Urban Futures – Embracing Change

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Contents

Foreword

Approaching the future presents a minefield of paradoxes. In 20 years a neighbourhood's urban fabric may have changed little whilst social, economic and political aspirations have shifted. Accessible, miniaturised and affordable information and communications technologies have enlarged local expectations and democratised decision making. We have the ability to make rapid physical changes, but building communities takes far longer.

The Building Futures programme aims to improve the quality of future built environments through thought-provoking projects. Urban Futures is part of the Building Futures programme and explores how we can anticipate and manage change within our urban areas in order to ensure the creation and retention of good quality sustainable environments.

The study looks ten to 20 years ahead and tries to envision how regeneration might be achieved by focusing on two neighbourhoods – one in Luton in the growing South East, the other, Burnley, in the North West, with a declining population and struggling economy. Both of the neighbourhoods selected are inner-city with Victorian terraced housing and low value commercial property. The objective was to develop a game that could engage each of the communities in a meaningful dialogue concerning their ambitions for the future, the opportunities and potential barriers ahead, and their expectations for success.

Public participation in local decision making is crucial to the regeneration agenda. Major resources are expended on public meetings, questionnaires, option selection and communication, but much of this is often perceived as just a stage to be passed through. What we need to consider is whether or not the participation process can be more productively viewed as a continuous process of managing change. Is the initial stage of framing requirements not part of a wider process of identifying options for the future, and allowing for continuous adaptation?

There are many excellent examples of building ambition and capacity through early collaborative exercises, such as "Planning for Real" and "Enquiry by Design." The Urban Futures game is a means at the neighbourhood level to engage the three very different interest groups of policy makers, providers and users, in identifying issues and expectations, envisioning opportunities and setting criteria to assess success.

The approach has three unique attributes:

- It builds on previous experience, by presenting a set of aspirations and concerns which have been raised by previous groups, that can then be used to focus the discussion and speed up the process;

- It recognises different perspectives and the value of articulating and celebrating diversity;

- Issues and opportunities are presented as generic themes and options which can be compared and tested against their ability to adapt to changing future demands.

Games are a means of exploring and expanding understanding. The Urban Futures game imaginatively provides a template to re-establish playfulness, creativity and continuous learning back into the process of regenerating our run down neighbourhoods.

John Worthington
Past Chair, Building Futures
Founder DEGW

Introduction

Things change. We are in the throes of social changes as profound as the agricultural and industrial revolutions. These changes mean that some places prosper and others decline. In Britain, London and the South East are expanding whilst manufacturing towns in the Midlands and North have suffered devastating economic collapse. Even within regions wealth isn't evenly distributed. Towns in growth areas have pockets of run-down housing while parts of the North are highly fashionable. Imbalances of growth and decline mean that there is a shortage of housing in the South but an excess in the North. What is to be done?

Building Futures was established in April 2002 as a joint venture between CABE and RIBA to create space for discussion about the needs of society for our built environment, and consequently the built environment professions, in 20 years and beyond.

The Urban Futures project explores how we can anticipate and manage change within our urban areas most effectively in order to ensure the creation and retention of good quality environments. The study is based on a 10-20 year time frame and is concerned with practical steps that can be undertaken to deal with change and arrive at a better future.

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

This study looks 10 to 20 years ahead and tries to envision how urban regeneration might be achieved by focusing on two neighbourhoods – one in Luton in the growing South East, the other in Burnley in declining North East Lancashire. Both towns are recipients of Government regeneration funding and both are scenes of intense local government activity.

Urban Futures reports the aspirations and concerns of the inhabitants of both towns. It describes the current initiatives being implemented and explores alternative options for the future of the two neighbourhoods and towns. Most importantly it draws lessons from these two types of place – one with a buoyant economy and increasing population, the other with a struggling economy and a declining population – about how to plan and implement urban futures more effectively.

Through its Urban Futures game, the study offers advice about how to use 'options' as a futures technique to explore the underlying social, economic and environmental drivers for change. Using options can make actions and consequences clear before they become hidden behind the more solid physical representations embedded in neighbourhood master plans. And they can help participants in the regeneration process raise their sights above current constraints and increase the scope of what they are trying to achieve.

Playing the Urban Futures game in the two towns showed that people are able to think constructively about the future if they are presented with a meaningful framework for decision-making. In both Burnley and Luton people from different sides of the process – policy makers, providers and members of the community – were able to talk about their aspirations and concerns and discuss different options for the future in a constructive way.
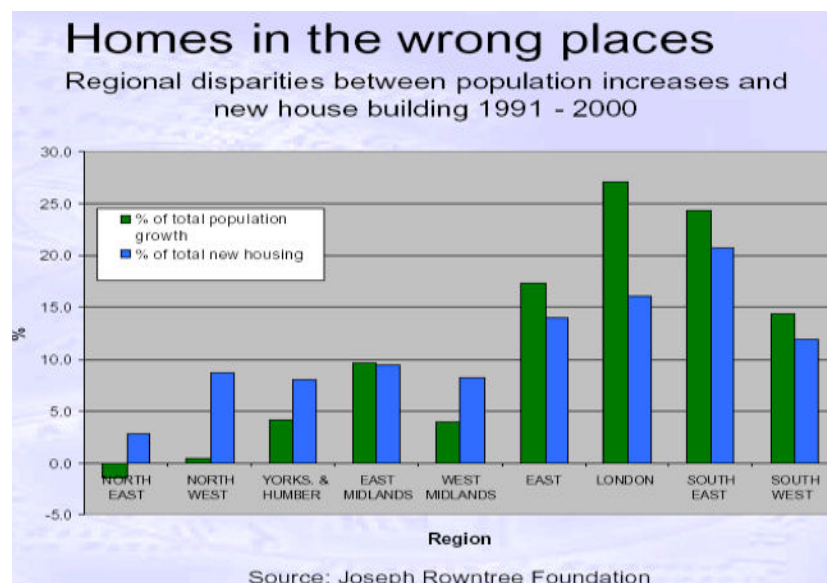
Setting the scene

After years of neglect, urban regeneration and housing renewal are now centre stage in British politics. They have become areas that are both 'policy' and 'cash' rich. Substantial state funding is now flowing out into the English regions, through public sector agencies, to tackle both housing over-supply in the North and housing shortage in the South. Issues originally raised under the banner of 'urban renaissance' by Richard Rogers' Urban Task Force in 1999 have been translated – in the hands of John Prescott, the Deputy Prime Minister – into a crusade for 'sustainable communities'. In 2003 he called for a 'step change' in tackling

- rapid population change
- needs of the UK economy
- serious housing shortage in London and the South East
- impact of housing abandonment in the North and Midlands

by providing 'thriving, inclusive communities across England that will stand the test of time'.

Pathfinder areas

In the North, the Government has recently announced an extension of its ambitious £1.2 billion Housing Market Renewal Programme. This is piloting new approaches not just to reforming the housing market but encouraging mixed communities in run down estates and neighbourhoods.

'In parts of the North and Midlands large areas of some cities are suffering from low demand and abandonment, even where the rest of the city is doing well. Our aim is to close the gap between those areas worst hit by low demand and the rest by one third by 2010, and eradicate the problems caused by low demand housing by 2020.'

Sustainable Communities: *Homes for All - A Five Year Plan from the ODPM,* 2005, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, London

Growth areas

In the South, a different set of problems is being tackled. The most pressing of these has been identified as failure to provide for housing need over the past 20 to 30 years, particularly to support the economy in London and the wider South East.

In response, major development is planned for four 'growth areas': Ashford, The Thames Gateway, London/ Stansted/ Cambridgeshire/ Peterborough corridor, and Milton Keynes/South Midlands. By 2016, 1.1 million new homes are to be provided in these areas.

The Government has been advised that for the past 10 years we have been building houses in the wrong place. In the Midlands and the North, population has grown less than the new housing that has been provided. In the South, population has been increasing more than additions to the housing stock.

Homes in the wrong places
Regional disparities between population increases and new house building 1991 - 2000

Source: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

CABE is part of the armoury in this new crusade for sustainable communities in the UK. Its purpose is to demonstrate the ability of great architecture and urban design to transform people's quality of life. It aims to raise the aspirations, capacity and performance of everyone involved in creating and maintaining buildings and public spaces across England. CABE's vision is that by 2010,

> "We will have instilled a basic self-belief in political leaders that high quality civic buildings and public spaces can transform neighbourhoods, towns and cities, providing a platform for sustainable growth."

CABE is focusing on providing advice – to clients and practitioners through direct enabling support, publications, events and intermediaries – that is grounded in awareness of the local and regional dimensions of urban regeneration and housing renewal.

In its recent publication, *Creating Successful Communities,* CABE has signalled that:

"Today we are attempting to deal with the future of our towns and cities in perhaps a more comprehensive way than ever before, recognising that the social, physical and economic well-being of places is vitally important."

So in Housing Market Renewal areas, for instance, it is important to recognise that:

- the problem of low demand has to be tackled at both a sub-regional (beyond the local authority boundary) and neighbourhood scale
- it is about more than housing: combining homes with access to employment, transport and services in a high quality environment is vital, and
- the involvement of the private sector is crucial to lever the investment required to turn these places around.
- This study examines how this more comprehensive approach is being implemented through two case studies that provide a direct North/South comparison of current urban regeneration and neighbourhood renewal practices.

Vision

In managing urban change we are faced with human memory and sentiment, with aspirations and concerns, with desire and despair. These need to be woven into the vision for the future of the towns and the physical fabric we create.

This is not an easy time in which to try to invent the future. All redundant manufacturing towns across Europe can't become centres of excellence and advanced industry. It is especially difficult to have a vision of a better life when there is no certainty about the direction of change and a lack of collective faith in the future.

Footbridge to High Town, Luton

One thing is clear. We need to change not only the physical fabric of a place that needs regeneration but also its function, its reason for being, and its self-image. Burnley and Luton, the two case study towns, need to build on what they have already. Their futures will be grounded in their pasts and tailored to the needs of people and place.

We need a vision of what can be achieved that people identify with and support. To get behind a plan people need to believe that the sacrifices they are called on to make today will be rewarded in the future. This process needs a champion, an archetypal hero, to articulate the vision and coordinate the effort.

Designers are suited to dealing with uncertainty. They are accustomed to imaging alternative futures from sometimes unprepossessing presents. But the material architects traditionally work with are inanimate and they can be less sure when dealing with people and communities.
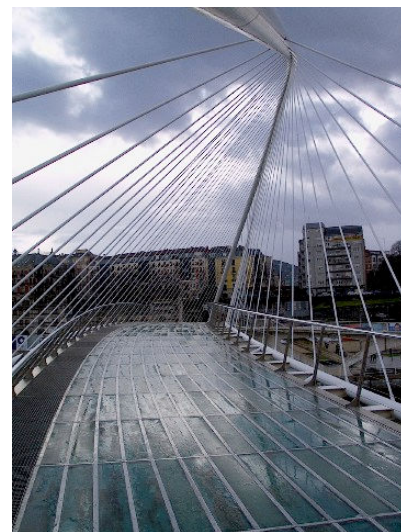

Calatrava bridge, Bilbao

Part of the problem is that physical artefacts – master plans, buildings, landscape designs – are being used to represent underlying economic, social and environmental choices about what should determine the future. This means that the underlying choices and issues are often left implicit and unexpressed. As a result conflict and consensus are not made manifest and differences about what goals should drive regeneration are left unresolved. Instead the battle is fought over the specific expression of choices, for example demolition and clearance, rather than the underlying motivations, for example assembling brownfield sites attractive to developers as against maintaining the social cohesion of an existing community.

Issues need to be defined clearly first so that informed choices can be made. Ideally this should happen before funding programmes begin. If this clarity is absent and plans push ahead without consensus and community support, then there is a strong chance that the programme will fail because underlying social and economic issues are not effectively addressed and so remain unresolved.

