in particular areas. Physical change in towns and cities is driven by a wide range of factors. And urban areas in different regions are being affected in different ways. In these circumstances, the capacity of decision makers and other stakeholders to anticipate and implement change is of crucial importance.

The study looked 10–20 years ahead and tried to envisage how urban regeneration might be achieved by focusing on two neighbourhoods – one in Luton in the growing South East, the other in Burnley in the North West with a declining population and struggling economy. Both towns are recipients of government regeneration funding and both are scenes of intense local government activity. The study reports people's aspirations and concerns. It describes the current regeneration initiatives and explores options for the future of the two neighbourhoods and towns. Most importantly it draws lessons from these two types of places – one with a buoyant economy and increasing population, the other with a struggling economy and declining population – about how to plan and implement urban futures more effectively.

The approach adopted was simple. Rather than try to quantify the factors that contribute to regeneration, the study set out to tell the 'story' about change in these two towns and neighbourhoods. Both towns were visited and the officers responsible for regeneration were interviewed. In each town, two or three neighbourhoods were suggested for study. In Burnley, Burnley Wood was chosen and in Luton, High Town was selected. Both are inner-city neighbourhoods with Victorian terraced housing and low-value commercial property.

In each town, people were carefully chosen to represent the three target audiences: policy makers, service providers and community



Photograph 10.2: Burnley town centre and Arndale Centre, Luton

members. From these selected interviewees, a broad range of stakeholder aspirations and concerns were identified. All the people that had been interviewed were invited to events billed as blue-skies workshops to explore the future of places like Burnley and Luton. It quickly became apparent that some way was required to make the wealth of material captured accessible to people coming to the workshops. An Urban Futures game was devised to provide a framework to help them think constructively about the future.



Photograph 10.3: Comparison of the two towns

Before thinking about the future, it is important to understand the contexts occupied by the two sets of workshop participants. Burnley became a centre of weaving in the 18th century and, along with many other towns in the North of England, grew rapidly in the 19th century. By 1886 there were 100,000 looms in the town, together with several coal pits and factories producing machinery and steam engines, and Burnley was the biggest producer of cotton cloth in the world. Burnley Wood is just over the canal from the Weaver's Triangle, next to the town centre. The new light engineering industries attracted to the town since the 1930s have nearly all gone. Since 1920 Burnley's population has steadily declined, at 2-3% a year, and in 2005 it was about 90,000. Luton was the centre of the hat industry located in Platters Lea and High Town, and as this declined the automotive industry took over. Recently Vauxhall closed down, but the economy, based on the airport and high-tech industry, is still buoyant. High Town is just over the railway line from the town centre. Luton saw an increase in population above national average between 1880-1980. And since 1980, population growth has been similar to the rest of the country and in 2005 it was 185,000, twice as big as Burnley.

The two towns are situated in very different regions. Burnley is in North East Lancashire, a region that has seen a steady decline in its population since 1920. Luton is in the prosperous South East and lies between two of the main growth areas in the country – the South

Midlands/Milton Keynes area and the M11 corridor. Most significantly Luton has excellent rail connections to London while in Burnley travellers have to change in Preston or Hebden Bridge to get to Manchester. Both neighbourhoods are 10 minutes' walk from their town centres but, because of geography and infrastructure, both feel isolated. Burnley Wood is to the south of the Leeds–Liverpool canal while High Town is to the north of the railway line.

At first sight Burnley and Luton seem quite different. Yet in both towns there are neighbourhoods, including Burnley Wood and High Town, among the 10% most deprived in the country. Both towns have areas of derelict commercial property and poor housing. And in both there are rundown areas of inner-city Victorian terraces and outer suburbs of 1960s council housing in desperate need of maintenance or renewal. Both towns have a poor image. Luton was voted the 'Worst Town in Britain' in an online poll of 20,000 people in 2004. Both towns also look gritty and rough. Both have the working-class feel of manufacturing towns in decline. Although unemployment is low in Burnley, there is a lot of 'make-work' – part-time, low-paid jobs – and that is reflected in average earnings. And, despite Burnley's notoriety, its Asian population is smaller than in Luton. In summary, the two towns have things in common. They both have similar small town inferiority complexes. They have similar low educational attainment and similar low aspirations and expectations. But they each have very different economic prospects.

