



Building houses or creating communities?



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A review of government progress on Sustainable Communities

Foreword

Creating sustainable communities is a complex challenge. We all want to have safe, attractive and affordable places to live, which connect us into work, opportunity and education. We want to make sure that our settlements do not over-reach environmental limits, minimising our impact on natural resources, water and climate. We want to live in a society which is healthy and just, where our communities are full of people we know, support and rely on. In short, creating sustainable communities is fundamentally about creating sustainable places to live.

The Sustainable Communities Plan forms the Government's response to this challenge. Launched in 2003, it is an attempt to tackle the decline of urban centres in the North and Midlands of England, while creating new communities in response to demand in the South and East of the country.

Given the importance of this agenda, the Sustainable Development Commission decided, in 2006, to conduct a thorough assessment of the Government's progress in creating sustainable communities. In 2005, we were given new powers to act as a scrutineer and 'watchdog' of government policy and in this, our first Thematic Review, we use this approach to examine whether the Sustainable Communities Plan is indeed sustainable – whether it matches up to the ambitious goals set out in the Government's Sustainable Development Strategy *Securing the Future*.

We have learned a great deal from this Review. We have talked to residents, developers, local authorities, central government and others – everyone who has a role in making sustainable communities happen. We have visited many of the sites where changes are beginning to happen on the ground. We are very grateful to everyone who has taken the time to share their views and experiences with us, and hope that this Review is useful to them in their endeavours.

Our findings are mixed. Along with many others, we are critical of the original Plan, feeling that it focused very heavily on housing growth without due consideration for the environment, for what is sometimes called 'liveability', or for social needs. And we do not feel that a focus on housing numbers alone is an adequate measure of progress. Recently, however, we have seen many encouraging signs. The moves away from demolition in the North, and the very welcome commitment that all new homes will be zero-carbon by 2016, are impressive steps forward. Greater efforts at community consultation, provision of public services and public transport, for both new and existing communities, will also reap dividends.

We hope that this Review will help to accelerate the positive momentum. The Commission wants to work with central, regional and local government, and other actors, to achieve truly sustainable communities. We want central government to help local areas find solutions to global pressures, encouraging local and regional partnerships to find their own ways. We want to see local communities themselves involved more directly in determining their future. We want to see more attention paid to environmental improvements in existing buildings, and to the need to tackle water scarcity. We think there is still a need for better co-ordination of housing, health, education and employment policy, underpinned by appropriate investment.

The challenge of helping communities adapt and develop within the five overarching guidelines of the UK's sustainable development strategy is difficult, but essential. We look forward to working with others to help achieve this aim.

Rebecca Willis

Alice Owen

SDC Commissioners

Glossary of terms

ASC	Academy for Sustainable Communities
BSF	Building Schools for the Future
CIF	Community Infrastructure Fund
CITB	Construction Industry Training Board
CLG	Communities and Local Government
COGS	Communities and Organisations: Growth and Support
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DfT	Department for Transport
DH	Department of Health
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
ECM	Every Child Matters
EEAP	Energy Efficiency Action Plan
EEIR	Energy Efficiency Innovation Review
EIP	Examination in Public
GAF	Growth Areas Fund
GCC	Good Corporate Citizenship
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HA	Highways Agency
HMR	Housing Market Renewal
HMRA	Housing Market Renewal Areas
HO	Home Office
IPPR	Institute for Public Policy Research
KCC	Kent County Council
LBBD	London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
LDF	Local Development Frameworks
LG	Local Government
LSPs	Local Strategic Partnerships
NHS	National Health Service
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Ofwat	The Water Services Regulation Authority
PCTs	Primary Care Trusts
PFI	Public Finance Initiative
PPS	Planning Policy Statement
RDA	Regional Development Agency
REIF	Regional Environmental Infrastructure Fund
RPG	Regional Planning Guidance
RSS	Regional Spatial Strategies
SC Plan	Sustainable Communities Plan
SDC	Sustainable Development Commission
SUDS	Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems

Contents

1	Executive Summary	6
2	Introduction	19
3	Sustainable Communities: the government's rationale	23
4	Environment	29
	What are the environmental impacts of the government's housing and communities policies?	
4.1	Land use	31
4.2	Climate Change	36
4.3	Building resources	46
4.4	Water resources and flood risk	49
4.5	Landscapes and biodiversity	54
5	Society and Economy	59
	Are the government's housing and communities policies helping to promote a strong, healthy, just society and sustainable economy?	
5.1	Services	60
5.2	Schools and young people	63
5.3	Transport and infrastructure	67
5.4	Healthy communities	72
5.5	Community cohesion	76
5.6	Promoting economic opportunity & skill development	82
5.7	Affordability and ownership	86
6	Making it happen	89
	Are the government's housing and communities policies being delivered and monitored effectively?	
6.1	From strategy to sustainable communities	90
6.2	Public funding	92
6.3	Land use planning	95
6.4	Measuring success	98
7	Overall conclusions	101
8	Annexes	103

1 Executive summary

1. Remit and methodology

The Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) is the UK Government's 'watchdog' on sustainable development, reporting to the Prime Minister and the First Ministers of Scotland and Wales. In this, our first Thematic Review, we have undertaken a review of the delivery of the Sustainable Communities Plan (SC Plan) to assess whether its delivery is achieving the required outcomes for sustainable development. This Review evaluates the broad approach, the delivery through the regional, sub-regional and local authority bodies, and the actual outcomes and plans 'on the ground' in specified areas. Our evaluation tests the outcomes of this programme against the government's five sustainable development principles.

The Sustainable Communities Plan was launched in 2003 as a major, long-term regeneration and growth programme, focussing on tackling the decline of urban centres in the north and midlands of England, and on increased house building in the south and east of England.

The Plan sets out broad requirements for what makes a sustainable community (Annex A). A more comprehensive statement of the government's view of what makes a sustainable community was published in 2005 in *Sustainable Communities: People, Places and Prosperity*, ODPM's Five Year Plan (Annex A). This included the definition, reiterated in *Securing the Future*, the UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy, that:

"Sustainable communities are places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. They meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, are sensitive to their environment, and contribute to a high quality of life. They are safe and inclusive, well planned, built and run, and offer equality of opportunity and good services for all."

Whilst this definition has served its purpose, we believe it should now be more closely aligned to the government's sustainable development principles as published in the 2005 Sustainable Development Strategy *Securing the Future*. The five principles are explicit: "we want to achieve our goals of living

within environmental limits and a just society, and we will do it by means of sustainable economy, good governance and sound science". By using this as the basis for the definition of sustainable communities we believe there would be a strengthening of some elements of the existing definition, particularly regarding the application of 'environmental limits'.

Despite these broad ambitions, the dominant policy focus and drive in the early stages of delivery of the Sustainable Communities Plan has been housing. The Plan is in effect a housing delivery programme under the heading of a regeneration programme, and the funding for the regeneration elements are largely found elsewhere. Progress in delivery very much remains a continuation of the planned housing programme. The "Sustainable Communities" title for the programme has recently been dropped from government communications on this programme. While we believe this is appropriate in the current context, the broader regeneration goal should not be lost as this is urgently needed if implementation on the ground is to improve in certain areas.

Our scope and approach

Covered in this Review

This Review examines in particular the ways in which government interventions in the Growth Areas and in the Housing Market Renewal Areas are being, and should be, reconciled with the five guiding principles for sustainable development.

In preparing our Review we have:

- undertaken desk research of the policy areas, key statistics and existing research
- commissioned consultants to undertake in-depth area assessments of local planning and delivery in two Housing Market Renewal Areas (Newcastle Gateshead and East Lancashire) and two Growth Areas (South Cambridgeshire and Barking & Dagenham)
- interviewed developers, NGOs and delivery bodies¹
- consulted an expert advisory group including developers, businesses, academics, consultants, and a group of government officials

- visited sites at Stoke-on-Trent, Barking, Manchester/Salford and Milton Keynes
- conducted in-depth interviews with residents.

Some of the sites examined, particularly in the Growth Areas, show little evidence of change, simply because the planning stage is still in progress. We have therefore been required to carry out some of the qualitative evidence-gathering for the Growth Areas in localities where the original planning permission was achieved before the Sustainable Communities Plan came into effect. However, discussions with planners, and local authorities in many of the areas reveals that the approach to developments under the banner of the SC Plan have, in practice, been very much ‘business as usual’, and such practice is likely to continue. We therefore feel there is value in highlighting some of the difficulties experienced by those existing communities, as illustrations of unsustainable outcomes.

All the Housing Market Renewal Areas visited are localities with work undertaken as part of the Sustainable Communities Plan.

Further details about our approach are included in Section 2. The detailed evidence we have gathered is available on our website.

Not covered in this Review

There is an ongoing and very lively debate about housing demand and the need to achieve significantly higher levels of house building. Whilst we concur entirely with the view that the social and economic benefits of ensuring people have quality homes in which to live is a critical element of sustainable development, we are much less persuaded than Ministers on two key assumptions that underpin their current thinking. These are:

- i) that an accelerated programme of house building is the most effective way of addressing problems of affordability in the housing market in the south east of England. In our view land values and housing market conditions mean that new housing will remain out of the reach of many potential purchasers, without more widespread assisted mortgage schemes. Increased provision of social housing is needed to provide for people in lower income groups.
- ii) that the best place for most of these new houses is in the ‘Growth Areas’ in the south east. Our evaluation of the growth

and Housing Market Renewal Areas in the midlands highlight the huge discrepancies in economic success and in pressures on the housing market. Improving the economic success of the failing areas in the midlands could help take some of the pressure off the south east, but the current programme is not delivering this in some (though not all) areas. We have not, however extensively examined this issue in this Review.

2. Overall assessment

The Sustainable Communities Plan stands at a crossroads. It has been active for four years and has a projected lifetime over the next decade or more. This Review shows that there have been some important steps forward. We welcome recent positive commitments from Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG), such as the recently-announced ‘green package’ including a commitment to zero-carbon new homes. But our research also indicates that the picture is variable in implementation, and that overall, the programme focuses on building or refurbishing houses rather than achieving sustainable communities.

Within the current framework of the SC Plan, our Review has identified opportunities for improvement through:

- further integration of environmental impacts into the programme
- better co-ordination of public funding and wider service provision
- more effective and meaningful community consultation and engagement
- more sophisticated monitoring and evaluation of outcomes.

Our assessments of current strengths and weaknesses, and the potential for improvements in each of these areas, are set out in the main body of this Review. Our evidence from this Review suggests that there remain considerable risks that sustainable outcomes will not be delivered in practice. It is not clear whether, and how, the examples of good practice that we have noted are being scaled up and replicated. These risks are highlighted throughout this Review, alongside our recommendations for improvements.



3. Principal findings

This Review assesses the Sustainable Communities Plan against the government's own sustainable development principles. We summarise our findings below.

A What are the environmental impacts of the government's housing and communities policies?

The approach in the SC Plan to tackling housing shortages and housing market decline has constrained the government's efforts to deliver on its environmental goals:

1. Climate change and energy

The climate change, and energy supply and demand impacts from new-build housing are likely to be huge, particularly as basic house-building standards are not as yet focussed around delivering against the needs of a carbon-constrained economy.

We are very encouraged that the CLG has recently taken a much more positive approach to its role in making and implementing policies for mitigating climate change. The new policies in CLG's

consultation document *Building a Greener Future: Towards Zero Carbon Development*, are particularly welcome – especially the target announced in the 2006 Pre-Budget Report that within 10 years all new homes will be zero carbon in use. Nevertheless, it is clear that the majority of current and planned house building between 2006 and 2016 will contribute significantly to overall UK carbon emissions.

The creation of Communities England as a new agency to deliver regeneration and housing programmes is an opportunity to build on recent progress, and to help realise government aspirations for more sustainable communities. This is also a live policy area, with the government's response to the Barker Review of Land Use Planning, for example, an important factor in determining how sustainable

communities can be planned and realised effectively, and how far business and economic interests shape development decisions.

In view of the very real progress that the government has made in its thinking on new build housing, the SDC is keen for the existing housing stock (the major contributor to carbon emissions from the household sector) to be tackled with the same vigour. Housing refurbishment and regeneration programmes must be aimed at dramatically cutting carbon emissions from the existing housing stock. Economic disincentives (such as VAT on refurbishment but not on new build) should be removed, and more holistic incentives for household energy efficiency and renewables urgently brought forward.

As a first step, the government could extend the current carbon neutral feasibility studies to focus on carbon neutrality in all of the SC Plan housing growth localities, with different solutions explored in different areas. We make extensive recommendations of specific, technical measures for new build and existing housing to achieve this goal in the body of this Review.

2. Land use and natural resources

The housing programme has huge impacts on land and natural resource use (such as water resources and construction materials) which will further jeopardise our ability to live within our environmental limits, as set out in the government's Sustainable Development Strategy. There is an urgent need to develop policies and measures to address water scarcity, starting with minimising demand across the east and south east of England. The importance of this is exposed, for example, in the recent Environment Agency Infrastructure reports. Given these pressures we welcome the Thames Gateway Water Neutrality study as a promising opportunity to make progress on this. We are also encouraged by the draft Planning Policy Statement on climate change which has a welcome requirement to secure sustainable urban drainage systems and support waste water recycling in new developments.

The SDC is pleased that the proportion of new buildings sited on previously developed land is exceeding the government's national target of 60% of new dwellings. However, this still leaves a significant amount of previously undeveloped land being taken for housing use. Moreover, as the target is a national average, it hides significant local and regional variations. Local land use and the impacts

of development are important indicators of progress in achieving sustainable development in practice.

Increasing the density of existing towns and cities is, in our view, significantly more sustainable in almost all circumstances than creating new communities outside them. This has the dual benefit of encouraging sustainable energy solutions such as district heating schemes, and improving the economic prospects for local businesses and some public services. We are pleased that the planning 'hierarchy' from government guidance encourages increased town density, and some areas are indeed pursuing this approach. But many others, including parts of Newcastle Gateshead, Cambridge and Ashford, are not. Outcomes are therefore highly variable, and we believe the government should urgently and clearly restate its commitment both to sequential planning and to increased density in towns, to further influence the implementation of the Sustainable Communities Plan. This should be complemented in practice by high quality design and delivery.

3. Green spaces and the natural environment

Our research reveals that the approach to green spaces and the natural environment is also highly variable. The most significant efforts to improve access to, and improve the quality of, green spaces are occurring in the areas which plan to encroach most significantly into green field land, such as Cambridge. Government has a role in ensuring a much more systematic approach to enhancement of green spaces in every development, and in ensuring that the inhabitants of communities have access to the wider countryside.

Ambitious housing targets and commercial considerations have generated a desire in government and the house building industry to speed up the planning process, as illustrated by the latest review of land use planning by Kate Barker. But sustainable development is about integrating, not trading off, economic, social and environmental needs, and achieving a sustainable outcome can take investment in time and effort. Community engagement and the checks and balances of appeals in planning should not be dismissed as 'bureaucracy'. A strong planning system is necessary to ensure that social, environmental and economic benefits are all considered. We would be particularly concerned if any changes to planning should occur which could undermine good planning practice or sustainable development.



B Are the government's housing and communities policies helping to promote a strong, healthy, just society and sustainable economy?

1. Public funding

Achieving the government's full vision of sustainable communities will require significant public intervention and funding alongside private endeavour for a substantial period of time. Government is already providing large amounts of public funding through diverse funding streams, but significantly improved integration and timing of this funding provision is urgently needed. It is not clear that the right amount of funding will be available at the right time, and with enough certainty, to deliver on the good intentions set out in delivery plans. Social and environmental benefits could be threatened by commercial development pressure or pressure on public body budgets. The Housing Market Renewal Areas, particularly, suffer from the very short term time horizon for the funding allocations, which makes it difficult to plan and deliver for the longer term.

2. Community cohesion

Our research in both Growth and Housing Market Renewal Areas reveals a broad range of issues related to community cohesion. In Growth Areas where development has occurred remotely from the town centre, such as around Ashford, dormitory housing developments have created areas lacking community infrastructure. A lack of facilities such as health clinics and shops, due to the lack of critical mass in demand, means there is no centre for social interaction, and residents can feel remote from their neighbours. This can drive some people to spend little time in the locality, and isolation and inadequate social support networks can reduce local community wellbeing.

By contrast, in the Housing Market Renewal Areas, many demolition programmes have led to significant community resistance, with the quality of community support and neighbourliness often cited by some residents as a reason to resist the planned

demolition programme. Community consultation is not adequately factored into the initial planning assessments, which so often appear to be based on simple cost/benefit analyses, it is therefore difficult to achieve a solution that will satisfy local communities, with such an approach. Nevertheless, despite occurrences of poor community cohesion, in many of the Housing Market Renewal Areas the major investment is having very positive effects and generating real improvements in local conditions.

Social and racial cohesion can be dramatically affected by house planning and design. The SDC believes front-line public sector delivery agents should proactively intervene in housing development if community cohesion is likely to be adversely affected by poor planning, consultation or delivery. This is likely to be helped by work the Academy for Sustainable Communities is doing with community leaders and development workers to facilitate better joint working and community engagement.

Built heritage has been compromised in some of the towns in the midlands and north of England. We found inadequate attention to preserving and improving some industrial terraced housing that characterises these cities, particularly in Stoke-on-Trent and parts of East Lancashire. We recognise that government policy in the Pathfinders on demolition has shifted over the past few years and that refurbishment of existing stock is indicated as potentially a more sustainable option. Nevertheless implementation of the SC Plan on the ground is continuing to see extensive demolition in these areas. This appears to be driven in some instances by the increased funding that is available to the delivery body when a housing developer partners with a housing association to redevelop the area. In this case, demolition and replacement is more attractive than refurbishment of the existing stock. We feel this is a perverse outcome from a programme that is designed to deliver sustainability.



3. Community engagement

We have identified examples of good practice in community engagement. For example, there has been extensive and successful consultation in Newcastle Gateshead. This has, however, apparently contributed to negative monitoring assessments from the Audit Commission because of delays in implementing plans. In our view, extensive and sophisticated engagement with communities must be a core requirement of the programme, as better and more sustainable outcomes can only be achieved with real support and commitment in the local community. This requires professional leadership to help to ensure that decisions are sustainable in the long term. It is also important that thorough community engagement is recognised and encouraged through the inspection regimes. Engagement processes in almost every other area we examined have not met the standard set in Newcastle Gateshead.

4. Public services

There are examples of serious disconnection between housing provision, and the provision of public services such as schools, bus services, healthcare facilities etc, as the funding streams are separate. We found a number of examples where this has contributed to communities having greater reliance on car travel as public transport has not been made available early on in the development process. Forward funding for sustainable transport and public service infrastructure is also urgently needed so that it is in place simultaneously with the housing. We recommend that the government explores more front-loaded ways of increasing developer contributions through the planning system, to achieve improved public facilities.

5. Health and well-being

Sustainable communities have an enormous role to play in promoting and supporting citizen health and well-being. The way communities are being delivered in many places currently misses the opportunities to minimise reliance on the car, and encourage recreation in a local green space. Communities should be planned and developed, from the start, to maximise opportunities to improve

the health of local people and to reduce health inequalities. If housing and planning policy is taken forward without taking into account the principles of sustainable development, the government's goals of improving the health of the population, reducing health inequalities and tackling obesity, will be much harder to achieve.

6. Transport

Our research into transport related issues indicates considerable difficulties in delivering sustainable transport solutions. In practice, there is a tendency for road-only solutions (new link roads, roundabouts or traffic lights) to be presented as part of the developer's Section 106 planning agreement.¹

The major road building required for some Growth Areas (e.g. around Ashford) will be funded from core Highways Agency funding (around £6.3bn programme budget for 06/07). The primary focus of the Department for Transport (DfT) and the Highways Agency (HA) appears to have been to combat congestion, with developers having to consider the impacts of proposed housing growth on the road networks. Developers therefore tend to default to offering improvements for road transport flow, and are not especially encouraged to develop low carbon transport options such as public transport, which would actually reduce car dependency.

The Highways Agency has recently been consulting on a new policy on spatial planning. This will include engaging with strategic planning to direct development to locations where least transport harm will be caused, and moving from a 'predict and provide' role to one of impact avoidance. This is a welcome shift in emphasis.

We are also pleased that a significant proportion of the £200m Community Infrastructure Fund (CIF) specifically related to the sustainable communities programme has been spent on public transport. However simply extending an existing bus route along a new stretch of road, for example, is not going to significantly reduce car usage on that new road. The road itself will encourage car usage.

In addition the CIF funding was made available for short-term delivery, with the £200m required to be spent and delivered within two years. For a genuinely sustainable transport solution, this is utterly unrealistic. Sustainable transport solutions can involve whole new infrastructure (such as guided bus ways, and integrated transport management

measures) which require feasibility studies and longer planning times than two years.

We believe the Community Infrastructure Fund needs to be restructured in the Comprehensive Spending Review 07 to allow for longer time horizons to scope and test more sustainable solutions, and there should be strong support in core DfT/HA funding for feasibility work on low carbon alternative transport solutions. This could help to develop and spread best practice, such as the pilot bus programmes currently being developed for Eastern Quarry in Kent, and in Peterborough. Funding for feasibility studies must, if successful, be followed by capital funding.

7. Economic and skill development

Economic and skill development is acknowledged in the SC Plan as an important component of achieving sustainable communities. The establishment of the Academy for Sustainable Communities (ASC) to develop skills, learning and knowledge for those involved in planning, delivering and maintaining communities is very welcome. It is important that the aims of the Academy continue to be translated into tangible positive outcomes.

In areas of low housing market value, such as the Housing Market Renewal Areas, public sector funding to fill the gap between market value and cost of development will be necessary because the developer contribution will depend on the value of the development, which can be quite low. Regional Development Agencies have no specific responsibility for housing, but they are also unwilling in some areas (not all) to fund initiatives that can support the housing agenda, make an area more attractive for incoming employers, and that will improve the local economy. We believe that government needs to reinforce the RDAs enabling function so investment is made that encourages economic development that delivers sustainable outcomes, not just direct job creation.

8. Locational balance

Finally, in addressing the overall challenge of promoting a "healthy, just society and a strong economy" the SDC has concerns with the locational balance of housing growth. We recognise that development decisions are complex and that

there are important current housing needs to be met. However, this reinforces the need to have a broad, evidence-based analysis of long-term environmental, social and economic costs and benefits of developments in order to deliver genuinely sustainable communities.

Current housing policy appears to be articulated around “predict and provide” in the south east regions, without due consideration to the imbalance between this region and others where house prices are modest and economic activity is generally weaker.

The Sustainable Development Commission believes that delivering the regeneration and growth agenda through a targeted housing programme is a weakness of the current Sustainable Communities Plan approach. The economic regeneration issues that are so critical in many areas of the north and

midlands are in some areas not being adequately coordinated with the housing agenda. A greater emphasis on improving the economic prospects for the areas in the midlands and north suffering most decline, could help to re-focus the programme. The current delivery plan, with its emphasis on housing, is unlikely to achieve this goal. We believe that the focus of the SC Plan should now be on improving and enhancing existing communities where the need is greatest.

While the Northern Way is an ambitious inter-regional and spatial approach to improve the economy of the north of England, it is unclear what the impact of this initiative will be. The city-region development plans (the major output to date) have not contained any mention of sustainable development, which should be of considerable concern to CLG.



C Are the government’s housing and communities policies being delivered and monitored effectively?

The delivery and monitoring processes set in place by the government tend to measure short-term outputs and housing targets rather than broader sustainable community outcomes as defined in government’s own SC Plan criteria (at Annex A). In addition, as plans are finalised and delivery starts, the SDC is concerned that commercial pressures, skill gaps, lack of timely public funding, poor infrastructure, or local political pressures will lead to unsustainable outcomes in some places. We found some evidence of this in Stoke-on-Trent.

The process of moving from plans to delivery has seen a tight focus on delivering the annual commitments to housing numbers in every area. In our opinion monitoring (such as the six monthly monitoring of the HMR areas by the Audit Commission) is focussed around outputs, and is insufficiently focussed on outcomes. In our view, this is not particularly helpful for sustainable development, as sustainable solutions often take longer to develop than the current

monitoring framework anticipates. Engagement with communities needs to be thorough, and finding adequate funding for sustainable solutions is required. We recommend that the government revises its monitoring systems to incorporate evaluation of the outcomes of the SC Plan against its own principles of sustainable development, rather than just assessing intermediate outputs, such as the number of houses built or refurbished, within each year.

In addition, our research reveals some undesired outcomes (highlighted throughout this Review) at the local level, and we feel more proactive intervention is needed from central government in these circumstances. Public funding from central to local government is being used to support these developments, and a mechanism needs to be in place to identify problems at the earliest stage, and ensure that the desired outcomes are delivered. We recommend that a further independent assessment is made in each region where there are

regeneration programmes, Growth Areas and growth points, to evaluate the planned developments against sustainable development principles. Such an assessment would evaluate the long-term impacts in advance of planning permission being awarded. This should then be followed-up by monitoring, during and after delivery. It would also help to surface more good practice and lessons for the future, complementing existing efforts to build capacity such as through Design Task Groups.

We have found that many of the programme delivery bodies have been effective in cutting through the difficulties inherent in dealing with many local authorities, and this is to be commended. Some of the delivery bodies have been less effective than others in accessing the multiple and diverse funding streams. We recommend improved guidance from government to delivery bodies so there is consistent information on all funding options.

4. Summary of recommendations

This Review contains a number of recommendations for government at central, regional and local level, as well as other actors. These are explained in each of the chapters that follow, and summarised here for convenience.

1 Recommendations for CLG

1.1 Land use and land use planning

- Government to raise the minimum density in planning guidance to an expectation of 50 dph wherever possible
- The national brown field target to be extended to cover commercial as well as residential properties, and increased to 75% by 2008, and extend/revise this further subject to evidence of availability and use of brown field sites. Stretching individual minimum targets must be set for Growth Areas/points to help meet the national figure. Some areas will be able to meet targets of 90% or more. Local delivery to be assessed against the evidence of available brown field land and efforts to secure brown field redevelopment
- Government to restate its commitment to sequential planning – i.e. that there is a hierarchy of land types for development so that inner-city brown field sites are considered before green field sites outside existing communities
- Government must ensure that assessments of Growth Points maximise the value of inner town development and achieve densification, to limit need for out of town growth in Phase 2
- CLG to urgently update PPS1 with the 2005 principles of sustainable development

1.2 Climate change

- Between now and 2016 new build houses will continue to contribute to overall UK carbon emissions; we therefore recommend that government offset any increase in carbon emissions in new homes in the Growth Areas with matched reductions in existing homes in the same region thereby delivering carbon neutral growth; this will contribute to existing programmes for reducing carbon emissions from existing homes
- Publicly funded development to be zero carbon as soon as possible and from 2013 at the latest
- Develop and promote the use of a Code for Sustainable Homes to apply to existing homes. Government must also promote codes for the wider built environment including, for example, commercial buildings
- The Building Regulations Part L to be extended urgently (as outlined in SDC's report to ODPM *Stock Take*), to apply to major refurbishments so that cost-effective energy efficiency measures must be installed (as identified in an Energy Performance Certificate) as part of the general approval process for household extensions and major refurbishments.