What this study shows is that different interest groups are able to engage constructively at a strategic level to discuss positive change in their town and neighbourhood if presented with a framework of ideas and options about the future.

Methodology

The information for this study was collected in two parts:

- Scoping research: A literature search was conducted and an expert panel workshop held to identify issues that needed to be explored by the study.

- Case studies: these were undertaken to describe the processes of managing change in two selected towns – one in the north of England, one in the south – in order to isolate the underlying forces and interventions that have had a significant effect.

The approach employed in the case studies was observation and interview followed up by interactive workshops with local stakeholders to test the information gathered.

Research questions

Key questions were identified, in collaboration with CABE, that the study should attempt to answer.

- What are the main issues in an area experiencing growth, as opposed to an area that is experiencing decline?

- How are these issues, and the process of change in general, being anticipated and managed by stakeholders and decision-makers involved?

- What examples are there of good practice and what lessons are there for other areas?

- How can these findings inform policy at a local, regional and national level?

Case-studies

The main criterion for choosing the two case-study areas was that they are likely to provide indicative lessons about the effective management of change. Two places were specified in the brief for the study – Burnley and Harlow. Because the current state of uncertainty in Harlow, the local Council declined to be involved. It was replaced, at the suggestion of the Government Office for the Eastern Region, by Luton where the Council agreed to collaborate.

Burnley is in East Lancashire, an area that has suffered severe economic decline. Luton lies between the M11 corridor and the Milton Keynes/South Midlands sub-region, two major growth areas. Within both towns, there are prosperous communities and those in decline. Both have neighbourhoods in need of regeneration and positive change.

We visited both towns and talked to the senior officers responsible for regeneration in each Council. In each, two or three neighbourhoods were suggested for study.

In Burnley three inner neighbourhoods were suggested: Burnley Wood, Daneshouse & Stoneyholme and South West Burnley. These are the three priority areas that have been targeted to receive neighbourhood action plans and Government funding through the Pathfinder programme. After careful consideration we chose Burnley Wood since it is more typical of other inner city areas in Britain.

In Luton the Council has prioritised five Neighbourhood Renewal Areas for attention and funding: High Town, Marsh Farm, Lewsey, Bury Park-Biscot and Bury Park-Dallow. After visiting Marsh Farm on the outskirts of Luton, we chose High Town since it is the most similar in character to Burnley Wood.

Interviews

A target was originally set for about twelve people to be interviewed in each case-study location, covering three categories:

- policy makers (local authority officers and elected members)
- service providers (design consultants, community engagement enablers)
- community members (residents, community workers, the vicar, the local beat policeman).

A list of people for interview was drawn up for each place and added to as contacts were made. In all, over twenty people were interviewed in each town, more than originally specified. Most of the interviews were face-to-face, although a minority had to be conducted over the telephone because of informants' time constraints.

Residents of High Town

	Burnley	Luton
Policy makers	10	9
Providers	6	8
Community	6	6
Total	22	23

Case-study narratives

The purpose of the interviews was to collect detailed information about people's experience of change and about their hopes and fears for the future. In this way the inherent complexity of change and regeneration might be captured and described. Rather than quantify the factors that contribute to regeneration we have set out to tell the 'story' about the management of change in these two towns and neighbourhoods.

The interviews were transcribed and their contents analysed to identify the informants':

- *Aspirations* about how the town and neighbourhood should be regenerated over the next 10 to 20 years
- *Concerns* about how regeneration is likely to play out over this period

This information forms the basis of the case-study narrative for each town. The aim is to provide insight into current regeneration initiatives and an analysis of 'what is likely to work' in other places. The narratives also describe failures or blind alleys that others may wish to avoid.

Urban Futures game

We wanted to play back the aspirations and concerns expressed by the people interviewed to the workshop participants in each of the towns. But it quickly became apparent as we analysed the wealth of information we had collected that we would need some way of making the material intelligible and accessible to the participants. This involved 'boiling down' the data and devising a 'game' to make the process of sifting and prioritising more enjoyable.

As well as prioritising their aspirations and concerns, workshop participants were also asked to assess:

- *Options* for future change that might be favoured
- *Criteria* for measuring how successful regeneration had been accomplished.

We invited all the people we had interviewed and billed the event as 'a short blue-skies workshop to explore regeneration issues and options in places like Burnley/Luton'.   In Luton, despite heavy rain, nine of the eleven people who said they would come turned up to the newly renovated Methodist Church Hall in High Town Road. In Burnley eleven of the fourteen people attended. Although these numbers are small, there were people representing all three of target audiences: policy makers, providers and community members.

Burnley workshop

Luton workshop

We devised sets of playing cards on which we transcribed the aspirations and concerns voiced by interviewees. Since people in Burnley and Luton have different aspirations and concerns we made separate packs for each town.

In the first exercise workshop participants were asked to choose five aspiration cards representing 'key aspirations that have to be met if towns like Burnley/Luton and their neighbourhoods are to be effectively regenerated over the next 10 to 20 years'. In the second they were asked to choose three concerns cards representing 'key concerns that, if not managed effectively, will prevent towns like Burnley/Luton, and their neighbourhoods, from regenerating

Urban Futures cards

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

successfully'. Using playing cards in this way helps people sort and prioritise and makes the process more game like.

Exercise 1 Aspirations

People	Housing	Community	Infrastructure	Economy	Education	Process	Leadership
1.1 Luton has been labelled a middle class town with working class aspirations. We need to give it middle class aspirations.	2.1 You need a greater variety of properties to enable people to bring up a family without having to move away.	3.1 You need to start with High Town Road. That needs to be flourishing.	4.1 High Town has the vestiges of historic businesses. We need create an environment where they can prosper.	5.1 The growth area is producing lots of inward investment and creating lots of jobs.	6.1 Improved education will have got youths off the street and reduced vandalism and petty crime.	7.1 Council policy is to encourage more people to live in the centre. So some sites in High Town will be rezoned as residential.	8.1 The philosophy that should guide our dealings with developers is that we want them to succeed but that this can't be at the expense of town interests.
1.2 The main way to make High Town shopping more viable is to increase the footfall in the area. More college students would do this.	2.2 The pattern of streets has scale, character and charm. You need to create the feeling that you wouldn't want to move away.	3.2 Luton could become a sustainable community. It is a very compact town. And it will stay like that because of geography and politics.	4.2 You need a more compact industrial area with higher quality buildings.	5.2 The future for High Town is to cater to niche markets selling things people are prepared to go out of the way for.	6.2 Noah will be able to deal with the lack training and skills.	7.2 The initiatives on housing, retail, employment, education, training and leisure need to continue but with real money behind them.	8.2 I'm impressed by the enthusiasm of the people at the top in Luton. There is political leadership there.
1.3 High Town has taken in waves of immigration. Now it is Poles, Lithuanians and North Africans. So there is a real mix of people.	2.3 There is great scope for residential accommodation and perhaps some commercial, because of commuting.	3.3 High Town is one of the better areas in terms of community engagement. Meetings are attended by a good mix of up to 50 people.	4.3 If you could change the shape and appearance of the footbridge into High Town, you might get people to come that way.	5.3 You need to create the best quality business environment close to the centre of the town with an impression of vibrant community where business can thrive.	6.3 One of the key things is increasing employment and training relevant to the job market.	7.3 High Town needs a regeneration plan for when the money arrives – mainly from the private sector – then you can put the pieces of the jigsaw in the right place.	8.3 The people who run Luton are very positive about the town. When they hear outside criticisms, their reaction is, "We're going to show 'em".
1.4 The Council hopes that the community centre will offer facilities, like a crèche, to attract new families.	2.4 The Milton Keynes South Midlands plan will create pressure to turn commercial and industrial land to residential.	3.4 Community facilities are the main priority as a local focus for the community.	4.4 High Town has potential to be a good place to live. It is possible to be in Kings Cross in 18 minutes. So you can live in Luton and work in London.	5.4 The area could be an incubator for small businesses. It is already attracting immigrants: Poles and Zimbabweans.	6.4 We need education and play facilities to attract families. The SATs performance of schools is crucial in this.	7.4 The immense amount of money being made available for public transport is going to make a difference No rival area can match it.	8.4 Luton has its own vision. It's a bit – work, rest and play. We also need to appeal to an inner feeling – to spirituality linked to quality of life.
1.5 Immigrants are creating a niche market of specialist shops which are attracting people from these communities into High Town.	2.5 High Town has some very pleasant residencies up on the hill. So we should anticipate gentrification, especially by those commuting to London.	3.5 The basic need is for a place from which to organise. The new centre will provide a whole range of services, sports facilities and act as a community.	4.5 The critical thing for High Town is how to manage the crossing of the northern section of the ring road and to make it as pedestrian friendly as possible.	5.5 Leisure is the new for Luton and High Town. We should open up and generate more activities.		7.5 The Milton Keynes South Midlands study will promote economic regeneration, especially since it will encourage the local authority to deliver on transport.	
1.6 We need to get people to come into High Town, to encourage them to spend their money here.	2.6 We badly need to increase housing supply and the future of High Town is likely to be housing.	3.6 We hope that people will claim ownership of the community centre.	4.6 There is a need for a better natural link between High Town and the centre. You need to be able to draw them in as they go past.	5.6 We need to attract shoppers to the area. A weekly market would help.		7.6 The Council needs to be able to point to local decisions made in the spirit of partnership. And, if people haven't got their own way, they should know why.	

Options

Neighbourhood regeneration in both towns is preoccupied with short-term goals. We decided to devise options or scenarios to raise people's horizons.

The Mill Road area in Cambridge, where the authors of this report are based, is similar in character to Burnley Wood and High Town in that it is five minutes' walk from the station and 10 minutes from the centre. In the mid-seventies Victorian terraced houses in the area were multi-tenanted or occupied by the elderly and many were condemned as unfit and were subject to a compulsory purchase orders.

The Council reversed its policy, the whole area has been regenerated and these modest terraces are now highly desirable. Cambridge Architectural Research is one of many small businesses that have spun out of the University and now occupies what was once an industrial unit that made PYE televisions.

Development of options

Cambridge terraces

Front – uniformity   Rear – variety

Cambridge business

New uses for redundant buildings

Options for Burnley Wood

No change   ELEVATE   Housing / People   Education / Economy

We used this experience in devising our first set of options. The plans show our first attempt for Burnley Wood. The first follows the Northern adage, "if in doubt, do nowt". The second is what is actually happening. ELEVATE proposes demolishing 40-50% of the housing and building new housing on the cleared sites. The third clears the same number of houses as ELEVATE by demolishing every other row and making private gardens. The final option builds an extension to the University of Central Lancashire and new commercial units.
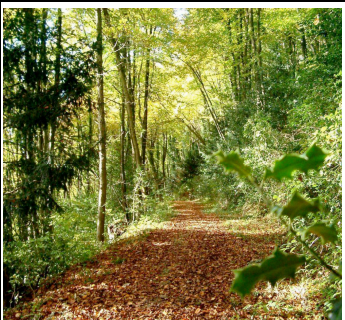
In the event Burnley Council decided that the ELEVATE programme was too far advanced for a consideration of alternatives. In response we devised a set of generic options, that with some minor differences, we could use in both Burnley and Luton and perhaps elsewhere.

The following table shows the set of options devised for High Town and Luton. We used the same options in Burnley, but the key features varied slightly. People were asked how much they liked or disliked each option individually and then to rank them as first, second and third choice.

