



## In-depth review of sustainable communities policy

Report on the Area Based Assessment of the East Lancashire Housing Market Renewal Area – Elevate East Lancashire.

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# Introduction

CAG Consultants were appointed by the Sustainable Development Commission to undertake an in-depth review of sustainable communities policy (the SCP and subsequent linked policy). The aims of the review were to: -

1. Investigate if and how the delivery of sustainable communities policy has helped to make communities more sustainable.
2. Learn lessons about how delivery of sustainable communities policy could better support the achievement of more sustainable communities.
3. Learn lessons about how to absorb the aims of the UK sustainable development strategy into government policy and practice more generally.

The review focuses on two proposals at the heart of the SCP – Housing Market Renewal Areas (HMRAs) and Growth Areas. It had two components:

1. A review of national policies on the Sustainable Communities Plan (SCP) and any existing performance assessments of sustainable communities policy by Government Departments and independent bodies.
2. Four area based assessments. Two in Growth Areas (Barking & Dagenham and South Cambridgeshire) and two in Housing Market Renewal Areas (East Lancashire and Newcastle / Gateshead).

This document is one of four reports on the area based assessments and presents our findings for the Housing Market Renewal Area of East Lancashire with particular focus given to the development area of Bank Top.

There is a separate report which draws together the conclusions from the area based assessments and national policy research.

# The area

The East Lancashire Housing Market Renewal Area, focused on Inner North West Blackburn and Bank Top in particular, was chosen for study because it represents an example of one of the largest HMRA pathfinder programmes, and is in an area of medium sized settlements with predominantly privately owned housing. This in contrast to some other HMRA that are located within large conurbations and have a high proportion of social housing. Situated in the North West, the HMRA area is characterised by a series of individual sites centred on the towns of Blackburn, Darwen, Accrington, Church, Clayton, Burnley, Padiham, Brierfield, Nelson, Colne, Bacup and Stacksteads. This amounts to 85,000 properties in the pathfinder area.

80% of the housing stock in the HMRA area is privately owned. Much is owner-occupied but there is a significant proportion of privately rented housing. Housing choice is seen as limited with two-thirds of the housing stock being terraced with the majority being 2 bedroom dwellings. 24% of homes are deemed to be 'unfit' compared to 7% in the country as a whole, with a similar proportion again in a state of disrepair.<sup>1</sup>

The Index of Deprivation notes that East Lancashire has five of the thirty worst wards for 'housing' nationally. Together with the problems of community cohesion, poor health, educational attainment and access, these conditions are seen as the primary causes and follow on results of the declining and poorly performing housing market.

East Lancashire is currently experiencing a relatively stagnant period in economic growth, and is behind both the wider Central Lancashire City Region and North West as a whole (Northern Way Business Plan, NWRA, 2005)<sup>2</sup>. The reliance on traditional industries is decreasing but not to the extent that it is improving the overall income of the resident population. High skills employers are located in the area, but they are not related to areas of low value housing (KPMG / GVA, 2005)<sup>3</sup>. Commuting patterns (see below) are relatively short and concentric with little evidence of extended trips beyond the locality; housing standards are directly linked to low wages and the structure of the immediate local economy.

For this HMRA, we have chosen to focus in detail on the Bank Top area in Inner North West Blackburn. The area has a significant Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) population and has previously been in receipt of support through the Bank Top Renewal Area programme. This 'follow on' support through the Renewal Area and HMRA programmes is a characteristic of certain areas in East Lancashire and has affected housing renewal rates at different levels. This issue is discussed later in this area report.

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Transformational Agenda: Housing Market Renewal in East Lancashire Scheme Update 2006-2019' Elevate

<sup>2</sup> Northern Way Steering Group, *Moving Forward: The Northern Way Business Plan 2005-08* (2005)

<sup>3</sup> KPMG and GVA Grimley, *Elevate East Lancashire Economic Analysis* (2005)

In most areas, as with Bank Top, replacement homes are proposed to replace the worst existing properties with the remainder to be extensively refurbished.

The table below summarises progress in the whole HMRA area and plans for the scheme to 2019.

	<b>Actual to August 05</b>	<b>Target to March 06</b>	<b>Target 2006/7 to 2018/2019</b>
Homes demolished	387	790	6679
Homes acquired	597	846	
New homes constructed or converted	0	131	7618
Homes refurbished	1019	1195	6723

From: *The Transformational Agenda: Housing Market Renewal in East Lancashire*, Scheme Update 2006 to 2019, Elevate East Lancashire.

In Bank Top to date:

- 103 homes have been cleared, to be replaced by;
- 14 homes for rent through the Housing Association;
- 43 homes for sale.

In Blackburn as a whole:

- 775 properties have received funding for improvements;
- With the demolition of 396 'sub-standard' properties.<sup>4</sup>

The HMRA delivery body 'Elevate' was established in 2003. They have close strategic links with each of the regional bodies tasked and responsible for regeneration in the North West. The head of the Housing Intervention Team at Government Office North West sits on an Elevate working group managing regulatory reform orders. This close co-operation is seen as a good model of interaction which allows Elevate and various local bodies to consider strategic issues when making local decisions.

The North West Development Agency have a representative on the Elevate governing body. They fund and support specific interventions in the area's economy and housing market. Investment from NWDA is significantly below that of the other HMRA's in the North West and this issue is discussed later in this area report.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.elevate-eastlancs.co.uk/blackburn.html>

It is important to note at this stage the significant differences between the East Lancashire HMRA and the work of Elevate, and the other HMRA Pathfinder areas in the North West. The East Lancashire HMRA covers five local authority areas (Blackburn with Darwen, Hyndburn, Pendle, Ribble Valley Burnley) with these being either unitary (Blackburn with Darwen) or district authorities as in the case of Ribble Valley. The North West's other HMRAs lie in single Unitary Authority areas, as in the case of Manchester Salford.

This partly explains why Elevate has been established as a stand-alone private limited company covering the HMRA as a whole. The other HMRAs in the North West have been established as subsidiary elements of their local authority, often closely linked to the authority's regeneration section. In East Lancashire the decision was taken to position Elevate across the local authorities to ensure that the area and the communities within it were treated fairly and to enable Elevate to act as a strategic lead for housing market regeneration in the area with clear mechanisms for local authority input and interaction with the HMRA process.

It is important at this stage to highlight perceived tensions in the twin issues of design standards and development profits and financial returns. Stakeholders have noted that the relatively small size of current developments bring with them lower returns on investment when land reclamation costs and general economies of scale are considered. Increased design standards and associated costs mean that profits are reduced, decreasing the relative attraction of development sites in East Lancashire. The need has been recognised to increase the overall size of sites to increase developer returns. This will have a knock-on affect on development timescales and the preservation of period properties, a particular concern in Blackburn and across the region as a whole.<sup>5</sup> Elevate are attempting to address this issue through the development of ADF's (Area Design Frameworks) for communities in East Lancashire to increase the mix of renovated and 'new build' properties. This does affect achievement of energy efficiency standards (see below). These will also 'lock' developers into agreements on the relative proportion of affordable homes vs. market housing for sale, supporting the aims of the NWRSS to increase overall housing mix (Policy L3). Move relevant bits into energy and housing sections. This overarching issues spans several discussion areas and is discussed in detail at several points in this area assessment.

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<sup>5</sup> The MJ, July 2006

# Main findings

## Active, inclusive and safe

### Community cohesion and identity

Stakeholders suggest that the area defined as 'East Lancashire' is a construct developed to enable to regeneration of key deprived communities in Blackburn, the Ribble Valley and Pendle. Whilst this provides a mechanism by which funding and support for the regeneration of the housing market may be distributed, the area does not seem to accord with the notions of community expressed by residents in the HMRA. Areas such as Salford, Merseyside, Oldham and Trafford are distinct communities which are mirrored by the local authority boundaries in the area. This commonality between local authority, HMRA and community boundaries is seen as being of considerable benefit when communicating with the community and private developers.