1.3 Building resources

- Develop and promote delivery of a new Building Regulations Approved Document on

Materials and Waste that includes standards for: pre-demolition audit and consideration of the potential for demolition material use in new building; design for deconstruction; materials inventory and environmental impact; construction waste management

- Where demolitions are taking place through HMR, best practice standards to be required for reuse and recycling of materials
- CLG with DTI must, through the emerging government Sustainable Construction Strategy, support the development of supply chains for the reuse and recycling of materials in new homes.

1.4 Water resources

- Government to set out a timetable for raising regulation standards for water efficiency in new houses towards the higher standards set out in the Code for Sustainable Homes
- Government to require any increased water consumption in new Growth Areas to be matched with reductions in existing homes in the same region – through, for example, wider metering of water use, water efficient appliances, rain-water harvesting and grey water use.

1.5 Landscape, green space and biodiversity

- The draft PPS on Planning and Climate Change to reflect the need to sustain biodiversity within a holistic ecosystems approach. This would help to support the ability of the natural environment to mitigate and adapt to climate change impacts by re-connecting fragmented habitats
- Funding sources available to local authorities from central government to improve and manage green spaces to be co-ordinated more effectively – especially focusing on the provision of revenue funding, not just capital.

1.6 Public services

- CLG/Communities England must ensure there is more effective co-ordination between government departments and local public bodies (PCTs, local education authorities and local authorities) to enable coordinated delivery of schools, hospitals and other public services with local housing developments
- CLG must ensure that the new guidance to LSPs on sustainable development reflects the

need to coordinate the provision of facilities reflecting housing growth or transition, transport demand and management, schools, health and the rest of the public sector.

1.7 Transport and infrastructure

- Guidance for developers and local authorities to be robust about the need for more up-front partnership working and planning time to ensure sustainable transport solutions work effectively.

1.8 Measuring and delivering success

- CLG to take a pro-active, national approach to monitoring outcomes as planning moves to delivery to ensure sustainability aims are achieved. This must be clearly based on the definition of sustainable communities and the principles of sustainable development. It must include qualitative and quantitative methods
- CLG/Communities England working with ASC to reinforce efforts to enable the sharing of good practice on delivering sustainable communities and provide expert advice for lead officials responsible for developments
- The Regional Spatial Strategy Annual Monitoring Report to be presented in a format that allows for the impact of Growth Areas/Housing Market Renewal Areas (HMRAs) to be holistically assessed.

2 Recommendations for HM Treasury

2.1 Transport and infrastructure

- The Communities Infrastructure Fund to be completely remodelled in CSR 2007 to become a defined feasibility and facilitation fund for sustainable transport solutions, with capital funding available for low carbon transport infrastructure projects
- If not remedied by the current infrastructure review, the Treasury must revisit estimates of necessary infrastructure funding to deliver sustainable communities (not just housing) and allocate resources accordingly.

2.2 Public funding

- Through CSR07 the government must consider more flexible and long-run timing for spending funds, and much more flexibility in capital/revenue split, particularly for HMRAs.
- Government to encourage local innovation

for funding regeneration in ways that do not compromise environmental or social goals now or in the future

- HMT to impose a 5% VAT rate on all new homes with an equal rate for refurbishments to help to level the financial costs for developers choosing between refurbishment and new build.

3 Recommendations for others in central and local government

3.1 Sustainable construction (DTI, CLG, Defra, local government)

- The local government response to the Sustainable Procurement Task Force report must include action to minimise the construction waste impacts of the housing programme
- Publicly funded regeneration programmes to be built at the top level of the Code for Sustainable Homes, with good practice refurbishment case studies showcased more widely to help raise sustainability standards for all HMR work.

3.2 Water resources (Defra, CLG)

- Government to commit to work with industry to accelerate the availability of water efficiency related products and services
- Government to explore more robust policies and incentives for water companies to reduce leakage. For example, The Water Services Regulation Authority's (Ofwat) next Periodic Review must extend existing annual leakage targets and incentivise even greater efficiency and sustainability in water supply
- The draft Climate Change PPS recommendation that planning authorities secure sustainable urban drainage systems in proposed developments to be adopted in the final version and effective implementation encouraged.

3.3 Landscape, green space and biodiversity (Defra, local government)

- HMR and Growth Areas to plan for high quality urban green space, recreation, sports and amenity areas, including community gardens, to allow communities to enjoy the local setting and to encourage wildlife
- Master planning and Local Development Frameworks to include systematic

consideration of how people who live in sustainable communities can have access to high quality green space and its benefits in addition to compliance with biodiversity legislation

- Local authorities to be asked to assess the existing quality of parks and green spaces in their communities, potentially as part of the process in reviewing Sustainable Community Strategies, and set clear and measurable aspirations for future quality, as well as a requirement for on-going management and monitoring of green spaces
- Defra's thinking on an ecosystems approach for planning and managing natural resources must be progressed and policies developed to apply the principles in the regions and for development areas.

3.4 Public services (DH, DfES, DfT, HO, CLG, local government, NHS)

- All HMR and Growth Areas to include plans to promote more sustainable travel and to reduce car use – e.g. prioritising active travel (cycling and walking) and infrastructure in travel plans and development design, public transport provision, limiting car parking, greater density
- Local Strategic Partnerships to develop their role in upfront development of local sustainable transport solutions
- In HMR and Growth Areas, public organisations such as health, local authorities and police, to be involved in an early stage to ensure effective public services are planned in the areas. These public buildings should be exemplars of excellent design and environmental efficiency
- The public sector – local authorities in particular – to maximise use of their corporate resources through procurement to contribute to the local economy, community and environment
- DfES to mainstream the valuable start made in encouraging schools to engage their pupils, staff and communities in sustainable development through the DfES Sustainable Schools strategy
- Government to ensure Local Area Agreement, Joint Area Reviews and Comprehensive Performance Assessments are exploited and, as necessary, adapted to incentivise education and children's services to support schools'

contributions to sustainable communities in line with the DfES Sustainable Schools strategy

- A new sustainable schools standards framework to be developed to maximise the contribution of new and refurbished schools to sustainable development
- The BSF delivery and financing model to be reviewed to ensure it delivers fully sustainable, and most especially zero carbon, schools and contributes to broader community development.

3.5 Healthy communities (CLG, DH, NHS)

- The new guidance on Sustainable Communities Strategies to explicitly include health plans. These should cover access to leisure and healthcare facilities, and ensure that the developments in themselves are health promoting
- Planning Guidance to integrate health issues into housing design. This must include suitability for the different needs of residents (e.g. older people, young children etc)
- The NHS to lead by example, leveraging their economic, social and environmental impacts to contribute to sustainable communities. DH to prioritise delivery of sustainable development by the NHS through, for example, on-going championing and leadership on these issues, encouraging more extensive uptake of the GCC Assessment Model, and embedding it in to performance management arrangements.

3.6 Community cohesion (CLG, local government, regional government)

- Effective and continuous public engagement to be mandatory throughout the planning and development of new homes, particularly existing communities likely to be affected by Growth Areas, and refurbishment in the HMRA's. Evidence-gathering of the needs of different communities is required to help develop solutions that are acceptable to all communities
- CLG/Communities England in partnership with ASC to provide improved guidance and share best practice on community cohesion and local engagement with communities. This must emphasise the need to build relationships with the affected communities right from the start of planning, through

to the design and delivery, and on to the business of living in the community

- Through policy changes and in the next revision of LDFs local government must require developers to build 'tenure blind' communities so that affordable housing is indistinguishable from market housing
- Public bodies must develop policies and actively monitoring the impact of housing and community developments to ensure compliance with the Race Relations Amendment Act duty to promote good race relations
- HMRA's and Growth Area delivery bodies to produce mandatory Race Equality Schemes and be required to promote social and ethnic cohesion as part of their grant offer letter from the government
- DfES and CLG to lead on ensuring individuals involved with developments are trained and equipped to promote participation in community life. This must include those involved with planning but also extend to other local authority areas like children's services.

3.7 Promoting economic opportunity and skill development (HMT, DTI, DfES, CLG, RDAs)

- DTI, DfES and CLG to take a joint leadership role with the emerging Sustainable Construction Strategy, to ensure a proactive approach to improving sustainable construction and building maintenance skills, through commitment with the sector and the Sector Skills Councils
- DTI and CLG to ensure that the RDAs' tasking framework provides focus and funding to support the regeneration of the whole area including supporting measures that will enable business development, and improvement of the education and skills of the communities, instead of concentrating predominantly on short-term job creation.

3.8 Measuring success (CLG, Audit Commission)

- The Audit Commission's new Comprehensive Area Assessments from 2008 to support outcome-based assessments that constructively recognise the long-term and complex work needed to deliver sustainable communities.

2

Introduction



2.0.1 The 2005 UK Government's Sustainable Development Strategy charges the Sustainable Development Commission with the role of 'watchdog for sustainable development'. As part of fulfilling this remit, we are undertaking reviews of important government policy areas that are likely to have a significant impact on the government's aim to achieve sustainable development.

2.0.2 Current government policy to accelerate housing supply in the south and east of England, and regenerate failing housing market in parts of the midlands and north is likely to have very significant economic, social and environmental impacts and was therefore chosen as one of the SDC's first watchdog reviews.

2.0.3 The Sustainable Communities Plan 2003 initially articulated government policy and it has subsequently been developed and extended through further policy statements and strategies. The full definition of sustainable communities is provided at Annex A. This is the definition that we use throughout this report. Since CLG was created in May 2006, taking on the functions of the former Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the term 'sustainable communities' has been used less by the department in official communication, but the policies that underpin the original aims, including encouraging extensive housing growth, remain.

Purpose of this review

2.1.1 This review assesses whether current government efforts to deliver sustainable communities will contribute to achieving sustainable development. The review aims to identify the environmental, social and economic impacts of government policy to date, and make recommendations on how to improve current approaches where necessary.

2.1.2 In examining the effectiveness of delivery and planning in achieving sustainable outcomes, the review also considers how policy is reflected in regional and local approaches and to what extent this is successful.

2.1.3 Our assessment has looked for evidence that the current approach in different localities:

- promotes the general principles and practice of sustainable development
- supports social cohesion
- considers and tackles climate change and other environmental impacts
- stimulates local economies
- makes provision for public services in an integrated and timely manner
- ensures sustainable provision of necessary resources such as water and energy
- improves health, wellbeing and life opportunities
- allocates appropriate resources to match stated ambitions
- nurtures and supports both existing and new communities.

Our approach

2.2.1 The review assesses government policy against the five principles of sustainable development as set out in the 2005 UK Sustainable Development Strategy, and against the government's own definition of a sustainable community. The government has defined sustainable communities both in the ODPM five year plan, Sustainable Communities: People, Places and Prosperity and in the UK Sustainable Development Strategy, *Securing the Future*.

2.2.2 Our work has focussed on the effectiveness of current policies in delivering sustainable development in the light of the government's own aims and definitions. We do not propose a new definition of sustainable communities. Instead we offer suggestions for improving the policies and delivery of sustainable communities. However, we argue that government should also regularly re-examine the more fundamental assumptions behind the sustainable communities policy. For example, while we recommend ways of improving the environmental performance of new housing development in the south east, we would also question whether such developments and their location are the best answer to the demographic challenges that the UK faces.

2.2.3 The scope of the sustainable communities vision is wide and ambitious. Government policies that will support communities extend well beyond those

taken forward under the 'sustainable communities' framework. This is particularly true of vital services such as health, education and transport. Given the breadth and depth of such policy areas, this review focuses on where the links are made between them and sustainable communities policy, in order to ensure government sustainable development objectives are delivered.

2.3.4 We have considered the original Sustainable Communities Plan, *Building for the Future*, the 2005 ODPM (now CLG) Five Year Strategy, the Barker Review of Housing Supply, the UK Sustainable Development Strategies and any responses and policy statements that have followed these policy documents, particularly from the ODPM/CLG.

2.3.5 The review does not attempt to assess every aspect of sustainable communities policy. Neither does it look in detail at every relevant geographical area. We have focussed specifically on those elements which potentially have the most impact on progress towards sustainable development in England, and on a smaller number of geographical areas in depth to give an indication of progress and future direction.

2.3.6 The review only considers England, as housing policy is a devolved matter.

2.3.7 This review draws on a number of information sources and pieces of research. In addition to the existing expertise and research programmes of the Sustainable Development Commission, we :

- consulted a panel of stakeholders with diverse expertise and experience in disciplines relevant to sustainable communities
- interviewed a number of other expert stakeholders one-to-one
- commissioned four in-depth area-based studies looking at delivery in localities in two Growth Areas (South Cambridgeshire and Barking & Dagenham) and two Housing Market Renewal Areas (Newcastle Gateshead and East Lancashire)
- conducted interviews with residents of recently built housing

- undertook a number of site visits and met with local stakeholders
- considered existing publications on housing, communities, and examined relevant statistics.

Annex B includes a diagrammatic representation of our methodology.

2.3.8 Through our engagement with stakeholders, we looked for examples of how delivery is being taken forward and the barriers and opportunities that individuals have faced in trying to create sustainable communities. The area-based studies and the site visits looked more closely at delivery and planning at the local level. The aim was not to judge or review the performance of local delivery partners, but to better understand the challenges they face. By interviewing some residents of new housing in-depth we gained an insight into what people look for in a house and in a community.

2.3.9 Some of the sites examined, particularly in the Growth Areas, show little evidence of change, because the planning stage is still in progress. We have therefore been required to carry out some of the qualitative evidence-gathering for the Growth Areas in localities where the original planning permission was achieved before the Sustainable Communities Plan came into effect. We recognise that the design of Cambourne is unlikely to be approved under newer planning priorities. However discussions with planners and local authorities in many of the areas reveals that the approach to developments under the banner of the SC Plan have, in practice, been very much 'business as usual', and such practice is likely to continue. We therefore feel there is value in highlighting some of the difficulties experienced by those existing communities, as illustrations of unsustainable outcomes.

2.3.10 The SDC has published relevant information on our website, except where information has been provided in confidence.

2.3.11 Chapters 4-7 below set out our conclusions based on this information.

A photograph of a modern wooden house with a dark roof and a brick base, set against a cloudy sky. The house features a gabled roof with two skylights, a balcony on the second floor, and a brick foundation. The number '3' is displayed in the top right corner.

3

Sustainable Communities

The government's rationale

3.0.1 The government's Sustainable Communities Plan³ was launched in 2003 to tackle a number of problems facing urban and rural communities; in particular:

- the apparent housing shortages in the south east and east of England
- the severe under-occupancy of housing in areas suffering depression of economic activity, particularly former industrial areas which have suffered chronic decline in their traditional primary and manufacturing industry sectors
- the low standards of some social sector dwellings.

3.0.2 These problems have become more acute recently, but their causes are long-running. The combination of population change, patterns of economic development and decline, and social trends have been the reason for government intervention in the housing market, both now and in the past.

3.0.3 Within these trends, there are large variations across the different English regions, and this has been reflected in the very diverse challenges across different areas of the country.

Demographic drivers

3.0.4 The size, distribution and composition of England's population is changing and the population of England has grown steadily over the last three decades. It is forecast to continue to rise. Between 1991 and 2004, the population increased from 47.9 million to 50.1 million. It is expected to be 52 million by 2011.⁴ Until the mid-1990s, higher birth rates than death rates were the main driver of population growth, but since the late 1990s, net international migration into the UK from abroad has been an increasingly important factor. Between 2001 and 2004 net migration accounted for two thirds of the population change.⁵

3.0.5 The number of households has also increased, and at a faster rate than population. This increase can be attributed to a larger number of smaller families and more one-person households. One person households made up 29% of households in 2005, compared to only 18% in 1971. As a result, the average household size has fallen from 2.9 to 2.4 between 1971 and 2005.⁶

3.0.6 The UK has an ageing as well as a growing population. This is the result of declines both in fertility rates and in the mortality rate, and has led to a declining proportion of the population aged under 16 and an increasing proportion aged 65 and over. The estimated average age in 2005 was 38.8 years, an increase on 1971 when it was 34.1 years. In mid-2005 approximately one in five people in the UK were aged under 16 and one in six people were aged 65 or over.⁷ This trend may have an impact both on the supply of housing, as people remain longer in their homes (as small households), and on the type of housing that people will require.

3.0.7 Inter-regional population movement patterns within England are also important determining factors in housing pressures. The east and south east regions (areas that already have high housing demand) continue to attract more people than leave for other regions. Furthermore, although more people left London for other parts of England than moved there from other regions, its population has continued to grow due to international migration. There has also been movement into the east and south east from London. For example, in 2003 161,000 of the 246,000 people moving within England from London moved to the east or south east.⁸ Elsewhere in the country, the most significant changes are clearest at the city level. From 1991-2001, the cities that experienced the most rapid growth were predominantly in the south and south midlands, including Milton Keynes, Reading, Southampton, London and Northampton. Those with the most significant population decreases over the same time period were in the midlands and the north, including Hull, Liverpool, Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle, Birmingham and Manchester.⁹ These patterns reflect the economic disparities that still exist between regions and within the regions themselves.

Economic drivers

3.0.8 Following the decline of traditional primary and manufacturing industries, the former industrial heartlands of the north and midlands of England suffered huge job losses which contributed to significant depopulation of towns and cities. Despite recent improvement in employment levels¹⁰ and the ongoing regeneration of some city centres, some areas, only partially populated or heading for

dereliction, still exist. This economic decline coexists with some housing in poor condition, housing stock of limited diversity and low land values. Housing standards can be low, with vacancies and abandonment a problem. In some areas, low incomes and poor employment opportunities can contribute to these problems, and when these conditions have adverse affects on people's health and well being, rendering more individuals ill, disabled and dependent, this in turn affects housing need and the quality of life of the community as a whole.

3.0.9 Employment and incomes have a clear impact on housing demand, values and standards. Furthermore, this link goes full circle. The design, location, quality, availability and suitability of housing stock in a given area significantly influences the local economy, both in terms of opportunity and in viability. In some low demand areas, this has created a vicious circle of decline.

3.0.10 Conversely, very high housing prices in high-demand areas continue to rise. This has caused concern within government that this may inhibit labour mobility, push key workers (e.g. nurses and fire fighters) out of some cities, and in turn impact negatively on economic growth and service delivery.

3.0.11 The government estimates that despite high prices, new houses are being built at a slower rate than households are forming in the south and east.¹¹ It identifies this as a further contributing factor to availability and affordability problems.

Social drivers

3.0.12 These demographic and economic pressures manifest themselves not only in regionally differential housing demand and supply, but also in the social impacts that they create.

3.0.13 Housing significantly impacts on our overall quality of life. Poor housing conditions or homelessness can contribute to social exclusion, health problems and more limited life opportunities. Neighbourhood design and planning and service provision can, for better or worse, affect social exclusion and health. These in turn, have an impact on housing need and quality of community life.

3.0.14 The government is also concerned by the increasing difficulty experienced by would-be first-time buyers in purchasing a house. This presents both quality of life, and equity issues, with younger or poorer sections of society not reaping the asset benefits of house-ownership experienced by some older and wealthier people. Poor housing and neighbourhood conditions for young people as they start to raise families, has an impact on their health and the health of their children.

The Sustainable Communities Plan: The government’s response

3.0.15 Government responses to the demographic, economic and social drivers summarised above are not restricted to housing policy. Government policy recognises in principle that as well as enabling the provision of adequate housing, there is a need to provide infrastructure, services, and pleasant, safe surroundings in order to create places where people want to live now and in the future.¹² This forms the basis of the Sustainable Communities programme set out in *Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future* (which from this point we will refer to as the Sustainable Communities Plan).

3.0.16 The government’s definition of a Sustainable Community in the 2005 ODPM Five Year Plan, *Homes for All* and the UK Sustainable Development Strategy, describes more than just provision of houses. It describes a place to live that is inclusive, safe, well run, well designed and built, environmentally sensitive, well connected, thriving, well served and fair for everyone (Annex A).¹³ However, the main policy interventions taken forward under the ‘Sustainable Communities’ banner are primarily housing focussed. These include:

- designation of four ‘Growth Areas’ to accommodate a significant increase in the rate of house building

- selection of nine ‘Housing Market Renewal Areas’ in order to rebalance the housing market in low-demand areas through a combination of refurbishment, demolition and house building
- refurbishment of all social and some private housing to bring it up to a “decent” standard.

3.0.17 The Growth Areas are intended to provide the geographical focus for the step change increase in house building envisaged by the Sustainable Communities Plan. These areas were already identified in regional planning guidance for London and the rest of the south east Regional Planning Guidance (RPG9) in 2001.¹⁴ Within these areas particular growth locations are ear-marked for significant growth in housing. Growth Area funding has been provided by CLG to help this process. This funding is intended for site assembly and remediation of brown field land, delivery mechanisms, additional affordable housing and local infrastructure. The first round of the Growth Areas Fund (GAF1) saw 162 projects offered a total of £216,489,760. In the second round (GAF2), 108 projects were offered funding totalling £248,417,762.¹⁵



Figure 1

The Four Growth Areas

- Thames Gateway
- Milton Keynes & South Midlands
- London-Stansted-Cambridge-Peterborough
- Ashford

3.0.18 In nine areas, housing market renewal pathfinders have been created to regenerate low demand areas and bring the local housing markets more in to line with regional and national markets. The Housing Market Renewal Fund provides money for capital investment in housing (including

refurbishment, acquisition and demolition), based on two-year funding agreements subject to scrutiny from the Audit Commission. The government has allocated £1.2bn for investment between 2003 and 2008¹⁸. A small proportion of the money is revenue funding – only 10% of HMR money in 2006-07.¹⁹

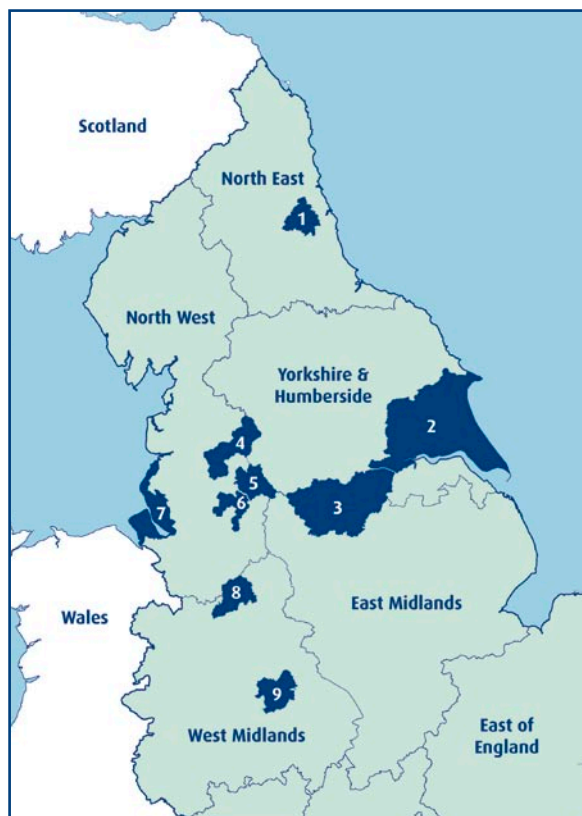


Figure 2

The Nine Housing Market Renewal areas

- 1 NewcastleGateshead
- 2 Hull & East Riding of Yorkshire
- 3 South Yorkshire
- 4 East Lancashire
- 5 Oldham & Rochdale
- 6 Manchester Salford
- 7 Merseyside
- 8 North Staffordshire
- 9 Birmingham & Sandwell

3.0.19 The strong housing focus, particularly on raising supply, was reinforced by the government's response²⁰ to the conclusions of the Barker Review of Housing Supply.²¹ One of the major conclusions of the review was that significant additional housing was required to slow down the upward trend in house prices. The government agreed and raised their target for housing growth to 200,000 additional dwelling per year over the next decade.

become more aware of the potential environmental impacts of the large housing targets. The proposed Code for Sustainable Homes²³ is intended to improve the environmental efficiency of housing, but is currently voluntary and relevant only to new build. The Thames Gateway Low Carbon/Carbon Neutral Feasibility Study is an example of more strategic approach from the government but it is too early to judge whether or not it will be followed by action.

3.0.20 In 2005 CLG (then ODPM) published its two five-year plans. Homes for All was the plan put forward as the next stage in the Sustainable Communities Plan. It reiterated the desire to accelerate housing growth and also put a strong emphasis on affordability and home ownership, with a number of schemes to support key workers, joint ownership and first time buyers.²²

3.0.22 The new 'Growth Points' initiative also shows a more strategic approach to housing growth. CLG is offering capital funding of £40m in 2007/08 to support local proposals for significant growth outside the current growth areas where this will strengthen their economic potential and promote regeneration. The growth is expected to be delivered through town centre redevelopment or densification and through the use of brown field land. Furthermore, proposals will need to demonstrate that the growth can be achieved without major environmental

3.0.21 Since publication of the original Sustainable Communities Plan, the government has started to

impacts and that it is realistic in terms of supporting infrastructure. The development of policy and the specific proposals have been taken forward through closer consultation with national and local partners, in contrast to the original Sustainable Communities Plan.

SDC's critique

3.0.23 In the context of this report we are not challenging the government's forecasts for housing number requirements, neither are we endorsing the targets. Instead this review has focussed on the potential economic, environmental and social impacts of the current and proposed scale of building.

3.0.24 However, making projections so far into the future is subject to considerable uncertainty. Changes that affect the underpinning assumptions and data in forecasts can alter predicted housing needs. We would urge a continual reassessment of housing requirements, in order to avoid unnecessary development that may have adverse environmental and social consequences.

3.0.25 The government's current approach to housing and growth, which could be characterised as market-led 'predict and provide', is not the only policy choice. For example the government could be more robust in limiting expansion in the south/east and promoting socio-economic development in other areas. However, this Review focuses on the government's current policy framework. Our detailed thinking is set out in the sections below.

Environment

What are the environmental impacts of the Government's housing and communities policies?

4.0.1 This section examines the evidence we have found on the ground of the environmental impacts of the housing programme, and the impacts we can expect if the programme continues as planned. Particular attention is focussed on carbon emissions, energy, water resources, biodiversity and landscape impacts.

4.0.2 The environmental impacts of house building are potentially very large. The original framework of the Sustainable Communities Plan (2003) did not put a high priority on managing these impacts. Awareness of the environmental challenges is growing in government and its agencies, but the scale of the issues is considerable and will require a proportionately serious response. In order to create sustainable communities, government must respect, and wherever possible improve, the local environment, limit exploitation of natural resources and the global impacts of this, and develop the quality of local biodiversity. Failure to do so will seriously jeopardise the government's ability to achieve its goal of living within environmental limits.