Option 1   Commuter village

This option seeks to give opportunities to aspiring and dynamic young families to renovate existing terrace houses. It needs to be kick started by public sector intervention to make available funds to support gentrification. Renovation is left to the private housing market supported by improvement grants. This option provides a form of housing attractive to families while not presuming significant changes in local employment opportunities.		**Key features** • Gentrification of existing terraces to provide affordable housing with 2 to 3 bedrooms with residential parking provision. • Houses privately renovated and extended. • Families with young children move into the area. • Effective crime and anti-social behaviour initiatives undertaken. • Households typically involved in commuting to London or within the Milton Keynes South Midlands.

Option 2   Urban wood

This option tries to address the current lack of green space close to the town centre directly by providing outdoor leisure amenities to the rest of the town while holding the neighbourhood in abeyance as a public asset against future development. This option also promotes the town as a leisure destination.		**Key features** • Removal of existing commercial development and extension of existing town park to the town centre. • Demolition returns area to pre-industrialisation status. • Outdoor leisure pursuits promoted in conjuntion with new community centre. • Green lifestyles promoted through recycling facilities. • Town promotes itself as a centre for sustainable lifestyles.

Option 3   Small business incubator

This option tries to address the current imbalance in residential and commercial land values. It seeks to stimulate the regeneration of the neighbourhood's commercial area through attracting a more highly skilled workforce. This option attempts to manage the transition from a low skill, low wage industrial economy to a high skill, high wage knowledge economy to support regeneration of high street with specialist shops, cafés and bars.		**Key features** • Re-invention of the image and purpose of the area by development of attractive location for small-scale businesses. • Adjoining innovation incubator supported by outpost university teaching and research facilities. • Aligned with a skills training programme in local colleges. • Incentives for new businesses and developers. • Rise in skill levels and average wages.

Option 4   Design-led regeneration

This option recognises the value of good design and its role in regeneration. It places high quality design and innovation at the heart of thinking and action and involves the creativity of local community in its planning.		**Key features** • Regeneration led by an iconic building, structure or work of art. • Emphasis on the use of high quality design as social and economic generator. • Focus on liveable environment with street designs to encourage social contact and usable green space. • Draws on contributions across mixed community integrating inputs from all ages, social and ethnic groups. • Mixture of innovative new design and enhanced local heritage and distinctiveness.

We were a little concerned that people might find this exercise too theoretical and too divorced from the detailed reality of their neighbourhood and town. We also wondered whether people would want to consider other options we hadn't put forward.

In practice the options were very well received. People understood the relevance of the options for their neighbourhood and were able to express clear preferences, but unable to suggest other options for consideration.

The results of this exercise are summarised at the end of the chapters on the two towns.

Exercise 3 Options

	Option 1 Commuter village	Option 2 Urban wood	Option 3 Small business incubator	Option 4 Design led regeneration
First	● ● ● ●		● ● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●
Second	● ●	●	●	●
Third		● ● ●		●

Options wall chart

The wall chart from the Luton workshop shows peoples' preferences for the four options.

Future development of the Urban Futures game

Overall the game approach, using cards to prioritise aspirations and concerns and options to test alternative futures, proved to be very successful. The workshops worked well and people were very enthusiastic about the approach and wanted copies of the game to use in their own organisations. We were pleased that the game had gone well and done what we had hoped to achieve in terms of clarifying the complex material and allowing people to engage with the process.

It was suggested by members of our Steering Group that the workshop material might form the basis of an Urban Futures board game. If the content derived from the case studies were generalised, then the game could be played in other places managing change and deciding about the future.

The idea is that the material from Burnley and Luton will be generalised into a game like Monopoly. The four sides of the board will represent four options for change and the 'chance' and 'community chest' will be the aspirations and concerns cards. People will play by moving round the board attempting to acquire the cards necessary to progress their preferred option.

Burnley and Luton compared

At first sight Burnley and Luton seem quite different. Burnley is in North East Lancashire, a region that has suffered a catastrophic collapse in its economy and has seen steady decline in its population over the last eighty years. Luton is in the prosperous South East and lies between two of the main growth areas in the country – the South Midlands/Milton Keynes area and the M11 corridor.

Yet things are not that simple. In both towns there are neighbourhoods in the 10% most deprived in the country. Both towns have areas of derelict commercial property and poor housing. In both there are run-down inner city areas of Victorian terraces and outer suburbs of Sixties council housing badly in need of maintenance.

Burnley	Luton
St James's Street	*Platters Lea*
Mechanics Institute	*Arndale Centre*
Canal-side mill	*Multi-storey car-park*

Past history

Burnley became a centre of weaving in the 18th century and, along with many other towns in the North of England, grew rapidly in the 19th century. By 1886 there were 100,000 looms in the town, together with several coal pits and factories producing machinery and steam engines, and Burnley was the biggest producer of cotton cloth in the world. The new light engineering industries attracted to the town since the 1930s have nearly all gone. Since 1920 Burnley's population has steadily declined at 2-3% a year and today is about 90,000.

Luton was the centre of the hat industry located in Platters Lea and High Town and as this declined the automotive industry took over. Recently Vauxhall closed down, but the economy, based on the airport and high tech industry, is still buoyant. Luton saw an increase in population above national average between 1880-1980. And since 1980 population growth has been similar to the rest of the country and today is 185,000, twice as big as Burnley.

Burnley	Luton

Weaver's Triangle 1910

Hat industry fears 1940

Leeds-Liverpool Canal

Railway station, 1921

Weaving, Trafalgar shed

Grinding at Skefco, 1915

Location

The two towns are situated in very different regions.

Burnley is in North East Lancashire, a region that has seen steady decline in its population over the last eighty years. Luton is in the prosperous South East and lies between two of the main growth areas in the country – the South Midlands/Milton Keynes area and the M11 corridor.

Both neighbourhoods are ten minutes' walk from the town centres, but both feel isolated. Burnley Wood is to the south of the Leeds Liverpool Canal while High Town is to the north of the railway line.

Most significantly Luton has excellent rail connections to London while in Burnley one has to change in Preston or Hebden Bridge to reach Manchester.

In terms of public transport Luton is much better served and is only 25 minutes to St Pancras, while to get to Manchester by train takes an hour and a half from Manchester Road station via Hebden Bridge to Manchester Victoria, or over two hours via Preston to Piccadilly. Although there is a bus service to Manchester this lack of a good rail link is a serious barrier to Burnley's development as a commuter town.

Road transport connections are very good in both towns. Luton is near the M1 and, without traffic, it takes only 40 minutes from the centre of Luton to central London. Burnley is near the M65 and M66 and it also takes 40 minutes from the town centre to the centre of Manchester.

Journey times	Burnley to Manchester	Luton to London
Road connection (non rush hour)	Central Manchester 40 min.	Central London 40 min.
Rail links	Victoria / Piccadilly, 90 - 145 min.	St Pancras, 25 min.
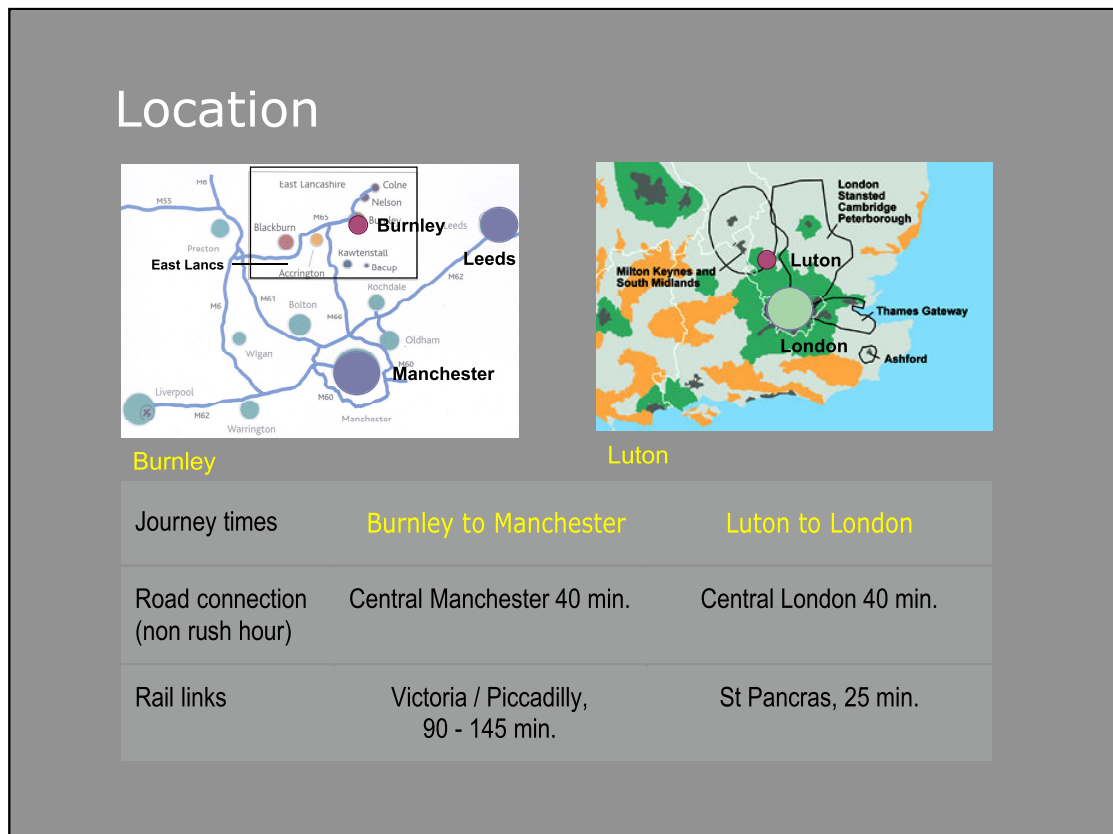
Economic and social factors

Both towns have a poor image. Luton was voted the 'Worst Town in Britain' in an on-line poll of 20,000 people in 2004. Both Luton and Burnley have promotion campaigns running to improve things. Luton First, a public relations firm funded by the council, the airport and local business, produced a brochure advertising the town and put up signs announcing that the town is twinned with Barcelona and Athens, which it isn't. Burnley is also trying to advertise its strengths to residents by means of a poster campaign. The point of both campaigns is to try to persuade locals to take pride in their town and to attract incomers.

Both towns look gritty and rough. Both have the working class feel of manufacturing towns in decline. Like Burnley, which lost its main industrial base awhile ago, Luton is also having to adjust to economic change since its main employer, Vauxhall (General Motors), closed their car plant.

Neither town is prosperous, but whereas Luton might be classed as wanting, in comparison Burnley is impoverished and even poverty stricken. Car ownership is similar to the national average in Luton but 10% lower in Burnley. The biggest ill that Burnley suffers and the probable cause of any racial tension is poverty.

Unemployment in both towns is fairly low and compares favourably with the national average of 3.4%. In Burnley 3.1% are unemployed and in Luton 3.8%. In Luton there are about 78,000 people in work, half of whom work either in the town centre or the airport, with 20% in manufacturing and 80% in services. In Burnley about 37,000 are employed, 30% in manufacturing and 70% in services.

But these similarities mask stark differences. Although, as the table below shows, unemployment is low in Burnley, there is a lot of 'make work' – part time, low paid jobs – and that is reflected in average earnings. In contrast, in Luton, there is the potential for residents to move to a higher skill, higher wage based economy. Many residents are suffering increasing levels of poverty. Blue chip companies such as BAe Systems, Astra Zeneca and Boeing Flight Safety have located in Luton. The airport is expanding rapidly and EasyJet have located their headquarters there.

Both towns have relatively young populations. Burnley has 21% and Luton has 22% under fifteen, compared with a national average of 19%. Both have ethnic minority populations but note that, despite Burnley's notoriety, the Asian population is smaller than in Luton. In Burnley about 92% of the population are classified as White and 7% as Asian British. This is slightly higher than the national average of 4%. The majority of these people are of Pakistani (69%) or Bangladeshi (22%) origin. Perhaps surprisingly, Luton has a proportionately much bigger ethnic minority. In Luton only 72% of the population are classified as White and 18% are Asian or Asian British. In both towns the Asian population is concentrated in inner urban wards – in Burnley this is Danes House/Stoneyholme and in Luton this is Bury Park.