What sets the two neighbourhoods of Burnley Wood and High Town in Luton apart is the state of the housing market. In Burnley there has been a significant fall in house prices. A standard 'two-up two-down' terraced house in Burnley Wood fetched about £25,000 in 1989. But when Philip Chew, the vicar at St Stephens, came to live

Table 10.1: The two towns compared (2005)

	Burnley	Luton	National
Population size	90,000	185,000	60 million
Population growth per year	declining 2-3%	national average	increasing 0.5%
Young people under 15 (%)	21	22	19
Asian minority (%)	7	18	4
Manufacturing employment (%)	30	20	14
Unemployment (%)	3.1	3.8	3.4
Annual earnings	£15,312	£24,970	£22,248
Burglary per 1,000 households	14	10	6
	(crime trend up)	(crime trend down)	(crime trend down)
Educational attainment	low	low	average

Table 10.2: Housing prices in the two towns compared (2005)

	Burnley Wood	High Town
2-3 bed terrace	£20,000	£135,000
3 bed semi	£94,000	£160,000
4 bed Edwardian	£150,000	£170,000
5 bed detached	£225,000	£250,000

there in 2002 you could buy a terraced house on a credit card. Currently compulsory purchase has fixed the going price at about £20,000. Yet within five minutes' walk there are houses on sale for a £250,000 and there are new infill terraces on Todmorden Road, on the edge of the neighbourhood, being built by a private developer that will sell for £200,000. In sharp contrast, in High Town the average price of a terraced house is £135,000. But the difference in the average price of semi-detached and larger houses is not nearly so marked. In a weak housing market, with a large excess supply, the least desirable housing can sink to very low values. As the market strengthens, previously undesirable housing can of course become desirable. In summary the two neighbourhoods have a lot in common. They have similar patterns of Victorian terraces and mixed uses. They both feel 'cut off' from the town centre. In both the occupants are a mix of 'transient' incomers and the remnants of a more stable community. But each has very different regeneration prospects.

Current initiatives

Given their 'deprived' status, there are wide-ranging government initiatives in the two towns. Only those related directly to regeneration of the selected neighbourhoods are described here. In Burnley, Burnley Wood is one of three Neighbourhood Action Areas sharing £15 million Elevate pathfinder funding from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Regeneration is being tackled through direct intervention in the housing market. In the short term, this will involve significant demolition and clearance. Whether it will produce benefits in the longer term is not clear, especially to the inhabitants of the neighbourhood. In Luton, High Town is one of five priority areas also sharing £15 million of Single Regeneration Budget and Objective 2 funding. The money is going into a new community centre and upgrading the high street. It is hoped that proximity to London and regional growth will deliver further regeneration. These sums look large. But to put them in perspective, £22 billion is earmarked for the Thames Gateway compared with £500 million for all nine pathfinders

in the North and Midlands. Admittedly, the growth area figure covers the provision of infrastructure, not just housing. But the comparison does indicate a different order of magnitude.

The thinking behind regeneration in both towns is to stimulate private investment. But the regeneration process is led by council officers whose main aim has been to win government funding. Once they have got it, they have to meet the often short-term milestones attached to it. Another problem is continuity. Regeneration takes a long while, perhaps as long as 20 years, but funding is time-limited and this can breed short-term thinking. There is also the issue of effective community engagement. There has been lots of consultation. In fact both communities speak of consultation fatigue. But, in both towns, decision making rests with the council whose main concern is, quite naturally, for the needs of the whole town, not just these two neighbourhoods.

The Urban Futures game

A novel feature of the study was the development of the Urban Futures game. The game was used to explore the aspirations and concerns of the inhabitants of both towns and to rehearse options for the future of the neighbourhoods selected as case studies.