4.0.3 The large level of building activity envisaged by the objectives of government's sustainable communities policies will require a considerable amount of land, energy, water, and buildings materials to deliver housing growth and regeneration and the implications of this have not been adequately assessed. The quality and design of developments will have serious impacts on the future use of resources, and emissions of greenhouse gases and pollutants for decades to come. By 2050 new housing built from today will represent around 25%²⁴ of the stock and therefore will have an increasing significance in terms of natural resources.

4.0.4 Land supply is limited, and most land in England is already being used or managed for specific purposes. Land provides a broad range of benefits, such as food production, energy crops, landscape, amenity and habitats that support biodiversity and well-being. Housing development affects the potential future uses of land. Once built upon, green field land is rarely returned to a state which can deliver these functions.

4.0.5 The environmental impacts of the housing Growth Areas are significant. These include increased carbon emissions from new-build housing at current standards and growth in the number of homes, the

spread of these homes particularly in areas of the south east and east of England vulnerable to flood risk, and also the anticipated growth in the SE which is the most water supply stressed area of the UK. While much of the housing growth is taking place on brown field land, some green field development remains. In some areas, regeneration can also lead to calls for new developments such as business parks on nearby green field land. For example, while Housing Market Renewal Areas are operating within existing built-up areas and therefore will not directly impinge on greenbelt, related employment generating developments can do so. In east Lancashire the Whitebirk employment park is proposed on greenbelt land close to Blackburn.

4.0.6 The Sustainable Development Commission remains concerned with the level of housing demolition that we found occurring in some of the Housing Market Renewal Areas, and we believe a fundamental review of the local plans and the reasons for the demolition and its wider community and environmental impacts is needed urgently. An analysis of the relative impacts of refurbishment of the existing housing stock against demolition and replacement would highlight some of the key environmental and social issues. CABE's report *Creating Successful Neighbourhoods* highlighted good practice and lessons from the Pathfinder programme to help to transform neighbourhoods through good design, sustainable development and valuing built heritage. The SDC recognises that government policy on demolition has shifted recently, and there is less encouragement for such a solution. Nevertheless, evidence from the ground reveals considerable demolition programmes in some of the areas we visited (Stoke-on-Trent and East Lancashire).

4.0.7 In view of the environmental and economic²⁵ imperative of climate change, the SDC believes the highest standards of house building – zero carbon buildings – needs to be deployed, particularly through government funded programmes initially. However, complete uptake of the higher standards will require amendments to the Building Regulations, and we believe government should now outline those standards and requirement dates as a matter of urgency. The government has now published a consultation on progressive changes to Building Regulations with an aim of zero carbon homes by 2016. This is a very welcome development, but similar ambition needs to be extended to existing homes.

MORE LAND REQUIRED INCLUDING BROWNFIELD

RING:



01233 664526



4.1 Land use

Do housing and communities policies make the best use of England's scarce land resources?

Issue

4.1.1 Land supply is finite and particularly scarce in England, which is a small and highly populated country. It is especially limited in the south east where land values are high. There is competition from different land uses in addition to housing. These include non-domestic development (commercial, public sector), agricultural production, landscape, recreational space, conservation and enhancement of biodiversity. Land also has value as a pollution sink, climate modifier, carbon sink, for flood storage, bio fuel provision, water provision and in providing green space for leisure, amenities and health. These functions and values need to be considered fully alongside land use for housing. Furthermore, decisions cannot simply be guided by local circumstances: land use impacts need to be considered on a national scale.

4.1.2 Current government policy does put some emphasis on building on previously used (brownfield) land, and on increasing housing densities, both of which are necessary to reduce the impact on land use from accelerated housing growth. The new Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3)²⁶ requires:

“At least 60% of new housing should be provided on previously developed land. Reflecting the above, local planning authorities may wish to set out a range of densities across the plan area rather than one broad density range, although 30 dwellings per hectare (dph) net should be used as a national indicative minimum to guide policy development and decision-making, until local density policies are in place.”

Our evidence

4.1.3 In 2005, 77% of new dwellings in England were built on previously developed land, at an average density of 40 dwellings per hectare, exceeding the government's target of 60%.²⁷ However, this still leaves a significant amount of previously undeveloped land (greenfield) being taken for housing use. Furthermore, the positive trend in reusing land, which has seen steady increase since 1998, may tail-off or reverse in the near future. The government expects that further pressure on greenfield land will appear as the desire for speeding up housing provision grows, particularly in the Growth Areas outside the Thames Gateway.²⁸ This could have serious and irreversible impacts. Even at recent relatively low rates of use of previously undeveloped land for housing, an average of approximately 1800 hectares per year changed to residential use between 2002-2004²⁹ which is equivalent to the entire area of green space in Milton Keynes.

4.1.4 There are likely to be regional and sub-regional variations in pressures on previously undeveloped land. For example, our research in south Cambridgeshire indicated that only 37% of new building in the area is expected to be on brownfield. The focus is on new settlements and

urban extensions. Densities are wastefully low (although above the national minimum) given that previously undeveloped land will be used. The emerging East of England Regional Spatial Strategy suggests a minimum of 30 dph but encourages the highest density commensurate with the character of the area, with greater density of development in places with good transport infrastructure. The Area Action Plan for south Cambridgeshire is aiming for around 40 dph.³⁰ On average a minimum density of 50 dph is necessary to support many local services (Para 4.1.8).

4.1.5 Another example of land use pressures within the Growth Areas is the development around Ashford. Ashford has a history of flooding due to a confluence of rivers. Previous development took place around the ring road to be out of the flood plain. Current regeneration efforts are focussed on the town centre. Upstream storage areas are being put in place to reduce flood risks for development in sites due for development after 'dry' sites are exhausted. Achieving sustainability in this Growth Area is challenging. It is clearly important that flood risks are minimised, but it is also desirable for development to happen within the existing urban frame and in ways that minimise transport impacts and road reliance.³¹

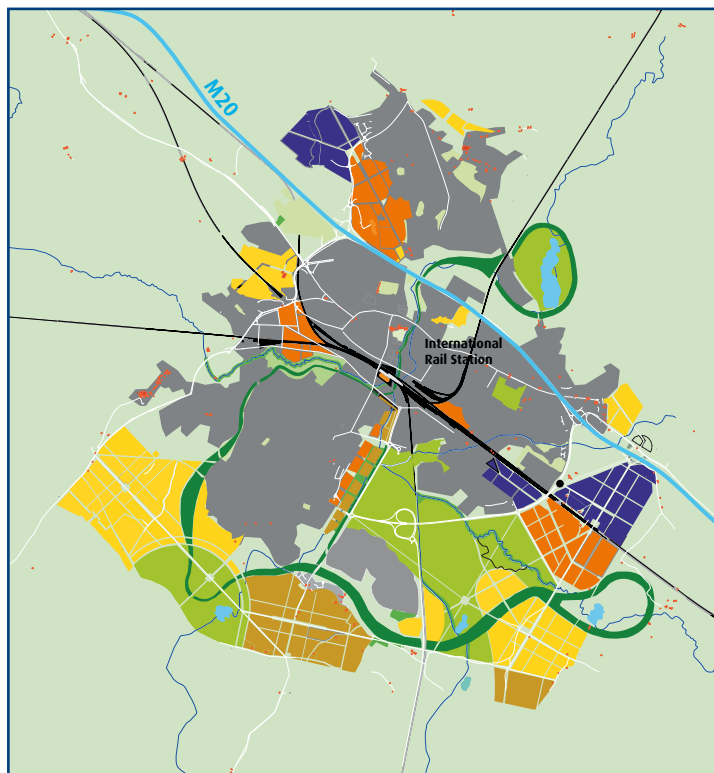


Figure 3

Ashford³²

-  Housing development
-  Proposed development post 2021
-  Commercial development
-  Mixed development
-  Existing urban area
-  Primary parks
-  Green Necklace



Ashford

4.1.6 Efficient use of existing land is crucial if the government’s housing programme is to provide homes and quality of living space whilst minimising land take. 40% of land take for housing is for private transport uses: car parking, driveways and access roads. Furthermore, the additional roads needed to serve new housing will add to this land take, particularly for urban extensions and new settlements. Between 1991 and 2001 around 11,000 hectares of land changed to highway and other road transport use. This is roughly equivalent to an urban area the size of Bournemouth.³³

4.1.7 Providing alternative, viable, transport options to the car can minimise the land take per home, and reduce other environmental and social impacts such as rainwater run-off and health benefits from more active travel. The Bedzed development in the London Borough of Sutton is a good example of this approach. It has been designed to encourage alternatives to car use including walking, cycling and use of public transport. A car pool for residents has been established and pedestrians are prioritised, for

example by providing good lighting, drop kerbs for prams and wheelchairs and a road layout that keeps vehicles to walking speed.³⁴ This has knock-on effects on health and wellbeing, both by minimising the negative effects of environmental damage on health (indirect) and by providing better opportunities for healthy lifestyles (direct). Considering that Bedzed is now 10 years old, it is disappointing that there is not more evidence of this good practice being repeated.

4.1.8 The density of developments (and thereby the local population) has a significant impact on the sustainability of the community and the amount of land it uses. Evidence suggests that a minimum density of 50 dwellings per hectare (dph) is necessary to support many local services. For example, 50 dph is the minimum density of housing needed for a frequent bus service (e.g. every 10 minutes or better) to be financially self-supporting.³⁵ Minimum densities of 50 dph make low-carbon decentralised energy provision, such as combined heat and power units, more viable.³⁶

4.1.9 This does not require building to densities that could be considered “crowded”. It is worth noting that existing Victorian terraces, which are considered desirable by many, are often built to a density of 70-100 units per hectare and allow for open space and parks. Also, density of dwellings no longer necessarily means overcrowding, because the numbers of people per home have fallen so dramatically.³⁷ However, over-crowding can be a problem if the developments are designed poorly, so inhabitants can feel overlooked and without privacy. Successful design can overcome this.

4.1.10 However, the “sustainability minimum” of 50 dph, despite being modest, is not being reached by the national average (40 dph), despite high densities of new build in London (112 dph in 2005).³⁸ Previous national planning guidance set a very low minimum density (30 dph) and regional and local planning based on this reflects this limited ambition. This is not only the case in the Growth Areas (as shown by the example of South Cambridgeshire above) but also in the Housing Market Renewal Areas.

4.1.11 Our area-based research indicates that the proposed density of developments in the Newcastle-Gateshead pathfinder is expected to be between

30 and 50 dph. The emerging North East Regional Spatial Strategy encourages average densities of 30 to 50 dph with some flexibility to provide for lower densities³⁹. It may be argued that this flexibility for lower densities will encourage a better mix of housing, but it will also increase the relative environmental footprint of development and hinder the provision of viable public and private services. In turn, this may have the opposite outcome for local housing demand than was intended.

4.1.12 The recently updated PPS3 (Housing) not only failed to increase the minimum density, but has left the option for local authorities to go below this if they see fit. However, local authorities are encouraged to select density strategies appropriate for their localities. In order to make efficient use of land and support local services, local authorities will generally need to set densities over 50 dph. At a national level, guidance on minimums should be re-visited at the first opportunity to avoid future wasteful use of land.

4.1.13 Density also influences the impact of transport on the community, and can make it easier or harder for local areas to pursue viable sustainable transport approaches impacting on the community in terms of accessibility, social cohesion and health (air quality, physical activity, accidents). For example, Nottingham city centre has actively pursued a lower environmental impact through its travel plans. This has been helped by its dense layout which makes walking and public transport more attractive in practical and economic terms. In comparison, growth in the west midlands' low-density rural population has put pressure on local transport, and its effects include increased car travel. This has made some west midlands urban areas less attractive through diminished air quality and streets that are unsafe for walking and cycling, thus making the challenge of achieving modal shift and running viable public transport more difficult.⁴⁰ There are implications, too, for the health of communities, if neighbourhoods are not designed to promote active lifestyles.

4.1.14 In terms of broader street and community design, CLG and DfT recently published the Manual for Streets to replace previous guidance from 1977 on the design and layout of streets. The guidance covers a range of factors including traffic and housing density, road safety, accessibility, parking,

public transport, cycle and pedestrian movement, maintenance requirements, place-making and issues relating to the provision of utilities and emergency services. We are pleased that this is cast in the context of the government's commitment to sustainable development. The guidelines support practitioners in ensuring that residential streets meet the needs of all street users, not just motorised vehicles; in facilitating the long-term sustainability of streets and in contributing to an enhanced sense of place. We hope that this guidance will have a positive impact on future developments.

Our views/assessment

4.1.15 The SDC believes that maximum use should be made of brownfield land and land already within the current urban frame. Development of new homes within existing communities is not only an efficient use of land, but also has the potential to further regenerate existing communities, prevent social polarisation and makes best use of existing infrastructure. Greater density of dwellings and well designed mixed communities helps to foster strong communities, reduces environmental impacts, and promotes sustainable transport solutions.

4.1.16 Central government should set a strong expectation that developments are built to a high density wherever possible, while ensuring communities are well-designed. There may be a few exceptional cases when lower densities are appropriate, but this needs to be justified carefully. Similarly, there should be a clear expectation that developments will be on brownfield sites. In some areas, due to specific local circumstances, there may be a need for green field development, but this should be carefully assessed. This is why we recommend that the targets set in planning guidance, for density and brownfield development, should be strengthened (see below).

4.1.17 The planning framework is an important instrument to support and encourage developments within existing communities. We are dismayed that the previous sequential approach to planning (in Planning Policy Guidance 3), giving preference to smaller inner-city brownfield sites over greenfield sites, has been taken out of PPS3. In addition the credits for land use and transport that were in Ecohomes (which was being used by public sector

housing) have been taken out of the Code for Sustainable Homes. This effectively means that two of the main mechanisms for encouraging use of brownfield land near public transport and town centre amenities have been removed. We would like the government to restate its previous commitment to sequential planning and ensure that the planning framework explicitly encourages this.

4.1.18 Whilst we recognise that in specific localities (such as Ashford) there are real tensions between the need to protect the town centre from flooding (and therefore to minimise development in an “at risk” location), and to enable the surrounding land to act as the flood plain, we believe that the current solution of allowing housing developments around the ring roads is ultimately unsustainable. Therefore, Ashford may not be the best location for housing growth.

Our recommendations

- The government should raise the minimum density in planning guidance to an expectation of 50 dph wherever possible.
- The national brownfield target should be extended to cover commercial as well as residential properties, and increased to 75% by 2008, and extend/revise this further subject to evidence of availability and use of brownfield sites. Stretching individual minimum targets should be set for Growth Areas/points to help meet the national figure. Some areas will be able to meet targets of 90% or more. Local delivery should be assessed against the evidence of available brownfield land and efforts to secure brownfield redevelopment.
- The government should restate its commitment to sequential planning – i.e. that there is a hierarchy of land types for development so that inner-city brownfield sites are considered before greenfield sites outside existing communities.



4.2 Climate change

Are new homes being built to high standards, to help limit the need for electricity and heating, and reduce the impact on climate change? How are the climate change impacts of existing homes being addressed?

Issue

4.2.1 Climate change is widely recognised as the most serious global environmental threat facing humankind today, and the UK government, in its Climate Change Programme 2005⁴¹ and Energy Review 2006⁴², outlined a range of measures to tackle this threat. Tackling climate change is a high political priority.

4.2.2 There are 24 million homes in the UK, accounting for 27% of carbon emissions. The way we live in our homes, and our demand for electricity and heat, directly contributes to our carbon impact. Our homes are largely heated by fossil fuels (gas, oil, electricity) and are powered (for lighting and appliances) by electricity. Around 80% of electricity

is itself created by fossil fuels (coal, gas, oil). Within the home, our demands for heat and hot water account for 80% of our energy demand, therefore reducing this demand is the first priority and this is the focus of the Climate Change Programme. However, the success of this programme so far is proving to be limited as demand for energy continues to grow year on year.

4.2.3 Demand for fossil fuels for transport is also a significant contributor to UK CO₂ emissions – 24% of the total⁴³. The pattern of car use by individuals is largely dependent on their ability and willingness to use alternative modes of transport, such as walking, cycling, taking the bus, or train. So the location and design of new developments will influence the transport needs of the residents. People living in

developments with limited public transport or access to local services, are dependent on car transport, and they have a significantly larger carbon footprint than if they used the car less. Further discussion of transport issues is included in section 5.3.

4.2.4 Adaptation to climate change is also important, particularly for the existing housing stock, to provide the right level of protection from intense weather events, such as the excessive heat in the summer of 2003. External shade from trees and shutters, as well as high thermal mass of the buildings will all contribute to limiting over-heating. It is worth noting that there was a 25% increase in insurance claims for subsidence in response to the hot dry summer of 2003, compared with the average annual number of subsidence claims which cost around £300m per year.⁴⁴

New housing stock

Issue

4.2.5 New housing currently represents only 1% of the total housing stock – 99% of the housing stock currently stands. We address the issues relating to the existing stock below (from 4.2.22). However, by 2050 the houses built under the current growth programme will represent around 25% of the housing stock, so its impact will become increasingly significant. The house building standards are therefore very important. The Building Regulations (Part L) have raised the standards of new-build homes at regular intervals over the past 20 years, and there is no doubt that the thermal efficiency of new homes is considerably higher than the average UK housing stock.

4.2.6 However, in view of the urgency with which reductions in carbon emissions need to be achieved across the UK economy we believe new-build housing (and refurbishments) must be performing at a much higher standard than the 2006 Building Regulations, and we welcome government proposals for the Building Regulations to achieve zero carbon use levels by 2016. We do not under-estimate the task of upskilling the building industry to achieve this.

Our evidence

4.2.7 Developers do not currently see any real incentives to build to standards above the Building Regulations. The introduction of the Energy Performance Certificates, required when the home is sold or rented from June 2007, will go some way to improve householder awareness of the energy performance of a home. However, EPCs for the social sector will not be brought in until 2008. And real householder demand for highly efficient homes will depend on better marketing and improved awareness of the fiscal incentive of 'no stamp duty' on zero carbon use homes as announced in the 2006 Pre Budget Report.

4.2.8 In addition to the standard of build, there is also a problem of the quality of completion of building. A recent study⁴⁵ found that many new homes were not even complying with Part L. Government has recognised the inadequacy of this situation, and the 2006 regulations require developers to prove that the homes they build do meet the required air-tightness standards. Soon a proportion of new homes in each development will have to be pressure-tested to prove compliance with the Building Regulations. Further to this there is a need to ensure adequate training of building control officers and appropriate sanctions for developers who do not meet building standards.

4.2.9 Some areas of the country are requiring higher standards of carbon efficiency. There are local authorities using the planning system to require some micro-renewables, or alternative means of achieving higher energy efficiency standards. For example the London Borough of Merton has a Community Plan target to cut CO₂ emissions by 15% by 2015. In line with this is the 'Merton 10% policy' which requires all developments with a floor space greater than 500m² and all residential units to use micro-renewables to cut CO₂ emissions by at least 10%. We therefore welcome proposals in the draft PPS on Climate Change that substantial new developments should be expected to gain a significant proportion of energy supply on-site and renewably and/or from a decentralised, renewable or low carbon energy supply.

4.2.10 Public funding (through English Partnerships and the Housing Corporation, soon to become Communities England) of new homes

sets an environmental standard above the Building Regulations. In recent years the public sector has used the BRE Eco-homes standard. In 2006 the government launched the Code for Sustainable Homes which sets performance standards for energy, water, materials and waste above the Building Regulations standards. The Code is the new public procurement standard for new homes (which must achieve at least level 3) and will be a voluntary standard for privately funded homes.

4.2.11 However, given the scale of the climate change challenge, and the speed with which we need to develop real solutions⁴⁶ the cumulative impacts of house building at the current standards need to be re-considered, especially now delivery plans for major housing growth are firming up.⁴⁷

4.2.12 CLG has commissioned a carbon neutral feasibility study for the Thames Gateway, to explore low and zero additional carbon paths. The concept of this approach is welcome, and expanding it to other areas would help provide the context for positive actions to tackle emissions. The study appears to be taking a holistic approach to identifying cost effective carbon emissions and is looking at making carbon savings in new and existing homes. Bringing the carbon impact of existing homes into the calculations, and exploring ways of stimulating energy efficiency measures beyond the current levels of activity, is very welcome.

4.2.13 Our research into the new housing development plans for the south and east of England, shows a broad range of potential solutions for improving the impact of new housing, and we very much welcome these. This ranges from some carbon neutral projects, effective use of combined heat and power systems to cut energy demand from the national grid, and the Millennium Communities. But these projects remain the exception rather than the rule in house building.

4.2.14 The sustainable use of natural resources is a key principle of national planning policy. It states that "regional planning authorities and local authorities should promote resource and energy efficient buildings; community heating schemes, the use of combined heat and power, small scale renewable and low carbon energy schemes and energy efficient buildings in developments".⁴⁸ However, the extent to which this has been followed

up in the regional and local plans for Growth Areas and Housing Market Renewal Areas is variable. Also, as several regional spatial strategies and many local development frameworks are still under development, there are currently few examples of any good intentions being realised or enforced. Where pursued, high energy efficiency and other environmental standards appear, to date, to have been driven by local authority intervention which varies in scale and leverage. The draft planning policy statement for climate change makes clear that climate change should be a key and integrating theme in plans. It expects regional and local spatial strategies to play a pivotal role in helping to deliver the government's ambition of zero carbon development, and in shaping sustainable communities that are resilient to the climate change which is now accepted as inevitable. We hope the final PPS retains these proposals and they are implemented effectively.

4.2.15 Some of the early initiatives of the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder in Newcastle have a strong emphasis on energy efficiency and renewable energy. The aim for the Cruddas Park and Byker schemes is to achieve carbon neutral development. However, development partners have yet to be identified for these schemes, and final standards are not yet agreed. A key design principle in the Walker Riverside Design Code is to maximise the solar potential of sites and one of the first sites for development incorporates the use of solar panels. However, there does not appear to be such a strong emphasis on sustainable design and renewable energy in the Gateshead schemes, which suggests that different local authorities' priorities are likely to be an important determinant of efforts on climate change.

4.2.16 The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham (LBBD) has proposed measures for improving the environmental performance of developments as part of the preparation of their Local Development Framework (LDF). It is proposed that new developments should use energy efficient design to reduce the need to heat and cool buildings. However, precise energy efficiency and renewable energy standards for new housing have yet to be set, although current proposals for the LDF are that new developments will in future be required to provide 10-20% of energy from renewable sources. In the meantime the LBBD has introduced a 'sustainability

statement' to be completed by planning applicants. Questions asked include whether developers are making use of grants for the incorporation of energy and resource efficient design of up to the 50% available through the Energy Saving Trust (EST); whether the development goes beyond the minimum energy efficient standard specified in Part L of the Building Regulations to achieve the EST's Energy Efficiency Best Practice standard for new build; and whether site orientation and design allows for retrofitting of solar devices such as photovoltaics or solar water heating where these have not been fitted initially. However, these questions are recent and planning applicants are not obliged to respond to them. Rather, the questions are for guidance but may be a material consideration when dealing with the planning application.

4.2.17 It is not clear from available monitoring documentation the extent to which planning applicants have responded to the request for a sustainability statement or how far these features have been incorporated into new developments and housing refurbishments. The LBBDD's efforts to promote high environmental standards should be recognised, though it is too early to judge what the impact will be. The decisions on the Barking Riverside planning application will be an interesting test of LBBDD's commitments. There is no information available on the energy efficiency standards or renewable energy generation in housing that has recently received planning permission from LBBDD under their previous local plan.⁴⁹



"It's lovely in the winter. I haven't turned my heating on since I moved in here!"

*Resident
St Ann's, Barking*

4.2.18 In addition to the significant opportunities for improving housing itself, Barking has the potential to secure heating for new and existing homes with minimal additional energy impacts. A consortium including the Thames Gateway Urban Development Company, CLG and Barking Power Station are proposing to use waste heat from Barking power station to provide a large district heating system. This project aims to provide heat to new and existing homes and businesses within the Thames Gateway by using 50 megawatts of waste heat available from Barking Power Station which currently is dispersed in the Thames. This could potentially make a significant contribution to the reduction of the energy required to support the Gateway. If this project goes ahead the system should be designed to ensure that existing homes are fully integrated into the network. Local heat, power or water networks can face regulatory barriers that may discourage projects like this on smaller scales. Public intervention is therefore likely to be needed to ensure the benefits are realised.

4.2.19 Looking at another Growth Area, the East of England Regional Spatial Strategy will guide development around Cambridge, and has policies requiring developments of greater than 50 dwellings to prepare energy consumption statements and to generate renewable energy for at least 10% of their needs. The area action plan for Cambridge's southern fringe proposes "flexible design that is energy efficient, built to be an exemplar of sustainable living with low carbon and greenhouse gas emissions and able to accommodate the impacts of climate change." However, it is not clear how this will be enforced or what sanctions may be taken in the event of failure to deliver. BRE is currently working with developers on plans for low carbon/low energy use housing and technologies are emerging, but definite proposals are still awaited.⁵⁰

4.2.20 In both the Cambridge and Barking areas, our interviews with residents suggested that build quality, an important determinant of whether energy efficiency is actually achieved, did not match expectations. Some residents felt that developers had cut corners when building their homes. They were happy with the size and layout of their homes, but not the delivery. There were repeated reports of poor building materials and cracked walls which would suggest that construction detailing for good thermal performance may also have been compromised.⁵¹



“One of the windows is broken but they’ve used the wrong brackets, not the right strength so they’ll continually break [...] They’ve used a lot of cheap materials.”

*Resident
Beringer’s Place, Barking*

Our views/assessment

4.2.21 In the light of the urgency with which we need to mitigate climate change, it is our view that major house building programmes should be moving rapidly towards delivering zero carbon use buildings to minimise their contribution to climate change. To date, national policy has not driven this agenda, and best practice is achieved through local authority or English Partnerships leadership in some areas. The recently announced consultations on zero carbon new homes and the planning policy statement on climate change suggest a positive move from government in this direction. We welcome recent announcements that within 10 years all new homes will be zero carbon, and suggest that between now and 2016 the government could also offset any increase in carbon emissions or water consumption in new Growth Areas with matched reductions in existing homes in the same region. This would mean there would be no net increase in carbon emissions from new housing growth immediately, and it would boost refurbishment activity in existing communities with its associated health and economic benefits.