Like many towns in Britain both Luton and Burnley have since the mid-eighties suffered from an increase in drug use and drug related crime.

A direct comparison of the Home Office figures of recorded crime for 2001-2 doesn't suggest a huge difference. Domestic burglary at 9.6 per 1,000 households for Luton and 14.3 for Burnley, compared with a national average of 6.5. Theft of a motor vehicle is 10.1 per thousand for Luton compared with 4.2 for Burnley compared with a national average of 5.0.

But the British Crime Survey does suggest that there is a difference. Nationally over the past three years crime has fallen by 5%. In Burnley, in the same period, it has risen by 24%. Crime is not equally spread across the town and it is much higher in the most deprived wards, including Burnley Wood. Crimes against property account for 78% of all crime, including criminal damage (22%), violent crime (19%) and vehicle crime (11%).

This level of crime is higher than that of the rest of Lancashire. In the same period crime in Luton has dropped.

Surveys of people's perception of crime suggest that 45% of people in Burnley feel that their quality of life is negatively affected by crime and people's biggest concern is vandalism to their car or home. Despite excellent work to address this problem by the Burnley Community Safety Partnership, crime and criminal damage is clearly a major obstacle to successful regeneration. In High Town, people we interviewed said they thought crime was on the increase. Fear of crime against property, as in Burnley, is seen as a major impediment to renewal.

Life expectancy is very similar in both towns. In 2001 the average for men was 74 in both towns and for women it was 78. In comparison life expectancy in Manchester was three years less and in Cambridge it was four years more. (Office for National Statistics 2002)

Educational attainment is fairly low in both towns. Luton University has 12,000 students in higher education and the University of Hertfordshire is close by. It also has a large College of Further Education. Burnley lost the chance of getting a university campus in the sixties when the proposed new university was founded in Lancaster instead. Burnley College was founded to provide skilled workers for the manufacturing industry of the town and this ethos of apprenticeship and jobs persists in the culture of the town.

	Burnley	Luton	National
Population size	90,000	185,000	60 million
Population growth per year	declining 2-3%	national average	increasing 0.5%
Young people under 15	21%	22%	19%
Asian minority	7%	18%	4%
Manufacturing employment	30%	20%	14%
Unemployment	3.1%	3.8%	3.4%
Annual earnings	£15,312	£24,970	£22,248
Burglary per 1000 households	14 (crime trend up)	10 (crime trend down)	6 (crime trend down)
Educational attainment	low	low	average

In summary then, the two towns have things in common. They both have a similar small town inferiority complex. They have similar low educational attainment and similar low aspirations and expectations.

But they each have very different economic prospects.

Housing market

What sets these two towns apart more than anything else is the state of their housing market and their economic prospects. Although both towns have areas of decline and poor housing and house prices vary widely in different parts of both towns, Burnley's inner areas are characterised by low demand and, in the case of Burnley Wood, by abandonment.

In Burnley Wood the average price of a terraced house is £20,000 yet within five minutes walk there are houses for sale for over £200,000. In sharp contrast the average price of a terraced house in High Town in Luton is £140,000. Yet the difference in the average price of semis is not nearly so marked. On the edge of Burnley Wood the average price of a semi is £94,000 and in High Town, in Luton, it is £160,000. Large detached houses are similar in price.

House prices	Burnley Wood	High Town
2-3 Bed Terrace	£20,000	£140,000
3 Bed Semi	£94,000	£160,000
4 Bed Edwardian	£150,000	£170,000
5 Bed Detached	£225,000	£250,000

In a weak housing market, with a large excess supply, the least desirable housing can sink to very low values. As the market strengthens and demand begins to exceed supply, previously undesirable housing, such as terraces, can of course become more desirable as people's attitudes change.

This study addresses this central question of how to strengthen the housing market and revitalise inner urban areas. But first a word of caution. The evidence that a particular solution works in one place is no guarantee that it will work in another. So what is appropriate for Luton might be disastrous for Burnley. The market might be expected to provide in a growth area, whereas in a place suffering decline a different prescription may be required.

In High Town in Luton public money is going into upgrading the high street and a new community centre. It is assumed that regional growth and proximity to London will deliver regeneration. In Burnley Wood the public purse is tackling regeneration through direct intervention in the housing market. In the short term this is proving to be a destructive process. Whether this will produce benefits longer term is not clear.

Paradoxically Burnley may be psychologically more disposed to change than Luton. As one of our interviewees, Mike Wellock, Director of Housing Market Renewal in Burnley Council said, "We are up for radical change". People feel that the town is at the end of the line. One might therefore expect that they feel they have nothing to lose. What is needed is leadership with a compelling vision and a concrete plan.

In summary, the two neighbourhoods have a similar settlement pattern, a similar cut-off relationship with the centre, a working class heritage and transient incomers. But they each have very different regeneration prospects.

Current initiatives

Given their 'deprived' status, there are wide ranging Government initiatives in the two towns. Only those that relate directly to regeneration are described here. (See Appendix.) In Burnley, Burnley Wood is one of three Neighbourhood Action Areas sharing £15 million ELEVATE Pathfinder funding from the ODPM. In Luton, High Town is one of five priority areas also sharing £15 million of Single Regeneration Budget and Objective 2 funding. It is hoped that proximity to London and regional growth will deliver regeneration.

Burnley

Housing Market Renewal (HMR) known as ELEVATE East Lancashire

£15 million in first two years 2004-06

Aim: to tackle problems of low demand and failing housing market and to introduce more choice. (Part of wider programme of investment in town centres, transport, health and education.)
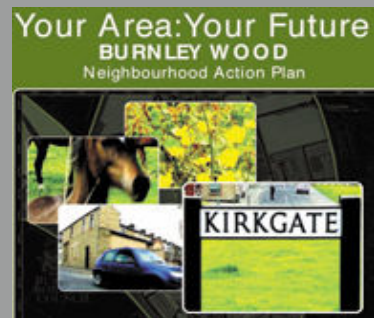
ELEVATE Neighbourhood Action Plan, Burnley Wood

Luton

Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) and Objective 2 Status

£15 million ends 2007

Aim: to enhance quality of life and secure economic diversification.

Luton town centre Development Framework, David Locke Assoc.

These sums look large, but to put them in perspective £22 billion is earmarked for the Thames Gateway compared with £500 million for all nine Pathfinders in the North and Midlands. That's 44 times as much.

The thinking behind regeneration is to stimulate private investment, but the process is led by officers whose main aim is to win public funding. The problem is that regeneration takes a long while, perhaps as long as twenty years, but this public funding is time limited and this breeds short-term thinking.

Finally there is a failure of effective community engagement. There's been lots of consultation, in fact both communities are suffering consultation fatigue, but decision making rests with the Council whose main concern is, quite naturally, for the needs of the whole town.

Burnley and Burnley Wood

Burnley Town centre	Burnley Wood from Leeds & Liverpool Canal	Bus station
Canal side property ripe for redevelopment	Cleared site in Burnley Wood	Back alley between terraced houses

Standing on the towpath of the Leeds & Liverpool Canal one can look down on Burnley Wood with its tightly packed rows of terraced cottages. One can also see the roofs of sheds and derelict industrial buildings. Despite earlier demolition there doesn't seem to be much open space, but then Townley Park and the moors are within walking distance.

To get to Burnley Wood from the town centre you have to make a detour to a bridge over the canal and, despite its proximity to the town centre, it feels isolated. Walk down its main road, Parliament Street, and look up each road to your right and a number of things strike you. Although the houses look well built in sound gritstone with slate roofs, many are vacant or boarded up with plywood over the windows and doors. Small back yards and alleyways separate the backs of adjacent terraces. None of the houses has been extended and there is an air of blight and neglect.

People note this relative isolation. As one resident described it, Burnley Wood became an island, separated from the town centre, with two entrances. It looked after itself. Anyone in a suit and tie was an enemy. It used to sort out its own problems. Even in the past, it was not a single community but three. Branch Road separated it into upper and lower Burnley Wood. Children went to different schools and if children from one strayed into another to play, they were beaten up. At the top, on the other side of the railway, were the mill owners' houses.

These Victorian mill owners and city fathers of Burnley built to last. It must have seemed to these Prometheans that the power and wealth of the industrial world would endure. And for the ordinary people of Burnley, with a tradition of work, where one's trade provided identity and meaning, it is hard to comprehend and deal with these changes. The legacy of gritstone houses, mills and civic architecture gives the town its strong character. The question is how can this distinctive character find new meaning and purpose in a changed world?

Burnley Wood was a White working class area that thought of itself a cut above other inner neighbourhoods. A resident of Burnley Wood described the process of decline. The terraced housing was well looked after. The people were proud working class. As someone in the Council told us, "Because it worked the Council decided to leave well enough alone. Absentee landlords bought houses and rented them out to an underclass

of drug users and alcoholics. The houses deteriorate and the DSS pays. No-one cares what happens to the property."

Burnley residents are fully aware of the underlying economic causes of the decline. As one resident put it, "Bacup, Burnley and Blackburn, they have all gone the same way. They are mill towns that have lost their industry and have nothing to fill the gap. I can't see how we can easily stop the decline. The population has collapsed by 50% and Burnley is the only borough in East Lancashire that is still declining. The problem is that this decline is spreading into better areas and affecting buildings and amenities."

Unemployment is low but most jobs are low skill, part-time and poorly paid, and so people don't have the spending power. "Very few who go to university come back. I can see steady decline for at least another decade. There are many elderly people living in houses no one wants and as they die there will be a glut of empty property."

Almost all the surviving 1,200 properties are pre-1919 terraced houses which were built to house local textile workers. Around the mid to late 1980's the area started to decline. Colette Bailey has been a Councillor for Burnley Wood for four years. She moved to Burnley Wood in 1965 because it was a nice place to raise a family. She believes the rot set in when people were re-housed in the area. Like a lot of towns, the drug scene became more prevalent. One after another the manufacturing companies started to fold and more and more people started a life on the dole. That, and the way drugs eat into people's lives, is the reason for the decline. Burglary and criminal damage are particularly high in Burnley Wood, almost 50% higher than in the rest of the Borough.

Since a peak in 1989 there has been a significant fall in house prices. In 1989 a standard 'two up and two down' terraced house fetched about £25,000. By 1997, 70% of sales were for less than £20,000 and, until the recent regeneration programme, asking prices fell as low as £2,000. Philip Chew, the vicar at St Stephens said that when he came to live here three years ago "you could buy a terraced house on a credit card".

A housing condition survey in 1989 on behalf of the Department of the Environment found evident signs of low-demand and abandonment, the majority of the stock to be 'at the end of its useful life', suffering from varying degrees of major or moderate disrepair and occupied by low income owner-occupiers and tenants unable to afford to maintain or repair the property. Yet the houses seem structurally sound, and although small, in places with buoyant housing demand these houses would be bought as starter homes. So it may be a mistake to demolish.

Current initiatives

Regeneration is big business in the North West of England. In 2003-4, the North West Development Agency spent £197.5m, 57% of its total budget, on regeneration activities. A key activity is "developing the strength of the areas of greatest concentration of unsatisfactory and unpopular housing". This is being done via the Government's Housing Market Renewal's Pathfinder programme in partnership with other Government agencies such as Go-North West, the Housing Corporation, English Partnerships, and the ODPM.