East Lancashire is not seen in the same way by the community. The HMRA area is based on socio-economic issues, topography and politics; the concern is that the communities of East Lancashire do not recognise the area in the same way as other communities in HMRA in the North West.<sup>6</sup>

Development boundaries to date in East Lancashire have tended to mirror clearly defined boundaries historically recognised by the community. Bank Top, the development chosen for further examination as part of this review, is recognised as a clearly defined area close to the centre of Blackburn with a predominantly BME community. The area has complementary services including sites for healthcare and education and stakeholders argue that identifying development sites along boundaries already defined by the local community assists in gaining developer interest. Where a developer can see clear links to the local community, Elevate argue that they are more likely to be convinced of the likelihood of receiving appropriate return on their investment.

The positive experience gained in Bank Top of using this 'community' approach to defining development sites in Area Development Frameworks (ADFs) is highlighted by the choice of the Ashworth area for redevelopment. Unlike Bank Top, properties in this area will be demolished for replacement with new build properties. The area is however based on existing community boundaries and the approach chosen for redevelopment reflects the differing desires and opinions of residents compared to Bank Top.

Elevate have established a 'Transformational Agenda'. This is focussing on changing people's life chances, in part through the development of higher value employment opportunities. Housing development and regeneration is one aspect of this agenda alongside objectives for educational attainment and employment. The overall aim is to develop a wider 'community' which is able to sustain a higher quality of housing stock

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<sup>6</sup> Elevate East Lancashire (Elevate), *A Profile of East Lancashire and the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder* (2003)



with a reduced level of outside financial support. This 'Transformational Agenda' is discussed later in this area report.

### Community safety

Community safety and crime issues are, like many other urban and metropolitan areas, of critical concern to the resident population. Pendle Borough Council, in conjunction with Elevate conducted research into resident attitudes to crime and personal safety. This research highlights the different attitudes to crime across East Lancashire and demonstrates the need for differing approaches to community issues across the HMRA.

Ribble Valley is seen as a predominantly 'safe' part of the HMRA with 63.6%<sup>7</sup> of the population strongly agreeing or agreeing that they feel 'safe' in their neighbourhood. Residents of Blackburn however feel, on average, less safe with 56% of residents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the same statement.

This research commissioned in 2004 has yet to be updated. However examining Lancashire County Council's MADE database shows that recorded crime levels are reducing. Between April 2002 and March 2003 there were 7 domestic burglaries per 1000 people in Lancashire as a whole, 9 in Blackburn and 10 in Burnley.<sup>8</sup> The same survey data for the period April 2005 to March 2006 shows a substantial decrease in recorded crime with 4 burglaries per 1000 in as a whole Lancashire, 6 in Blackburn and 6 in Burnley.<sup>9</sup>

Elevate have set out design principals for developers through their 'Common Agenda' which sets out criteria for developers. This includes guidance on both internal and external security measures to 'design in' security. It states

- *'Active frontages should be provided to public spaces and footpaths along water courses should be overlooked by adjacent buildings;*
- *Windows should be provided to both elevations which turn corners;*
- *Access points to the rear of buildings should be should be kept to a minimum and controlled;*
- *Footpaths and cycleways should provide a clear forward view with any changes in direction being gradual;*
- *New developments and refurbishment should address community safety issues; and*
- *New developments should use well designed lighting to emphasise the character and identity of the neighbourhood selecting appropriate fittings and locations to reduce the fear and incidence of crime*

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<sup>7</sup> Citizens' Panel Survey 'Living & Working in East Lancashire' (Q13), Pendle Borough Council/ Elevate East Lancashire, 2004

<sup>8</sup> Lancashire County Council - MADE database, April 2002 - March 2003

<sup>9</sup> Lancashire Council - MADE database, April 2005 - March 2006

- *Where boundary treatments to public areas are unavoidable then the design needs to be robust, attractive and effective; and*
- *Footpaths and cycleways should be illuminated in built-up areas except where routes pass through ecologically sensitive areas, in which case an alternative lit route should be provided'*

When considering the internal security of both refurbished and 'new-build properties, developers are required to ensure that:

- *'Household security should be in accordance with the detailed specification set out in 'Secured by Design'<sup>10</sup>*

## Well run

### Community engagement

As discussed in the previous section, Elevate work across five local authority areas and are structured as a public limited company. This strategic position allows Elevate to plan, manage and implement housing market renewal on an area-wide basis but stakeholders also expressed concern that operating at this level may adversely affect the maintenance and management of local community engagement mechanisms in East Lancashire.

It is important to recognise the significant differences between the HMRA in the North West. Many, such as Salford /Manchester and Merseyside, have arisen out of previous regeneration programmes. These have built on existing mechanisms for community and developer engagement and the structure of the local authority sector in their area may be particularly conducive to regeneration across local authority boundaries; departments may have joint working groups for example. Elevate have begun regenerating the Housing Market in East Lancashire by establishing new mechanisms for engagement and consultation with the community and local government; the time required to establish these new ways of working has meant that the area is only now beginning to 'bear fruit' compared to its established HMRA neighbours in the region.

To facilitate community engagement in regeneration activity and the HMRA, Elevate has an engagement strategy. The Audit Commission review of Elevate suggested that Local Authority awareness of the strategy is limited but the broad principles and approach of the strategy is consistent with the work of the five HMRA local authorities.<sup>11</sup>

To overcome the potential difficulties in managing community engagement exercises across 5 local authority areas Elevate has established and funded neighbourhood management teams. These teams, under the strategic direction of Elevate, and working within the local authority are responsible for managing engagement and consultation

<sup>10</sup> Elevate East Lancashire 'Common Agenda'

<sup>11</sup> Audit Commission - Elevate East Lancashire, Market Renewal Inspection Report 2006

exercises which run in parallel with preparation of the HMRA ADFs. These teams work together with the individual HMR teams within each of the local authorities to deliver the objectives of Elevate's Community Engagement Strategy when working against development objectives in a particular ADF. It is the responsibility of the individual Neighbourhood Management and HMR teams to manage consultation and engagement exercises in parallel with developments set out in the ADF. Preferred mechanisms and techniques for engagement are set out in the strategy and each area ADF will show clear linkages to the Neighbourhood Management Strategy for each Neighbourhood Management Area. Where appropriate, the Neighbourhood Management Team will establish a partnership for a particular development between the community, developers and the local authority.<sup>12</sup> Community engagement projects of note include:

- The training of local residents to undertake consultation in Bacup and Stacksteads;
- Support for young people to design their own Youth Shelter;
- Encouragement for young people through the Spacelift urban design project, in understanding urban design and town planning issues; and
- The use of 3D visualisation software in Blackburn and Darwen.

Elevate have also introduced 'Community Impact Assessments' in Burnley. These are aimed at identifying vulnerable residents and assessing the impact of the proposed scheme and development work on community facilities such as health centres and schools.

Stakeholders argue that the need for action such as this is well founded. Pendle Borough Council's Citizen's Panel commissioned research on living and working in East Lancashire. Residents were asked to consider whether or not they felt they 'belonged' in the Borough Council area. Between 47.32% (Ribble Valley) and 38.42% (Pendle) felt that they did 'belong'.<sup>13</sup> Stakeholders argue that these low levels of 'belonging' heighten the need for community engagement which actively involves residents in decision making.