4.2.22 The SDC also believes that publicly funded house building by English Partnerships and the Housing Corporation (soon to become Communities England) should begin to construct to zero-carbon-use standards as extensively, and as soon as

possible, and by 2013 at the latest. This would lead the way for other new housing to be zero-carbon-use by 2016 and stimulate the industry and supply chain to up-skill and mass-produce the products required. Achieving zero carbon use homes means the house construction must minimise demand for heat with super-insulated walls and high thermal mass, have renewable fuels for any heat demand (biomass, ground source heat pumps) and have integrated micro or community scale renewables for the supply of hot water and electricity for powering lights and appliances. The energy consumption of the lights and products would also need to be at the least possible and so product policy would need to be aligned to this goal, requiring an acceleration and expansion of the government’s current market transformation programme.

4.2.23 External shading is also important for both existing homes (which will need to provide shelter against excessive summer heat in a climate changed world) and new build homes. Trees, exterior shutters and blinds all help minimise demand for air conditioning, which may become prevalent in homes with a low thermal mass, or lightweight construction, particularly in the light of climate change and the rise in overall UK temperatures that are envisaged. Urban green space is particularly important for overcoming some of the “urban heat island” effects in towns, as well as helping water and biodiversity management.

4.2.24 Our work with the industry has shown that rapid and significant changes to building practices are best achieved through a comprehensive approach to regulation,⁵² requiring:

- the entire industry to work to the same standard, and stimulating the supply chain to produce the products and services to meet the new demand, and
- comprehensive training and capacity building programmes undertaken in partnership with the industry, and
- enforcement of the standards to ensure compliance. Enforcement of the Building Regulations is a recognised problem and government is attempting to tackle this. Industry operated compliance programmes appear to be quite successful (such as Fensa, and the boiler regulation compliance programmes), although these should be kept under continual review and testing.

The introduction in the 2006 Building Regulations of pressure testing of new homes in the 2006 should help improve the air tightness problems that have affected new build in the past.

4.2.25 The Code for Sustainable Homes is the new national standard for sustainable design and construction of new homes. It aims to minimise the environmental damage caused by new development and will ensure that all new homes in England have been designed with sustainability in mind. While we support the concept of mandatory assessments against the Code for Sustainable Homes standards, we would like to see requirements for publicising/display of assessment ratings for new homes. We also believe it is important that the outcomes of the Code standards must be evaluated and government should clarify how it will govern and update the Code.

Our recommendations

- Between now and 2016 new build houses will continue to contribute to overall UK carbon emissions, therefore we recommend that government offsets any increase in carbon emissions in new homes in the Growth Areas with matched reductions in existing homes in the same region thereby delivering carbon neutral growth; this will contribute to existing programmes for reducing carbon emissions from existing homes
- Publicly funded development to be zero carbon as soon as possible and from 2013 at the latest.

Existing housing stock

Issue

4.2.26 While the proportion of new housing in the total housing stock may grow to become 25% of the stock by 2050, existing stock will still represent about 75% of the total at that point. So the focus on tackling carbon emissions from existing homes remains critical. There is a massive opportunity to reduce carbon emissions from existing stock.

4.2.27 There are three major programmes for improving the energy efficiency of the housing stock:

- the Energy Efficiency Commitment (EEC) which is a government regulation on the energy suppliers requiring them to offer energy efficiency measures to their customers
- the Warm Front government funded programme to improve the energy efficiency of homes of the fuel poor, and vulnerable groups
- the Decent Homes Programme where local authorities upgrade the housing standards of their tenants – this in practice is often

delivered in partnership with the energy supplier through EEC. There is also a Decent Homes target for vulnerable people in the private sector.

4.2.28 The Sustainable Development Commission has carried out a year-long project on the opportunities for improving the resource efficiency of the existing stock, and our key findings outline the technical opportunities for achieving significant energy and carbon savings as well as wider sustainable development benefits.⁵³ Government has also carried out a range of reviews of the opportunities for improving the efficiency of existing homes – the Energy Efficiency Action Plan (Defra 2005), Energy Efficiency Innovation Review (Defra & HMT 2005), and CLG’s review of the sustainability of existing buildings, yet to be published. In addition the government funds the Low Carbon Buildings Programme to encourage the uptake of micro-generation in new and existing buildings.

4.2.29 The technologies to be used to improve the efficiency of the existing housing stock are well known, and include cavity and loft insulation, improved heating systems and controls, draught

proofing, use of low energy lighting, secondary or double glazing and efficient household appliances.⁵⁴ Micro-generation, such as solar hot water, ground source heat pumps, micro-wind, photovoltaics and potentially micro-CHP units can all contribute to achieving significant improvements in the overall efficiency and SAP rating⁵⁵ of a home.

4.2.30 It is imperative to transform the delivery of the SC Plan’s current large scale housing development programme into one that significantly delivers against the carbon emission reduction goals. Such an approach must include the Decent Homes Programme, which to date has not focussed on achieving carbon emission reductions.

4.2.31 In addition to an improved and more ambitious use of current policies to tackle the standards of existing homes, the Housing Market Renewal Areas in particular are delivering major changes to the existing housing stock, and to date around 8,000 homes have been demolished, approximately half of which were post-war social stock. Pathfinders have reconsidered demolition

plans as markets have improved, and some homes that were to be demolished will now be refurbished.

4.2.32 The full life cycle impacts of demolishing and replacing housing need to be taken into account when improving existing stock, including the impact of embodied energy and carbon. While there are different arguments and studies about the relative merits of demolition and refurbishment, one authoritative study⁵⁶ estimates that it can be between three times and ten times more costly to fund demolition and replacement than to refurbish. Demolition can blight existing housing and drive up costs of renewal, and it can generate demand for new housing. Importantly it also brings a social cost of community fragmentation (covered in section 5 below) and the loss of heritage and local identity. The alternative of refurbishing and reusing buildings wherever possible can bring the standards of those buildings up to the highest achievable, deliver significant energy and carbon saving, help to preserve community identity and bring value to the householder as well as the UK economy.



Our evidence

4.2.33 Our research into the HMR areas revealed that resource efficiency practice is highly variable.

4.2.34 An approach which concerned us was found in Stoke-on-Trent where widespread demolition is taking place. The regeneration strategy in Stoke-on-Trent is to focus economic and housing regeneration within the six towns that make up the city of Stoke-on-Trent. The goal is to make each town more vibrant, attractive economically, and with an increased footfall on the high street. However, demolishing housing that could be refurbished, risks wasting materials and embodied energy, and the negative impact of demolition programmes on communities, and on identity and heritage, may hamper the achievement of the strategy's aims.

4.2.35 There are geological difficulties in Stoke-on-Trent, resulting from the extensive coal mining beneath the city, which may affect the viability of some existing buildings. However, groups of buildings designated as most at risk in local assessments are not the only ones selected for demolition. Furthermore, some housing identified for demolition is close to a town centre, and therefore would appear to be well placed to provide the increased footfall, particularly if the existing housing is upgraded to improved standards, the internal layout improved to meet market needs, and the street environment improved to be more attractive. Additional economic activity is urgently needed as part of the overall strategy, to stimulate the regeneration process (see section 5.6). Most areas proposed for demolition are occupied.

4.2.36 We also found worrying evidence that the condition of existing homes was being used as a reason for demolition, so a low SAP rating and failure to meet the Decent Homes thermal efficiency standard is used as an additional reason for demolition instead of being a stimulus for a serious refurbishment programme.

4.2.37 In addition Stoke-on-Trent has an industrial heritage; the pottery industry, mining and steel industries dominated the economy for centuries, until the UK's industrial decline over the past two decades. The characteristic terraced housing is a mark of the city's heritage, and should, in our view, continue to play a part in defining its identity.

Much of this stock is attractive, reasonably well maintained and relatively popular. In view of the extensive range of technical options for improving the quality, efficiency and viability of the existing housing stock, we believe there is considerable potential for improving the existing housing throughout the city. A refurbishment approach also reduces the impact of wasted embodied energy and materials. We believe the housing programme delivery needs further examination by government so a more creative and sustainable approach to meeting housing and regeneration needs in Stoke-on-Trent can be adopted.

4.2.38 There appear to be considerable barriers to LAs and HMR delivery agencies delivering more widespread refurbishment programmes, as opposed to the demolition and replacement programmes that are underway, particularly:

- evidence that the requirement to pay VAT on refurbishment (+17.5%) considerably raises the costs of a refurbishment project, and zero rating on new-build makes the economics more favourable for this option. (see example below on the *Chimney Pot Park Urban Splash* development)
- the public sector normally bears the cost of compulsory purchase and demolition, so the private developer has an attractive opportunity for a development on newly vacated land
- a number of agencies told us that the economics are significantly more attractive with demolition and replacement, because attracting large-scale private developers allows more investment to go into that specific plot.

4.2.39 In other words the public sector funding through the HMR programmes enables and attracts private sector funding, particularly for new build developments where the developer will benefit (often in a partnership with a Housing Association). Refurbishment programmes do not receive the same level of interest from the private sector and therefore the costs fall heavily on the publicly funded bodies – LA or HMR delivery body. The use of public funding on this scale, bringing about such unsustainable outcomes, has to be seriously questioned.

4.2.40 Where housing is considered to be of an inappropriate or unappealing size or design,



Chimney Pot Park

housing market renewal funding has been used to deliver innovative approaches instead of demolition. For example in Langworthy, Salford, in the area locally known as *Chimney Pot Park*, around 90% of the 385 properties were vacant in 2003. The property developer Urban Splash, working with the local authority and English Partnerships developed a plan to completely redesign and refurbish the small terrace houses in the area. As far as possible the house exteriors are being retained, as is the existing streetscape which links with the surrounding community. More of the existing structure than was wanted had to be removed because 17.5% VAT would have been added to the cost of the development had it been refurbished. To avoid this the developer left just the façade, so it would be treated as new build and therefore incur 0% VAT. The interiors have been re-modelled to make the most out of the space and the houses have been turned ‘upside-down’ – creating living spaces in the loft, and moving the bedrooms to the ground floor. When they were marketed, they sold rapidly, demonstrating a complete turn-around in the desirability of the area. Existing residents were invited to either opt for the Council’s *Home Swap* scheme, trading their existing house for a newly refurbished house, or were offered first choice on the new Chimney Pot Park houses.

4.2.41 In addition to the issues of demolition and new build, research into some of the planned Growth Areas has also revealed a lack of understanding of the need to approach housing growth with the existing housing in mind. This is particularly true in the Harlow North plans, where an almost entirely separate community had been planned, with little reference to the existing town, and little benefit being brought to the existing community. While we understand efforts are being made to overcome this, any further plans to take forward that development must engage with the existing community, and provide the opportunity for improvements in densification of the existing town, improvements in the standard of the housing where possible – particularly in LA owned and housing association owned properties – but also with targeted programmes under EEC and *Warm Front* to owner-occupiers to ensure that environmental improvements are maximised in the existing housing stock.

Our views/assessment

4.2.42 The Sustainable Development Commission has considerable anxiety about the levels of housing demolition that we found, given its negative environmental, social and economic consequences. Demolition is often justified on the grounds of the unsuitability of existing housing for the current housing market. However, refurbishment can be to a very high standard. Innovative approaches can be used to remodel outdated internal layouts whilst maintaining workable medium-density street layouts, retaining existing communities and avoiding a waste of resources. To overcome a shortage of sustainable refurbishment case studies, particularly with public funding, we would encourage Pathfinders to run and to publicise additional major pilots of sustainable refurbishment in Housing Market Renewal Areas. Promoting examples of good practice in refurbishment could help to raise the sustainability standard of all HMR work.

4.2.43 We would like financial and regulatory frameworks to encourage more innovation and delivery of housing renewal that has minimal impact on climate change. While EU rules specify that VAT can only be legally levied at the same rate throughout a territory (either 5% or 17.5%), harmonising rates for new build and refurbishment will help to rebalance the fiscal dimension of

re-development decisions. It has been estimated that 5% VAT on new homes would raise around £650m which could be used to fund VAT reductions on refurbishment.⁵⁷

4.2.44 We believe it is important that a version of the *Code for Sustainable Homes* is developed to apply to existing homes. This should set challenging carbon, water and waste standards to measure the performance of the existing housing stock and set standards for improvements. The Decent Homes programme should then be based on that Code for existing homes.

4.2.45 The SDC is currently undertaking a Thematic Review of OFGEM, and this will include recommendations on energy markets and encouraging the uptake of micro-renewables and decentralised energy.

Our recommendations

- CLG to develop and promote the use of a *Code for Sustainable Homes* to apply to existing homes. Government should also promote codes for the wider built environment including, for example, commercial buildings
- To help to level the financial costs for developers choosing between refurbishment and new build, HMT to impose a 5% VAT rate on all new homes with an equal rate for refurbishments
- Publicly funded regeneration programmes to be building at the top level of the Code for Sustainable Homes, with good practice refurbishment case studies showcased more widely to help raise sustainability standards for all HMR work
- The Building Regulations Part L to be extended urgently (as outlined in SDC's report to ODPM Stock Take), to apply to major refurbishments so that cost-effective energy efficiency measures must be installed (as identified in an Energy Performance Certificate) as part of the general approval process for household extensions and major refurbishments.⁵⁸



4.3 Building resources

What are the environmental impacts of demolishing existing homes and constructing new homes, and how are they being dealt with?

Issue

4.3.1 The government's commitment to increase the rate of new housing supply to 200,000 per year over the next decade will require a considerable amount of building materials. The sourcing, processing, use and disposal of these materials will have major and varied environmental, visual and social impacts. For example, over 90% of non-energy minerals (mainly aggregates) extracted in the UK, with associated quarrying and mining impacts, are supplied as construction materials. Furthermore, the construction and demolition industry contributes 33% to the UK's volumes of waste.⁵⁹ This is four times the waste produced by all UK households. Existing licensed landfill sites only have capacity to take waste for 6.5 more years at current rates

of disposal. Thirty percent of UK fly tipped waste is currently construction waste.

Our evidence

4.3.2 The original Sustainable Communities Plan and the ODPM Five Year Plan *Homes for all* did not directly tackle the issue of buildings materials and waste. *Homes for all* indicates that the government wants to promote construction waste reduction, and the use of materials with less environmental impacts, but no solid measures are put forward to achieve this. The exemplar role of the Millennium Communities, and the encouragement given by the voluntary (except for the public sector) Code for Sustainable Homes are put forward as levers for change, but they are not commensurate with the scale of the challenge.

The English Partnerships' Millennium Communities Programme

began in 1997 with the purpose of designing communities that incorporate a variety of housing with green spaces, good transport links, shops and community facilities. Seven communities have been established where the integration of services, minimisation of resource consumption and environmental performance standards of buildings are key concerns. These communities are based in a range of locations from a city estate (Manchester, New Islington) to a seaside town (Hastings), demonstrating that all areas can be improved and adapted to create more sustainable environments for living and working.

The programme has improved land through remediation as at the Telford Millennium Community site and it has contributed to the much-needed regeneration of areas such as the Greenwich Peninsula. Each community is themed, to highlight a particular approach to sustainable living including integrated transport at Hastings and community integration at South Lyn. Community involvement is a vital component of the programme at every site with local residents participating at all stages of planning and implementation and also in the running of their community's new facilities thus creating a sense of community ownership.

4.3.3 The Building Regulations do not currently cover construction or demolition waste, and do not establish standards for construction or demolition processes.⁶⁰ The Sustainable and Secure Buildings Act (2004) does enable buildings regulations to be made for the purposes of furthering sustainable development and the government should use this power to fill this gap.⁶¹

4.3.4 The Code for Sustainable Homes includes standards for sustainable materials specification. Our research found that implementation of high standards of sustainable construction (e.g. for materials, climate change adaptation, energy efficiency, renewable energy, waste minimisation, water efficiency) is patchy and appears to rely on the commitment of local policy makers and the bargaining strength of local planning authorities.⁶²

4.3.5 Despite the scale of the government's housing programmes, there is no evidence that the environmental impact of building materials and waste is being assessed in a systematic manner, and measures of an appropriate magnitude put in place. There is scant data available on construction waste or benchmarks for industry practice. Good practice tools which exist such as the 'Design for Deconstruction' process and 'Demolition Auditing' have not been sufficiently piloted to evaluate benefits and learn lessons towards mainstreaming. Two of the top ten areas identified in the Sustainable Procurement Action Plan are construction and waste and the public sector needs to show leadership by

tackling construction waste from its own projects, and should announce substantive measures in the responses to the Sustainable Procurement Task Force recommendations from government, the health and education sectors.

Our views/assessment

4.3.6 The environmental impacts of construction are not being dealt with adequately and we believe the government must put in place a more stringent policy framework to minimise environmental impact and use of natural resources. We would like maximum reuse and recycling of materials, which brings a double-benefit by reducing the environmental impact of both materials sourcing and waste disposal.

We are concerned that there is so little data available to measure or monitor the environmental impact of building resources. This needs to be addressed urgently.

Our recommendations

- **Develop and promote delivery of a new Building Regulations Approved Document on Materials and Waste that includes standards for: pre-demolition audit and consideration of the potential for demolition material use in new building; design for deconstruction; materials inventory and environmental impact; construction waste management**

- The local government response to the Sustainable Procurement Task Force report should include action to minimise the construction waste impacts of the housing programme
- Where demolitions are taking place through HMR, best practice standards should be required for reuse and recycling of materials
- CLG with DTI to, through the emerging government Sustainable Construction Strategy, support the development of supply chains for the reuse and recycling of materials in new homes.



4.4 Water resources and flood risk

Do the location and design of new houses take into account water resources and flood risk?

Issue

4.4.1 Water is a vital resource for people, the economy and the environment. Ambitious housing targets, growing demand and the impacts of climate change will put pressure on the availability of fresh water and may increase the number of households at flood risk. Water supply, usage and flood risks are important issues to consider in the delivery of housing. Without full integration of water issues in national location, as well as regional and local, development decisions, the viability of new or existing communities could be threatened.

Our evidence

4.4.2 Much evidence has already been presented to government, notably by the Environment

Agency,⁶³ that identifies the provision of water resources as a fundamental constraining factor on the sustainability of the new proposed housing growth. In a recent report⁶⁴ the Environmental Audit Committee set out some serious concerns about the security of water supply and the state of the water infrastructure in the proposed Growth Areas.

4.4.3 The current Sustainable Communities Plan's proposed Growth Areas are where the water problem is greatest.⁶⁵ The high population density in these regions means that there is relatively little water available per capita in the areas ear-marked for housing growth.⁶⁶

4.4.4 Furthermore, according to The Water Services Regulation Authority (Ofwat), water consumption per head is increasing which will exacerbate this pressure. They report that in the period 1995 to 2005

average per capita consumption has risen from 144 litres/head/day to 150 litres/head/day⁶⁷. In the south east the per capita consumption is higher than in any other region⁶⁸. If the rising trend in water consumption is not addressed, water resources in the south east of England will not be sufficient to cope with increasing demand.⁶⁹

4.4.5 The water supply problem will be compounded by the impacts of climate change, with an increase in the extremes of wetter winters and drier warmer summers expected.⁷⁰ Climate change is predicted to reduce summer rainfall by 15%-60% by 2080, with shorter more intense rainfall activity in the winter. Climate change scenarios also present serious waste water treatment and river water quality challenges.⁷¹

4.4.6 New infrastructure for water supply and waste water disposal will be essential in order to meet demand. Water company resource plans indicate that seven large-scale water facilities are being considered for the south east of England: four new reservoirs and increased capacity at three existing sites. If delivered these would provide enough water for nearly 1.5 million households by 2020. Reservoirs can take 20 years to develop, plan and build.⁷²

4.4.7 Creation of new water infrastructure has environmental implications. New reservoirs, desalination plants, river abstraction and inter-basin transfers all have some negative environmental consequences. Resource development options like desalination and effluent reuse have higher energy costs than demand management options. Over-abstraction of water from rivers and groundwater supplies runs the risk of England and Wales falling foul of the Water Framework Directive, which could prove very costly. WWF identifies the Severn and Trent as two major rivers at particular risk.⁷³ It is welcome therefore that the government is providing funding for studies into flood risk, surface water management and water cycle issues in recognition of these concerns.

4.4.8 The Environment Agency estimates that it will cost £7.5bn over the next 20 years to provide sewage treatment for the new housing proposed under the South East Plan. Protecting water quality and providing water, waste management and flood protection is estimated to cost £20,200



“We have a water meter but we don’t pay for water, it’s all included in the rent.”

*Resident
The Quills, Cambridge*

for each of these houses. Even if additional foul water infrastructure is provided, there are limits to the capacity of rivers to receive additional treated effluent. Increasing the standard of treatment can be expensive and increase energy costs. This is an important issue at a number of growth points. For example at Basingstoke, studies are underway to assess the capacity of the River Loddon (a chalkstream Site of Special Scientific Interest) to accommodate the additional requirements of the growth point proposals.

4.4.9 The Environment Agency has been trying to encourage greater application of a twin-track approach of reducing demand from new and existing housing at the same time as developing new water resources. For example metering significantly reduces people’s demand for water by making them aware of the amount they use and pay for. Metered households use about 10% less water than non-metered households.⁷⁴ It is also estimated that up to 40% of the extra water needed for growth in the south east could be supplied from the water saved by installing ultra low flush toilets and water meters in existing housing.⁷⁵

4.4.10 The SDC’s evidence shows that there has been some response in regional planning to these pressures, but there remains considerable doubt over whether plans for new water supplies will be able to meet the increased demand from new housing.

The draft East of England Regional Spatial Strategy advocates strong water conservation measures and the use of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS). However, the inspectors' report on the examination in public of the RSS states that "truly sustainable development will mean marked change, indeed a reversal of the habits and attitudes of the region and its people, to, among other things, water use, energy consumption and waste". It goes on to say that "without action going well beyond the remit of the RSS and the planning system the changes needed to secure truly sustainable development will not occur".

4.4.11 In the meantime it appears that current housing approvals in the Growth Areas are rarely meeting the higher water efficiency standards that the Environment Agency would like to see. Meeting higher standards remains voluntary, particularly for private housing developments. There are indications that despite the new Growth Area plans, south Cambridgeshire District Council is failing to agree high water efficiency standards with developers.⁷⁶ The *Code for Sustainable Homes* requires improved water standards for new publicly-funded homes from April 2007, and new water efficiency regulations will apply more stringent standards to all new homes by 2008 and, subject to the outcome of the current consultation process, we welcome this improvement.

4.4.12 In London, major infrastructure expansion is planned but growing supply pressures are unlikely to be solved by those steps alone – Boroughs will need to do more through their local development plans. For example, the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham's current proposals include measures for minimising water consumption, collecting rain water and installing systems for water re-use (grey water) in housing. However, there is no information on what standards are currently being achieved and how future standards would be enforced or monitored.⁷⁷ So it is welcome that the Thames Gateway water neutrality project is considering the feasibility of moving towards water neutrality, whereby total demand for water after development is equal to current demand pre-development, by 2016 and beyond.

4.4.13 The technology to increase water efficiency in new build is available, from changes in flow rates of taps, to installing integrated rainwater harvesting

and grey-water recycling systems. Exemplars such as BedZed and Kingsmead Primary School demonstrate the benefits of state-of-the-art water efficiency systems, but more modest measure such as dual flush toilets can also have significant impacts.

4.4.14 In addition to the problem of supplying fresh water to growing populations, flood risk presents a threat to housing development in some areas. Development on or close to flood plains and flood risk areas (e.g. from urban/sewer flooding) will be vulnerable to flooding, and may increase the risk of flooding elsewhere. Nearly two million properties in floodplains along rivers, estuaries and coasts in the UK are potentially at risk of river or coastal flooding.⁷⁸

4.4.15 Besides river and coastal flooding, towns and cities will be subject to localised flooding caused by the sewer and drainage systems being overwhelmed by sudden localised downpours, further exacerbated due to increased run off from hard surface development. The potential damage could be huge but much more work needs to be done to quantify the potential problem. Homes may be destroyed or abandoned as sea levels rise and adapting to this change and integrating these considerations into housing planning is a matter of urgency.

4.4.16 The new policy in Planning Policy Statement 25 (Development and flood risk), published in December 2006, aims to ensure that flood risk is taken into account throughout the planning process to avoid inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding. It employs a risk based, sequential approach to direct development away from areas at highest risk. In addition, the Environment Agency's study of flood risk management is considering what flood defences will be needed to protect the Thames Estuary for the next century, including future sea-level rises, and how to use the Thames Gateway redevelopment to deliver sustainable flood management solutions. These are welcome initiatives to help to minimise flood risks to new and existing homes.

4.4.17 Regional planning bodies (RPBs) and local planning authorities (LPAs) should prepare spatial plans by:

- **appraising risk** – identifying land at risk and the degree of risk of flooding from river,

sea and other sources in their areas; and preparing Regional Flood Risk Appraisals (RFRAs) or Strategic Flood Risk Assessments (SFRAs) as appropriate

- **managing risk** – producing development policies which avoid flood risk to people and property where possible (using the sequential approach/test), and manage residual risk taking account of the impacts of climate change
- **reducing risk** – safeguarding land from development that is required for current and future flood management; reducing flood risk to and from new development through location, layout and design; using opportunities offered by new development to reduce causes and impacts of flooding e.g. surface water management plans; making the most of the benefits of green infrastructure for flood storage, SUDS, etc.
- **partnership approach** – working effectively with the Environment Agency and other stakeholders and ensuring that spatial planning supports flood risk management plan policies, River Basin Management Plans and emergency planning.

4.4.18 LPAs should deal with planning applications by:

- ensuring they have a site-specific flood risk assessment (FRA)
- applying the sequential approach to minimise risk – directing the most vulnerable development to areas of lowest flood risk
- giving priority to the use of SUDS
- ensuring that all new development in flood risk areas is appropriately flood resilient and resistant, including safe access and escape routes where required, and that any residual risk can be safely managed.

4.4.19 More generally CLG has proposed some positive measures in the draft PPS on climate change. This PPS makes clear that in considering the environmental performance of proposed developments, taking particular account of the climate the development is likely to experience over its expected lifetime, planning authorities should, as part of a wider adaptation package:

- secure sustainable urban drainage systems
- pay attention to the potential contribution to be gained from water harvesting from

impermeable surfaces

- encourage layouts that accommodate waste water recycling.

Our views/assessment

4.4.20 In the absence of clear and effective measures to address water supply and a continued intention to build new homes in the south and east of England, it is all the more important that action is taken to maximise water efficiency and reduce usage.

4.4.21 Given the constraints of water supply, emphasis must be placed on minimising demand for potable water and supporting this with timely and environmentally sensitive new infrastructure if necessary. This requires complete clarity over the levels of efficiency that the government believes can be realistically achieved in the next 5, 10, 20 and 50 years. Once an ambitious but realistic target has been set, it is imperative that the respective roles of the various interested parties are established and agreed. Interested parties are primarily the water companies, Ofwat, government, the Environment Agency, the demand management supply chain and consumers.