One major difference between Housing Market Renewal and previous regeneration programmes is the Government's intention that most of the money will come, through public/private partnerships, from the private sector. CABE has provided direct assistance on design to the HMR Pathfinders and set up a Design Task Group for sharing a best practice on design quality. It has also sought to help them develop their policies and practices for design issues, including sustainable development and heritage. And CABE has also acted in an enabling capacity on individual projects with Pathfinders.

The vehicle for regeneration in East Lancashire is the ELEVATE Pathfinder. This covers six local authorities – Blackburn with Darwen, Burnley, Hynburn, Pendle, Rossendale and Lancashire County Council plus the East Lancashire Partnership.

In Burnley, Burnley Wood was chosen as one of the three initial neighbourhoods to have an Area Development Framework submitted as part of the ELEVATE prospectus in 2003.

The ADF sets out the Council's long-term strategy for tackling the collapse of the housing market in the neighbourhood. It was based on a detailed audit of the existing situation and of the drivers of market failure. In this first instance, the plan has required "significant clearance". But, in the medium term, the Council plans "to introduce phased new build that will set us on the road to improving quality".

Burnley Wood –Neighbourhood Action Plan

After widespread consultation with residents, service providers and Government officials, the Council published its 'preferred option' Neighbourhood Action Plan for Burnley Wood in late 2004. This showed the broad outline of 'the changes that the Council think will be good for the area'. A master plan is now being prepared by Taylor Young Associates. This will be used to support ELEVATE's bid for further funding. Once adopted, the master plan will form the basis of supplementary planning guidance for the area.

The Neighbourhood Action Plan indicated that the Council wants to clear a large number of properties. Mainly these would be unfit and empty houses but "In some cases, these will be 'fit' properties, as we will need to create large sites for redevelopment." In answer to its own question – 'Won't this break up the Community?', the Council wrote, "Our plan is designed so that anyone who wants to carry on living in the area can do so – in good quality housing which meets a range of different household's needs".

A BBC Radio File on 4 Programme broadcast on 8 March 2005 examined some of the tensions of the whole Pathfinder programme. Mike Cook, Director of Regeneration for Burnley Council, was interviewed. On the programme he said, "Private developers need a framework which we are delivering. There will be some hard choices and I recognise that there will be people who won't be winners." Philip Chew, the Vicar at St Stephen's in Burnley Wood, said on the same programme that he felt his parishioners are the dispossessed. "They have been told they will have to move to another part of Burnley when they need housing to move into within their own community."

Anne Power, Professor of Social Policy at the London School of Economics, described the HMR programme as something of a self-fulfilling prophecy in which demolition accelerates the process of decline, shops close, schools lose children and families leave the area, which justifies the decision to demolish.

The Council has put great efforts into consulting the community. But the Radio Four programme suggested that the community feels that the process has been a sham, a public relations exercise for a decision already made. This isn't entirely fair, since the Council have acted with the best of intentions. But Jeff Rooker, the Government minister, believes that the HMR programme may be jeopardised if communities aren't listened to. Professor Brendan Nevin, architect of the Pathfinder programme, is concerned about the possibility of failure on a grand scale. He suggested that a lack of necessary skills in managing change lies at the heart of the problem.

The central dilemma is that the HMR programme relies on private investment. This dependence on private developers makes demolition an attractive option. There is a growing recognition that such decisions are driven not so much by the state of the

housing but rather by the value of the land. To kick start renewal, councils like Burnley will not unnaturally be anxious to assemble sites that are attractive to developers.

View from east	Parliament Street	Due for demolition	Back yards
Struggling corner shops	Britannia Pub	Community One Stop Shop	Cleared area
Terrace on periphery	Face-lifted terraces	The Courtyard development	For sale at £225,000

Views of Burnley Wood

Aspirations

We asked stakeholders in Burnley and Burnley Wood what they wanted to see happen over the next 10 to 20 years. Policy makers and service providers on the one hand and the community on the other share many aspirations for the future. Overall there are more shared suggestions and greater consensus about aspirations for the town as a whole than for the neighbourhood of Burnley Wood. Unsurprisingly everyone agrees that they would like the town to be vital and prosperous and Burnley Wood to be a thriving community again. But there are clear differences of emphasis, as well some areas of disagreement and conflict, between those with a direct material interest in the neighbourhood, e.g. residents, and outside decision-makers.

People and housing

There is general agreement amongst those interviewed that it is necessary to provide the right sort of housing and facilities to attract young families. Only by attracting and retaining families and young people will the neighbourhood renew itself.

Everyone involved in the regeneration process can sympathise with the aspirations of current residents of Burnley Wood: "We will attract people by providing the sort of housing people want to live in, by providing good schools and by making pleasant places to live." "We want Burnley Wood to be an urban village, to regain the village feel with some local shops and where people care about each other. We need to make connections with the Asian community. We need more green open space where people live." "People want it like it was 10 years ago. With all the properties occupied, no anti-social neighbours, low crime levels, better bus timetable and better train connections."

But policy makers are thinking beyond the needs of current residents. They emphasise the need to attract new residents to the inner city to create more balanced communities with a larger middle class. "We need dynamic young people. They need to come back after they have been to university. We need to get people to take some pride in the town." "We should encourage gentrification of the housing stock." "Burnley has a lot going for it.

It could be a fantastic environment and a great place to get out of the city with a range of housing types. The environment has a lot to offer here." "We need fewer but a broader range of houses." Residents are also realistic about the future and agree that, "there will be more diverse higher value housing". They have come to accept that "we need to remove some houses and to replace them with ones suitable for wage earners with families." They can also see that, "the scenery is fantastic, the housing is affordable and a young couple could buy a nice property here".

The aspirations of policy makers and residents diverge when it comes to the way they want these solutions to be implemented. Policy makers have defined the problem as housing market failure produced by an excess of housing rather than one of a particular community needing support and investment. The recipe is to remove stock by demolition, to push up house prices and to encourage private developers by providing attractive cleared sites. "Selective demolition will lead to a neighbourhood park and a broader range of house type." "There will be a market for sandblasted oversized lofts for people who can't afford to live in Manchester." If developers aren't ready to invest then some people think the best solution would be to "demolish areas of decline and return them to woodland", and hold this land bank until times change. "I think they should demolish the whole of Burnley Wood and make it into a field and put sheep in it."

In contrast the community have seen the destructive effects of the renewal programme and are keen to prevent further demolition. "Don't demolish, refurbish." "We don't want any more demolition. Instead we want to build on the fabric, build on what we have got". They are desperate to retain remaining families and to preserve the vestiges of their community. So they stress, "We need to give the first chance for a new home to existing residents." They accept that things will have to change to attract families, "I know all the current thinking is about city living but people with kids want more space", but they want to retain the best of the old.

Council officers responsible for consulting residents find themselves in an almost schizophrenic situation. "I wouldn't like to see people in old communities driven out, but the town needs gentrification to become more prosperous. We are hopeful that developers will come in and build new homes, but people want, as far as possible, to stay in their community and have their homes redesigned or remodelled." And they have already publicly signalled, "We should give existing residents first choice of new homes".

To an outsider these differences of opinion might look insignificant. After all there is substantial agreement about what needs doing. But to someone who wants to stay in the neighbourhood but who has received a compulsory purchase notice that their house is about to be demolished the differences of emphasis are huge. But perhaps not unnaturally, given the problems Burnley faces, officials responsible for the ELEVATE programme are taking a fairly robust attitude to community doubts. As one put it, "We are up for radical change. We are following the democratic processes, but the council, as the elected body, will make the final decision".

For policy makers, "Success will be measured in terms of house prices. Pushing them up would be a good thing, especially since we have the luxury of large amounts of social housing". For the community success will be measured in terms of "a vibrant crime free community and better housing for existing residents as well as new families".

Community and infrastructure
Burnley's inner city neighbourhoods are seen as the focus that needs to be addressed if the town is to regenerate. And housing market failure is seen as a political problem linked to racial tension. People living in the outer areas of Burnley are alarmed by the evident decline in the centre and by the rise in property crime and drug use. One informant described how Burnley Wood residents were branded as scum in the local press. The Asian neighbourhoods of Daneshouse and Stoneyholme have been seen as getting a disproportionately bigger slice of previous cakes and the BNP have exploited this envy and fear.

Policy makers see the purpose of the housing market renewal programme as "regenerating neighbourhoods to benefit the whole town, not just existing residents". They also hope the programme will "stitch together the affluent suburbs of semi-detached houses and inner core properties". They want to encourage "mixed communities with greater breakdown in inter-area tensions. I hope we won't be known as the racist capital of Britain and that Burnley becomes a more tolerant place."

The community have a slightly different perspective. "People want it like it was 10 years ago. With all the properties occupied, no anti-social neighbours, low crime levels, better bus timetable, better train connections." People in the community think racial tension is produced by both cultural segregation and poverty. "It's too much them and us. It's territorial and fuelled by poverty. If everyone had a good job, everyone would get on. All are living in poverty and so they blame the other side." "Race and racism were not and are not the fundamental reasons for unrest – it all boils down to poverty."

The Principal of Burnley College has a vision of "a more balanced community, with a larger middle class and greater integration of the communities. Burnley could become an attractive place for families. We'll have educational achievement equivalent to that in the rest of the country. There will be a change in the whole culture of the town and far better relations between the ethnic groups and a more relaxed integrated society."

Property crime and vandalism have increased dramatically and policy makers recognise that "fear of crime is top of people's agenda". Burnley Community Safety Partnership is doing good work in reducing crime levels and anti-social behaviour. Burnley Wood has a Police Community Beat Manager and a Police Community Support Officer. Their role is "high visibility foot patrol policing, hence the yellow jackets. It's about building contacts and trust with members of the community. We are re-inventing beat bobbies."

There is a strong desire to exploit the architectural heritage of the town and the "well preserved traditional built environment". The vision of the policy makers is to "maintain and preserve Victorian heritage and built environment, make gateways into town attractive, restore old mills and streets sympathetically and encourage conversion of mills into modern apartments". Members of the community agree that "we want to keep the heritage features and make use of that to attract more difference and diversity". But they can also signal caution. "Signs of recovery are slow in coming. The town centre has been improved. It's more attractive. The town has a good Victorian heritage. But that's not appreciated by Burnley people." One designer involved in the regeneration programme highlighted the importance of canal side development to rejuvenating an area. "The [Leeds & Liverpool] canal is the key to regenerating not only Burnley, but the surrounding area as well."

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, policy makers and the community are in agreement about the crucial importance of transport. "Better train connections to Manchester would make Burnley ideal for commuting, attract new people into the area, and make the town more affluent. From Burnley Wood you need to be able to walk down to the station and be in Manchester in half an hour." "We need a park-and-ride and a safe place to leave cars for people who live on the outskirts and want to commute. We need a transport system that links Burnley Wood with the town centre. We need to upgrade Manchester Road station which has better links with Leeds and Manchester."

Economy and education

If better rapid transit connections to Manchester and Leeds are one plank of the town's vision for its economic future, then another is to bring higher paid, higher skilled jobs to the town. As one policy maker described, "The transition from a manufacturing economy to a higher skilled service economy will be managed by a combination of commuting and other economic activities including small-scale creative industries."

The hope is that "The town will be wealthier with a wider ethnic and social mix. It will be more gentrified and this new section of society will bring new aspirations and spending patterns. Reinvention could also come from Burnley as the major service centre for this end of Lancashire. We will have a wholly new further and higher educational facility with

direct involvement of the University of Central Lancashire. There will be more high quality jobs, not the low value, low skill economy that has characterised the region to date."

"We will have a more attractive infrastructure if the town reinvents itself. The town centre will improve and move from being a boozers' paradise at night. We'll see derelict mills, like those in the Weavers triangle, converted into apartments. The town centre will be more developed and sophisticated." "We'll establish the town as a major service centre for the area by creating a more vibrant town centre capable of attracting department stores."