### Delivery partnerships

A number of the local partners have highlighted a potential mismatch between regional economic agendas and the Elevate transformational agenda. In particular, they have characterised the North West Regional Development Agency strategy as evidenced

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<sup>12</sup> Elevate East Lancashire '*Community Engagement Strategy*' 2005

<sup>13</sup> Citizens' Panel Survey 'Living & Working in East Lancashire' (Q9) Pendle Borough Council/ Elevate East Lanc's 2004

through the regional economic strategy (RES) and development of the Central Lancashire city region work as being essentially opportunities-driven and look towards Preston in the west whilst Elevate's housing programmes are more needs-driven, although not exclusively, and focused on East Lancashire. Stakeholders argue that Elevate and its partners will need to devote even greater resources to influencing those economic agendas going forward but that will be more difficult without a stronger sub-regional mechanism being in place.

At a strategic level, Elevate's interaction with key stakeholders is defined by a communications strategy. Whilst this sets out parameters and guidance for engagement with the media and key strategic organisations, Elevate and the five East Lancashire local authorities have noted the difficulty in resolving the often significant tension between acting as a local delivery body and strategic advocate for the area. Since its inception, Elevate and its local authority partners took the decision to clearly demarcate the boundaries between strategic decision making and local delivery. In 2006 Elevate, the five borough and district authorities, Lancashire County Council and Blackburn and Darwen as a Unitary Authority established 'Elchex' the East Lancashire Chief Executives Group. This group will take the lead on strategic issues such as transport and access investment through liaison with national and regional bodies such as Network Rail in lobbying for investment in infrastructure such as the rail network which will be complementary to the aims and objectives of developments progressed by Elevate and the local authorities.

Elchex does not yet have a significant track record with the detailed structure of the group, its terms of reference and aims and objectives still to be formulated. It is however a positive response by the key agencies responsible for regeneration in East Lancashire to the problem of 'marrying' the strategic lobbying functions of seeking inward investment in major infrastructure with the local need to progress often small scale development projects. For Elevate, as a limited company without the scale and scope of other local authority based HMRA's, stakeholders see Elchex as a pragmatic solution to this problem. It is also argued that this will go some way towards providing support to the 'Transformational Agenda' as a mechanism for sub-regional interaction.

## Environmentally sensitive

Elevate have prepared a Sustainability Framework establishing good design and development principles that Elevate would like developers to meet. These principles are not binding and do not set minimum standards, however Elevate believe that they are influencing local authority planning decisions and Environmental Impact Assessments of local authority led developments of facilities complementary to new housing such as schools and leisure facilities.

To progress key developments within the HMRA, Elevate has established 'preferred developer' agreements with private developers for individual sites. These agreements

are based on competitive tender and guidance to developers is released in advance of the Invitation to Tender. This guidance, which sits within Elevate's overall Sustainability Framework, includes Elevate's 'Guidance to Achieving Eco-Homes for new build and refurbishments' and a note on sustainable building practice for the East Lancashire area building on regional guidance published by Sustainability North West.

Developer masterplans submitted for individual sites are assessed according to the criteria. Therefore, Elevate stress that high environmental design standards are considered prior to the masterplanning stage to ensure that good principles are considered from the outset. Given the slow pace of new build in East Lancashire, information on the actual standards that will be achieved is not yet available.

### Climate change

The most high-profile and accessible information on energy efficiency and climate change adaptation in building and home design in the HMRA is contained within Elevate's Sustainability Framework and developer principles.

Masterplans will go through a Sustainability Appraisal and take into account the guidance set out in Elevate's Sustainability Framework. This will examine points related to energy efficiency and climate change adaptation and Elevate argue that this process has been successful in exerting influence on lead developer partners. As stated elsewhere in this area assessment, anecdotal evidence from discussions with developers suggests that meeting the standards set out within the 'Eco-Homes' standard is now seen as 'meat and drink' to the building industry. A concern of the NWRA however is that there is no rigorous assessment of this framework to determine its affect and influence on private developments for release to the market.

The challenge working across a 2 tier local authority structure is to ensure that influence can be brought to bear both at the strategic policy level but also directly with lead developers and at a local level when drawing up policy guidance. Ensuring that Elevate's Sustainability Framework is introduced across 6 (each of the 5 HMRA districts and Lancashire County Council as the 'shire' county in some parts of the HMRA) (thought is was 5) local authorities at the three levels of intervention outlined above is a challenge for Elevate as highlighted by the Audit Commission in 2006. It is encouraging to note that in respect of transport infrastructure and the adaptation of designs to accommodate the effects of Climate Change, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council has developed a subsidiary element to their Sustainability Appraisal framework for transport infrastructure in their Local Development Framework.

The concern of stakeholders at the regional level is that the capacity needed to progress this standard of appraisal of key issues such as climate change adaptation on a scheme by scheme basis is not available across the whole HMRA area; as a Unitary Authority, Blackburn with Darwen is able to draw on the structural advantages of having appropriate staff together to undertake appraisals of this type. Unfortunately, the HMRA programme in East Lancashire is not yet at a position where the actual implications on the ground of this issue can be assessed but this would certainly be an area to explore in greater detail later in the life of the programme.

There is a feeling among some stakeholders that the lowest common denominator is being used in defining standards for private developers, in order to make developments financially attractive, and that this is resulting in poor performance against the RSS Objective L3 (NWRSS) to make homes energy efficient. Again, this is partly seen as a function of existing house prices and incomes within the HMRA.

The same is also true of decisions about demolition and housing refurbishment. The Regional 'Decent Homes Standard', which sets out regional good practice for the decisions on the replacement and refurbishment of housing (based upon national guidance), sets out four principle criteria by which houses are assessed as being 'fit for purpose'. This includes "reasonable degree of thermal comfort" but does not set targets from achieving minimum standards of energy efficiency.<sup>14</sup>

### Water supply

Elevate's guidance for developers released in advance of an Invitation to Tender for developments includes standards for efficient water use, both internally and externally. It notes:

- For internal water use – The use of grey water systems, low flow rate utilities and showers, auto shut-off systems and rainwater recycling; and
- For external water use – The use of a rainwater collection system.

Developer masterplans submitted for individual sites were assessed according to the above criteria and points awarded for the use of the above technology. Therefore, Elevate stress that high environmental design standards for water use and supply were considered prior to the masterplanning stage to ensure that good principles for water use, as well as other issues such as energy efficiency were considered from the outset. It is still too early to assess how well these will be implemented.

### Flood risk and drainage

For the North West as a whole flood-risk is a critical issue, principally relating to the location of the Salford HMRA close to the River Mersey. These developments have shown that without proper planning, considerable remediation measures are required to address flood risk. Regional stakeholders are concerned that the immediacy of housing pressures overwhelms good planning principles and practice in choosing long-term, suitable locations. Some of these issues have only been identified after HMRA boundaries have been defined.

Flood Risk is less of an issue in East Lancashire, principally due to the topography of the local area. However, there is concern at the regional level, and recognition within Elevate, that silt run-off during the build phase of development work is of considerable concern. The relatively narrow watercourses in the locality may not be able to handle

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<sup>14</sup> *Delivering decent homes in the private sector: Guidance for implementation in the North West*, North West Regional Housing Board, April 2006.



run-off from exposed brown-field sites without either management of run-off or upgrading of local drainage.

Flood Risk due to flash floods, rather than building on the flood plain is an issue in East Lancashire, with insurance cover refusals due to flash flood risk higher than the national and regional average.<sup>15</sup> Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDs) is therefore being promoted to developers on developments of all sizes to ensure that rainfall is dealt with 'at source' rather than relying on local watercourses to take up increases in rainfall. Filtration trenches are being installed to deal with on-site silt run-off from the relatively sandy soils in East Lancashire.