4.4.22 On water demand, the SDC believes that England should aim for significant reductions in water consumption from the entire built environment, delivered through cost effective measures which encourage market transformation and innovation.

4.4.23 CLG's consultation on Mandating Water Efficiency in New Buildings contains some welcome proposals in this regard. The SDC welcomes the proposed adoption of stretching whole building performance standards for water consumption in new homes: CLG are proposing a maximum of 120-135 litres per head per day. While this represents a 10-20% reduction of the current UK average consumption of 150 litres per head per day the SDC suggest that, in light of improving efficiency standards in new houses, the government could opt for more stringent targets.⁷⁹ These regulatory standards should be aligned with the Code for Sustainable Homes, to give a clear commitment to progressive tightening of future standards in advance, and align methodologies for the 'whole building performance' standard.

4.4.24 The SDC also believes that more action must be taken to reduce water consumption in existing homes. Various measures have been proposed in SDC's *Stock Take: Delivering improvements in existing homes*.⁸⁰ Thus we support a 'hybrid' solution comprising challenging whole building performance standard for new domestic properties, and a components-based approach underpinning the whole building standard which establishes uniform standards across all building types, new and existing.

4.4.25 Low flush toilets, water saving taps and other water efficient fittings are not routinely used, and it can be hard to source them currently, so measures need to be taken to encourage and enable the manufacturing industry and supply chain to deliver better products. The CLG consultation on water efficiency in new homes aims to identify the best incentives for driving market transformation and innovation. In our view, this is best delivered through clear consistent standards for all water using fittings and appliances, with clear signals for future regulatory standards.

4.4.26 We would also welcome measures to encourage the water industry to innovate more to improve water supply efficiency. For example the last Ofwat Periodic Review in 2004, which set annual price limits for the UK's 22 water companies, included annual leakage targets for the period 2005-2010. This is the first time specific targets have been included as periodic review outputs. We would like Ofwat to tighten these targets at the next Review to further incentivise efficiency and sustainability in water supply. Ofwat should also introduce targets on water efficiency in homes, with enhanced targets in areas prone to water shortages.

Our recommendations

- Government to set out a timetable for raising regulation standards for water efficiency in new houses towards the higher standards set out in the *Code for Sustainable Homes*
- Government to require any increased water consumption in new Growth Areas to be matched with reductions in existing homes in the same region – through, for example, wider metering of water use, water efficient appliances, rainwater harvesting and grey water use
- The draft Climate Change PPS recommendation that planning authorities secure sustainable urban drainage systems in proposed developments to be adopted in the final version and effective implementation encouraged
- Government to commit to work with industry to accelerate the availability of water efficiency related products and services
- Government to explore more robust policies and incentives for water companies to reduce leakage. For example Ofwat's next Periodic Review should extend existing annual leakage targets and incentivise even greater efficiency and sustainability in water supply.



4.5 Landscapes and biodiversity

Do the design and location of new houses help to protect and enhance countryside and wildlife? Do communities have access to high quality parks and green spaces?

Natural landscapes and biodiversity

Issue

4.5.1 The natural environment provides services that are fundamental to human health and well being. It provides the resources we need for basic survival and good health. Natural and semi-natural systems support the production of food and other goods and services; provide a resource for recreation, leisure and tourism; support vital ecosystem services such as climate regulation, flood management and carbon storage; and provide habitats for wildlife. The natural environment also provides social and cultural value in terms of our national heritage, education and inspiration.

4.5.2 Urban areas and the countryside are

interdependent, and housing development and regeneration in our towns and cities cannot be planned effectively without taking into account the impacts on surrounding natural landscapes and biodiversity, and recognising the benefits and services that it provides to new and existing communities. Sustainable communities not only need to be environmentally sensitive, but should also allow everyone to benefit from green space, landscape and biodiversity.

4.5.3 Land supply is finite, and particularly scarce in England. New housing should not be delivered at the expense of other environmental functions such as those of biodiversity, leisure, health and landscape. While resources such as biodiversity and soils are considered 'renewable', they can be exploited to the extent that long-term irreversible damage will

be caused. Maintaining a natural resource system above these threshold levels of irreversible damage is an important goal of sustainable development, and decisions to build on areas of land that currently contribute to biodiversity or landscape should not be taken lightly.

4.5.4 The rate of biodiversity loss is now recognised to be a cause for serious concern. Whilst it might seem like a distant problem, in the UK we have lost over 100 species during the last century, with many more species and habitats in danger of disappearing, especially at the local level.⁸¹ Thus it is of ever increasing importance to consider the habitat value of land earmarked for development.

4.5.5 Climate change is an emerging threat, and leaving significant areas of undeveloped land will help both people and wildlife to adapt. The effects of climate change are not restricted to humans; birds, fish, and land-based animals will all be increasingly under threat as their habitats and the climate alter. Leaving space for a range of habitats will help species of both flora and fauna to migrate with the changing climate, and allow them to follow their food sources.

Our evidence

4.5.6 The economic value of 'natural' areas is often underplayed. Areas of great countryside and biodiversity value also tend to generate economic benefits alongside their social and environmental value, as a result of their intrinsic appeal and the tourism they generate. Collectively, environment-linked activity supports 299,000 full-time equivalent jobs in England and contributes £7.6bn in gross value added.⁸² For example, the five protected landscapes in the north east account for 11% of all tourism activity in the region, supporting 14,000 jobs and generating £700m.⁸³ The majority of businesses in these areas felt that the quality of the landscapes and the environment had a direct effect on their business performance. Maintaining landscape and biodiversity can have positive economic impacts. The kind of economic benefit associated with natural areas and the countryside could potentially be particularly beneficial for communities in need of economic regeneration.

4.5.7 Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity

and Geological Conservation (PPS 9) does require regional and local planners conserve and enhance biodiversity. However, the emphasis is more on protection and minimisation of damage rather than treating landscape and biodiversity as an integral part of designing communities. A planned and managed network of multi-functional green space provided across a sub-region can contribute to a high-quality and natural built environment, but needs to be planned strategically and delivered in an integrated way and across all spatial planning levels. This requires that it is considered ahead of planned development. Green networks can take many forms including allotments, amenity spaces, green corridors, brownfield sites, parks and gardens, commons and greens, playing fields, cemeteries, woodlands, and nature reserves, as well as waterways, public rights of way, and other recreational routes.⁸⁴

4.5.8 PPS 9 does recognise the importance of networks of natural habitats (sometimes referred to as 'green infrastructure') but guidance is limited, and does not take into account the full, broader value of landscape and biodiversity, leaving a onus on regional or local bodies to take their own approach. We would like the final PPS on Planning and Climate Change to ensure that the importance of sustaining biodiversity is framed within the context of an ecosystems approach.

4.5.9 There are examples of regional planning taking a positive approach. For example, the East Midlands Regional Assembly's Integrated Regional Strategy recognises the importance of developing environmental infrastructure alongside economic development. It has identified 'green infrastructure' as an important component of their environmental infrastructure and a priority for action. 'Green infrastructure' means the network of protected sites, nature reserves, green spaces and greenway linkages, in urban and rural locations, that have diverse benefits (e.g. wildlife, recreation and cultural experiences) and deliver ecological services such as flood and microclimate control. This is supported by the joining up of existing environmental funding streams into a single Regional Environmental Infrastructure Fund (REIF).⁸⁵

4.5.10 The West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy also sees maintaining and enhancing landscape and biodiversity as a beneficial for economic, social

and environmental reasons, with an emphasis on the value of National Parks and other designated areas in particular.⁸⁶ And CABE Space has issued a great deal of guidance about, and helped to enable projects, to deliver green space infrastructure.

4.5.11 However, many of the decisions that will determine how well housing, landscape, biodiversity and other natural environment features are integrated, will be made at the local level. It is not clear whether the capacity exists to deliver strategic intentions set at the regional and local level. This will only become apparent as more Local Development Frameworks are finalised.

4.5.12 While there are very few proposals for housing development on nationally designated sites, Natural England is concerned that it is proving very difficult to predict the indirect and cumulative impact of developments close to important habitats. For example, the Thames Basin contains fragmented heathlands and it is likely that the increased recreational impact associated with the new housing developments will have an adverse impact on ground nesting birds. Similarly, the impact of additional street lighting and traffic on the breeding success of birds is difficult to predict. One of the most important indirect effects of housing growth on biodiversity could be reduced water flow and increased sewage discharges. Strategic planning needs to consider all of these effects.

4.5.13 Some areas with declining centres have suffered from an excess of greenfield development, which has both exacerbated urban decline by drawing more affluent residents away from existing communities and unnecessarily used land that could have had landscape and biodiversity benefits. Whilst much recent housing development in the Housing Market Renewal Areas is occurring out of necessity on brownfield land, related employment generating developments have at times impinged on surrounding greenbelt and greenfield land – such as the Whitebirk employment park near Blackburn, east Lancashire.⁸⁷ And while some of the Growth Areas are achieving the national brownfield target of 60%, others are not – for example, south Cambridgeshire District Council recently released greenbelt land around Cambridge for development, and is only expected to achieve 37% development on brownfield land through its plans for so many urban extensions.⁸⁸ Cambridge has many smaller

potential housing infill sites which are within its ring road, and these should be exploited for development first.

4.5.14 However, in other areas, there appears to be a stronger emphasis on promoting improvements to the quality of open space and access to it, as well as measures to promote biodiversity. In the Walker Riverside development in the Bridging Newcastle Gateshead Pathfinder, the Area Action Plan identifies two sites of nature conservation interest and proposes to explore the feasibility of designating one more, and includes a suite of proposals to improve the open spaces in the area. The plan also aims to include green corridors to link the area to the River Tyne. A development tariff has been agreed with the Council's development partners to fund these improvements.⁸⁹

Community landscapes

Issue

4.5.15 Parks and green spaces are an essential element of liveable cities, towns and indeed, villages. According to a recent CABE report,⁹⁰ 91% of people think that parks and green spaces contribute to their quality of life. Good community landscapes provide opportunities for exercise, social engagement, and create the civic space necessary to provide a sense of place.

4.5.16 Consideration of the quality of the local natural environment has a real impact on people's choices about where to live. There is good scientific evidence that access to high quality natural areas – and the resultant connection with nature – has a positive impact on mental health and general wellbeing,⁹¹ as well as the obvious benefits to physical health resulting from the ability to use local green spaces. CABE research⁹² confirms the link between high-quality green spaces and increased house prices; their benefits in improving the image of an area and attracting investment; their contribution to biodiversity; their contribution to promoting exercise and the benefits to health; and the role of public space design and management in tackling social issues such as risk and anti-social behaviour. Surveys indicate that the urban population of England makes 2.5 billion visits a year to urban green spaces, and there is compelling

evidence of the value of urban green spaces for quality of life. The clear conclusion is that successful green spaces can have a major positive impact on local communities.

Our evidence

4.5.17 The Sustainable Communities Plan recognises the importance of urban green space, stating that communities should have access to quality green spaces that encourage and enable social interaction, urban biodiversity, opportunities for exercise and play. However, despite their importance there is no statutory national requirement associated with parks, nor a coordinated funding stream, and so the provision and maintenance of these places can end up adding extra pressure on already strained local authority parks' department budgets.

4.5.18 Good quality parks and green spaces help to give communities their special identity, enhancing their attraction and usefulness to residents and visitors alike. However, poor quality, run-down parks and green spaces can bring down the image of an area and attract anti-social behaviour. It is important that parks and green spaces are designed and managed as attractive, stimulating and safe places for children and young people to play, and for other adults to feel confident about their own safety when using them.

4.5.19 Our public opinion interviews showed mixed provision of green spaces that were accessible and desirable to residents. In Cambridgeshire, spaces were thought to be too small. In Barking and Dagenham some green or play areas were either inaccessible to some households, as they were for private residents only. Others were not in a usable condition.⁹³ However in Blackburn several green spaces had been provided, and the recently developed Corporation Park was felt to have added a sense of civic pride.

4.5.20 Currently there is no statutory national quality standard for parks and urban green spaces, although voluntary standards – like the Green Flag Award – are adopted by some local authorities, and indicators like Best Value Performance Indicator 119, Comprehensive Performance Assessments and Planning Policy Guidance 17 all promote open space quality.



“There is nothing on this estate. Children used to play here on the small bit of grass, today they put the benches in, now there is no space for children to play.”

*Resident
The Quills, Cambridge*

4.5.21 In 2001, the Public Parks Assessment showed that only 18% of parks were considered to be in good condition, and that the condition of 37% of all parks was declining. The increasing demands from statutory public service areas, such as education and social services, makes it difficult for local authorities to find the capital needed to reverse the decline from their existing budgets. External sources of capital funding might be able to plug some of the gaps, for example the Heritage Lottery Fund Public Parks Initiative (formerly the Urban Parks Programme), which has provided £400m to parks and urban green spaces with historic interest; the Big Lottery Fund; and Section 106 agreements. In south Cambridgeshire the Growth Area Fund has funded a nature reserve at Coton, and the area plans substantial investment in green infrastructure including local green corridors, Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS), areas of green space, cycling corridors and improvements to a number of nationally important wetland reserves.

4.5.22 However, due to the heavy burden on local authorities to invest significant resources in a treadmill of applications for short-term funding from diverse funding sources alongside their other commitments (which include a major focus on delivering to Best Value Performance Indicators), this good practice cannot be expected to be rolled

out across the board without increased support to local authorities, and possibly the creation of a coordinated funding stream.

4.5.23 Additionally, staff who manage the green space may not be sufficiently skilled to deliver high quality green spaces that meet the needs of the community. In order to go some way towards tackling this issue, Natural England has devised a range of techniques and methods to be used by planners, local authorities and others involved in planning and delivering green spaces.⁹⁴

Our views/assessment

4.5.24 The SDC believes that landscapes and biodiversity should be integrated into developments much more systematically, to enhance biodiversity as well as to promote social interaction and the physical and mental health of the community. At present, performance is patchy, but good examples in strategic planning do exist, such as the east midlands example cited above.

4.5.25 Regulatory and funding arrangements need to support the inclusion of high quality parks and green space in community developments. Defra is currently developing a whole ecosystems approach for managing and thinking about natural resources and the environment. This is welcome because we believe that a holistic approach to natural landscapes and biodiversity should inform the planning and delivery of housing growth and regeneration. Development should protect the countryside and undeveloped land that may be vulnerable to its impacts (e.g. nature reserves, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty). We also believe that ASC should continue to enhance the skills of staff involved in planning, delivering and maintaining communities, including the provision of high quality green spaces.

4.5.26 The overall amount of land taken for development is also a major factor in protecting landscapes and biodiversity. This is why the SDC recommends that local areas should be required to set stretching targets for brownfield development. We discuss this in more detail in the section on land-use, above.

Our recommendations

- Defra's thinking on an ecosystems approach for planning and managing natural resources to be progressed and policies developed to apply the principles in the regions and for development areas.
- HMR and Growth Areas to plan for high quality urban green space, recreation, sports and amenity areas including community gardens, to allow communities to enjoy the local setting and to encourage wildlife
- Master planning and Local Development Frameworks to include systematic consideration of how people living in sustainable communities can have access to high quality green space and its benefits in addition to compliance with biodiversity legislation
- The draft PPS on Planning and Climate Change to reflect the need to sustain biodiversity within a holistic ecosystems approach. This would help to support the ability of the natural environment to mitigate and adapt to climate change impacts by re-connecting fragmented habitats
- Local authorities to be asked to assess the existing quality of parks and green spaces in their communities, potentially as part of the process in reviewing Sustainable Community Strategies, and set clear and measurable aspirations for future quality, as well as a requirement for on-going management and monitoring of green spaces
- Funding sources made available to local authorities to improve and manage green spaces should be co-ordinated more effectively – especially focusing on the provision of revenue funding, not just capital.

Site reserved
for...

Police Station

Date Due: To be confirmed

Society and Economy

Are the government's housing and communities policies helping to promote a strong, healthy, just society and sustainable economy?

5.0.1 The 2005 UK Sustainable Development Strategy identifies ensuring a strong, healthy and just society as one of the five sustainable development goals. This includes meeting the diverse needs of all people in existing and future communities, promoting personal wellbeing, social cohesion and inclusion, providing employment, and creating equal opportunity for all. Housing and communities policy can contribute to these goals.

5.0.2 The Sustainable Communities Plan asserts that communities will be sustainable only if they are fully inclusive and if basic minimum standards of public services are delivered. This is especially

true in existing communities with the most deprived neighbourhoods and most vulnerable groups.

5.0.3 Planning, design, density and layout will influence the shape of a new community, the level of services and the way people interact with each other and their environment. Community organisation and neighbourhood management are essential to social networks and urban viability, ensuring well-maintained, secure conditions which are the prerequisites of stable, long-term, participative, healthy and cohesive communities. To develop this in new communities takes a long time.

5.1 Services

Do communities have access to high quality public services, local shops, leisure and general facilities?

Issue

5.1.1 Sustainable communities require good quality local public services, including good public and private transport links, education and training opportunities, healthcare, sports and community facilities. Communities need easy access to a varied range of these services, and these need to be provided holistically and, in the case of a new development, at the same time as the housing is being built.

5.1.2 Where development takes place within existing housing and communities, the demand for public services is immediately increased and so it becomes cost-effective to provide the service. Similarly, private investment is attracted to the areas where the footfall on the high street is increased and there is greater demand for shops, restaurants and bars.

Our evidence

5.1.3 Developers often make space provision for local facilities and services like healthcare, schools and shops in their master planning for larger developments. However, because house builders can rarely deliver such facilities themselves, decisions about the actual provision of services

are made elsewhere, and these vital elements of the plans are often left out of the development when they are first implemented. This leaves new communities without the local services they need despite theoretical provision in the land use planning process.

5.1.4 Our interviews with residents in some recently built developments highlighted that services have been slow in being delivered alongside housing, even where they have been promised. Residents in Cambourne were extremely frustrated by the small amount of infrastructure that has been put in place since they arrived. Residents were promised certain facilities before moving in, such as local pubs, sports centres and so on, but these had not materialised. Residents were also still waiting for the local police station to open, and the lack of police presence was a serious concern in terms of security.⁹⁵

5.1.5 Developments within existing urban areas have better access to services, as these are already likely to be well established. Our interviews in Barking & Dagenham and Blackburn suggested that residents felt they were well-served in their locality.⁹⁶

“I really like the area. You have everything – town’s near and shops like Netto. And school near – everything – that is what is good in this area.”
Resident, Blackburn

“Amenity-wise I feel quite satisfied. They’re really important because I don’t drive, I’m single and I work long hours – if I didn’t have these facilities on my doorstep it would be really difficult.”

Resident
St Ann’s, Barking

“People have got really annoyed with Cambourne because they’ve said all these promises and it’s been being built for so many years, and they’re not getting anywhere, they’re just putting more and more and more houses here, rather than what we need. They did dupe us.”

Resident
Cambourne, Cambridge

5.1.6 One of the key difficulties is that funding for the different elements of public services comes from different sources and therefore coordination of this funding is difficult. This is discussed further in section 5.2 for example.

5.1.7 Shops and other commercial activities need a market of a given size to be viable. In the early stages of a large scale development, this may not exist. Furthermore, if commercial activities enter an area long after the first housing, many residents may have already developed behaviour patterns that take their business elsewhere. For example, they may drive to out of town shopping centres, making the local business unviable and contributing to negative travel impacts. Local inducements such as temporary low rents and other incentives may be necessary to encourage commercial services. The same issues will apply to regenerating Housing Market Renewal Areas where activity has stopped in the past and needs to be attracted back in order to support renewed areas.

Our views/assessment

5.1.8 It is important that spatial planning is linked with health and education provision planning, and there are some examples of this beginning to take place. However, there is still a great deal of progress required to ensure integration of forward planning. Our evidence shows that vital services are not always put in place when new developments are built.

National funding for public services like schools and hospitals is not sufficiently connected to housing and regeneration programmes. Local Strategic Partnerships can help significantly in co-ordinating delivery on the ground. However there appears to be inadequate planning and co-ordination above this level to ensure that funding cycles are better aligned to enable residents of new developments to have local access to good public services early on. The SDC asks government to take a lead in order to ensure that services are co-ordinated, and in place, much earlier in the development process.

5.1.9 The design and planning of new development also influences the quantity and quality of private services that can be supported. The SDC would like to see higher density, mixed use developments. This would bring employment closer to housing, and provide the critical mass of people required to make some services viable. For example, 50 homes per hectare is required for district heating schemes to be cost-effective and also for a bus service to be viable.

5.1.10 Good services, facilities and pleasant urban layouts can create positive spirals as people are attracted to the community or choose to stay bringing jobs, social activity, and a critical mass of population to support enterprise and services. This process can just as easily work in reverse, and if the right services and facilities are not provided or maintained, communities can quickly spiral downwards as residents leave or regularly travel outwards, with the associated negative economic, environmental and social impacts.

5.1.11 Difficulties in co-ordinating funding for public services, and ensuring there is a sufficient market to support local private businesses and services strengthens the argument for concentrating growth within existing settlements rather than new ones.

Our recommendations

- In HMR and Growth Areas public organisations such as health, local authorities and police, to be involved in an early stage to ensure effective public services are planned in the areas. These public buildings should be exemplars of excellent design and environmental efficiency

- The public sector – local authorities in particular – to maximise use of their corporate resources through procurement to contribute to the local economy, community and environment
- CLG/Communities England to ensure there is more effective co-ordination between government departments and local public bodies (PCTs, local education authorities and local authorities) to enable coordinated delivery of schools, hospitals and other public services with local housing developments
- CLG to ensure that the new guidance to LSPs on sustainable development reflects the need to coordinate the provision of facilities reflecting housing growth or transition, transport demand and management, schools, health and the rest of the public sector.



5.2 Schools and young people

Do communities have access to well-performing local schools and high quality facilities for families and young people?

Issue

5.2.1 Schools are often central to a community. They are a significant determinant of wellbeing and opportunities for local young people. It is therefore critical that school capacity is increased, or new schools created, to accommodate local population changes caused by housing growth. This must happen concurrently with the growth in housing rather than some time afterwards. Failure to provide local schooling can also create and entrench unsustainable travel patterns.

5.2.2 The government is currently undertaking a massive programme of school building and renewal: *Building Schools for the Future (BSF)*⁹⁷ which covers secondary schools; and the *Primary Capital Programme*⁹⁸ for primary schools. This process is not

explicitly linked to sustainable communities policy, but will be very important to fulfil the government's vision of sustainable communities.⁹⁹

5.2.3 The location and design of schools will also be a determinant of the success of the government's aim to provide more services and opportunities through schools to the community at large. The Extended Schools initiative represents an opportunity for communities to become more involved with their local school, both as users of services and in the form of additional staff. This makes it all the more important to get the school's location right, and to ensure that travel patterns are sustainable. It also opens the school up to a wider group who stand to witness and learn from sustainability in action in school grounds and buildings. Schools can demonstrate ways of living

that are models of good practice for children and their communities. They can build sustainable development into the learning experience of every child to encourage innovation and improvement.

5.2.4 The needs of young people extend beyond education. The government is committed to improving the well-being of young people through its Every Child Matters (ECM) strategy.¹⁰⁰ As well as school provision, the design of housing, its surrounding streetscapes, green spaces and transport will make a large contribution to the safety and health of young people and the life opportunities available to them. ECM highlights the need for children to have access to transport in order to 'achieve economic well-being'. In effect this means good public transport, as many young people will not be able to access private car transport, either due to age or income. Transport infrastructure is recognised by the Department for Education and Skills as a key element in young people accessing training and employment.

5.2.5 Also, there are obvious links between child poverty and fuel poverty. Children living in fuel poor or 'bad' housing are likely to have more health problems and other disadvantages. Government's fuel poverty programmes are focussing on delivering energy efficiency measures in existing homes. In some cases such installations need to be enhanced with renewable power from ground source heat pumps, solar hot water etc, to lift the household out of fuel poverty at a time when gas and electricity prices remain high; and are unlikely to fall significantly. Poorly designed and built housing will make it difficult for the government to deliver the five aims of Every Child Matters to young people in those communities.

5.2.6 *Youth Matters: Next Steps* (2006)¹⁰¹ applies the principles of Every Child Matters to young people and focuses on providing 'something to do' and 'somewhere to go'. Young people are frequently seen as a problem in local communities and the provision of green spaces, sports facilities and places to house youth groups and other activities are not only key to fulfilling the ongoing drive for 'diversionary activities' from the Home Office but, if built sustainably, offer the same opportunities to see sustainability in action that is possible in schools.

Our evidence

5.2.7 Our investigations suggest that education provision planning does not appear to link fully with housing planning, and funding mechanisms do not accommodate the required anticipation of need. In Stoke-on-Trent, for example, we heard that the schools planning process had resulted in new schools being planned in the areas identified for demolition. Many (but not all) of these have now been stopped and negotiations are ongoing to re-site the developments, but this clearly illustrates the lack of communication between key public service delivery bodies. It also underlines the critical importance of a fully functioning Local Strategic Partnership in areas such as Stoke-on-Trent (where it is now in place).

5.2.8 If schools require journeys that are risky or in unsafe areas, even if they are local, parents are still unlikely to allow their children to walk or cycle to school. For example, a local school on a busy main road would probably instil a sense of fear in many parents about their children arriving on foot or bike. Evidence from one site in Newcastle Gateshead underlines this difficulty. One regeneration community had no local school within two miles, inadequate bus services and no safe, designated bike routes. This has led to significant car use for school drop off and pick up. Well designed, safe, off-road bike routes, with active encouragement by the school (bike parking, bike user and road safety training) could have a significant influence on trip choices in this locality, and reduce the use of the car.

5.2.9 Current assumptions in the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) building standard is for 10% of pupils to have access to bike parking. In some areas this should actually be around 90%, and in many schools it could be around 50%. But there is currently no facility for improving this, and there is little scope for providers of schools to engage in cycling routes or other elements of sustainable transport planning for schools.

5.2.10 The public consultation on the government's Sustainable Schools Strategy demonstrated that young people make connections between themselves and the impacts of their actions on their communities and the wider world. In their response to the consultation, the government recognised that

communities that take into account these attitudes and expectations, require a distinctive approach to the way services are planned and delivered, including education and children's services; an approach which addresses the area's current and longer term needs together. It is essential for schools, childcare and youth work to help children contribute positively to their local areas. In this way schools can play an important role in realising sustainable communities.¹⁰²

5.2.11 A good example of linking education and the community is Bowbridge Primary School in Newark, Nottinghamshire. It is a large school at the centre of a 9,000 resident housing estate with relatively low average incomes. By looking at the community, the head teacher and his senior management team concluded that a lack of a proper breakfast was inhibiting the concentration of the pupils. So, with grants and local authority funding they introduced a breakfast club which now provides breakfast to around 100 pupils a day. They also discovered that low incomes and poor energy efficiency contributed to high levels of fuel poverty locally. They talked with pupils about energy and water use, which had an impact both on their awareness and their families' energy usage. Extended services at the school also contribute to community development through many free classes and other activities, such as a focus on cooking and the link between healthy eating and health.¹⁰³

5.2.12 Our public opinion research work revealed that in Blackburn, people saw the area as well-served, and that included the schools (primary & secondary school in the area). Residents in Barking felt that the area had a good range of schools.