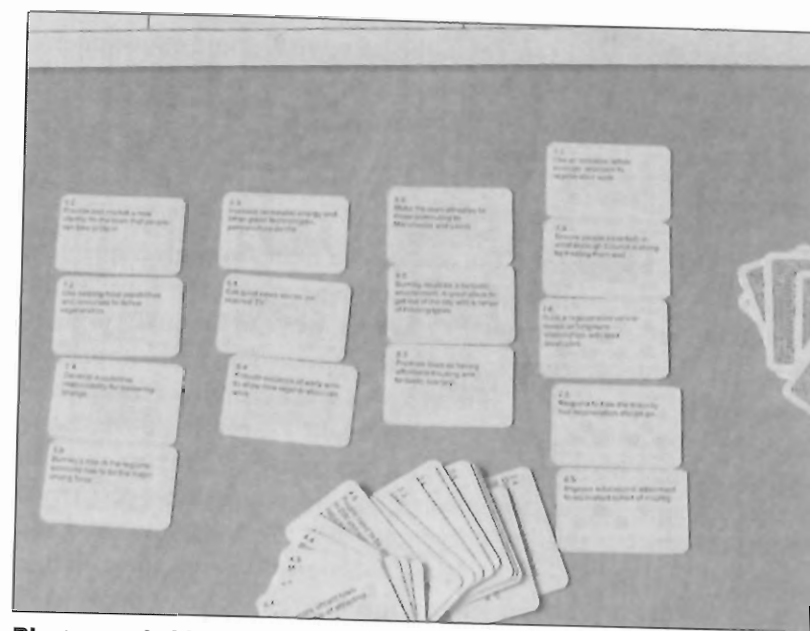
The Urban Futures game confronted stakeholders with their aspirations, concerns, options and their criteria for measuring the success of regeneration. Sets of playing cards were devised on which the aspirations and concerns voiced by interviewees were transcribed. Since people in Burnley and Luton have different aspirations and concerns, separate packs were made for each town. At the workshops, participants were asked to make choices by prioritising the cards. To record people's answers wall charts were designed in which the aspiration and concern choices were arranged in eight-by-six matrices. The column headings were labelled: people, housing, community, infrastructure, economy, education, process and leadership.

Neighbourhood regeneration in both towns is constrained by a need to meet short-term goals. So it was decided to devise options or scenarios to raise people's horizons. Our immersion in the two towns was used to develop four broad and generic options for how the case study neighbourhoods could be regenerated over the next 10-20 years. At the workshops, these options were used to promote a dialogue between stakeholders about what might be done. We drew on the interviews to identify a wide range of criteria that people thought should be used to judge whether regeneration had been successful



Photograph 10.4: People's priorities

People's priorities and preferences are recorded on wall charts



Photograph 10.5: Two sets of cards

Two sets of cards are used in the Urban Futures game, one for aspirations, the other for concerns

over this timescale. At the workshops, participants were asked to prioritise which criteria should be used to measure whether change had been successful in their neighbourhood. The game made the wealth of material collected and collated accessible to people coming to the workshop. It also made the process more enjoyable.

Aspirations

At first glance the spread of aspirations in the two towns looked similar. There are dots in all the columns of the wall chart that meant that there was a wide range of priorities in both towns. This complexity reflects what we learnt from the interviews – there are many ideas about regenerating these places and different people value different things. Nevertheless there were differences between the two towns. In Burnley the focus was on the economy and education columns, while in Luton it was on community, infrastructure and process. There were also clear areas of agreement and disagreement between different interest groups. In Burnley everyone agreed that regeneration depended on the regional economy. Policy makers/providers then chose aspirations that described current policy initiatives, while residents of Burnley Wood seemed to be thinking more holistically. In contrast, in Luton policy makers/providers were thinking more broadly in choosing to focus on the neighbourhood–town link and on continuity, while the community members chose issues closer to home that would improve the prospects of High Town.

Concerns

As one might expect from the diversity of aspirations given priority, there were widespread concerns about regeneration. In Burnley the overriding concern was about the economy while in Luton the primary focus was on infrastructure and the environment. This is not surprising. Burnley has a long history of false dawns and Luton has a tradition of poor architecture. In Burnley, as one might expect, both sides were concerned that the town will still be struggling in 20 years' time. In sharp contrast, however, policy makers/providers were more concerned about introducing aspiring households into the neighbourhood and raising the expectations of those who already live there, while community members were more concerned about the lack of vision and whether the current pathfinder programme, with its focus on housing market renewal, stood any chance of working. In Luton, policy makers/providers were most concerned about High Town's physical