Sustainable Urban Drainage is progressed through the Sustainability Framework process outlined previously in this report under the discussion on climate change. Sustainability North West have established key indicators for criteria for the use and implementation of design features appropriate to energy and water use for what? including SUDs. The Sustainable Development Group within Sustainability North West has Local Authority and HMRA representation. This is an attempt to develop a consistent approach to the introduction of SUDs.

The actual deployment of SUD within individual development sites is difficult to quantify. As stated previously, the HMRA process is only now beginning to show actual change on the ground following extensive work to establish key structures at a strategic level. Also, developments to date have tended to focus on the re-furbishment of homes, with actual work varying from the replacement of windows to the complete re-furbishment of houses. Therefore, the actual use of SUD is very low given that to date work on properties has not taken a completely new approach to the drainage systems of a development.

The development of Bank Top has however included the re-modelling of the streetscape to implement a 'homezone' (extensive streetscape remodelling to give greater emphasis to the needs of pedestrians). This re-modelling work has used some aspects of SUD in its design.

### **Greenfield land, greenbelt, biodiversity & countryside**

East Lancashire is recognised as being an area of particularly high value Greenfield land and countryside. Indeed, in a survey of its citizen's panels, Pendle Borough Council with Elevate found that between 29.55% (Hyndburn) and 39.47% (Ribble Valley) of the residents of East Lancashire had moved to the area specifically because of its landscape and greenspace features.<sup>16</sup>

There is a strong push in East Lancashire to build on the perceived 'liveability' of the surrounding environment through maximising use of brown-field sites close to recreational areas. Strategic direction from The North West Regional Housing Board

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<sup>15</sup> GVA Grimley, '*Elevate East Lancashire – the Housing Market Assessment*' (2005)

<sup>16</sup> Citizens' Panel Survey - '*Living and Working in East Lancashire*' (Q22), Pendle Borough Council/ Elevate East Lanc's 2004

recognises the local environment as a key commodity in attracting inward investment to developments.

HMRA's in the North West operate across a number of different types of urban and semi-urban environments. High density terraced housing in Merseyside covers a potentially greater development area at approximately 70dph<sup>17</sup>. Whilst housing styles may be similar in East Lancashire, overall density is lower due to the smaller size of overall communities. Elevate have therefore set variable dwelling density rates to individual communities and landscape types to maximise the available use of space and provide acceptable returns on private investment. Bank Top has been defined as a development of housing at 55dph.

There is little evidence at this stage to suggest that the HMRA in East Lancashire is attracting additional population. This is partly a function of low wages, housing quality and service access. This issue is covered in detail later in the report.

There is recognition that targeted clearance is needed to reduce the proportion of high density terraced homes to lower vacancy levels and allow for the development of a more varied 'mix' of housing stock. This is allowing developers to increase the perceived value of their development through the retention of new 'green-space' increasing the desirability of developments<sup>18</sup> and reducing the pressure on surrounding green-space.

It is important to note that several wider proposals contained within the HMRA 'Transformational Agenda' may require a revision to planning policy within East Lancashire as they sit on greenbelt land. The proposals for the Whitebirk employment park are discussed later in this area assessment report. The proposed site sits close to other employment areas but the land itself is in greenbelt close to Blackburn. Stakeholders argue that the development of the site and resultant educational, employment and social benefits this would bring may outweigh the disadvantages of the loss of greenbelt. These highlights a tension between the 'Transformational Agenda' and current thinking on landscape preservation; how to address the serious socio-economic issues in East Lancashire, an area of significant landscape and environmental value.

## Waste

We were unable to identify documentation to suggest that waste from building work or refurbishment is recycled or re-used. However, given the relatively high proportion of developments in East Lancashire which will be refurbished to retain their characteristic features, stakeholders did suggest anecdotally that developers retain valuable materials where possible.

In addition to the consideration of waste from building works, Elevate also consider the design implications of waste management in their selection of preferred site designs.

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<sup>17</sup> Elevate 'Sustainability framework for housing market restructuring in East Lancashire' 2004

<sup>18</sup> GVA Grimley, 'Elevate East Lancashire – the Housing Market Assessment' (2005)



The Elevate Sustainability Checklist for Housing Market Renewal asks two questions of a proposed development:

- Does the development provide space for recycling bins; and
- Does the development encourage residents to recycle domestic waste and how?

A positive score against each of these two questions should support the case for development. However, this checklist is not mandatory and a negative score against any of the questions in the framework does not necessarily count against development. More, it is intended to act as a prompt for local authority officers, the Pathfinder and developers to ensure that issues such as waste management are dealt with in a structured manner across the HMRA.

As part of the 'Transformational Agenda' Elevate stress the importance of both training young people in East Lancashire in building and design and also using local trades' people and developers. Elevate's 'Constructing the Future' programme brings together stakeholders from education, employment and business support to increase the supply of apprentices and qualified building staff, assist local firms in competing for Elevate sponsored work and to promote local employment on other projects in the HMRA. Employers in the building trade are in turn encouraged to source materials from local suppliers.

### Cleaner and greener

Elevate have used English Nature's 'Guidance on Accessible Green Space' to define key standards for the improvement of surrounding green space. However, there is concern that the increasing costs of land remediation in East Lancashire for both housing and additional greenspace are prohibitive to development and in particular private developers<sup>19</sup>. Some stakeholders suggest that some development sites selected for private sector re-development are still perceived to be too small to support additional environmental remediation works although GAP funding available through the HMRA can address this issue and has to date been used in selected developments. Master-planning in the HMRA is seen as being focussed on too small an area to successfully address wider local environment issues; Elevate have now begun a programme of developing strategic links (based on housing size, type and location) between development sites to increase the financial returns available to developers. It is anticipated that this will also increase the wider sustainability of surrounding green-space by 'tying in' remediation work to development programmes, rather than by seeing developments as divorced from their surrounding area.

However, the HMRA process has considered a series of projects to improve the greenspace and local environment targeting the key problems expressed by stakeholders of small scale dereliction, users of recreation areas experiencing anti-

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<sup>19</sup> KPMG and GVA Grimley, *Elevate East Lancashire, Economic Analysis* 2005

social behaviour, and the previously poor use of urban areas as key green corridors. Projects of this nature have included:

- Work in Accrington to retain the heritage features of the town centre whilst improving its overall 'streetscape';
- The development of a neighbourhood park in Burnley Wood to provide a greenspace and recreational amenity for residents in recently refurbished properties (this project is scheduled for completion in 2008);
- The development of a new public square on the Colne road; and
- Developing a working partnership with Groundwork Rossendale in Bacup, Stacksteads and Britannia.

### **Eco Homes / Sustainable Buildings Code**

Elevate have set a Sustainable Homes Framework to guide developers. This is based on Policy L4 in the NWRSS which stipulates objectives for the use of 'sustainable' design practices. It covers issues relating to the structural design of new homes and relates guidance back to regional strategy and policy but it also considers:

1. Transport and Access
2. Crime and secure homes design
3. Appropriate land use within development sites
4. The management and construction of sites; and
5. Sustainable energy use including the use of low energy use designs

It does however go further than the regional guidance by requiring developers to show how they meet the framework in their developments, as part of supplementary planning approval.

At a delivery level Elevate are working with 12 private developer partners to consolidate 'on the ground' the use and requirements for the design standards for refurbished and new build homes supported through the HMRA programme, and set in conjunction with Design East Lancashire. Whilst eco-homes (good) is being adopted as the minimum standard for developments, Elevate are looking to require developers to meet the 'Building For Life (Silver)' standard which sets out criteria by which developers should construct 'lifetime' homes but which also shows clear links to sustainable design principles.

These standards are set through the use of 'lead developer' agreements which declare minimum design and build standards during the procurement process for a particular development. These are then tracked through to the appraisal process and are monitored using Key Performance Indicators during development appraisals at key points in the development process. These apply not only to the 12 lead developers but

also to all subsequent private developer agreements between the HMRA programme and developers.