“At Jo Richardson school there's at least four or five things to do every night, ranging from homework clubs to canoeing to rock climbing. It's a brilliant school.”

Resident, Beringer's Place, Barking

Our views/assessment

5.2.13 The SDC is working with DfES to improve on the overall design and build standards in the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme. However, coordination with the local transport authority is essential for access to schools by bike to

be safe and separated from vehicles on the road.

5.2.14 School location and design must be integrated with housing and the provision of other public services to ensure that the significant investment taking place delivers maximum benefits for communities and is consistent with other government efforts to improve economic, social and environmental outcomes. Failure to do so risks missing a tremendous opportunity. BSF should build social regeneration as well as schools and set the highest environmental standards.

5.2.15 The current financing structures can provide barriers to delivering sustainable schools as they do not properly take into account whole-life costs. For example, currently under BSF Public Finance Initiative (PFI) projects, the providing consortium takes on the risk of changes in energy use volume for the project, but the local authority takes on the risk of changes in prices of energy. Therefore, the provider does not take into account future energy price rises (which could be very important in determining the viability of renewables and energy efficiency measures) in the whole life costing of the project.

5.2.16 Where schools are being built, relocated or refurbished, they should be designed and planned to enable extended community use, and they must be exemplars for sustainable building and living. They should have adequate outdoor space, and encourage sustainable methods of transport, which also will improve pupils' health and behaviour during school hours, and help to avoid school-run traffic congestion. DfES have recently announced that they are funding CABE to provide advice and support to LAs and to ensure that proposed new/refurbished schools achieve design quality.

5.2.17 The public sector is a powerful player in regenerating communities and should be expected to use its resources to get the best results in social, economic and environmental terms, as well as for the health of local communities. It can do this by how it commissions buildings and how it makes use of its land, as well as in the way it uses its corporate resources to purchase goods and services, and how it commissions and provides health services. Providing employment and business opportunities for the local community will help contribute to population health, social cohesion and the local economy.

5.2.18 We believe that there could be mutual benefits if Housing Market Renewal/Growth Area activity and the Building Schools for the Future programme (and other public sector investment) are more closely aligned. For example, schools within the BSF programme could develop a district heating network which could then supply low carbon, affordable heat to houses in the area. Encouraging such partnership working, for example by using BSF business cases to include identifying synergies with broader local regeneration work, would require a more flexible and less rushed delivery model for the BSF programme. The payback would be that local communities gain maximum value from the different sources of public investment.

Our recommendations

- DfES to mainstream the valuable start made in encouraging schools to engage their pupils, staff and communities in sustainable development through the DfES Sustainable Schools strategy
- Government to ensure Local Area Agreement, Joint Area Reviews and Comprehensive Performance Assessments are exploited and, as necessary, adapted to incentivise education and children's services to support schools' contributions to sustainable communities in line with the DfES Sustainable Schools strategy
- A new sustainable schools standards framework to be developed to maximise the contribution of new and refurbished schools to sustainable development
- The BSF delivery and financing model to be reviewed to ensure it delivers fully sustainable, and most especially zero carbon, schools and contributes to broader community development.



5.3 Transport and infrastructure

Do communities have access to high quality public transport, and space for walking and cycling?

Issue

5.3.1 All housing developments need public and private transport links, but how these are designed, together with the location of the development itself, has a significant impact on the overall environmental impact of our mobility. Traffic congestion is estimated to currently cost the UK £20bn a year, which could increase to £30bn by 2010.¹⁰⁴ This illustrates the economic importance of designing and building communities with more sustainable transport solutions.

5.3.2 Car reliance is also bad for health and wellbeing. Fossil fuel dependent developments with limited alternative transport or accessibility to services will have a larger carbon footprint and higher levels of pollutants in the air, than those

with more sustainable approaches. Road transport produces nitrogen dioxide, particulates and carbon monoxide, which are all associated with respiratory problems. There are an estimated 10,500 respiratory hospital admissions in urban areas each year, and the probable earlier deaths of 8,100 people due to particulate matter of which a quarter is attributed to road transport.¹⁰⁵ Estimates put the cost to the NHS of pollution-related admissions nationally between £17-60 million per year.¹⁰⁶

5.3.3 Walking and cycling for travel purposes have both been in long-term decline as car ownership and use have increased. The direct cost to the NHS of treating and managing obesity has been estimated at £1bn a year (not including the cost of treating diseases obesity may go on to cause). The wider costs to the economy in lower productivity

and lost output from obesity are estimated to be £2.3bn and £2.6bn each year.¹⁰⁷ Inactivity plays a major role here: at present only 37% of men and 24% of women are sufficiently active to gain any health benefit. At the same time, there has been a substantial decline in active modes of transport: the number of miles cycled fell by 26% between 1976 and 2000, whilst the number of annual journeys walked has fallen by a quarter in less than 15 years. There is renewed urgency to design communities that encourage and enable walking and cycling (e.g. cycle paths, good pavements) to increase physical activity and reduce the risk of obesity-related health problems.

5.3.4 Road accidents also take their toll on communities. The Department for Transport estimate that the cost of road casualties in 2005 was £1.4m for every fatality, £160,480 for every serious injury and £12,370 for every slight injury, which averages at £44,920 per road casualty. In 2005 there were 198,735 road accidents involving personal injury, and in cost-benefit terms the value of prevention of these is estimated to have been £12.8bn in 2005 prices and values (not including the cost of road accidents which do not result in casualties).¹⁰⁸

5.3.5 In 1996 the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions estimated that the cost of road accidents to the NHS was £490m per year. Evidence suggests that motor vehicle speed is the main factor in road accidents leading to serious injury and death. Speeding vehicles also use far more energy than slower vehicles and so have much greater emissions of CO₂, thereby contributing to climate change. Communities that are designed for pedestrians, with minimum car use and speed restriction measures in place (e.g. speed bumps, Home Zones) will help to reduce the risk of road accidents.

5.3.6 Sustainable transport also addresses accessibility issues and the sustainable communities agenda needs to do the same. Accessibility allows for physical, financial and cultural considerations. 1.4 million people have missed, turned down or chosen not to seek medical help because of transport difficulties.¹⁰⁹ Accessibility and inclusivity are vital in tackling inequalities and need to be included in the design of all amenities including green space, health care provision, housing, public buildings, social and community infrastructure and public transport.

Our evidence

5.3.7 The Sustainable Communities Plan makes much of the need to provide appropriate and sustainable transport choices to those living in new communities, recommending that cycle paths, footpaths and public transport choices are made locally accessible to new developments. But our evidence suggests that the costs and practicalities of delivering a transport infrastructure to new and regenerated communities, and the potential impacts on the environment were not covered sufficiently by the original Sustainable Communities Plan. Neither have they been adequately tackled subsequently.

5.3.8 Current developments such as the developments on the outskirts of Ashford, the market towns around Bath and Bristol, are heavily dependent on motorised, fossil fuel driven transport. Furthermore, the plans for future development that we have examined, still seem to have modest aspirations for sustainable transport and modal shift.¹¹⁰

5.3.9 Many of the new housing developments seem to be designed with the assumption that car use is the residents' preferred option. In practice preferences will be driven to some extent by the opportunities available. For example, the residents we interviewed in developments outside the main urban centre were very car reliant because they did not feel public transport met their needs, and most services were otherwise inaccessible.¹¹¹

5.3.10 The design of Cambourne would be unlikely to be approved under newer planning priorities, but car reliance seems likely to remain. For example, even the Northstowe development in Cambridgeshire, which is being held up as an example of a more sustainable approach, is likely to need significant improvements to the A14 to make it viable. The guided bus way being put in place as part of this project is expected to take a minority share of passenger journeys in comparison to car travel.¹¹²

5.3.11 Our public opinion research in Blackburn revealed that residents felt bus services were good. And our research in the south west region revealed that the strategy for housing growth has centred around strengthening the declining market towns by increasing housing density within their



**“For people that haven’t got a car,
it must be so awkward –
it must be horrible.”**

*Resident
Cambourne, Cambridge*

communities. This is a sensible strategy and we support it in principle. However, alongside this there has been no serious effort to reduce dependency on the car, as many people travel by car for work. Our suggestion that better public transport provision, such as guided bus systems, could link these market towns to Bristol city centre was met with some scepticism by regional officials.

**“The bus services are actually very good:
I use the bus five days a week.”**

Resident, Blackburn

5.3.12 Our research also revealed a limitation in the current process for examining individual development plans for transport impacts. The Highways Agency (under the powers of the Secretary of State for Transport), can stop permission for development that may threaten the effective running of the national strategic road network (motorways and major trunk roads) by overloading capacity.¹¹³ This means that the developer has to fund strengthened road infrastructure to increase capacity, or fund solutions

to reduce car use (provision of bike paths, travel plans with business development, support a local bus service) in order to reduce expected additional traffic load. This process is congestion driven, rather than focused on developing sustainable transport, and therefore in itself does not necessarily push for more sustainable solutions.

5.3.13 However, it is possible to propose public transport solutions when all partners work together. We were extremely heartened to learn of a planned approach at Eastern Quarry, in the Kent Thameside area. A 25,000 home development is currently in the planning process. The DfT and Kent County Council have worked together with the developer to agree the provision of a new bus service, which the developers assert will get a 60% share of passenger journeys. The council is aware that they need to have this system in place before day one of the development and have put in the necessary funding in place up front to make this happen. The Highways Agency will also add traffic lights (‘ramp metering’) on the A2 where new developments intersect, as a fallback, to limit access should public transport not take the expected number of passengers.

The developer will therefore need to market the bus system alongside the houses. There are plans afoot to do the same in Northall, Kettering (A14).

5.3.14 Fundamentally, this process is driven by the desire to avoid overloading the already widening A2, but could result in a significant modal shift in that specific area. We welcome such a collaborative approach and would like to see this replicated elsewhere. However, it is clear that this example would not have been possible without the investment of time and money by KCC and DfT, in the early stages of implementing a development.

Our views/assessment

5.3.15 We believe the sustainable communities plan is based around mobility rather than focused on accessibility. There is some focus on public transport, but little on removing the need for people to travel by providing jobs, services and facilities locally where they can be reached by walking or cycling. Car travel is the primary mode of transport in the UK today, and current housing development design accommodates and perpetuates this situation.

5.3.16 Good land design and planning can have a significant impact on carbon emissions and the quality of life of residents and communities. Emission reductions of 16% could be achieved through a combination of land use planning policies and transport measures.¹¹⁴ Healthy, active lifestyles can be promoted by designing communities around accessibility, walkability and active travel. Options include developing within the existing urban frame, the use of maximum parking standards, altering development patterns to encourage the provision and use of public transport and walking/cycling facilities, encouraging modal shifts, and increased development densities. There are resources available to help, for example CABE's Building for Life guide includes aspects that promote sustainable travel patterns.

5.3.17 The primary focus of the Department for Transport (DfT) and the Highways Agency (HA) appears to have been to combat congestion, with developers having to consider the impacts of proposed housing growth on the road networks. Developers therefore tend to default to offering improvements for road transport flow and are not

encouraged to develop public transport options. However, the Highways Agency has recently been consulting on a new policy on spatial planning. This will include engaging with strategic planning to direct development to locations where least transport harm will be caused, and moving from a 'predict and provide' role to one of impact avoidance. This is a welcome shift in emphasis.

5.3.18 In 2004/05 around £9,351m was spent on transport in England by central and local government. Of this £7,550m was spent by local government. Capital spend by local government on roads that year was £2,107m. This represents an increase of around 35% from 2001/02 spend. The comparative spend for public transport was £654m, which is an increase of around 186% on 2001/02 spend. Over the same period local government revenue support to public transport rose by about 149% to £2,254m while current/resource spend on roads rose by around 19% to £2,236m. These figures suggest that the percentage spend on public transport by local government compared to roads is rising. This is welcome, and we would want to see continued rebalancing, particularly in capital spend, in favour of low carbon transport solutions.¹¹⁵

5.3.19 In parallel to the housing programme, government launched the Communities Infrastructure Fund (CIF). This is a two year funding programme for transport infrastructure totalling £200m, to be delivered within that two year period. We are pleased that over half of the fund has been spent on public transport or low carbon transport solutions: about 30% on buses, 22% on rail, 4% on light rail and 2% on cycling/walking. However simply extending an existing bus route along a new stretch of road, for example, is not going to significantly reduce car usage on that new road. The road itself will encourage car usage. In our view the time frame is misconceived because really significant shifts towards sustainable transport infrastructure and services can take more time to scope and deliver. In our view government needs to award feasibility and facilitation funding for around two years to enable the development of sustainable transport solutions, with capital funding in subsequent years to support the widespread development of guided buses, safe cycling infrastructure, and other sustainable transport solutions. Until government starts to plan for sustainability across all sectors, including the transport sector, we are unlikely

as a nation to shift transport patterns away from dependency on the car.

Our recommendations:

- All HMR and Growth Areas to include plans to promote more sustainable travel and to reduce car use, e.g. prioritising active travel (cycling and walking) and infrastructure in travel plans and development design; public transport provision; limiting car parking; and greater density
- The Communities Infrastructure Fund to be completely remodelled in CSR 2007, to become a defined feasibility and facilitation fund for sustainable transport solutions, with capital funding available for low carbon transport infrastructure projects
- Guidance for developers and local authorities to be more robust about the need for more up-front partnership working and planning time to ensure sustainable transport solutions work effectively
- Local Strategic Partnerships to develop their role in upfront development of local sustainable transport solutions.



5.4 Healthy communities

Do the housing developments help to encourage healthy and active lifestyles and reduce health inequalities?

Issue

5.4.1 Although the government's sustainable communities programme does not focus on health improvement, the areas it covers affect the wider determinants of health. Planners and building professionals need to help create housing and communities that help to improve the health of residents. Health is, by definition, integral to a sustainable community. Communities should be planned and developed, from the start, to maximise opportunities to improve the health of local people, through providing useable green space and sustainable transport, and to reduce health inequalities.

5.4.2 Housing and the surrounding environment and infrastructure have direct and indirect health

impacts. Each building can mitigate health risks such as asthma, respiratory disease, mental health problems, heart attack and stroke in vulnerable people, through good ventilation, insulation and heating systems, use of natural light, materials that minimise harmful effects and the connections between dwellings that provide either a sense of community or that reinforce a sense of isolation.

5.4.3 Neighbourhood design, infrastructure, services and accessibility are all crucial to good health. In neighbourhoods of mixed income, the less affluent have better health and quality of life compared to those living in entirely low income neighbourhoods. For health inequalities to be reduced it is important for people to have access to shops selling healthy food, public services such as schools, sports centres, parks and healthcare facilities, and to social facilities;

they must also be able to take exercise and to move about their neighbourhoods in safety and without fear. Accessibility to amenities, is therefore, a key factor in tackling inequalities and this can be both physical proximity and transport, ability to pay for amenities (or low cost provision) and provision that enables all cultures to participate.

“Since she was born I don’t have to go to the doctor for an injection, I just come here and if I want to weigh her or measure her it just takes five no three minutes I think and they have dentists in there – it is a proper hospital, all specialists, everything [in the medical centre].”

Resident, Blackburn

Our evidence

5.4.4 *Tackling Health Inequalities: A Programme for Action*¹¹⁶ recognises improved social housing and reduced fuel poverty among vulnerable populations, and improved access to public services and supervised public spaces, as some of the actions likely to have the greatest impact on health inequalities. It also recognises improving housing quality, by tackling cold and dampness, and reducing accidents in the home and on the road, as key interventions to close the life expectancy and infant mortality gaps.

5.4.5 The current housing programme provides the opportunity to take these factors into account in order to help reduce the health divide and contribute to population health. However, our public opinion research findings show that these opportunities are not always capitalised on. For example, our public opinion research found that refurbishment in Blackburn failed to solve the serious damp problems. These were mentioned repeatedly by residents as a source of ill health to children.

5.4.6 Elevate’s Sustainability Framework provides guidance on energy conservation, renewable energy and adaptation to climate change for new developments. However, given the difficulties in enforcing the guidance it is debatable whether it has had a significant impact to date. The north West Decent Homes Standard (based on the national

standard) influences decisions on the replacement and refurbishment of housing. It 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.

5.4.7 Availability of useable public space and access to nature can have a beneficial impact on good physical health and mental well-being. In light of the upward trend in mental ill health in the UK – in the most recent Psychiatric Morbidity Survey 15% of people were diagnosed with a neurotic disorder, mainly anxiety or depression – it is imperative that communities are developed with access to useable green space for all. English Nature’s Urban Green Space Standard recommends that people living in towns and cities should have green space within at least 300 metres from the home.¹¹⁷ Allotments, particularly in areas with limited garden space, also provide valuable opportunities for healthy recreation. The importance of landscapes and biodiversity to communities is discussed further in Section 4.5.

5.4.8 In Newcastle there are proposals to improve green space and biodiversity in the Walker Riverside Area Action Plan, which is very welcome. This identifies two sites of nature conservation interest, proposes to explore the feasibility of designating one more, and includes a suite of proposals to improve the open spaces in the area, including green corridors to link the area to the River Tyne. Provision for walking and cycling is also a feature of the master planning and design work in Walker Riverside. For example, the Walker Riverside Design Code identifies how improvements to the main Walker Road will be designed, including dedicated cycle lanes. The design code also has a strong emphasis on reducing car dominance in local streets. Improving safety and reducing car dominance are likely to have benefits in terms of improving the health of the community.

5.4.9 London Borough of Barking and Dagenham Council’s *Parks and Green Spaces Strategy* documents the Borough’s proposals to ensure that there is good access to public parks, green spaces and biodiversity sites. Barking has given each of its parks and open spaces a score including distance from homes, facilities and general quality. Few rated well. The Borough reports that in the

medium term it has set aside £5m to spend between 2005 and 2008 to deliver the strategy. However, it notes that “although this is a significant commitment, we will not be able to make all of the improvements that are needed. So, to make the best use of this investment, we will prioritise funding.”

Our views/assessment

5.4.10 There is a real opportunity to develop healthy communities and tackle health inequalities through the Sustainable Communities Plan. If housing and planning policy is taken forward without taking into account the principles of sustainable development, the government’s goals of improving the health of the population, reducing health inequalities and tackling obesity will be much harder to achieve.¹¹⁸ We would encourage continued policy work between CLG and DH to tackle these issues.

5.4.11 New housing developments should provide the opportunity to make physical activity a part of daily life. Designing and planning streets, public spaces, parks and play areas and neighbourhoods that are welcoming and safe (e.g. low traffic and crime, free from litter) and encourage walking and cycling (e.g. pavements, bike lanes, good street lighting) can help people keep active and healthy. Designing communities that prioritise cycling, walking and the use of public transport, can promote good health by encouraging activity, reducing accidents, increasing social contact and reducing air pollution. The new *Manual for Streets* aims to bring guidance for residential streets in line with wider sustainability aims.

5.4.12 Poor housing can have negative impacts on health, but failure now to achieve a good energy rating in a home (for example under the government’s Standard Assessment Procedure), and to require improved wall and loft insulation, heating systems, low energy lighting and appliances, double or secondary glazed windows, must not be used by councils as a reason for demolishing a community. Refurbishment, rather than demolition, may ensure that social fabric important for health remains intact. Our research has revealed that this, among other factors particularly associated with access to private developers’ finance, is being used as a reason to demolish a viable and currently sustainable community in Meir, Stoke-on-Trent.

In our view evidence of the failure of housing to reach the Decent Homes thermal efficiency standards is not a reason for demolition. The funding element is further discussed in section 6.2.

5.4.13 The NHS needs to form an integral part of new developments, both in terms of appropriate and accessible service provision, but also by using its corporate resources to maximum effect – as a good corporate citizen. The NHS has the opportunity to contribute to local population health and to the well being of society, the economy and the environment through how it behaves – as an employer, a purchaser of goods and services, a manager of transport, energy, waste and water, as a landholder and commissioner of building work and as a powerful influence in society. In addition, the government is currently investing over £12bn in new hospitals and primary care buildings, in addition to ongoing refurbishment. Although not explicitly linked to sustainable communities policy, it will be very important to fulfil the government’s vision of sustainable communities. The SDC and DH have developed the NHS Good Corporate Citizenship Assessment Model to help NHS organisations realise their potential.

Our recommendations

- The new guidance on Sustainable Communities Strategies to explicitly include health plans. These must cover access to leisure and healthcare facilities, and ensure that the developments in themselves are health promoting
- Planning Guidance to integrate health issues into housing design. This must include suitability for the different needs of residents (e.g. older people, young children etc)
- The NHS to lead by example, leveraging their economic, social and environmental impacts to contribute to sustainable communities. DH to prioritise delivery of sustainable development by the NHS through, for example, on-going championing and leadership on these issues, encouraging more extensive uptake of the GCC Assessment Model, and embedding it into performance management arrangements

- See Section 4.5 for recommendations about access to the natural environment and useable green space for recreation, sports etc.
- See Section 6.4 about funding and preventing poor thermal ratings being used to justify demolition.



5.5 Community cohesion

Does the planning and design of housing developments contribute to community cohesion?

Issue

5.5.1 The way major housing growth and renewal is taken forward, not only in terms of location and design but also how effectively local communities and other stakeholders are consulted at all stages of delivery, can have an influence on local feelings and opinions, and in turn can affect community cohesion, particularly where there are existing tensions.¹¹⁹ This is relevant to both Growth Areas and Housing Market Renewal Areas.

Our evidence

5.5.2 Our research has shown that tensions can appear in a number of ways: between income groups, between existing and new residents and between different cultures or ethnicities.

The reasons are likely to be diverse and difficult to pinpoint specifically. Government can help manage and reduce these risks by being sensitive to the possibility of these tensions and of engaging those affected right from the start of any growth or regeneration initiative (i.e. at the stage of scoping the problem or issue to be resolved as well as at the options stage) to build on their interests and concerns, and start to generate trust. This is not just about effective communications, but a two way process of interaction in which government learns and changes as much as the different groups and communities.

5.5.3 Change can cause concerns, and is not always welcomed by everyone, particularly if they have not been involved in the process of planning or scoping the change. The government was given ample evidence of this through the initial press and

public reaction to the Sustainable Communities Plan which was developed without extensive consultation with communities, other stakeholders or statutory bodies.

5.5.4 To most residents, government intervention in housing will appear as one continuum, regardless of the particular policy strand, funding stream or tier of government responsible. For example, it will be rare that someone will associate given changes specifically with the sustainable communities Growth Area aims of increasing housing supply or any other specific policy.

5.5.5 Government interventions to change housing conditions create the risk that some sections of the community may believe that changes are not necessarily to their benefit. The recent IPPR Report: *Would you live here? Making the Growth Areas communities of choice*¹²⁰ suggested that community divisions in Thames Gateway can partly be due to perceptions of fairness in the allocation of scarce resources. Residents may anticipate that resources linked to growth will be allocated in a way that disadvantages them. For example, one of our study areas, the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham (LBBDD), has experienced this. LBBDD is the seventh most deprived Borough in London and scores highly on a number of indices on the Index of Deprivation. There are concerns that the pace and scale of housing development is threatening community cohesion. In particular, we found that there is a perception among some parts of the community that people of minority ethnic backgrounds and recent immigrants are being favoured for new housing to the exclusion of the traditionally predominantly white community of the area.¹²¹ To help to avoid this being exploited for malevolent political ends, government at all levels needs to communicate and engage with residents in order to address these perceptions. The Commission for Racial Equality is currently undertaking a formal investigation into the impacts of regeneration,¹²² which is involving a range of stakeholders, and the government should see these as an opportunity to explore how housing policy may inadvertently affect social cohesion.

5.5.6 Housing expansion in the Growth Areas and regeneration in Housing Market Renewal Areas has the potential to have considerable impacts on existing communities. Existing social relationships, local heritage, demand for services, and community

aesthetics are all likely to be affected. There are risks that housing development could act as a mechanism to further increase tensions and divisions in communities. Housing development can also affect the affordability of home ownership.

5.5.7 The main focus of community consultation has been in the Housing Market Renewal Areas where the impacts on local areas and individual residents is most pronounced due to the use of compulsory purchase orders to enable demolition plans.¹²³

5.5.8 The Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders have all made efforts to consult their communities. In fact the Audit Commission has examined these consultations as part of their assessment process. However, given the nature of the changes and the large areas covered, there is, unsurprisingly, resistance in some areas, predominantly due to demolition plans. Although initial consultation has taken place, it is often more traditional consultation late in the process, rather than the more enlightened approach of engaging with those affected in co-design and co-delivery. The government and local delivery partners should start their engagement early, and build in a wide variety of interests throughout the process, from raising awareness of the need for change right the way through to deciding how to undertake works in a way that minimises disruption and other potential problems. For example, during our resident interviews in Blackburn, it appeared that direct evidence of consultation of local residents was negligible. Aside from a letter from the council, our respondents had not experienced any other consultation. In addition, the communication of details and timings of refurbishments created some frustration amongst residents, as they were sometimes inconvenienced by the short notice they were given (despite previous delays).¹²⁴ It is important the delivery partners ensure an effective and continual public consultation process and do not just pay 'lip service' to the notion of public consultation.

5.5.9 The Housing Market Renewal area in Newcastle Gateshead has been particularly careful to go through a full engagement process with local communities. This is inevitably time consuming. In our view this has led to local support for the proposals, but the pathfinder has been criticised by the Audit Commission¹²⁵ who consider their

progress to be unnecessarily slow. This is one manifestation of the output rather than outcome focus of the housing programme, as we discuss further in section 6. An outcome focus will respect the preparatory engagement processes with the affected community, as this will lead to greater acceptability in the medium term.

5.5.10 The best examples of consultation, such as the regeneration of the Walker area of Newcastle/Gateshead or of New Islington in Manchester, have given residents real influence over their community by encouraging their input into choosing developers and being involved in their designs. This is only likely to be feasible in Housing Market Renewal Areas, but shows real engagement rather than formulaic consultation.

5.5.11 It is notable that the six monthly monitoring by the Audit Commission fails to distinguish between good engagement and a tick box approach, and some areas where we believe engagement to be inadequate (e.g. in parts of Stoke-on-Trent), have received a clear bill of health for this engagement with the communities by the Audit Commission. Focussing simply on delivering the projected outputs, in terms of numbers of homes refurbished or replaced, can, and is, leading to fractured

communities in some places. An output focus is failing to deliver the desired outcomes.