Figure 10.1: Exercise 1 – aspirations

People	Housing	Community	Infrastructure	Economy	Education	Process	Leadership
1.1 Attract and retain dynamic young people	2.1 Have fewer but broader range of houses	3.1 Don't demolish, refurbish	4.1 Restore old mills and streets sympathetically and encourage conversion of mills into modern apartments	5.1 Establish the town as a major service centre for the area	6.1 Manage the transition from manufacturing to higher skilled service economy	7.1 Use an inclusive 'whole borough' approach to regeneration work	8.1 Get good news stories on regional TV
1.2 Create a more balanced community with a larger middle class	2.2 Push up house prices	3.2 Get rid of absentee private landlords	4.2 Make gateways into town attractive	5.2 Create more vibrant town centre capable of attracting department stores	6.2 Develop skilled service industry activities and small-scale creative industries	7.2 Use existing local capabilities and resources to deliver regeneration	8.2 Provide and market a new identity for the town that people can take pride in
1.3 Give existing residents first choice of new homes	2.3 Insist on adaptable high-quality housing using renewable energy	3.3 Upgrade communities by reducing crime, improving facilities and providing better transport	4.3 Maintain and preserve Victorian heritage and built environment	5.3 Increase renewable energy and other green technologies, permaculture centre	6.3 Deliver greater levels of educational choice	7.3 Ensure people have faith in what Borough Council is doing by treating them well	8.3 Promote town as having affordable housing and fantastic scenery
1.4 Provide houses and facilities to attract young families	2.4 Demolish areas of decline and return them to woodland	3.4 Regain the urban villages feel with local shops and where people care about each other	4.4 Regenerate neighbourhoods to benefit whole town, not just existing residents	5.4 Provide jobs to attract families into the area	6.4 Develop workforce skills through training programme with local colleges	7.4 Develop a collective responsibility for delivering change	8.4 Provide evidence of early wins to show how regeneration can work
1.5 Encourage gentrification of the housing stock	2.5 There will be a market for subsidised oversized jobs for people who can't afford to live in Manchester	3.5 Deliver mixed communities with greater breakdown in inter-area tensions	4.5 People need to be able to live in BW and walk down to the rapid transit station and be in Manchester in half an hour	5.5 Tackle poverty to reduce racism	6.5 Improve educational attainment to equivalent in rest of country	7.5 Respond to how the majority feel regeneration should go	8.5 Burnley could be a fantastic environment. A great place to get out of the city with a range of housing types
1.6 We will attract people by providing the sort of housing people want to live in and good schools	2.6 I know all the current thinking is about city living but people with kids want more space	3.6 Employ facilitators and residents for community building activities	4.6 The canal is the key to regenerating not only Burnley, but the surrounding area as well	5.6 Burnley's role in the regional economy has to be the major driving force	6.6 Greater university provision to attract and retain university students	7.6 Build a regeneration vehicle based on long-term relationships with lead developers	8.6 Make the town attractive to those commuting to Manchester and Leeds

and social isolation. They thought that people harked back to the past rather than looking positively to the future. People in the community put a more positive spin on this. They wanted a thriving neighbourhood with local shops where people took an active role in the community. Residents were also more concerned about the quality of life and worried about increasing density, which they saw as cramming people in.

In summary, in terms of aspirations and concerns, there were areas of agreement in both towns. The differences revolved around the balance between the needs of existing residents and the future of the town as a whole.

Options

A set of generic options was developed that, with some minor differences, we were able to use in both Burnley and Luton and which might be developed for use elsewhere. Figure 10.2 shows the set of options devised for High Town and Luton. We used the same options in Burnley, but the key features varied slightly. People were asked how much they liked or disliked each option individually and then to rank them as first, second and third choices.

At the workshops people were asked to assess the options for regenerating towns and neighbourhoods like theirs over the next 10–20 years. Despite the abstract nature of the options on offer, none of the participants had problems doing so. What was immediately striking is that no single option is favoured in either town. This means that the preferred solution is likely to be a package of measures. The danger of course is that the plan ends up as a mishmash of ideas trying to satisfy everyone.

In both towns all interest groups clearly preferred Option 3 *Small business incubator*. This obviously reflects their focus on education and the economy. They also liked Option 1 *Commuter village* that would exploit each town's relatively cheap housing and proximity to a major conurbation. Beyond this there are some differences. In Burnley, policy makers/providers preferred Option 4 *Design-led regeneration* while the community was prepared to consider Option 2 *Urban wood*. In Luton, perhaps because of the town's poor record in this area, both community members also prioritised Option 4 *Design-led regeneration*. At both workshops, the consultants responsible for the, as yet unfinished, master plans for each neighbourhood were very interested in and drew on these outcomes.

Figure 10.2: The set of options

Option 1: Commuter village

This option seeks to give opportunities to aspiring and dynamic young families to renovate existing terrace houses. It needs to be kick-started by public sector intervention but renovation is left to the private housing market supported by improvement grants.