Policy makers and community agree on the central importance of high quality education from nursery provision to higher education. "I'm looking to education. Building Schools for the Future has a £180m programme. They will stand out like beacons. There will be five new secondary schools and Burnley College will be relocated." "I would like to see greater university provision to attract and retain university students. We need to attract the right kind of employment. I'd love to have Luton's or Preston's university."

This vision of Burnley as a commuter town for Manchester or Leeds and an institute of higher education may be unrealistic. But without either the town's economic future looks bleak.

Process and leadership

Perhaps not surprisingly people expressed many more concerns than aspirations about the process and leadership of regeneration. Two types of aspiration were emphasised – the relationship between the Council and the community and changing the image of the town by promotion.

There is a lot of rhetoric about community consultation. "The key issue is that people have faith in what the Borough Council is doing." "We need to ensure that people have faith in what Borough Council is doing by treating them well." "We must develop a collective responsibility for delivering change." People in the community agree with this ideal. "The Council needs to work with people. ELEVATE could act as a change agent for the local authorities, sorting Burnley out and bring the five areas together in a way that hasn't happened before."

As one policy maker said, "I'd like to see Burnley redefined. It needs its own identity. And this needs to be marketed. We need dynamic young people. They need to come back after they have been to university. We need to get people to take some pride in the town. Get some good news stories on regional TV." "We should promote the town as having affordable housing and fantastic scenery."

Regeneration is heavily dependent on private investment and it is not certain yet if this will be forthcoming. "There is a need for a regeneration vehicle based on long-term partnership with a lead developer over ten to fifteen years." There is a belief that the current funding will have the desired effect. "The future of the town will be much more positive and brighter because we have made the fullest use of government funding we have." The outcomes of issues look very different when addressed from the perspective of stakeholders' concerns. As one resident of Burnley put it, "I'm all in favour of spending money on repairing buildings but we shouldn't expect this to regenerate the town."

Concerns

People and housing

The most immediate concerns, the things people see as they leave their homes and travel around the neighbourhood and town, are the boarded up houses and demolition sites, visible evidence that people have left the area. As one resident said, "Anyone with money or children has moved away. We've lost wage earners and have lots of people over sixty. Before re-housing starts, there will be no children left and the school will close."

It's hard not to be pessimistic about the future. Policy makers admit that, "It's not clear the town will ever have the business opportunities to attract or retain dynamic young people". " A resident described how people live a hand-to-mouth existence on-benefit, "Young people go off to university and never return. The town doesn't give them a reason to return. Burnley feels like the end of the line, there's no through route; we're disconnected. We have to accept that the town is shrinking and will continue to shrink. The town has declined so much that it no longer has the independent minded people it needs. The town lacks real expertise and the Council lacks the right calibre of members. Burnley people have little experience of what's happening elsewhere and people hang onto a world that no longer exists."

The Principal of Burnley College thinks that the town is at crossroads. "We have a strong traditional culture that has failed to move into the second half of the twentieth century. But in three years or so it will be clear that decline will continue and the town will become a backwater or it will regenerate and reinvent itself."

Policy makers think that one of the key problems in attracting new families to the area is that there is too much of the wrong sort of housing. "There is nothing in the starter range to attract young families with children." "Commuting won't happen because house prices in nice areas are too high." "We need homes suitable for families but the only funding is for demolition."

Policy makers are also concerned about the effects of demolition. "There is a huge clearance site in the middle of Burnley Wood and it's just getting bigger and bigger. The amount of clearance is problematic. Our problem is helping people to understand what is coming in the place of the demolition. That new building is going to come and that it is going to be good. But people are attached to their terraced housing."

They are also concerned that attacking housing market renewal directly will fail. "There is a surplus of about 4,000 terraced houses and the only buyers are private landlords from all over the country. But I can't see how doing something to the housing will improve the economy, except in the short term. What Burnley needs is something that will produce long term jobs and I'm not sure this will ever happen. It also baffles me why speculators who have invested nothing in the town and will just take the money out of the local economy should be compensated for houses that are worth nothing."

In some respects the local community have been more positive and pragmatic than policy makers in addressing the problems of Burnley Wood. One community spokesperson thinks that Burnley Wood could do what Hebden Bridge has done but the reaction from the Council is "They're different people and places entirely."

The empty houses need redevelopment. But, because of geography, the terraces in Burnley Wood are more cramped than in many mill towns as the mill owners needed to concentrate employees next to the mill. To be suitable for families, houses need more space, with a small garden and a garage. Then they would then sell for £60,000. "One bad house is like a bad tooth. You have to maintain it or the rest go. What they ought to do is compulsory purchase boarded up houses and transfer them to a registered social landlord who would do them up and put them back on the market. That would build confidence back into the street. Instead we have roads that are blighted. We have houses that are coming down but may not get renewal until 2012."

Regeneration creates winners and losers. One group that lose out are the elderly who may have lived in the area all their lives. They may own their home outright but the house is their only asset. Compulsory purchase currently pays about £20,000, but if they are rehoused in sheltered accommodation they lose this compensation.

The community can see that there have been some benefits from physical face lifting, especially on the central roads and around the edge of the community. But they think it is difficult to see any signs of improvement in the rest of Burnley Wood. Clearance involves grassing over and just leaving areas and this has a gradual creeping up effect. The community mindset is to repair, improve and remodel but this doesn't appear shared by

the Borough Council. Their mindset is that "If it is tatty then knock it down and clear away."

Community and infrastructure

People we spoke to believe that there is a strong sense of community in Burnley Wood, but that over the last few years, this has been eroded through blight and anti-social behaviour. "What happens to community spirit when you remove the post office, the shops and the bus service? Declining neighbourhoods have become a private landlord's heaven. Property speculation and absentee landlords aggravate the problem. Blight has a knock-on effect as properties fall into disrepair and are boarded up." "We need to get back to the community owning and tackling their own problems with help from agencies. Initiatives should be recruited and resourced from the community. Instead we have short term funding managed by outsiders with little understanding who then disappear and leave a void."

Apart from housing, there are two other areas of particular concern – schooling and transport. "We have a new school with only five children registered to start next year. The school only opened last year. By the time rehousing starts in 2007, there will be no children left." "We are finding problems with transport. There aren't enough buses and the services that are left get cancelled. There are none on Sunday. So you have to walk a mile and half into town. And the elderly and young families can't do that."

Policy makers are not blind to these problems. "Burnley Wood is in the throes of transition but no one is very clear what it is changing into. A key issue is how to keep services going when you have removed the population? The process of transition can't be managed overnight and repopulation is going to take at least two or three years to get any vibrancy back." They see that housing market failure is aggravated by poor education, crime and ill health to become a spiral of decline. The rise in anti-social behaviour is serious and, although there is lots of money for neighbourhood renewal, there is no extra to deal with this wave of petty crime which undermines attempts to improve the neighbourhood. As one policy maker said, "Putting the same people in better quality housing will only make the houses deteriorate."

The biggest cleavage is seen as being between inner city and outer suburbs that look down on those who live in central Burnley. "Words like 'scum' and 'dosers' have been used which are really galling to those who have lived here through the collapse." There is widespread resentment that money is only spent in Daneshouse and Burnley Wood. People have become defensive and anxious and the BNP have exploited strong political manifestations of demoralisation in the town. Previous area-based initiatives have resulted in racism and stigmatising and there is concern that this may happen again.

Economy and education

Both policy makers and community see that the crux of the problem is economic and that doing something to housing won't fix the economy.

Since 1900, the story of the town has been one of decline and repeated false dawns resulting in life experiences of multiple redundancies. There has been no progress on moving towards a higher wage economy. "In fact, Burnley's wage levels have dropped against the improvement targets. I am not worried about losing population, but the loss of graduates to the town is critical."

There is no growth hub in East Lancashire. "The nearest centre is Preston. Burnley can't compete with Blackburn, just as Blackburn can't compete with Preston. We're at the end of a long arm." One policy maker was worried that in twenty years time, "Burnley may still be struggling. Just ticking over with major environmental problems because the town hasn't an economic reason to exist."

"The town is working class with low expectations and low levels of education and the social fabric has been broken by unemployment." There is a general acceptance that manufacturing won't come back. "There is no industry and no meaningful employment, at least in terms of the old working class sense of a trade and apprenticeships."

People in the community are equally sanguine about Burnley's economic future. Burnley is facing big challenges. "It is an ex-mill town, in transition and it doesn't know where it is going." "The town is very land-locked. This affects people's attitudes and is very narrowing." "There is a pecking order to the five towns. Burnley has a lot to learn from its four partners and from the outside world. But Burnley doesn't have contact with Manchester or West Yorkshire. Actually it doesn't have much contact full stop."

Local businesses aren't active in regeneration. Most of them are on Oxford Road and Parliament Street. "You could say they are involved informally, not formally. They don't have active participation in the refurbishment initiatives."

The Principal of Burnley College described how, in a competitive educational market, they have to compete for students, "And we may lose out if we can't get a new facility."

Process and leadership

Government funding means that things have to happen " … and that works against community engagement. ELEVATE is made up of nine areas and if one of those doesn't spend, then the whole bid is in trouble. And that just leaves us with the biggest brownfield site in Lancashire", as one resident put it. "The money allocated isn't attached to any strategic approach to remodelling communities and plans for new buildings are a hotch-potch because of the need to chase funding. The big debate is decanting or keeping local residents, and whether new housing will be affordable."

Burnley has had similar investment before. "Nine million pounds of SRB funding was spent on clearance, grants for home improvement and face lifting, but it didn't work." There is a lack of conviction that ELEVATE and the new funding will make a difference. One policy maker conceded, "Neither ELEVATE nor Burnley have cracked what being a Pathfinder means. We are five local authorities that have secured a huge injection of resources. The Audit Commission is right to be sceptical about our capacity to deliver."

Others feel this assessment is unfair. "The central renewal area benefited from public sector investment in the 1990s. The ODPM evaluated the programme's effectiveness and decided that the renewal didn't work. But this isn't fair as parts of the area have broken through and there are terraced houses selling for £70,000."

A principal concern of residents is that Government funding is unrelated to any strategic approach to remodelling communities. "People have been consulted, told these are the plans, but there is no reaction and that isn't acceptable." "There are no time lines so people are reluctant to engage." "Housing Market Renewal chases the worst problems but it isn't strategic. You need a plan. We haven't got one yet and nothing can move forward. The lack of vision is stalling everything."

Policy makers feel that they have done fairly well in getting public funding, but are concerned about the lack of private investment. "And it remains unclear how developers' options for Burnley Wood are going to be framed." "Even though ELEVATE has relatively large resources it's only a drop in the ocean of what's needed." "Residents are very concerned about the lack of clarity, about what's going and what's staying." But "prices of houses have gone up since the Elevate programme and no one knows how far the money will stretch." "ELEVATE is hoping to involve nine developers, two of them for Burnley. But they need to divvy up the development opportunities to get the most out of this private investment rather than just housing sites."

Previous funding didn't work because the economic conditions necessary weren't present. Designers working in Burnley describe the dilemma policy makers find themselves in. "Burnley has opportunities, it's accessibility to Manchester and Leeds for example, that haven't been realised yet. Maybe the physical structure of Burnley should just be mothballed for the next twenty years. There are precedents in other areas like the Cotswolds that were derelict for decades. But how do you do that, it is just not acceptable." "Nobody has plans to mothball Burnley Wood. But what if the Housing Market Renewal money dries up, it would happen by default and no one seems to have thought of that." "Burnley Wood is a small, well-defined area and if we can't make this

work, I'm less confident about other neighbourhoods. But ELEVATE looks disjointed and piecemeal. Its not built on the past. The officers have failed to convince people living in these places."