Feedback from developers has been positive with many seeing the 'eco-homes' standard as 'bread and butter' when considering their usual design standards. Building for Life (Silver) is seen as being more challenging with some developers unsure as to the subjectivity of the criteria used for assessment. CABE have indicated that they will be issuing guidance on this issue.

This issue is linked to the design of refurbished and new build properties discussed below.

## Well designed and built

### Design

The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) have established a regional pilot programme, Design East Lancashire. Its purpose is:

*'To help place high quality design at the centre of the area's renaissance'.*

CABE staff are placed within Elevate and they provide training and support to Elevate and preferred developers in the HMRA, as well as engineers, local authority officers, and residents.

The concern for all involved is to ensure that developers continue to be attracted to invitations to develop sites through the HMRA process. Any increase in development costs in a low value market may reduce the attractiveness of working through the HMRA programme for developers. Elevate do have an option to 'incentivise' the cost / value balance to redress developer costs through HMRA GAP funding. This has been used to date through Elevate involvement in land purchase to free up developer investment for actual development costs on buildings. This 'incentivisation' may also be linked to the KPIs for Ecohomes / Lifetime Homes standards to ensure that whilst developers benefit from Elevate investment, this investment is mirrored by developers meeting sustainable design and build targets.

### Character and heritage

Design East Lancashire has sought to raise design awareness amongst local authority officers, elected members and local residents regarding the preservation of local character and design features of particular heritage value. The pathfinder has also worked jointly with English Heritage to produce guidelines for carrying out group repair schemes in areas such as St Mary's Conservation Area in Nelson. The Sustainable Communities Framework brings together issues of good design, wellbeing and sustainability.

Design East Lancashire have also introduced Heritage Area Appraisals for use prior to the development of site masterplans. These require the local authority to identify

'buildings of value'. For developers Elevate have introduced 'group repair standards' for use in conservation areas. These have been introduced to date in Whitefields in Nelson.

There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that the preservation of heritage features does allow developers to gain higher re-sale values for their properties. To this end Elevate have selected companies for 'lead developer' status for the selected re-development of buildings of 'value'. These will involve the complete modernisation of the buildings interior, working with English Heritage, whilst retaining the exterior features. The initial development costs will be higher but developers are confident that the return on investment will be appropriate; this is supported by the high level of interest in and demand for the properties. Development is 'on site' at the time of writing.

### Meeting housing need

The North West Regional Spatial Strategy requires 'regeneration area's to

*'identify and implement measures through their regeneration strategies in order to reduce regional vacancy levels in the existing housing stock to 3%'<sup>20</sup>*

The concern of the Audit Commission is that Elevate has made very slow progress in developing a system to map and monitor drivers and market intelligence. They suggest that without a system to collate information on housing need, resources may not necessarily be targeted in the appropriate manner to meet housing need. Elevate have now begun to establish a system to collate this information, but the time taken to 'map' need, alongside the need to establish systems to engage with the community means that progress in meeting the targets set for house building and refurbishment in the HMRA has only recently begun to gather pace.

Elevate and the local authorities within the HMRA area have decided to address three principle problems: reducing levels of vacancy, unfitness and the number of homes in low demand. The aim is to reduce the overall number of voids and properties that are considered to be of a poor standard, and balance supply and demand to re-invigorate the housing market. In addition, as discussed elsewhere in this report, Elevate aim to transfer the benefits of housing improvements to home owners rather than the private rented sector. It is anticipated that this programme of demolition and refurbishment will both retain existing home owners and also free up land to provide development sites for different types of housing to introduce a greater 'mix' of properties into the area which stakeholders stress is needed to meet community aspirations.

Using information on the anticipated impact of the HMRA process in East Lancashire, the Regional Housing Board and Elevate have suggested that long-term voids will fall from 3.2% in 2004/05 to 1.75% by 2017/18 compared with a 'policy-off', or 'do nothing' scenario of 6.9% without intervention. At present, based on figures from the 2001 Census, the number of vacant properties is estimated to be 5,400.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.gos.gov.uk/gonw/docs/273480/RPG13-Chapter5>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/reports/BVIR.asp?CategoryID=&ProdID=C684AC12-C0A6-4f38-BB3B-1BD749FCFC20&SectionID=sect7#>

It is important to note that the overall level of proposed clearance over the life of the programme is significantly greater than the current estimate of excess vacant properties.

Housing prices as a whole in East Lancashire are performing less well than the region as a whole.<sup>22</sup> Housing is skewed towards the lower price range with a perceived low level of desirability. This is leading to a low turnover of homes at market with, interestingly, owner-occupancy rates at a level higher than the housing type average but with low wage levels. There are therefore significant numbers of homes falling into disrepair through inadequate maintenance. Re-build as new owner-occupancy dwellings is not seen as the answer in the short to medium term given low levels of disposable income. NWRA and Elevate both recognise the need to introduce a greater 'mix' of owner types into the market, and in the long term, increase wage levels. This is seen as a more sustainable method of meeting housing needs rather than simply providing 'new for old'.

The table on the next page<sup>23</sup> highlights the concern of key regional agencies that house prices in the HMRA are not performing to the same level as the other HMRA's in the North West. This is partly a function of development type; smaller developments usually have a lesser affect on the housing market as a whole than large scale regeneration of the type identified in Manchester and Liverpool. The area is seen as suffering due to its geographical location and resultant difficulties in attracting higher wage earners, which would normally lead to increasing house prices.

Elevate have earmarked 10% of all new homes for those with mobility needs, with reduced travel time distances to key facilities for their residents. The BME community also make up a significant proportion of the community in East Lancashire<sup>24</sup> and research has indicated that large family homes are required and are being delivered as shown in Bank Top. This does cause issues relating to housing density and design standards, given that the local area has historically been based on 2 and 3 bedroom homes.

There have been tensions in the local community regarding the suitability of new homes for particular members of the community. Single occupancy flats are earmarked for demolition and replacement with bungalows. Many elderly residents have expressed unease about the change in house design, with some suggesting that they feel 'safer' in the flats they currently occupy. This may simply be uncertainty on the part of residents about the plans for their area but it may also highlight the need for greater engagement and dialogue with residents over the new design for their area.<sup>25</sup>