This option provides a form of housing attractive to families while not presuming significant changes in local employment opportunities.



Key features

- Gentrification of existing terraces to provide affordable housing with 2 to 3 bedrooms with residential parking provision.
- Houses privately renovated and extended.
- Families with young children move into the area.
- Effective crime and antisocial behaviour initiatives undertaken.
- Households typically involved in commuting to London or within Milton Keynes/South Midlands

Option 2: Urban wood

This option tries to address the current lack of green space close to the town centre directly by providing outdoor leisure amenities to the rest of the town while holding the neighbourhood in abeyance as a public asset against future development.

This option also promotes the town as a leisure destination.



Key features

- Removal of existing commercial development and extension of existing town park to the town centre.
- Demolition returns area to pre-industrialisation status.
- Outdoor leisure pursuits promoted in conjunction with new community centre.
- Green lifestyles promoted through recycling facilities.
- Town promotes itself as a centre for sustainable lifestyles.

Figure 10.2: The set of options (continued)

Option 3: Small business incubator

This option tries to address the current imbalance in residential and commercial land values. It seeks to stimulate the regeneration of the neighbourhood's commercial area through attracting a more highly skilled workforce.

This option attempts to manage the transition from a low-skill, low-wage industrial economy to a high-skill, high-wage knowledge economy to support regeneration of the high street with specialist shops, cafes and bars.



Key features

- Reinvention of the image and purpose of the area by development of an attractive location for small-scale businesses.
- Adjoining innovation incubator supported by outpost university teaching and research facilities.
- Aligned with a skills training programme in local colleges.
- Incentives for new businesses and developers.
- Rise in skill levels and average wages.

Option 4: Design-led regeneration

This option recognises the value of good design and its role in regeneration. It places high-quality design and innovation at the heart of thinking and action and involves the creativity of the local community in its planning.



Key features

- Regeneration led by an iconic building, structure or work of art.
- Emphasis on the use of high-quality design as a social and economic generator.
- Focus on liveable environment with street designs to encourage social contact and usable green space.
- Draws on contributions across the mixed community integrating inputs from all ages, social and ethnic groups.
- Mixture of innovative new design and enhanced local heritage and distinctiveness.

Success criteria

The final exercise at the workshops considered the success factors people would use to measure whether change has been effective in 10 or 20 years' time. Although there were differences between the two towns, strikingly there was much more consensus about success criteria, in other words, about where people want to get to, than about aspirations and concerns. In Burnley the focus was on the education, economy and process columns, while in Luton the focus was on community and the economy. In Burnley both interest groups focused on educational attainment and the socioeconomic status of future inhabitants. In Luton both groups chose quality of life issues and pride in the town. The game identified real opportunities here for consensus building. From this it would be possible to build an agreed platform about the way forward and also to identify areas of conflict that needed to be harnessed positively to bring about successful regeneration.

Using options to manage change

Futures methods are largely absent from the toolbox currently being used for urban regeneration and neighbourhood renewal. Yet their effective use could help to mitigate many of the shortcomings identified in the Urban Futures study. The use of cards to represent stakeholders' aspirations and concerns makes sorting and prioritising them fun. But the cards are also democratic. They mean that everybody's voice is brought to the table, anonymously, for joint consideration. Displaying participants' individual choices via wall charts is a good way of making opinions transparent, and aggregating these helps to identify shared and unshared preferences. This aids consensus building as well as signposting areas of conflict that have to be managed positively.

Options are a powerful way of engaging policy makers/providers and the community in thinking about the longer-term future of neighbourhoods and towns. They offer an early opportunity to explore possible futures and to help people to make leaps of the imagination. Options can be employed to clarify the range of hard choices available that confront a community. They can be selected to give voice to all the types of stakeholder involved and to illustrate the underlying motives and intentions, fears and aspirations of each of these groups, regardless of their current power to impose their own preferred solutions. For instance, options can be chosen so that they make explicit what is cherished in a locality and what is seen as expendable.