The community desperately want resurgence but have become disillusioned with all the delay and what they see as a lack of a plan. Residents described a recent consultation meeting, attended by two hundred people. "People wanted to know, will my house be demolished? And if so, when? But the planners have no answers. Demolition of particular properties couldn't be confirmed because nothing is set in stone and this lack of decision is a big part of the problem". "People had been consulted. They had been told these are our plans. But there was no response to our views and that isn't acceptable. They need to know what can happen where, with what mix of housing and how we are going to rebuild the neighbourhood."

Originally the Council said that preferably anyone rehoused would be rehoused in the area. But there isn't going to be any redevelopment until 2007. "The community has been offered no concrete visualisation of what was going to happen and no time line for decision-making. At the first consultation meeting, people were angry. At the second they were resentful. Now they are just resigned."

"There are inconsistencies in the NAPs. And there is a lack of time lines. So people are reluctant to engage." "If Burnley rolls out ELEVATE as it has in the past, through paternalism, if that's the way we continue to translate policy, then it's not hopeful." "The culture and climate here are very challenging. It's something about expectations and belief, about not being receptive to being challenged. It's representative not participatory democracy. It's about an inability to see the difference between consultation and participation. And they don't understand criticism. If you make any, they are completely affronted."

"People feel that Burnley has a heavily paternalistic Council that means real partnerships aren't really possible." "People are used to things being provided for them. It's an old mill tradition. And now the mills are gone and they are stuck between that and something else. And because of the lull in the economy, it is very difficult for people to see beyond current ways of doing things."

"The political class is seen as having let the town down." "There is a concern that the town has declined to the point where it doesn't have the independent minded people it needs and that small local authorities like Burnley lack the size to provide top leadership."

Different stakeholders appear to be working in isolation. "We have a community plan, but it's aspirational and lacks action." "ELEVATE will only work if the redevelopment is part of a total programme of economic regeneration and neighbourhood management."

"To manage the process of transition successfully you need a vision to communicate to people." But people feel that the regeneration is being lead by institutions that lack expertise in development and business. "They lack an understanding that investment in peripheral things like housing won't work. It's been tried in the past and didn't work then, and it won't work now." There is also a lack an understanding of how to make the town attractive to tourists and incomers or how to revive the economy. People are asking who owns and drives the regeneration strategy. People admit that there is even a lack of confidence about the future in the core steering group that has been set up. "There is no core vision to drive forward and no civic leadership. And there needs to be leadership to make tough decisions."

People in the community are devastating in their criticism of this lack of leadership and vision. "You need a plan. We haven't got one yet." "The master planning exercise is taking much too long. It's hard to be positive without a plan." "Nothing can move forward and the lack of vision is stalling everything."

"The Northern Way programme begs the question of where this end of East Lancashire, with its 270,000 people, fits into the picture. Government policy crudely favours growth wherever that is happening and the North is left to rot."

Civic identity is important and implies big community and political challenges. "Burnley is a much bigger problem than Burnley Wood and the lack of well-paid jobs is the biggest problem." "Burnley was a mill town, it isn't a mill town now and it won't be again. So what is it to be?" "What is the role for Burnley? It has no special differentiation. It is just a small town on the periphery of Manchester."

Luton and High Town

Arndale Centre

Footbridge linking High Town with town centre and railway station

Entrance to High Town

High Town Community Centre under construction

Recently restored Methodist Church Hall

Terraced houses in Cobden Street

Stand with your back to the concrete bastion of the Arndale Shopping Centre, cross the footbridge over the railway and you leave behind the ring road traffic and the bustle of the town centre and enter High Town. This is a quieter, older world of small shops and terraced houses, a mixed area that provided work, shelter and leisure to people engaged in the hat trade that flourished in Luton until the late thirties.

What is immediately striking is that this area looks like a place on the way up. There are signs of new economic activity in High Town Road. The Council has just finished a programme of refurbishing shop fronts and paving the road. The High Town Action Trust has its offices here, and over the road is the Council's Wellbeck Centre. There is Polish deli and a brand new Lithuanian café and grocers. But there are also seedy junk shops and other signs of dereliction.

Further up High Town Road and on the side streets and adjacent roads are terraces of Victorian houses. Brick-built with bays with very substantial back gardens, these houses offer more in terms of family accommodation than those in Burnley Wood. To the right, between High Town Road and Hitchin Road, is an area of warehouses and factories. Some look new and thriving, whilst others are poor quality and derelict. The jury's out still, but in marked contrast to Burnley Wood, this neighbourhood looks as though it is about to be rediscovered.

Current initiatives

Regeneration has taken a long time to come to High Town. There are community members who have been struggling for 30 years to provide the neighbourhood with an appropriate community centre. The conservation value of High Town with its Victorian high street, its terraced housing snaking up the hillside, and its backyard remnants of the 19th century hat industry – has long been recognised, and architecturally High Town is important to Luton.

A conservation study was undertaken by the Council in 1995 and the latest round of initiatives to regenerate High Town started in 1999. Consultation with the community led to the development of the 2000 Renewal Plan for High Town. It was this plan that formed the basis for defining the bids submitted for SRB and Objective 2 funding. Because of its level of deprivation, High Town got a substantial slice of the £15m awarded to Luton. Consultation identified projects prioritised by the community. The community centre was top of the list, followed by regeneration of High Town Road, a one-year project on reducing crime against business premises and an environmental enhancement project.

A group of community representatives was brought together to form the High Town Action Trust. Its immediate role was to oversee the delivery of the Community Centre. A Design Group, representative of the wider community, was set up by the HAT to scrutinise the design and construction of the Centre which is due to open in June 2005. The HAT has a wider remit, beyond delivering the Community Centre, and has committees representing both the resident and business communities in High Town. High Town also has a Neighbourhood Renewal worker, employed by the Council and based in the Welbeck Centre, who holds regular stakeholder meetings aimed at updating the Renewal Plan.

Building Design Partnership was appointed by the Council in 2004 to undertake a master planning exercise for High Town. After submission in April 2005, the master plan will be subjected to a sustainability appraisal by the Council before being adopted as supplementary planning guidance for development in the area.

The Council is clear that implementation of the High Town master plan will depend on financial input from the private sector and probably further support from English Partnerships which has funded the master planning exercise. Current SRB and Objective 2 funding is due to finish in March 2007. The Council hopes that money may also come from GO-East via funding for sustainable communities and other regional activities.

Separately, the GroundWork Trust is working, under funding from the ODPM, on the Council's Parks, Plazas and Promenades initiative. It is undertaking consultation on what should be done to improve High Town's three adjoining parks – Bells Close, the People's Park and Popes Meadow.

Not surprisingly some community members are confused by and suffering fatigue from the many rounds of consultation in their area.

As in Burnley Wood, the central issue in High Town is that further implementation of the regeneration programme will have to rely on private investment. But land-owners and developers appear to be waiting for land to be redesignated from commercial to residential uses before engaging with the regeneration process. And this expected change is not universally popular in High Town as some see it as just another blow against what they want to be – a small scale, mixed use, sustainable community.

Lower High Town Road	*Welbeck Centre*	*Recently restored Methodist Church Hall*

High Town Community Centre under construction

Terraced houses in Cobden Street

Edwardian terraces

Polish deli

Renovated shop front

Convenience store

Aspirations

We asked stakeholders in Luton and High Town what they wanted to see happen over the next 10 to 20 years. There is general agreement amongst those interviewed about what currently needs to be done to kick start regeneration of the neighbourhood. This typically centres on reconnecting High Town with the town centre and re-energising its main shopping street by increasing the footfall in the area. There is less agreement between policy makers and service providers, on the one hand, and community members, on the other, about what the neighbourhood's future should be. The former tend to see it as a destination for incomers, as a commuter village and incubator for budding entrepreneurs. The latter want an end to increasing densification in order to protect the quality of life of the remnants of an earlier, more settled community.

People and housing

Policy makers in Luton see the town as suffering from an inferiority complex. "Luton people have a 'working class and proud of it' mentality." This is seen as becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. "There is an underlying cynicism. In part, it is a self-protection against problems in the past." And it afflicts not just the townsfolk. The Council and local politicians are also seen as having low expectations, "When it was time for the TransLink [guided bus] bid to be submitted, the attitude was we haven't bid because we won't get it. It's all a question of belief."

Both elected members and Council officers voiced a need to break out of this trap. "Luton has been labelled a middle class town with working class aspirations. We need to give it middle class aspirations by increasing the visibility of the good things that are being done and the improvements that are happening. Then it will look better and work better. And more people will be attracted to settle in the town."

Policy makers also see low aspiration as affecting High Town as a neighbourhood. "People's mindsets are a barrier. High Town is very much an urban village. People there aspire to what it was like 20 or 30 years ago, with its own butchers and bakers, etc. But you can't go back to that." But both policy makers and service providers also see the neighbourhood as having more positive features too. "It is a characteristic of High Town that it has taken in waves of immigration. 150 years ago it was the Irish. Now it is Poles, Lithuanians and North Africans. So there is a real mix of people working here." "People are generally positive about immigrants in High Town. These new arrivals have taken over the shops and there is a greater variety of products on offer." Some, but not all, community members welcome this influx, "The community is changing. But most people are quite positive about the African and East European immigrants. It is good for people who are scared of the new."

Community members agree that there have been low expectations in High Town, arising from what they see as unsuccessful attempts to get regeneration started in the past. But recent changes could alter that, "People now believe that change will happen because of the community centre." "People are beginning to have confidence now the environmental improvement work to the shopping street is being done." Such expectations can be important. As one member of the High Town Action Trust commented, "I think Luton is a beautiful place with more positives than negatives. And it can be beautiful again. It depends on what people put into it."

Community and infrastructure

Design consultants employed by the Council have identified that "Luton could become a sustainable community. It is a very compact town. And it will stay like that because of geography and politics. It is surrounded by green belt and by other authorities. And it is built right up to its boundaries." Conversely, GO-East, the Government Office for the Eastern Region, has indicated that, "As part of Milton Keynes growth area, the plan is to allow the town to break out of the straight jacket caused by geography and its green belt."

Whatever happens to Luton as a whole, policy makers and service providers are unanimous that infrastructure changes are essential for the successful regeneration of High Town. Most of these changes lie outside High Town itself, on its border with the town centre. There is to be a new square to bring people back to the ground level in the town centre along with major road works to complete the ring road around the retail core. "We aim to get redevelopment on the north face of the Arndale. Some kind of vitality to link it back to the station." This is tied in with transport improvements and the TransLink guided bus initiative. "We want a developer to provide a new station on the back of comprehensive redevelopment of the whole area." "There should be airspace development over the station to refurbish the station with ground level entrances at both town centre and High Town ends of the bridge."

High Town is seen as potentially benefiting from these developments. "The critical thing for High Town is how to manage the crossing of the northern section of the ring road. The challenge is to make it as pedestrian friendly as possible. Redevelopment of the railway will improve that." "If you could change the shape and appearance of the footbridge into High Town, maybe you could get people to come the other way into it." Indeed one councillor identifies better access, for pedestrians and cyclists, as key for the whole town, not just High Town. One of the policy makers agrees, "Physically it is important to catch people as they come by the end of High Town Road." Likewise design consultants think that, "Establishing a park and ride with a bus link down High Town Road could make it a place where people stop off and have a coffee or go to the deli. They could make that part of their town centre shopping trip." It is hoped that the Milton Keynes South Midlands growth area will be helpful here, "It will provide a context for economic regeneration, especially since it will encourage the local authority to deliver the communication and transport plan."