5.5.12 Our research suggests existing communities in Growth Areas have not had the same focus in terms of consultation. Efforts are required to consider the impacts on areas contiguous to new development, and how it can be delivered in a way that is mutually beneficial to the individuals who will live there, and to people in the surrounding area. Also, engagement should extend beyond 'existing communities'. It should be standard practice to engage with new residents as and when they move in. Engagement should be seen as a continuum, not a one-off consultation at the start of the development. Our public opinion work suggested that engagement in the Growth Areas appears to be piecemeal and patchy. For example, in Cambourne, Cambridgeshire, a poor engagement process exacerbated residents' feelings that they had been 'duped' about the area, as promised facilities had not materialised. The overall feeling was that developers were going to put up 'so many thousand' houses, and that they were not interested in the local community. Similarly, residents in another Cambridgeshire development, and in Barking & Dagenham, did not feel that they have been properly engaged about the development of their surroundings.¹²⁶



“I’m thinking of setting up a residents’ association so that we have a communal voice. At the moment it’s one person ringing up Southern Housing and they’re not getting a bigger picture.”

Resident
St Anns’, Barking

“It’s just them telling you things; there’s no opportunity for you to have your say.”

Resident
Cambourne, Cambridge

5.5.13 Design, planning and tenure are also important to local cohesion. Creating mixed income new communities and building mixed tenure developments requires careful planning and delivery by the developers and their partners.

5.5.14 Some lower-income households that we spoke to in newer developments expressed the opinion that some local facilities were only meant for wealthier residents, which reinforced a ‘them and us’ attitude created by development design. There was a distinct architectural split between the affordable and private houses, compounded by separate roads for each. This led to a perceived division of single, working-class parents on one side of the development, and younger couples with ‘money, good jobs and nice houses’ on the other. Similarly, housing design in the Beringer’s development in Barking & Dagenham, demarcated private and affordable homes. Private residents had their own communal bins, a gated park and CCTV, whilst affordable houses went without. There were even separate entrances for private and other homes. As well as the obvious physical split, the private flats were generally smaller one and two bedroom flats, designed for younger couples and not so many families. This further alienated the two groups.

5.5.15 However, in the St Ann’s development in Barking & Dagenham, there was a noticeable absence of these divisions. This appeared to be appreciated by affordable householders. The architecture of the private, shared and affordable blocks was identical.¹²⁷



“Not everyone complains but it [the layout] does cause problems. All the green area is only for the private residents which is fair enough as they’ve paid for it but the Housing Association kids are not allowed on the estate at all.”

Resident
Beringer’s Place, Barking

“I think it’s quite clever with these apartments as they’ve made one lot shared ownership, one lot for outright sale, one lot for council.”

Resident
St Ann’s, Barking

5.5.16 In both Housing Market Renewal and Growth Areas, there is a risk of causing resentment amongst existing residents. Radical change could be seen for the benefit of new residents at the cost of, and with indifference to, the existing local community. For example, in some Housing Market Renewal Areas such as in Oldham or Blackburn, new housing will be contiguous to existing, lower quality housing. Sensitivities are to be expected, particularly where very different qualities of social housing may be provided to close neighbours. In the Bank Top area of Blackburn we found that a new, privately-funded development of large houses appeared to be being marketed particularly to suit the needs of Asian families. Our research suggests that there is some resentment in the existing community. In that particular development it seemed no effort had been made to provide mixed style housing, such as small flats for single or elderly residents,

larger flats for couples, or small houses for families. This has also been the recent building pattern in Barking. Consequently there was a perceived divide between the two communities which the new housing development had clearly exacerbated.

5.5.17 There seem to be mixed findings in terms of community cohesion for infill areas. For example in Barking & Dagenham, there were large differences between the developments. In St Ann's and Beringer's Place, the verdict was good with a resident commenting "We've got a nice little community." However, in Robert's Place, where the location and design of the development meant that it is less integrated into existing communities, residents felt that there was little community, with a resident saying "Everyone minds their own business around here."

5.5.16 Where large urban extension or out of town stand-alone developments take place, there is a risk that they may attract more ambitious working residents who will leave communities within towns and cities. This could lead to less diverse, declining neighborhoods that are less able to support services and contribute to social polarisation. Spatial planning should take this into account, and as suggested above, government should restate its commitment to sequential planning so that smaller inner-city brown field sites are considered before outer city green field sites.

5.5.17 CABE's *Enabling* programme is helpful in seeking to build the foundations for long term positive change in the built environment. It aims to build confidence and capacity in organisations like local authorities and regeneration companies to use design-led processes not just to influence the physical qualities of development, but also to provoke interest and ambition and inspire new ways of thinking about change.

"I think that the thing is a lot of people have bought houses as investments and are letting them out, like next door, so that, I don't know that you get that community feel then, because people come and go."

Resident
The Quills, Cambridge

Our views/assessment

5.5.18 Effective communication and consultation with communities, and good design of public spaces, layout and connectivity to encourage social interaction, are fundamental to achieving sustainable communities. So far the government's record on engaging communities has been mixed, with a need to consider further its effectiveness. There was not sufficient consultation in the development of the Sustainable Communities Plan prior to publication, but later efforts at a local level have been more encouraging.

5.5.19 There seems to be some good practice around consultation for Housing Market Renewal Areas, for example, Elevate East Lancashire has led some excellent and innovative work with Mediation Northern Ireland to bring together communities in Burnley. This should be built on but we recognise the time and resources it takes. Growth Area communities are more difficult to consult, as large scale development may be contiguous to a number of areas, rather than confined to a specific neighbourhood. However, good communication is still necessary to help people who are affected, even peripherally, in order to prevent uncertainty and allay any concerns.

5.5.20 Across whole development areas there should be mixed housing in terms of size and tenure. In addition, developments should be 'tenure-blind' so that any affordable housing is indistinguishable in design and quality from 100% private housing. Clear divisions could lead to negative feelings between residents of different tenures, from both directions.

5.5.21 One of the major risks is relying on private developer funding, in that the housing will be built to meet the market demand as perceived by the developer. Private sector developers are also likely to build for the best financial return rather than to maximize social capital. It is important that the public sector bodies involved with developments robustly pursue the broader public interest and community cohesion in the frameworks for community design and delivery.

5.5.22 Public bodies have a statutory duty under the Race Relations Amendment Act to promote good race relations. We believe it is important that

public bodies' involvement in developments gives due consideration to the implications of design and delivery on different communities. This is likely to be helped by work the Academy for Sustainable Communities is doing with community leaders to facilitate better joint working and community engagement.

Our recommendations:

- Effective and continuous public engagement to be mandatory throughout the planning and development of new homes, particularly in existing communities likely to be affected by Growth Areas, and refurbishment in the Housing Market Renewal Areas. Evidence-gathering of the needs of different communities is required to help develop solutions that are acceptable to all communities
- CLG/Communities England in partnership with ASC to provide improved guidance and share best practice on community cohesion and local engagement with communities. This should emphasise the need to build relationships with the affected communities right from the start of planning, through to the design and delivery, and on to the business of living in the community
- Through policy changes and in the next revision of LDFs, local government to require developers to build 'tenure blind' communities so that affordable housing is indistinguishable from market housing
- Public bodies to be developing policies and actively monitoring the impact of housing and community developments to ensure compliance with the Race Relations Amendment Act duty to promote good race relations
- Housing Market Renewal Areas and Growth Area delivery bodies to produce mandatory Race Equality Schemes and should be required to promote social and ethnic cohesion as part of their grant offer letter from the government
- DfES and CLG to lead on ensuring individuals involved with developments are trained and equipped to promote participation in community life. This should include those involved with planning but also extend to other local authority areas like children's services.



5.6 Promoting economic opportunity & skill development

How well do the housing developments help to promote economic opportunity and skill development in the local area?

Issue

5.6.1 Growth and regeneration activities should provide direct economic opportunities for local communities through their delivery. New development and regeneration should positively seek to stimulate sustainable economic activity through, procurement decisions, and encouraging local employment and development of skills.

5.6.2 This is particularly important for existing communities in Housing Market Renewal Areas, where neighbourhoods have suffered serious decline due to a range of factors. Although the Housing Market Renewal Funds are core funding for a housing programme, those delivering it realise that it has to be part of a broader regeneration effort to be successful.

5.6.3 Supporting existing communities is also relevant to the Growth Areas. New development in the Growth Areas will inevitably be within or strongly linked to existing communities, whether it takes the form of in-fill, urban extension, or stand-alone communities, some of which are likely to benefit from economic stimuli, especially in the Thames Gateway.

Our evidence

5.6.4 As outlined above, one of the major weaknesses of the delivery of the SC Plan is that the focus has shifted from a comprehensive approach to regeneration, to a housing programme. As a result, responsibility for the economic growth

agenda has fallen onto the Regional Development Agencies. There is some sense in this, as the RDA Tasking Framework is focussed heavily on achieving economic growth, but given the aggressive RDA focus on direct job creation and growth in GDP, many communities are suffering from inadequate enabling support and high levels of economic inactivity or exclusion from the job market. For example our research has indicated that this applies to east London and Barking, and the Thames Gateway more generally.

5.6.5 Employers are often reluctant to invest in areas which demonstrate significant conditions of low skills and high inactivity. Areas which are unable to invest in improving the conditions that would attract employers, will suffer from inhibited economic growth. Stoke-on-Trent, for example has very significant economic deprivation with the loss of the mining industry, most of the pottery industry and the steel industry. There are large areas of industrial dereliction; pottery factories stand derelict along the main roads connecting the six towns. Whilst there is much activity in the housing Pathfinder programme (demolishing terraced housing and rebuilding homes nearer to the city centre), there remain real problems with the reclamation of polluted sites and economic regeneration. Stoke-on-Trent is dependent on the West Midlands RDA for support funding, but this is largely only available for direct job creation. There is little funding available to improve the general conditions of the city to make it more attractive to employers. Empty factories remain undeveloped and un-demolished, whilst the owners remain hopeful that their site may be attractive to housing developers (and therefore have a high value).

5.6.6 Local politics appear to have left such problems unresolved, despite the city's published strategy of densification of the six towns and improving local activity in each.

5.6.7 There are also some good examples. The Walker Riverside (Newcastle) proposals include a master plan for the adjacent industrial area which includes the development of environmental industries, education facilities and skills training and this is supported by the Area Action Plan (however the Audit Commission point out that the outcomes for this area have yet to be recognised as a priority by ONE North East, the Regional Development Agency). Whether there will be a similar emphasis

in some of the other more peripheral areas remains to be seen.¹²⁸

5.6.8 Good planning develops housing and employment opportunities together. Our public opinion research spoke to residents who were frustrated by the lack of local opportunities because facilities and business had not been integrated with the housing.¹²⁹

5.6.9 Skill development for the sustainable communities programme also provides broader, national economic opportunities, particularly for the construction industry.

5.6.10 A large and skilled workforce will be necessary to deliver the building targets. To deliver these targets in a way that integrates economic, social and environmental benefits, everyone from planners to builders will need the skills to make sustainable decisions and realise them on the ground. There is a need to enhance the sustainability expertise and skills of planners. The risk is that pressing targets, limited capacity or poor understanding may work against sustainability, particularly for small infill projects which may in fact make a significant contribution to achieve housing targets in some Growth Areas. Furthermore, the standards set by planners must be deliverable by a workforce that has the skills to use sustainable methods and innovative enough to use new techniques.

5.6.11 In some areas, developers move in with their own workforce to deliver new-build on their development, whereas in refurbishments, more locally available workforce can be used (plumbers, electricians, insulation installers), helping to improve the local economy.

5.6.12 There is currently a shortage of skills for construction and maintenance, particularly in south east England. However, current information available makes it difficult to assess the magnitude and composition of that shortage. The construction industry training board (CITB), through its 'Future Skills' project, collates information on the skill needs of industry – but defines these skills by type, e.g. 'concrete operator', rather than any analysis of what skills each type of construction worker has or may need to have in order to deliver sustainable communities.

5.6.13 As well as specific skills associated with construction, refurbishing existing properties and deploying new technologies, there is a need to ‘future proof’ skills to ensure people have the capacities or competencies to them to cope with change and work with others in enabling and leading change. This was recommended in the Egan Review which led to the establishment of the Academy for Sustainable Communities. It concluded that while the Urban Task Force had found “the teaching in basic professional technical skills is excellent: the main problem is a lack of cross disciplinary learning with a strong vocational element. The evidence is that it is generic rather than technical skills that are in short supply.”¹³⁰

5.6.14 Both vocational and academic training and career development should include more generic skill sets such as project management and leadership skills. They should also encourage people to have the collaborative outlook needed to deliver sustainable communities.

5.6.15 Also skills of decision makers and planners, with reference to sustainable development, need to improve and whole life costing integrated in to their decision making. The same is true of property/housing market professionals.

5.6.16 The Academy for Sustainable Communities has been set up with the aim of developing leading edge skills, learning and knowledge for all those involved in planning, delivering and maintaining communities. The focus is on filling the generic skills and knowledge gaps around community engagement, leadership, project management and partnership working. They are at an early stage early of developing their programmes. As one example of ASC’s approach, they have commissioned COGS (Communities and Organisations: Growth and Support) to develop, deliver and evaluate two pilot learning programmes in developing sustainable communities in the north West. It is too early to judge what impact these will have, but it will be important that the government ensures that the overall aims of the Academy are delivered.

Our views/assessment

5.6.17 A number of design and planning characteristics can help enable local economic development:

- well designed and located mixed use (commercial and residential) developments can enable local employment
- making the density of communities sufficient to support economic opportunities – are there enough people in the area to support local businesses?
- mixed affordability – different income levels required to support diverse businesses (as users and suppliers)
- providing infrastructure provision to support economic opportunities – is there adequate sustainable transport for workers and goods?
- making an area attractive, so mixed incomes residents are attracted and retained.

5.6.18 There is therefore, an urgent need for the Sector Skills Councils and others to focus on these issues, taking in to account the enormity of the proposed long term building plans. The skills gap is currently being filled by migrant workers from Eastern Europe, alongside the Sector Skills Council efforts to improve vocational training programmes. However employers believe many of these workers are, in practice, more highly educated than their existing labouring and semi-skilled jobs would suggest, and in time they are likely to move on to more skilled jobs outside the construction industry. Therefore a sustained concentration through Construction Skills on improving the skills of existing builders, and attracting far more apprenticeships into the building trade, is essential.

5.6.19 The SDC also believes there is a need to enhance the sustainability expertise and skills of decision makers and planners, particularly around effective consultation and engagement with people, and sustainable construction knowledge. The Royal Town Planning Institute is already demonstrably committed to this, as illustrated in their New Vision for Planning. This is welcome and we would like this to continue to be translated into upskilling across the profession.

5.6.20 There is an opportunity for the public sector to contribute to regeneration in terms of training and employing a local workforce (especially during

the current schools and healthcare buildings boom) and by using its purchasing muscle to support local businesses and enterprise. In turn, an employed population will be a healthier population.

5.6.21 Concentrating housing growth in existing communities not only helps to regenerate areas but leads to more mixed communities, more economic activity and more jobs.

Our recommendations

- DTI, DfES and CLG take a joint leadership role with the emerging Sustainable Construction Strategy, to ensuring a proactive approach to improving sustainable construction and building maintenance skills, through commitment with the sector and the Sector Skills Councils
- DTI and CLG to ensure that the RDAs' tasking framework provides focus and funding to support the regeneration of the whole area including supporting measures that will enable business development, and improving education and skills of the communities, instead of concentrating predominantly on short-term job creation.



5.7 Affordability and ownership

How successful are the government's housing and communities policies in addressing issues of affordability and ownership?

Issue

5.7.1 Affordability, in particular related to ownership, is a high priority issue for the government.¹³¹ They are keen to help people “get a foot on the housing ladder.” This is increasingly difficult in a high priced market, particularly in London and the south east. However, home ownership is only one aspect of affordability, and the need for increased forms of social provision is considerable and growing.

5.7.2 Considerations of affordability should not stop at the upfront costs of acquiring accommodation. The design and location of a home will influence the utility bills, as well as the maintenance and transport needs of the household, all of which could cause significant problems to low-income families.

Energy efficient homes with easy, affordable access to services, will keep these costs down.

Our evidence

5.7.3 The Barker review of housing supply (2004)¹³² concluded that a significant increase in additions to the housing stock were necessary to enable affordability. Even then, the Barker review projections were for a reduction in the growth of prices rather than an absolute reduction. This is likely to leave many people still unable to buy, even if earnings outstrip housing price growth. Although the free market logic of “more supply, same demand, thus lower price” that underlies the Barker analysis makes initial sense in the simplest economic terms, more careful thought raises concerns. The housing

market is not a homogenous market: it is locally segmented and demand for, and differentials in price between dwellings is influenced by a variety of factors including location, size, type, aspect and design. It is therefore simplistic to think that affordability problems can be tackled by house-buildings alone, particularly in high-demand areas. Furthermore, supply fuels additional demand.

5.7.4 Building is not the only avenue available to government for raising the supply of dwellings. There are almost 100,000 homeless householders in the UK living in temporary accommodation at the cost to the public purse of around £500m.¹³³ There are a considerable number of empty homes, including around 90,000 in London and the south east.¹³⁴ Bringing more of these homes into use will provide much-needed extra supply in high demand areas, in many cases more quickly, and with less environmental impacts and infrastructure costs.

5.7.5 Social house building is at historically low levels.¹³⁵ There is considerable unmet demand for socially rented homes in some areas. The government have introduced a number of schemes to provide options for the latter, particularly for key workers but it is not clear whether these measures will be enough to meet the need.

5.7.6 The situation is perhaps even less clear-cut for socially rented accommodation. The government is not building homes itself, and is still selling properties to some occupiers, albeit at a slower rate than previously. Additional supply will mainly therefore only come forward from planning agreements (e.g. section 106), registered social landlords and large government subsidies.

5.7.7 Growth Areas are seeking to use planning agreements to secure affordable housing (shared ownership or social rented), but this is reliant both on their bargaining power (which is likely to be lower in areas of low private demand) and the reliability of housing developers to deliver.

5.7.8 Affordability of larger family homes may also develop into a significant problem if current trends continue. In some areas, small properties form the largest share of new supply. For example, in Barking and Dagenham in 2004-05, 97.7% of all units approved were one and two bedroom units. Exacerbating this situation, there is a tendency for

existing larger houses to be subdivided into small flats. There is concern that private sector developers find larger houses less profitable because of the cost of land.¹³⁶

5.7.9 However, findings from our Public Opinion Research work indicate that some people feel that these houses have helped them get a foot on the ladder, and that is important to them. For example a resident in Barking says his property has far exceeded his expectations because it has allowed him to get a foot on the housing ladder. So in this case, the development has been perceived as successful.

Our views/assessment

5.7.10 The Sustainable Development Commission does not accept that simply by increasing the supply of housing in the south east of England, the availability of affordable homes will automatically be improved. It is our view that affordable homes for key workers will require an increase in both the availability of social housing and easy access to shared mortgage schemes. The housing growth agenda is not delivering homes that will be affordable for those in most need as there are insufficient low-cost homes being built.

5.7.11 Targeted public intervention may be needed to provide small scale provision of social and affordable housing in the Growth Areas that would otherwise become exclusively highly-priced properties.

5.7.12 Family-sized homes can be provided on smaller sites. It is possible to build 3 and 4 bedroom terraced homes at densities of well over 50 homes per hectare including individual gardens. In fact the New House Builders' Federation recently published figures showing a resurgence of building new terraces.

5.7.13 The Sustainable Development Commission has a fundamental difficulty with government's plans to increase development in Thames Gateway, while parts of the midlands (only one and a half hours from London by train) are suffering over-supply of housing, to the degree that home ownership is possible on a very modest salary (in Stoke-on-Trent a Victorian terrace house can be bought for around £80k, whilst in the most depressed areas, this falls to around £30k).

5.7.14 There are important and challenging issues raised by the overall 'predict and provide' rationale the government seem to be following. It is beyond the scope of this review of the Sustainable Communities Plan to detail alternative proposals. However, we would advise that the government continues to take action on empty homes, regularly reviews housing forecasts, and continues to push for regeneration of regions beyond London and the south east.

Making it happen

Are the government's housing and communities policies being delivered and monitored effectively?



Issue

6.0.1 To deliver the aims of the Sustainable Communities Plan, the government and a large range of national, regional and local private and public sector organisations will need to integrate their efforts, and deploy enormous resources. Our research has shown that government has not successfully transferred its vision of sustainable communities through the bodies involved in delivery, and that the overall goal of sustainable communities has been lost in the process of delivering a large housing programme.

6.0.2 Effective governance structures from central to local government, and with identified delivery bodies, are vital to ensure that all bodies work together successfully to support sustainable communities. Funding needs to be used to better effect; accountability must be clear, and delivery taken forward following the principles of sustainable development.

6.0.3 Open consultation and discussion with the full range of relevant stakeholders, especially the communities themselves, is vital to achieve a sustainable approach.

Our evidence and view overall

6.0.4 Evidence of the success with which delivery is being taken forward in a co-ordinated and integrated way is mixed. Our judgement is that the current housing programme is not sufficiently focussed around delivering to a sustainable development agenda. In some areas delivery is at an early stage, and lessons have been learnt already, but some major concerns remain.

6.0.5 Our Review also suggests that the monitoring of progress is output focussed and therefore the outcomes are being inadequately assessed. Going forward we urge the government to improve their monitoring of real benefits and outcomes from the sustainable communities effort.

6.1 From strategy to sustainable communities

How well are the government's housing and communities policies moving from strategy to delivery?

Issue

6.1.1 Ultimately, housing will be delivered largely by private sector developers. Success will require effective and integrated public interventions at all levels to ensure that environmental, social and economic benefits are delivered and adverse impacts are minimised. This will require suitable levels of public funding, which is discussed further below. It also requires effective public sector governance and management of performance.

6.1.2 Delivery of the aims of the sustainable communities plan is at a fairly early stage. However, indications so far are that there are significant risks that the outcomes will not contribute to sustainable development, or sustainable communities as defined by the government.

6.1.3 The previous chapters of this document

have many examples where there are weaknesses in delivery of sustainable communities, and we are not replicating this evidence here. Our evidence reveals that current approaches will not tackle the environmental challenges presented by large scale housing growth and regeneration. Likewise, it is not certain that necessary infrastructure and services will be fully resourced and provided in a timely manner. It is not clear that sustainable economic development will be delivered to the areas with most need, nor whether the communities created by housing development will indeed be healthy, cohesive communities.

6.1.4 The original framing of Sustainable Communities policy did not fully tackle these issues. Goals on housing growth and housing replacement (i.e. demolition) were prioritised and were accompanied by hard targets. Environmental impacts and the funding of infrastructure were

largely omitted, with only vague references included and no hard targets put forward.

6.1.5 It is not surprising therefore that national, regional and local delivery strategies have largely reflected this imbalance. The process for delivering the government’s sustainable communities goals is complicated and involves a diverse range of public and private bodies at national, regional and local level. The structures and processes that exist for spatial planning are predominantly designed for delivering housing targets and do not necessarily provide a framework for integrating the full range of activities required to enable sustainable communities.

6.1.6 The inherent difficulty and expense of providing new services infrastructure to new communities further strengthens the argument that building within existing urban frames (where service capacity can be adjusted more easily), and making the best use of existing available urban land, is a more sustainable approach to housing growth than very large house building projects, which either sprawl beyond the urban fringe, or are established on completely new sites.

6.1.7 We are encouraged that the housing growth approach in England is focussing more in the short-term on “Growth Points” and we welcome this. However, it remains clear that large scale development on new sites outside town and city centres remains dominant for the next phase of growth. We consider that to be unnecessary, and would urge government to re-examine the design of the Growth Point to maximise the value of inner town developments.

6.1.8 Lessons are being learnt by many of the delivery organisation involved. This experience is valuable, and organisations like CABE have been working to share learning and good practices across Growth Areas and Housing Market Renewal Areas.

Our views/assessment

6.1.9 We believe the government should recognise that the housing programme delivery process can only deliver some aspects of sustainable communities and must be fully integrated with the provision of major public services like public transport, education and health. It will need to adjust its policy and delivery frameworks accordingly, even if this means providing the public funding earlier than might otherwise have been assumed.

6.1.10 As identified earlier, the role of the RDA as funder of measures that can enhance a location’s appeal to prospective employers, needs to be delivered consistently across the regions.

Our recommendations

- If not remedied by the infrastructure review, the Treasury to revisit estimates of necessary infrastructure funding to deliver sustainable communities (not just housing) and allocate resources accordingly
- CLG/Communities England working with ASC to reinforce efforts to enable the sharing of good practice and provide expert advice for lead officials responsible for developments
- Government to ensure that assessments of Growth Points maximise the value of inner town development and achieve densification, to limit need for out of town growth in Phase 2
- The Regional Spatial Strategy Annual Monitoring Report to be presented in a format that allows for the impact of Growth Areas/Housing Market Renewal Areas to be holistically assessed.



6.2 Public funding

How effectively is public money being spent?

Issue

6.2.1 Public funding is vital to achieving sustainable communities. Development and regeneration based on purely commercial considerations will rarely, if ever, deliver the range of public benefits required to create sustainable communities, including tackling the legacy of economic decline and environmental damage.

Our evidence

6.2.2 Public funding spent as part of the sustainable communities, programme is having some positive impacts on communities. Some of the projects to improve neighbourhoods in Housing Market Renewal Areas would not have been possible otherwise, and public bodies such as

Communities England and CABE are working with delivery bodies to help to improve the quality of housing developments in terms of design, location, environmental performance and surroundings.

6.2.3 However, uncertainties concerning the level, timing and security of public funding remain particularly difficult for local delivery, and present significant risks to achieving the goals of sustainable communities. The public funding associated with the original Sustainable Communities Plan was £22bn, but this did not cover many of the expenditures necessary for delivery, some of which have now been identified in response to Kate Barker's review of housing supply.¹³⁷

6.2.4 Possible funding streams for regeneration and growth are numerous and diverse. Relevant funding has been made available from a wide range

of sources, including CLG Growth Area funds, HMR pathfinder funding, English Partnerships, and Local authorities.

6.2.5 In some parts of the country, the Sustainable Communities Plan has led to inter-regional approaches, such as the “Northern Way”, being developed. The Northern Way is a 20 year strategy to transform the economy of the north of England, by bridging a £30bn output gap between the north and the average for England; closing this gap is seen as an important part of delivering sustainable communities. It involves the three northern RDAs, Yorkshire Forward, Northwest Regional Development Agency and One NorthEast, working in collaboration on ten investment priorities. The major output of this process has been the production of development plans for the eight city regions. However, the mention of sustainable development and communities within these plans has been significantly absent.