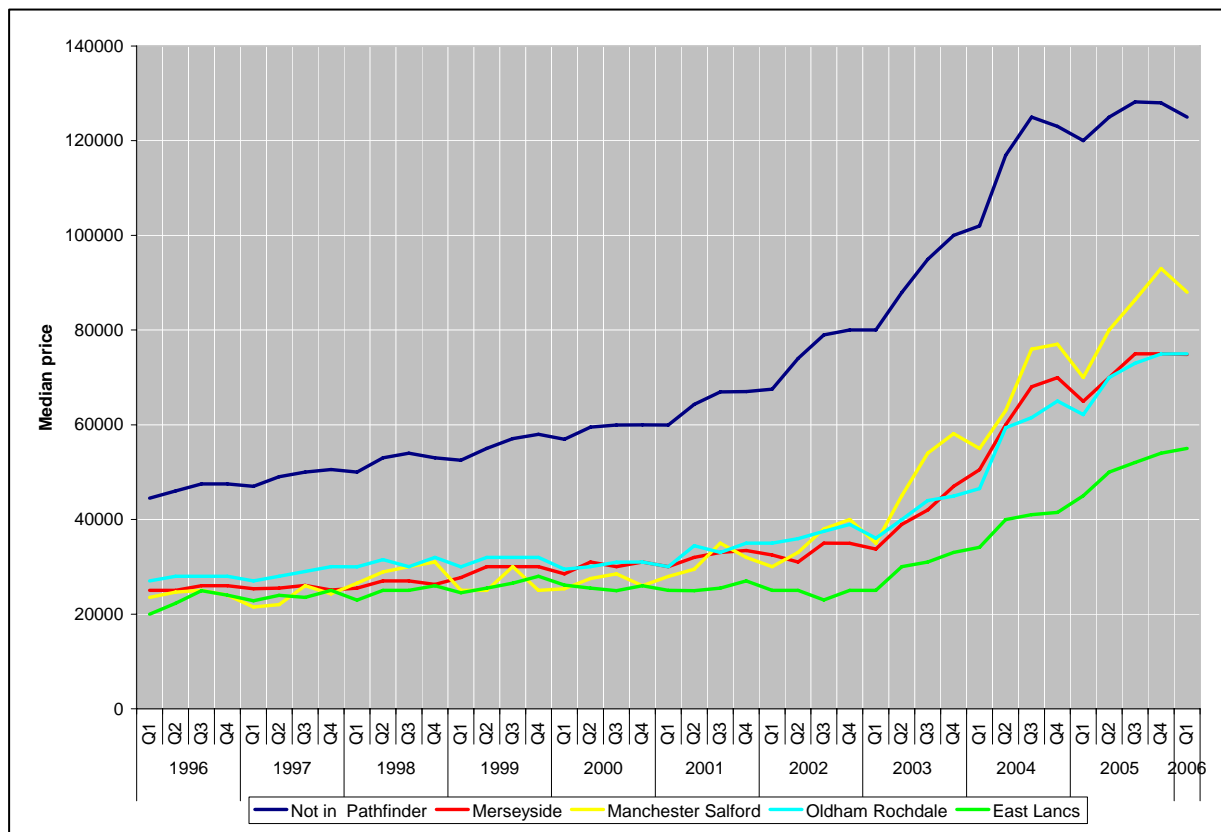
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<sup>22</sup> ECOTEC Research and Consulting Limited 'North West Housing Market Review, 2005 and Q1 2006' July 2006

<sup>23</sup> ECOTEC Research and Consulting Limited 'North West Housing Market Review, 2005 and Q1 2006' July 2006

<sup>24</sup> Elevate, 'Household Survey Focus Report One: BME Households in the Elevate Intervention Area' 2005

<sup>25</sup> (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/lancashire/3560346.stm>)



Elevate and NWHB have established a Sustainable Home Ownership Toolkit to facilitate developments for those eligible for Social Housing but who aspire to home ownership. This provides varying financial options for prospective home buyers or those wishing to let a property who may not currently have the financial resources to do so. Options include loans for inclusion in shared equity schemes. The aim is to provide a staggered 'mix' of home options to introduce greater choice in the housing market and increase the sustainability of re-developed homes beyond the life of the HMRA by passing responsibility for the management of houses to their owners at a point where they are financially able to do so. We have not been able to identify specific information on the actual use of this scheme, but discussions with key stakeholders suggest that future demand for the scheme is high, evidenced through pre-development discussions with community representatives.

## Well connected

Proposals for transport and access infrastructure and services within the HMRA are progressed in a partnership between each local authority, be it Blackburn with Darwen as a Unitary Authority, or for example Ribble Valley and Lancashire County Council as

authorities in the two-tier structure in the rest of the HMRA. For both types of area, Elevate and the respective local authority progress investment in transport through the Area Development Framework. These form supplementary documentation to the Local Development Framework, and take their overall strategic direction from the respective Local Transport Plan.

HMRA is seen as having given a 'platform' for co-ordinated investment in transport services and infrastructure. Local officers have suggested that without the strategic approach of HMRA, individual interventions in each local authority may not have been complementary and allowed local government in the area to address the wider strategic issues of unemployment and educational attainment. LTP2 has taken a 'consultation' led approach to directing investment in transport; the HMRA process has facilitated a wider gathering of information from the community.

It is difficult at present to determine actual physical change 'on the ground' in transport infrastructure thanks to HMRA funding, primarily due to the long lead in times for large civil engineering projects and also because Elevate and the local authorities have spent time carefully aligning individual projects across local authority boundaries to be complementary not only to each other, but also in respect of support for housing renewal and employment growth. A good example of this is the Whitebirk employment site on the eastern edge of Blackburn with Darwen

The most prominent source of investment to improve public transport services will be the East Lancashire Rapid Transit system<sup>26</sup>. The aim is to provide a strategic link comprised of dedicated bus lanes and priority measures between the key sub-regional centres of Blackburn, Darwen and Accrington. This will be laid out to maximise links between HMRA areas and earmarked employment sites such as Whitebirk, noted above. This has received £20m of investment through Blackburn and Darwen's Local Transport Plan 2 submission although further committed funding is still required.

Large strategic investment such as this will be complemented by small scale investment in transport and access infrastructure complementary to housing refurbishment and development. Bank Top was the first area in the HMRA area to undergo streetscape improvements alongside the refurbishment of housing stock, but these improvements were not identified in the original proposals for the site. Blackburn with Darwen and Elevate noted the potential for complementary improvements only once the development was approved. In future, the two authorities have suggested that the planning of streetscape improvements and housing development / refurbishment will be planned in tandem through the ADF process.

The streetscape developments at Bank Top were funded through Blackburn with Darwen's Road Safety allocation through LTP1. The actual scope and design of improvements were identified through community consultation. The resultant Home Zone infrastructure will be replicated at other development sites and at appropriate points along the route of the East Lancashire Rapid Transit bus network. Of note is that

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<sup>26</sup> Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council 'LTP2 Bus Strategy 2006-11' 2006



the adjacent Ashworth estate is currently being completely re-modelled, rather than refurbished as in the case of Bank Top, and this will include streetscape works.

There is an issue of tension regarding commuting patterns in the short term. Stakeholders have recognised the short term need to increase the ability of local residents to access higher wage employment, principally in central Manchester and along the M65 corridor. This will lead to an increase in commuting distances but will also, theoretically increase incomes. Elevate recognise the need to address this dichotomy through investment in local employment opportunities to reduce the long term dependence on commuting outside the immediate area.

The Whitebirk employment area in Blackburn and Darwen is an example of strategic planning for employment opportunities linked to transport planning. Strategic thinking and Master-planning has tried to consider the transport and access needs of new and developed areas of housing. However, it is a concern of key stakeholders that developers will often go after 'quick' wins, taking forward housing development without considering an area's wider transport and access needs. It is important to distinguish HMRA's in core urban areas such as Manchester with those more on the periphery such as East Lancashire. It is easier to make the case for funding and a combined development approach to developers when the HMRA are able to sell the promise of major scheme investment such as 'Metrolink' which is due to receive £650 million worth of investment over the next 6 years; this is in comparison to the £20 million of investment earmarked for the East Lancashire Rapid Transit Network.<sup>27</sup> This option is not available to Elevate in East Lancashire and is it therefore harder to convince developers of the need to align their plans with those of the local transport authority.

The Sustainability Framework for East Lancashire sets out key principals for transport, mobility and access in the HMRA. It acts as an influencing document, by which Local Transport Plans and other proposals can take guidance on the design and implementation of transport and access schemes. This includes design standards for footways and cycle paths and 'best practice' levels for each mode to employment sites and key facilities. A housing density level of 40 dph is defined as the minimum acceptable level for new bus services; developments to date have met this standard.<sup>28</sup>

The Framework sets out the following distances that people are prepared to walk for facilities.