Options should be based on realistic but aspirational assumptions

and tested against economic, social and environmental criteria to identify the option that performs robustly against all three criteria. Any option that performs well on some, but badly on others, should be viewed with suspicion. Options can be used to test the viability of proposals over an extended period of time – for example, beyond the current generation handing over to the next. They can also be employed to expand the scale and the scope of what might be done. Any option preferred by stakeholders can be treated as a desired end state. Backcasting techniques can then be employed to identify what needs to happen for this desired future to be brought about successfully. Finally, stakeholders can use their judgement to make an impact assessment of the options. The key issues are: what timescale does the option operate over? Can its implementation be phased? What are the costs and benefits? Who bears these? What might stop the option happening? In this way a probability ranking might be assigned to each option.

Using a range of options prevents participants rushing to a ‘lowest common denominator’ shared vision. Options help keep the choices available open for longer. They can also clarify the goals that lie behind these choices and the means of achieving them. And this can happen before goals become buried beneath physical proposals in master plans and before funding begins. Options can also help stakeholders to break free of short-termism and grapple with a longer-term view of what could happen. They can help untangle the complexity of choices and delivery mechanisms – holding them up for comparison, weighing them against each other. As a result, options are a useful mechanism for building consensus and for harnessing conflicts so that they can be exploited positively. If this clarity is absent and plans push ahead without stakeholder support, then there is a strong chance that a regeneration programme will fail. If carefully selected, options can be used to explore innovative solutions and the front-end contribution from developers currently absent in both towns. And finally, in line with Building Futures’ remit, options can be used to raise awareness of the issue of design quality that has yet to become part of the general currency for negotiating urban futures.

Taken together, the aspirations, concerns, options and success criteria provided workshop participants with a framework within which to explore possible futures for their town and neighbourhood. Playing the Urban Futures game in Burnley and Luton showed that people from different sides of the process – policy makers, service providers and members of the community – are able to talk about their aspirations and concerns and discuss options for the future in a constructive way.

This experience provides lessons for elsewhere about how to manage both growth and downsizing. The workshops clearly demonstrated how a broader shared platform for managing change could be built for urban regeneration and neighbourhood renewal in both of the case study towns.

There is an apocryphal tale about Burnley Alderman Tony Gallagher taking a deputation to London in the 1960s to demand government investment in jobs. Harold Macmillan said that towns have disappeared throughout history and it was not the government’s job to try and stem the tide. Gallagher said that 100,000 people cannot just disappear and that Burnley demanded the same investment as people in the South. Burnley gained a new shopping centre, an inner ring road and new industry, industry that has now all gone.

Towns like Burnley and Luton have to start from where they are now. Other places have shown that the damage of the 1960s can be repaired and these studies demonstrate that enlightened leadership, that is prepared to engage with different interest groups, can develop a joint vision of the future.

Conclusion

A number of principles involved in deliberative decision making underlie all three studies reported in this chapter (Institute for Global Ethics, 2005). In each case, they work by providing people with a framework for thinking about the future. They do this, principally, by offering a range of options for consideration. They also attempt to involve stakeholders from a wide variety of interest groups in discussing issues at a strategic level. The frameworks provided promote clarity by offering a strong but sensitive structure within which to discuss complex issues.

The process has the following steps:

- establish a *forum*: that brings stakeholders from different interest groups together;
- devise a *framework*: that clarifies and provides a structure for effective discussion and testing of the issues raised by these stakeholders;
- devise *options*: that map out solutions and promote dialogue and negotiation pointing to a shared platform for moving forward; and
- report *preferences* and *priorities*: that help create a positive and proactive climate of opinion about the future.

There is a democratic impulse underlying this approach. The Urban Futures game, for instance, temporarily suspends the normal distribution of power between stakeholders that exists outside the context of the workshop. The cards that summarise people's aspirations and concerns help bring everyone's voice to the table. The engagement process creates a common platform that can be built on by stakeholders and used to identify, and if necessary to isolate, those areas of disagreement that need to be dealt with further.

Similar lessons can be drawn from all three of the studies. What they each show is that, provided with a well-structured discussion space, constructive dialogue between stakeholders can be influential in altering the climate of opinion about change and development. There is currently a huge amount of public consultation about urban development and regeneration in the UK, but there is little effective engagement with citizens at a strategic level. These studies show that, if presented with well-grounded information about a range of options, people are quite capable of making reasoned choices and trade-offs and are often far less negative about change and redevelopment than politicians and council officers assume.

Democracy, we think, means engaging citizens in deciding strategy and having a voice in making hard choices. And democracy, we believe, is an essential ingredient in the genius necessary for dealing with change and for a town to reinvent itself.

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