6.2.6 Allocations to HMR pathfinders and awards under the two Growth Area funding rounds, constitute a relatively small amount of the £22bn funding announced under the Sustainable Communities Plan (around £500m each). The majority of listed funding in the plan was for housing programmes and neighbourhood renewal work that was already established. This goes some way to explain why the non-housing elements of the programme appear to be short on committed resources.¹³⁸

6.2.7 Public funding for sustainable communities projects tends to be capital funding rather than revenue funding. This puts an emphasis on local bodies such as local authorities to take on the burden of any projects that require revenue funding. This, and the short term funding of long term projects in HMR and Growth Areas transfers some risk to local authorities, which may deter funding of some important local services. For example, in the Bridging Newcastle Gateshead pathfinder, local bodies have provided revenue funding for community safety – an important factor in achieving sustainable communities – but outside the HMR funding and governance structures. In fact achieving delivery of all non-housing elements is acknowledged as being problematic because of the uncertainties surrounding the necessary long-term funding for public services, and of attracting-in private service providers such as retail. The introduction of Local

Area Agreements offers the potential for closer alignment and integration of funding, but funding uncertainties do appear to hamper strategic medium term planning.¹³⁹

6.2.8 HMRA’s are reaching a critical stage, and insecurity about levels and certainty of funding may jeopardise delivery of holistic regeneration programmes in these areas. Previous initiatives (such as the Urban Programme) were cited as examples of failure to regenerate communities in a holistic manner, which is why some housing built as recently as the 1980s is now being demolished. There are considerable fears at local level that the government may now be considering pulling back from their commitments to the Pathfinders and that, if they were to do so, the Pathfinders will also fail to deliver truly sustainable communities.¹⁴⁰

6.2.9 As discussed in Chapter 5 well planned and timely transport is crucial to a sustainable community and failure to integrate with growth and regeneration planning may inhibit the pace of development, and result in unsustainable outcomes. However transport infrastructure funding has been an area of considerable uncertainty.

6.2.10 The original SC Plan did not explicitly and directly tackle transport, and the fund associated with the plan did not include infrastructure. The introduction of the Community Infrastructure Fund has been a subsequent attempt to close this gap. This is a two year funding programme for transport infrastructure totalling £200m, and the projects were required to be delivered on the ground within that two year period. In our view this is misconceived. Clearly, transport infrastructure projects that are already researched, planned and mapped out, and ready to go within the time frame, were more likely to be road building projects which had previously been rejected (largely on the grounds of inadequate cost-effectiveness and/or negative environmental impacts). Furthermore the amount involved are relatively small (£200m in total) in relative terms to overall transport expenditure, which runs in to £billions. £200m would not cover even a fifth of the expected infrastructure funding for Milton Keynes. It is estimated that £1050m will be required. The Milton Keynes Partnership has successfully secured around £110m from the local tariff, but will need to source the rest, primarily from core transport funding, which has not yet been

committed. For areas that have not been able to secure some funding up front, like Milton Keynes, this uncertainty must be more acute, and have impact across more sectors. The expected housing growth in the Thames Gateway is estimated to need £16bn of infrastructure funding.¹⁴¹

Our views/assessment

6.2.11 Public funding can provide the stimulus for development that may not have happened otherwise, or not to the same level of public benefit. This can include site preparation, paying for additional features such as landscaping or improving street environments, and supporting sustainable transport solutions. English Partnerships, local authorities and others already fulfil this role. However, the sustainable communities vision is very ambitious, and it is likely to require even more of this type of funding if it is to be achieved in areas of significant economic depression such as Stoke-on-Trent, and to attract inward investment and jobs.

6.2.12 There is a strong onus on local authorities at the moment to fund and support the full range of action needed to enable sustainable communities. Due to the short term nature of central funding, its uncertainty, and its capital-biased focus, local authorities have to absorb the risk of taking forward long term and revenue driven projects. This is particularly the case in some HMRA areas where 15 year regeneration plans commit a local area to action, without knowing if funding will last more than two years. This is likely to be a barrier to delivery of some projects in both HMRs and Growth Areas and needs more innovative thinking and flexible funding from central government to support local authorities.

6.2.13 Many of the growth and Housing Market Renewal Areas are under pressure to spend their

allocated funding, but the experience in Newcastle Gateshead that we highlight early in this document, shows that deferral of some funding would be preferable to allow more time for planning and community engagement.

6.2.14 In our view the Communities Infrastructure Fund should award feasibility and facilitation funding for projects to enable the development of sustainable transport solutions, with capital funding available in later years to support the widespread development of guided buses, safe cycling infrastructure, and other sustainable transport solutions. Until government starts to plan for sustainability across all sectors, including the transport sector, we are unlikely as a nation to shift transport patterns away from dependency on the car. We urge the Treasury to take these issues into consideration in its 2007 review of infrastructure funding.

6.2.15 The Barker Review of Land Use Planning highlighted the possibilities for funding urban regeneration by encouraging the use of councils' prudential borrowing powers. We would support greater innovation to leverage funds to support regeneration, though these should be achieved in ways that do not give compromise environmental and social goals now or in the future.

Our recommendations

- Through CSR07 the government to consider more flexible and long-run timing for spending funds, and much more flexibility in capital/revenue split, particularly for Housing Market Renewal Areas
- The government to encourage local innovation for funding regeneration in ways that do not compromise environmental or social goals now or in the future.



6.3 Land use planning

How has the planning process worked?

Issue

6.3.1 Land use planning is a crucial tool for delivering sustainable communities. It should help achieve sustainable development, and can be used as a lever to ensure the delivery of public benefits that are necessary, but which are unlikely to be generated by development based on commercial considerations only.

6.3.2 The planning system determines the location and form of development, and is therefore, a key mechanism for delivering sustainable development.

6.3.3 Planning for sustainability should promote the highest quality development and most beneficial land use changes, in the most appropriate locations at the most appropriate time, and in the

public interest. It should assess and provide for needs rather than just meet demands. Conversely, it should prevent inappropriate, poorly located, poor quality or unnecessary development.¹⁴²

Our evidence

6.3.4 Planning has not always delivered high quality housing in communities that could be considered sustainable by the government's definition in the past. Changes have been made to planning approaches, but there is no guarantee yet that this will deliver sustainable outcomes.

6.3.5 The new Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Frameworks must reflect National Planning policy as reflected by Planning Policy Guidance (PPGs) and Planning

Policy Statements (PPSs). PPS 1¹⁴³ sets out the government's overarching policy for delivering sustainable development through planning.

6.3.6 Most Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS) and Local Development Frameworks are currently still under development, therefore most present development is under old plans. Whilst we may not start to see the results of the new plans for another three to five years, those examples that we have looked at, appear to reflect the lack of urgency in the planning policy statement themselves, particularly on environmental impacts.

6.3.7 The East of England RSS is one of the most advanced and has been through an examination in public (EiP). The EiP provides an opportunity for those involved in the drafting of the spatial plan to discuss specific points. The draft RSS submitted to the EiP was fairly traditional in language and aspiration and did not really express the expected shift from Regional Planning Guidance to the new statutory RSS. It was presented as the Regional Assembly's spatial plan, i.e., of interest only to those concerned with planning issues at the regional, sub-regional and local scale as it indicated what physically should happen where. The EiP Panel Report extends the concept of RSS to include broader aims towards achieving sustainable development, particularly on transport. These new policies will require a far greater involvement of non-planning organisations if they are to be realised, and so the challenge for the RSS and the RA will be in gaining regional ownership of the final document.

6.3.8 However, there appears to be limited scope for the RSS to change the direction of planning set by National government. They cannot, for example, realistically change housing targets or challenge other policies like aviation needs. They cannot also set specific locations for development nor specific standards – this will be covered by the LDF and individual planners. This reinforces the importance of national framing of planning, and the final planning decision on local level that decides exactly where and how housing will be delivered.

6.3.9 Funding for public requirements can be secured from developers via 'section 106'¹⁴⁴ agreements to make the proposed development more acceptable for planning approval. However, funding is not available until the houses are built,

leaving a gap in forward funding to deliver social benefits or necessary infrastructure. This can force local partners to plan for housing with no guarantee that the supporting services will be funded. The problem is exacerbated when combined with uncertainties about some direct public funding. This could be particularly damaging in terms of developing community cohesion and promoting non car-based journeys. New ways need to be found during the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 process to identify ways in which advanced funding could be made available to local areas.¹⁴⁵

6.3.10 A planning gain supplement was suggested by Kate Barker as a way to bring forward funding for public benefits from the land price increase created by the granting of planning permission, and to speed up the planning process. If taken forward, the SDC believes that it should deliver the following:

- the allocation of funding consistent with local priorities
- the delivery of funding quickly
- the monitoring and evaluation of use of funding against sustainable development principle criteria
- more funding being secured for social benefits, environmental enhancement and infrastructure
- the increase in the protection planning gives to the environment, heritage, and residents.

Our views/assessment

6.3.11 Ambitious housing targets and commercial considerations have generated a desire in government and the housing development industry to speed-up planning. Sustainable development is about integrating, not balancing or trading off, economic, social and environmental needs. Any changes to planning should not occur at the expense of good planning practice or sustainable development. Complexity in planning does not mean the same as unnecessary bureaucracy and may be necessary to deliver and protect social benefits. It is also essential that the interests of local communities (e.g. through consultation, planning enquiries, etc) are not overridden in the quest to improve speed and efficiency.

6.3.12 As planning permission is granted based on new regional spatial strategies and local

development frameworks, the government must keep a close eye on whether they are creating sustainable communities.

6.3.13 When considering how best to generate and allocate funding from private developers, government should remember that the amount generated through Section 106 agreements is likely to be largely determined by the land value and local demand, which will dictate the private returns. Therefore, in lower demand areas, more direct public funding is likely to be necessary to secure some of the benefits that planning authorities may want to gain from planning agreements.

6.3.14 Land use planning protects and enhances social and environmental benefits. Judgement of the benefits of planning should not be reduced to cost, and simple economic gain should not be the arbiter of land use.

Our recommendations

- CLG to urgently update PPS1 with the 2005 principles of sustainable development.

Also see other land use recommendations in section 4.1.



6.4 Measuring success

How well is the government monitoring its progress?

Issue

6.4.1 The government's definition of a sustainable community represents an ambitious vision for the future. Policies aimed towards this ambition will require significant resource investment and the successful operation and interaction of numerous and diverse public delivery organisations and private interests. Given this, it is vital that the government monitors the outputs it expects to derive from its interventions (e.g. total land remediation or number of houses refurbished), and evaluate whether the sum of those outputs generates the outcomes that the strategy wants to achieve: safe, inclusive, healthy and environmentally sound communities.

Our evidence

6.4.2 The government monitors housing completions and relative price changes with respect to CLG's PSA target 5. The indicators of success for this PSA are measured as net additional dwellings; long-term vacancies; homeless households with children; house prices; and lower quartile incomes compared to house prices.¹⁴⁶ Other information on housing is regularly collected, such as the English Housing Condition Survey. It also undertakes specific monitoring on Sustainable Communities Plan sponsored funding schemes.

6.4.3 Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders have been closely scrutinised by the Audit Commission on the basis of a number of output based indicators. In addition to producing scrutiny reports on the Pathfinders' initial submissions of

their proposals, and Strategic Review reports of Pathfinders' scheme updates, the Audit Commission has been undertaking Performance Review visits approximately every six months. Visits monitor the ongoing delivery of each programme rather than the quality of plans for the future. Compliance with the recommendations made in earlier reports is also examined. These Performance Reviews follow the same themes as the scrutiny frameworks, though they often examine a certain theme or location in greater detail. In addition, CLG recently published an independent national evaluation it commissioned about the Housing Market Renewal programme. While we welcome the government's desire to assess progress, there is little evidence in the reports published to date that sustainability is being assessed systematically and holistically.

6.4.4 Growth Area delivery bodies and Growth Area funding is monitored differently. The SC Plan is a high level framework that is taken forward in more detailed proposals. For Growth Areas the key next stage is developing and testing the Regional or Sub-Regional Spatial Strategies for each area. These are cascaded through local development frameworks and local development documents. The Milton Keynes/south midlands Growth Area was the first to complete a sub-regional strategy. Its monitoring report for 2004/05 includes a relatively comprehensive set of indicators covering quantitative measures on the economy, social and green infrastructure. However, it does not seem to capture broader environmental impacts like carbon contributions or water extraction and use. In addition, the current approach to agreeing a monitoring framework seems to be rather complex. To maximise the value of monitoring, it will be important that data can be quickly fed back to the relevant bodies to inform decisions about delivery.

6.4.5 To date there has been little evidence of systematic monitoring and evaluation of the overall national progress towards sustainable communities as defined by the government in the UK Sustainable Development Strategy. The current focus appears to be driven by housing numbers, without more sophisticated assessments of whether or not housing delivery has been accompanied by the appropriate development and delivery of services, infrastructure and other important factors in enabling truly sustainable communities. Parliamentary committees have provided some scrutiny¹⁴⁷ but

more wide-ranging monitoring is needed to provide an early warning system of where things might be going wrong, combined with feedback mechanisms for responding to emerging issues.¹⁴⁸ That said, it is encouraging that CLG expect to establish their own overall SC Plan programme evaluation once the relevant local plans are in place.

6.4.6 We believe that evaluation of sustainability must evaluate aggregate impacts across communities as well as within them. For example, individual planning approvals may stipulate requirements such as eco-homes standards, giving the impression that it is part of an approach that delivers housing without adverse environmental impacts. However, if the developments' impact is not zero, the national sum of impacts may be large and not within environmental limits. This is particularly important for carbon emissions given the scale of the climate change challenge. The Thames Gateway Zero/Low Carbon Feasibility Study is a first step towards a larger scale impact assessment approach. However, we believe this needs to be expanded to a larger scale and encompass other impacts, such as water use infrastructure capacity.

Our views/assessment

6.4.7 The sustainable communities agenda is reaching a pivotal point. Plans in the Growth Areas are developing with some major developments getting closer to final planning approval.¹⁴⁹ Some Regional Spatial Strategies have reached their final stages. Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders are moving towards more major stages of delivery.

6.4.8 There are positive indications and good intentions with regard to sustainable approaches in some of the planning so far. However, as plans are finalised and delivery starts, commercial pressures, skills gaps, lack of timely public funding, poor infrastructure or political pressures may make the actual approaches unsustainable.

6.4.9 SDC believes that a rigorous and proactive approach to monitoring outcomes (rather than outputs) from the sustainable communities work is important. This would include measuring against indicators such as % in employment, health inequalities, biodiversity, passenger km by mode etc. Outcome monitoring should happen

systematically throughout the delivery chain, from planning to surveying the experiences of residents after the developers leave, to help to ensure that delivery of genuinely sustainable communities is happening. It would also help to surface more good practice and lessons for the future. This could complement existing efforts to build capacity for delivering sustainable communities like the Design Task Groups and other work that organisations like CABE have been doing to help delivery of places where people want to live and work (like their Actions for Housing Growth publication).

Our recommendations

- CLG to take a pro-active, national approach to monitoring outcomes as planning moves to delivery to ensure sustainability aims are achieved. This should be clearly based on the definition of sustainable communities and the principles of sustainable development. It should include qualitative and quantitative methods
- The Audit Commission's new Comprehensive Area Assessments from 2008 to support outcome-based assessments that constructively recognise the long-term and complex work needed to deliver sustainable communities.

Overall conclusions



The Sustainable Communities Plan stands at a crossroads. This Review has highlighted some of the good practice achieved to date. But our research also indicates that delivery of genuinely sustainable communities is not sufficiently widespread in a programme that seems to be increasingly focussed on building houses rather than enabling sustainable communities to develop.

We welcome recent positive commitments from CLG and Treasury, but we also believe that there needs to be further ambition in environmental standards for building and land use. This will enable us to curtail carbon emissions and further enhance valuable green space.

We have found examples where community opinions are listened to, the public actively engaged in development decisions, and good designs are helping to create places where people want to live and work. We would like this good practice to be adopted elsewhere and more positively encouraged by the government's monitoring regimes. If this does not happen then our work suggests that there are real risks to social and community cohesion from demolition programmes, poorly integrated new housing, and the creation of dormitory suburbs with minimal social fabric.

Huge amounts of public resources are going into this programme. We have found some signs of collaborative working and a positive impact from this investment. But so far the outcomes on the ground are not consistently furthering sustainable development. For example, transport provision is rarely being developed around the sustainable development goals, and transport funding for this programme to date has been relatively short-term in focus. Changes to funding regimes and spreading the lessons from the good practice that we found, will help to maximise the value from this investment.

And underpinning our policy recommendations, we believe that the government should adopt a more sophisticated evaluation framework to track the long term social and environmental outcomes from the SC Plan.

It is essential that the next phase of delivery helps to create communities where social, environmental and economic components are fully integrated. The opportunity to get this right still exists and would make a massive contribution to the government's overall performance on sustainability and enable more citizens to live in genuinely sustainable communities.

8

Annexes

- **Definition of a sustainable community**
- **Methodology**
- **End notes**

Annex A: Definition of a sustainable community

Articulation of the requirements of a sustainable community from the 2003 Sustainable Communities Plan

www.communities.gov.uk/pub/872/SustainableCommunitiesBuildingfortheFutureMaindocument_id1139872.pdf

According to this plan, some of the key requirements of sustainable communities are:

- A flourishing local economy to provide jobs and wealth
- Strong leadership to respond positively to change
- Effective engagement and participation by local people, groups and businesses, especially in the planning, design and long term stewardship of their community, and an active voluntary and community sector
- A safe and healthy local environment with well-designed public and green space
- Sufficient size, scale and density, and the right layout, to support basic amenities in the neighbourhood and minimise use of resources (including land)
- Good public transport and other transport infrastructure both within the community and by linking it to urban, rural and regional centres
- Buildings – both individually and collectively – that can meet different needs over time, and that minimise the use of resources
- A well-integrated mix of decent homes of different types and tenures to support a range of household sizes, ages and incomes
- Good quality local public services, including education and training opportunities, health care and community facilities, especially for leisure
- A diverse, vibrant and creative local culture, encouraging pride in the community and cohesion within it
- A 'sense of place'
- The right links with the wider regional, national and international community.

**Definitions and components of sustainable communities in
*Securing the Future: The UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy (2005);
and in Sustainable Communities: People, Places and Prosperity, ODPM's Five year plan (2005)***

www.communities.gov.uk/pub/490/SustainableCommunitiesPeoplePlacesandProsperity_id1500490.pdf

One-line definition

Places where people want to live and work, now and in the future.

Definition

Sustainable communities are places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. They meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, are sensitive to their environment, and contribute to a high quality of life. They are safe and inclusive, well planned, built and run, and offer equality of opportunity and good services for all.

Components: headlines

Sustainable communities are:

1. Active, inclusive and safe
2. Well run
3. Environmentally sensitive
4. Well designed and built
5. Well connected
6. Thriving
7. Well served
8. Fair for everyone

Components: in full

Sustainable communities embody the principles of sustainable development.

They:

- balance and integrate the social, economic and environmental components of their community
- meet the needs of existing and future generations
- respect the needs of other communities in the wider region or internationally, to also make their communities sustainable.

Sustainable communities are diverse, reflecting their local circumstances. There is no standard template to fit them all. But they should be:

1 Active, Inclusive and Safe

Fair, tolerant and cohesive with a strong local culture and other shared community activities

Sustainable communities offer:

- a sense of community identity and belonging
- tolerance, respect and engagement with people from different cultures, background and beliefs
- friendly, co-operative and helpful behaviour in neighbourhoods
- opportunities for cultural, leisure, community, sport and other activities, including for children and young people
- low levels of crime, drugs and anti-social behaviour with visible, effective and community-friendly policing
- social inclusion and good life chances for all.

2 Well Run

with effective and inclusive participation, representation and leadership

Sustainable communities enjoy:

- representative, accountable governance systems which both facilitate strategic, visionary leadership and enable inclusive, active and effective participation by individuals and organisations
- effective engagement with the community at neighbourhood level, including capacity building to develop the community's skills, knowledge and confidence
- strong, informed and effective partnerships that lead by example (e.g. government, business, community)
- a strong, inclusive, community and voluntary sector
- a sense of civic values, responsibility and pride.

3 Environmentally Sensitive

providing places for people to live that are considerate of the environment

Sustainable communities:

- actively seek to minimise climate change, including through energy efficiency and the use of renewables
- protect the environment, by minimising pollution on land, in water and in the air.
- minimise waste and dispose of it in accordance with current good practice
- make efficient use of natural resources, encouraging sustainable production and consumption
- protect and improve bio-diversity (e.g. wildlife habitats)
- enable a lifestyle that minimises negative environmental impact and enhances positive impacts (e.g. by creating opportunities for walking and cycling, and reducing noise pollution and dependence on cars)
- create cleaner, safer and greener neighbourhoods (e.g. by reducing litter and graffiti, and maintaining pleasant public spaces).

4 Well Designed and Built

featuring a quality built and natural environment

Sustainable communities offer:

- a sense of place (e.g. a place with a positive 'feeling' for people and local distinctiveness)
- user-friendly public and green spaces with facilities for everyone including children and older people
- sufficient range, diversity, affordability and accessibility of housing within a balanced housing market
- appropriate size, scale, density, design and layout, including mixed-use development, complementing the distinctive local character of the community and using modern low cost building methods
- high quality, mixed-use, durable, flexible and adaptable buildings, using materials which minimise negative environmental impacts
- buildings and public spaces which promote health and are designed to reduce crime and make people feel safe
- accessibility of jobs, key services and facilities by public transport, walking and cycling.

5 Well Connected

with good transport services and communication linking people to jobs, schools, health and other services

Sustainable communities offer:

- transport facilities, including public transport, that help people travel within and between communities and reduce dependence on cars
- facilities to encourage safe local walking and cycling
- an appropriate level of local parking facilities in line with local plans to manage road traffic demand
- widely available and effective telecommunications and Internet access
- good access to regional, national and international communications networks.

6 Thriving

with a flourishing and diverse local economy

Sustainable communities feature:

- a wide range of jobs and training opportunities
- sufficient suitable land and buildings to support economic prosperity and change
- dynamic job and business creation, with benefits for the local community
- a strong business community with links into the wider economy
- economically viable and attractive town centres.

7 Well Served

with public, private, community and voluntary services that are appropriate to people's needs and accessible to all

Sustainable communities have:

- well-performing local schools, further and higher education institutions, and other opportunities for life-long learning
- high quality local health care and social services, integrated where possible with other services
- high quality services for families and children (including early years child care)
- a good range of affordable public, community, voluntary and private services (e.g. retail, fresh food, commercial, utilities, information and advice) which are accessible to the whole community
- service providers who think and act long term and beyond their own immediate geographical and interest boundaries, and who involve users and local residents in shaping their policy and practice.

8 Fair for Everyone

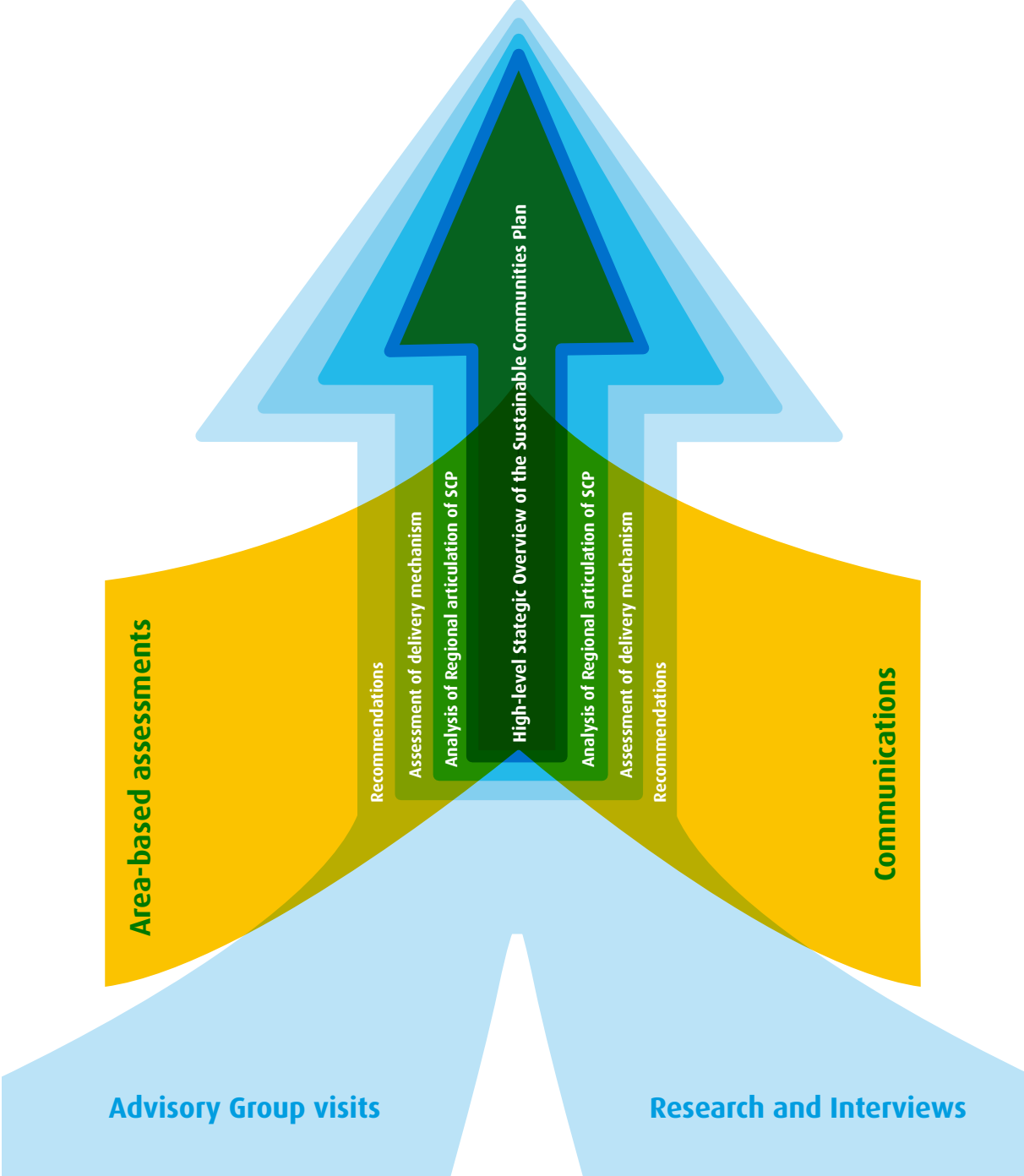
including those in other communities, now and in the future

Sustainable communities:

- recognise individuals' rights and responsibilities
- respect the rights and aspirations of others (both neighbouring communities, and across the wider world) to be sustainable also
- have due regard for the needs of future generations in current decisions and actions.

Annex B: Diagrammatic representation of report methodology

Review Report



Endnotes

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