- Primary schools: 400-600 metres
- Local shops: 400-800 metres
- Leisure centres: 1500-2000 metres
- Bus stops: 300-400 metres

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<sup>27</sup> [http://www.gmpte.com/content.cfm?subcategory\\_id=109024](http://www.gmpte.com/content.cfm?subcategory_id=109024)

<sup>28</sup> 'The Transformational Agenda: Housing Market Renewal in East Lancashire Scheme Update 2006-2019' Elevate



- Train stations: 600-800 metres<sup>29</sup>

There is however, limited information on the use of these design standards by developers. They accord with the LTPs for each Local Highway Authority and can be monitored for the area as a whole, but data is not yet available for individual developments.

Whilst Elevate and each of the Local Authorities in East Lancashire have earmarked local and area-based investment in transport infrastructure, stakeholders have expressed concern regarding the ability of the current HMRA programme to access strategic funding for investment in major transport and access infrastructure. Whilst land for employment generation has been identified, there is still recognition of the need to provide access to neighbouring urban areas such as Manchester for residents of East Lancashire to access high wage employment and to attract workers in Manchester to live in East Lancashire. Elevate have earmarked key rail improvements to facilitate access to these employment opportunities. These improvements will not run in parallel with new housing development, primarily because of the scale of investment required.

There is concern regarding the long term revenue support for the development of new infrastructure. Whilst housing may be taken into the private sector, there will still be a need to secure revenue to support key infrastructure such as Public Transport. There is a danger that the responsibility to secure this will fall to the Local Authority; with the limited resources they have available, the long term sustainability of new developments will be affected.

There was no indicated funding for rail infrastructure identified in the Regional Funding Allocation (RFA) for rail. Whilst Elevate and Blackburn with Darwen have developed plans for a new railway station to complement the Whitebirk employment site, this will not go ahead without strategic investment in rail through the RFA. Improvements to rail to facilitate both access to employment within the HMRA and further afield will not go ahead under the present funding regime.

It is also worth noting that Blackburn with Darwen, as a Unitary Authority within the HMRA, is seen by stakeholders as suffering due to its structure as Transport Authority. Whilst other Unitary Authorities in the region have powers as transport authorities to manage the bus network as a Passenger Transport Executive, Blackburn with Darwen does not have these powers. The other neighbouring authorities in the HMRA fall within the remit of Lancashire County Council as Highway and Transport Authority. This therefore means that information on public bus performance and management, and the power to manage the public bus network to complement the work of the HMRA is not available in Blackburn with Darwen.

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<sup>29</sup> Elevate 'Sustainability framework for housing market restructuring in East Lancashire' 2004

## Thriving

East Lancashire is recognised regionally as an area that is particularly economically 'fragile'. The area contains pockets of 'decay and neglect' and has to date struggled to overcome the loss of key employers and the need for fundamental change in the area's employment market and economy.<sup>30</sup>

### Number of Benefit Claimants.

Area	Sept 99	Sept 04
Blackburn with Darwen	3,575	2,181
Ribble Valley	301	196
Pendle	1,525	882
Hyndburn	1,081	849
Burnley	1,512	962
North West	151,834	96,022
England	986,773	669,879

The above table<sup>31</sup> highlights the declining number of claimants in the East Lancashire HMRA area as a whole between 1999 and 2004 and it is anticipated that the release of the latest data on claimants rates on the 18<sup>th</sup> October 2006 will show a further fall in unemployment. However, what the table also shows are the significant differences in unemployment across the HMRA. The difference between Blackburn and Darwen, and Ribble Valley is marked and stakeholders and Elevate recognise the need for a strategic approach to the regeneration of the local economy which seeks to address these differences but which also notes and acts upon the particular issues at the local authority level.

Elevate have recognised that refurbishing existing housing stock and undertaking small scale clearance of poor quality homes may re-invigorate the housing market but the wider socio-economic issues in the area which, stakeholders argue, are preventing a greater 'mix' to the local community are preventing long term economic growth. Elevate have therefore developed a 'transformational agenda' which sets out the methods by which Elevate and their local authority partners will address the long term socio-economic problems in East Lancashire and which recognises the very local differences in the economy as noted in the table above..

The 'Transformational Agenda' has the following strategic objectives:

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.gos.gov.uk/gonw/docs/273480/RPG13-Chapter3>

<sup>31</sup> Nomis – Official Labour Market Statistics 1999 – 2004, Claimant Count Rate, Number of Claimants (Persons)

- Accommodate – developing attractive neighbourhoods and sustainable housing;
- Connect – connecting the HMRA to neighbouring metropolitan areas to both improve access to employment elsewhere in the region, but also to make it easier for residents elsewhere to work in East Lancashire;
- Equip – developing skills, enhancing productivity and employment;
- Change – improve resident’s life chances, through community cohesion and participation;
- Diversify – invest in and stimulate sub-sectors in the economy to move away from low value employment;
- Attract – improve the local environment and urban centres; and
- Support – individuals in taking advantage of opportunities.<sup>32</sup>

It is still too early to determine the actual impact of the ‘Transformational Agenda’ on the ‘ground’ but both Elevate and key stakeholders recognise that to achieve the ‘Transformational Agenda’ and therefore significant economic growth and decreased unemployment, will require both intervention in the housing market through the significant development of new homes with a greater variety of dwelling types (# of bedrooms etc) and the implementation of an ‘agenda’ which goes beyond housing targets and considers the wider socio-economic needs of the area. The following table<sup>33</sup> highlights the projected difference in new house numbers required per year to meet the requirements of the RSS, a general growth in the economy and Elevate’s more fundamental transformational agenda.

Area	RSS	Economic Growth	Transformational Agenda
Blackburn with Darwen	261	350 - 434	471-544
Ribble Valley	190	143	360
Pendle	190	98 - 161	303 - 366
Hyndburn	189	83 - 126	289 - 331
Burnley	130	48 - 145	255 - 352
<b>HMRA</b>	<b>960</b>	<b>722 - 1008</b>	<b>1677 - 1820</b>

<sup>32</sup> ‘The Transformational Agenda: Housing Market Renewal in East Lancashire Scheme Update 2006-2019’ Elevate

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/reports/BVIR.asp?CategoryID=&ProdID=C684AC12-C0A6-4f38-BB3B-1BD749FCFC20&SectionID=sect7>

It is too early at present to determine the affect of this significant increase in house building and refurbishment that Elevate and their strategic partners are proposing in East Lancashire. However, the Audit Commission in their review of Elevate to date did note that the higher housing figures would need to be absorbed into a revised RSS, and therefore is at risk because “this therefore places a reliance on an as yet undetermined future review process for the RSS which brings with it significant risks.”<sup>34</sup>

## Well served

Discussions with key stakeholders highlighted the intrinsic difficulties facing Elevate and the HMRA process in East Lancashire in seeking to improve ‘complementary’ facilities such as schools, health centres and community facilities. Whilst the programme has, to date, focussed on refurbishment and clearance to re-invigorate the housing market, the size of developments and potentially low returns on developer investment are making it harder to plan the improvement of complementary facilities as the overall size of the development may preclude the use of Section 106 or 278 agreements for example as developers may be unable to recoup sufficient investment to offset the increased costs incurred through the instigation of requirements such as these. Elevate are therefore looking to the use of GAP funding to meet costs incurred in the re-furbishment and improvement of facilities.

Whilst there is little specific evidence to suggest that local authorities and other public bodies are targeting their resources on improving services in the HMRA areas, the development of the Neighbourhood Management Teams and their close relationship with the HMRA teams in each local authority means that the actual disbursement of financial resources is seen as being easier in the HMRA area.

There is also concern that to date, the potential offered through Section 106 and 278 (the ability to recoup development costs for highway improvements at the developer’s expense) agreements has not been fully realised, and only now are Elevate and their Local Authority partners making greater use of these ‘tools’ available to them. Prior to the introduction of HMRA, a significant number of developments were given planning permission and these have only recently been progressed ready for actual development. Elevate have therefore focussed on working with the developers of these sites to consider the overall service needs of the community and the potential ‘added value’ to be gained by more closely aligning previously approved developments with the HMRA programme. The lessons learnt through this process have also been put to use in progressing the development of new employment sites such as Whitebirk, considered elsewhere in this report, and Elevate and their partners are now more aware of the need to develop and harness planning gain through the Section 106 and 278 process. There is however still concern that reliance on Section 106 agreements can lead to uncertainty and a lack of rigor in the development monitoring process.

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<sup>34</sup> Audit Commission - Elevate East Lancashire, Market Renewal Inspection Report 2006

Funding may only be allocated through Section 106 once the development has begun, reducing the ability of the planning authority to influence changes to design.

In the Bank Top area, key services and facilities were already earmarked for improvement through the Bank Top Renewal Area Programme. There is however little available information on the subsequent work of the HMRA in improving key facilities and services other than discussion on streetscape re-modelling.

# Conclusions

As noted by the Audit Commission<sup>35</sup>, Elevate have only recently begun to draw together data across the 5 local authority areas to inform decision making on the aims and developmental objectives for the HMRA process. It is suggested that the availability of data on progress, and in turn evidence of significant change through the 'Transformational Agenda' may be much greater once the current programmes in place come to fruition.

## Strengths

It is evident that there is strong alignment between the strategic direction of Elevate and the East Lancashire HMRA and regional and sub-regional housing policy. Regional stakeholders and Elevate both suggested that this was in part due to the position of Elevate as a 'strategic' HMRA lead, sitting above each of the five local authorities and their individual HMRA Local Implementation Teams. Stakeholders and the Audit Commission both support the development of 'Elchex' as a strategic lead to increase the influence of the HMRA, especially related to the need to draw in investment in areas such as transport infrastructure.

Elevate has a strong relationship with CABE through the positioning of Design East Lancashire and it is anticipated that this will have a considerable positive impact on the design standards of new developments. This relationship also brings with it benefits for Elevate's relationship with the private development sector. The clear mechanisms for engagement with and the commissioning of developers allow Elevate to closely integrate principles of sustainable design and construction into the procurement process.

However, the actual implementation of the framework is still a concern to some stakeholders. Stakeholders would wish to see greater clarity in the procurement process and subsequent monitoring of the Sustainability Framework to ensure that the principles contained within it are being cascaded through to actual work on-site.

The focus to date on refurbishing existing property in a way which increases the 'mix' of property within the HMRA area is seen as being the most appropriate way of maximising the use of existing housing resources in the area, retaining homes of social value expressed through consultation with communities, and addressing the need to offer housing which may act as a means of attracting high salary earners to the area. It is important to note that the term 'refurbishment' seems to be fairly 'elastic' used to

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<sup>35</sup> Audit Commission - Elevate East Lancashire, Market Renewal Inspection Report 2006

cover a wide range of interventions which may require very different levels of resources.

The community engagement in decisions such as that on the use of existing properties is also encouraging. The use of Neighbourhood Management Teams has allowed Elevate to develop engagement structures between the community and key regeneration agencies on an area basis to reflect the social differences between communities.

It is to be hoped that the 'Transformational Agenda' will have a significant impact on the socio-economic issues facing East Lancashire and many stakeholders have welcomed the development of an approach which sees the regeneration of the housing market and housing stock as just one aspect required in East Lancashire. The recognition that investment, however small, must be part of a wider programme of strategic intervention will allow Elevate to maintain links between relatively small scale projects across local authority boundaries.

## Areas of concern

Of greatest concern for HMRA in East Lancashire is the need to operate across five local authority areas. Both stakeholders and Elevate themselves recognise that without careful management, levels of progress across the HMRA could become very different. It could be suggested that this is already beginning to happen with developments in Blackburn and Darwen being seen as 'quick wins' due to the less hierarchical planning structure in the Unitary Authority, where approval has only to be sought from one set of council members.

The other main issue of concern is the relative lack of 'strength' behind guidance on sustainable design and the preservation of heritage characteristics. Whilst these issues can be taken into consideration when selecting developers for 'preferred' status, this guidance is not binding on developments outside the HMRA process.

With regard to the actual impact of the programme on the ground, of particular concern is the relatively limited level of change to house prices to close the gap with regional house prices. This may in part be due to the long lead in time for Elevate's 'Transformational Agenda' which is seen as the primary means by which overall economic regeneration and stimulus of the Housing Market will be achieved. However, it is worrying that the promotion of this programme has not already begun to affect the views of private developers regarding the potential returns to be received through investment in HMRA areas.

Finally, as noted in the scheme update report for 2006, the area continues to be isolated with regard to access to key economic centres in the North West such as Liverpool and Manchester. Elevate recognise that to achieve long-term sustainable growth, residents of the HMRA area must be able to access jobs with higher wages in

the metropolitan areas, and that those currently working in the major urban centres should be given the means to live in areas such as East Lancashire. Without significant investment in major transport infrastructure such as the rail network, these changes are unlikely to take place. Investment in schemes such as the East Lancashire Rapid Transit system is welcomed by stakeholders, but this will not facilitate the fundamental changes to the area's economy set out in the 'Transformational Agenda'.



# Appendices

## 1. People interviewed

- Jon Lovell – SDC Manager – North West Regional Assembly
- Peter Bailey – NWRA – Lead on Housing Market Renewal
- Amanda Richardson and Ste Lingard – Strategy and Policy Managers – Elevate
- Sayyed Osman – Deputy Director, Regeneration, Housing and Neighbourhoods – Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council
- Brian Bailey – Assistant Director, Regeneration and Planning Policy – Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council
- Mike Cliff – Team Leader, Transport Policy – Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council
- Chris Hayward – Group Leader, Forward Planning and Transport – Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council
- Dave Procter – Team Leader, Forward Planning - Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

## 2. Documents and other material reviewed

- The MJ, July 2006
- Elevate 'The Transformational Agenda: Housing Market Renewal in East Lancashire Scheme Update 2006-2019'
- Northern Way Steering Group, Moving Forward: The Northern Way Business Plan 2005-08 (2005)
- KPMG and GVA Grimley, Elevate East Lancashire Economic Analysis, 2005
- Elevate East Lancashire (Elevate), A Profile of East Lancashire and the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder, 2003
- Citizens' Panel Survey 'Living & Working in East Lancashire' (Q13), Pendle Borough Council/ Elevate East Lanc's, 2004
- ECOTEC Research and Consulting Limited 'North West Housing Market Review, 2005 and Q1 2006' July 2006

- Elevate, 'Household Survey Focus Report One: BME Households in the Elevate Intervention Area' 2005
- Elevate 'Sustainability framework for housing market restructuring in East Lancashire' 2004
- GVA Grimley, 'Elevate East Lancashire – the Housing Market Assessment' 2005
- Audit Commission - Elevate East Lancashire, Market Renewal Inspection Report 2006
- ODPM; Creating Sustainable Communities in the North West
- North West Regional Spatial Strategy
- North West Housing Strategy
- North West Regional Sustainable Development Framework
- Action For Sustainability; Programme for Integrating Sustainability across the North West
- Lancashire County Council Local Transport Plan 2006-11
- Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council 'LTP2 Bus Strategy 2006-11' 2006
- Blackburn with Darwen Local Transport Plan, Sustainability Appraisal and Annual Progress Reports 2004 and '05
- Blackburn with Darwen Housing Strategy
- Blackburn with Darwen Local Development Framework
- Blackburn with Darwen Community Plan and Local Area Agreement
- Elevate East Lancashire – Common Development Agenda
- Elevate East Lancashire – Sustainability Framework