Community members agree that there need to be changes to the relationship between High Town and its connection to the town centre. "The whole station area needs to be made more attractive. It is such an eyesore." "The Council should take the footbridge down at the town centre end. They could put in escalators and enhance the area." "The new ring road may be a big barrier to people coming into High Town. It needs to look better." As these statement suggest, community members' aspirations are usually expressed in term of the local here and now. Only one lifted her gaze to comment on the impending impact of the growth area on the neighbourhood and the town, "If the guided bus was like the tram in Sheffield, it would be ideal. It would help people in Dunstable and Luton by going on to Milton Keynes. And the growth area would open the whole town up." Instead their aspirations are much smaller in scale and typically relate directly to the neighbourhood's high street, "I wanted to pedestrianise the High Town Road so that people could sit outside cafes and socialise in the evenings." "We should provide sufficient on street parking. It is important to keep the road open for casual shoppers."

Outside decision-makers see High Town as having a bright future because of its location. "A station on the best commuter line into London." "You can live in High Town and work in London. With the right connection, be in Kings Cross in 18 minutes."

The Council has an aspiration to improve the quality of the town's environment. High Town is seen as an asset here. Design consultants have advised, "The pattern of streets has scale, character and charm. You need to create the feeling that you wouldn't want to move away from it." "There is great scope mainly for residential accommodation and perhaps some commercial, because of commuting." High Town, close to the station, has already begun to gentrify because it is so close in journey time to a major London terminus.

The Council is now looking at longer-term land use in the rest of High Town. "We are focusing on strategic release of land for housing." It has been a long-held aspiration to reconsider the demarcation between residential, retail and employment land in the neighbourhood. And regeneration has to feed through into improving the physical environment, "Lower High Town Road has considerable character. Elsewhere it wouldn't be considered important as a conservation area but here it is." "We mustn't forget the Liveability agenda. We have to improve High Town's open spaces." High Town also needs

to manage the speed of its traffic since "Doing that will improve the quality of the environment". There is a Victorian park on the edge of High Town that needs refurbishment, "Bells Close is going to be improved with Liveability funding. Play equipment has been defined as a priority."

Elected members and community service providers have great expectations about the capacity of the newly finished Community Centre to transform High Town. The hope is that the Centre will act as focal point for the community. "Consultation identified community facilities as the main priority as a local focus for the community." "The basic need of people is for a centre from which to organise. The community centre will provide a whole range of services: sports facilities, advice, and a hub for the community." "We are hoping that the momentum we have started will continue and that people will come forward."

There is a hope that the Centre will service not only those already in the neighbourhood but that "It will increase the number of people coming into the area". "The Council hopes that the Community Centre will offer facilities, like a crèche, to attract new families." There is also a desire that the Centre, along with the Noah Centre which is to be located next door to it, will be able to address the high levels of drug use and public alcohol abuse in the area.

People' aspirations are focused on the present and on the new Community Centre. They clearly have invested a lot in its success. "Formation of the High Town Action Trust, responsible for overseeing the new Community Centre, has pulled the community together." "The HAT hopes that people will claim ownership of the community centre." "The HAT's hope is that people won't have to travel out of High Town to use facilities." "We must make sure the community centre is a success."

Thinking about the longer-term future seems to have been a casualty of this concern with making the Centre a success. Their aspirations are typically short term and expressed in terms of present assets located on the neighbourhood's high street, rather than any more distant future, "We have to re-open the Welbeck for Youth." "The Council should support church hall activities for the community."

Economy and education

Senior Council officers portray Luton as on the cusp of economic lift-off triggered by the Milton Keynes South Midlands growth area. "Lots of inward investment, creating lots of jobs, is coming because of the pressure of this being a growth area." "There will be transport investment because of the growth area – 26,000 homes by 2021 and another 15-16,000 afterwards." And this new industry will be different, "It will have a high tech base. And it will pull in tech staff from where they have been employed before." Even without Government intervention, Luton's economic future is regarded as secure, "Private sector investment, not Government pump-priming or assistance, will be enough to replace the manufacturing decline in the town."

Private sector investment is also seen as important in the town centre as well because "We want a better retail food offer in the town". Design consultants agree that currently too many people shop elsewhere, for instance in Milton Keynes, "The town has a leakage of retail expenditure. There is the potential to capture that. Power Court, a proposed new retail development between the town centre and High Town, could be the key to that." Despite its outward appearance, the Arndale Centre is seen as an asset, "The retail offer of the town is slightly down market. But the Arndale actually trades very well. So there is a need to extend the retail profile of the town." Fortunately, "there is evidence of strong private sector demand in the centre of Luton."

An elected member summed up the economic vision for Luton's future, "The Council is really keen on new business growth, high tech development, and high quality employment. It is encouraging opportunities to retain the skill base that might otherwise be lost." He also specified how to measure whether this had been achieved, "We will know we have been successful when Luton is seen as a magnificent town and hard-nose developers have invested here."

Service providers also stress the importance of retail for the future of High Town itself. A design consultant suggested, "You need to start with High Town Road. That needs to be flourishing." From this perspective, High Town looks to be improving, "The future looks very bright. Five or six years ago things looked quite bleak. Many of the shops were boarded up. Now local businesses have regenerated and most of the shops are open." Outside decision-makers agree about how to improve the neighbourhood's shopping street, "The future for High Town is to cater for a niche market selling things people are prepared to go out of the way for." "The nature of High Town Road is changing. It is providing a niche where junior entrepreneurs can come in because it is cheap, where they can put their toe in the water, which is not happening elsewhere in the town." "Some of the high street shop units are too small. And that needs to be tackled. But you don't want to make them so big that the normal high street stores move in and it loses its individuality." Such external decision-makers are keen to bring more outsiders into the area, "The main way to make the High Town shopping area more viable is to increase the footfall in the area. More college students would do this and it would be wonderful for the area."

Community members' aspirations are firmly fixed on improving the neighbourhood's main shopping street and its retail economy. "The refurbished shop fronts are signs of improvement. There are new businesses and they are doing really well. We've got food shops and the cafeteria and that's all come in the last six months." "The Council grants to shops has improved the frontages so the fabric of the shops has made High Town Road smarter." More improvement is wanted on this front. "We need to get other people to come into High Town, to encourage them to spend their money here." "We need people around during the day. People with money to spend." And some agree that specialist shops could be a solution, "Independent niche shops would help. The Fair Trade shop has done well." "Hitchin has many more specialist shops but then it is more prosperous. The focus has been on big retail shops in the centre." "I have advocated a farmers' market, once a week. But I've been told that it's too close to town and there's an agreement with the Arndale Centre."

Others would prefer a return to basic commodity shops, "I'd love to have the pop-in shops back. In the morning, the smell of bread was wonderful. But there's no profit margin." "Locating a supermarket in the area between High Town Road and Hitchin Road might help revitalise local shopping." Whatever the solution to regenerating the local retail economy, Council assistance is required, "The Council needs to encourage small businesses and provide a subsidy on rents and rates."

Some community members recognise possibilities beyond the retail sector, "Leisure is the new hope for Luton and High Town. We should generate more activities." And others recognise that the underlying economy also needs to be successful, "Decent jobs. That's the necessity if people are going to stay." "Without work, it doesn't matter how many houses you build, regeneration won't work." "Social problems also need to be tackled. We have to address the drug problem and dealing in High Town." The Council is seen as capable of exacerbating this situation by acting against the neighbourhood's commercial interest, "We should stop the Noah relocating to High Town as this is undermining business confidence.

Outside decision-makers are also keen to improve the neighbourhood's commercial base, both by building on the past and ushering in the new. "High Town has the vestiges of historic businesses. Victorian workshops at the bottom of gardens where people are still drying and dipping and dyeing. We need to get alongside that and create an environment where it can prosper." "The Council wants to improve the quality of jobs in High Town, with more employment of highly skilled labour." Achieving this will require changes, "The industrial area needs to be rationalised and the businesses in it. You don't want to lose the progressive ones with R&D, but you do need to get rid of the storage sheds." What is required is "a more compact industrial area with high quality, with the kinds of properties that will allow a business-to-business infrastructure and environment."

The aim is "to create the best quality business environment close to the centre of the town. You have got to create the impression of a vibrant community where business can

be done." As those involved in community development have recognised, "The area could be an incubator for small businesses. It is already attracting immigrants: Poles and Zimbabweans." Immigrants are seen as an asset. "Immigrants are creating a niche market of specialist shops. These shops are attracting visitors to High Town, bringing people from these immigrant communities into the area."

Sustaining this might need Council intervention, "We need a strategy to support local businesses so that they are sustainable in the long term. This might mean rent and rate subsidies to help them compete with supermarkets and the Arndale. We need a strategy for business to sustain community employment opportunities."

Outside decision-makers recognise that education and training will be required if these desired futures for Luton and High Town are to come about. For Luton to achieve its high tech future, "We need especially to address training – old industry apprenticeships that aren't there any more. And we need to raise skill levels." "One of the key things is increasing employment and training relevant to the job market." Likewise, in High Town, improved education is held to have a crucial role to play in improving the community and tackling social problems. "We need education and play facilities to attract families. The SATs performance of schools is crucial in this." "Improved education will get youths off the street and reduce vandalism and petty crime."

Process and leadership

For GO-East, the remit of regeneration runs from the neighbourhood right up to the sub-regional level, "The key question is how broad is your vision. Currently options are grounded in the community and what people see as the priorities. There is a need to up the game on regeneration in relation to the whole conurbation in advance of the urban expansion programme." But for elected members and design consultants, the focus of attention remains on the town of Luton itself, "The new philosophy that should guide our dealing with developers and business is that we want them to succeed but that this can't be at the expense of the interests of the town." "What needs to be done is to continue the initiatives on housing, retail, employment, education and training, and better leisure but put real muscle behind it. If that were done for 10 or 20 years, you could be effective." At this level, they see grounds for optimism, "I'm impressed by the enthusiasm of the people at the top in Luton. There is political leadership there." "There is a very positive feel to the people who run Luton. Lots of them are very positive about the town. When they hear outside criticisms, their reaction is, We're going to show'em." Other service providers appear less persuaded, "Luton's vision suggests we are looking for the Mars bar response: a nice place to work, rest and play." Community members can share this misgiving, wanting more, "Luton has its own vision. It's a bit gummy – work, rest and play. But we need to appeal to an inner feeling of spirituality linked to quality of life."

Service providers may also have aspirations about how the Council should conduct the regeneration process, "The Council needs to be able to point to local decisions made in the spirit of partnership that have changed the local environment. And, if people haven't got their own way, they should know why." These may be shared by community members, "Council departments must listen to people's concerns." Typically, community members' aspirations about the regeneration process are strongly grounded in the here and now, just as they are based on low expectations, "Over the past year, quite a lot of money has been thrown at High Town. Its appearance has improved. The shops still struggle, We must make the most of what we have and build on the existing services."

Outside decision-makers see the injection of external funding as grounds for optimism, "I think that the future is incredibly bright but that is mainly because of the Milton Keynes South Midlands growth area." "What is going to make a difference is the immense amount of money being made available for public transport. No other rival area can match it. There is £100m for TransLink, the bus station and the northern section of the ring road." But whereas Government money may be forthcoming for transport improvement, it isn't available for regenerating High Town, "When it comes to the implementation of the master plan, we will be looking for commercial input." But, wherever it comes from, future investment still needs to be planned, "High Town needs a regeneration plan in place so

that when the money arrives – and it will be mainly from the private sector – then you can put the pieces of the jigsaw in the right place rather than just anywhere like now."

Concerns

People and housing

Policy makers, and both their internal and external service providers, have a clear view of Luton. "There is the image thing. Luton is still seen very much as an industrial and manufacturing town set within areas of green belt and next to the Chilterns. In that sense, it is a blot on the landscape." "There is the thorny issue of how the town is perceived in the surrounding areas, in the property and national press. It has been described as the crappiest town in the UK. Lorraine Chase did Luton a lot of harm." In the 70s, when Reading and Swindon (towns used for comparison) "were bursting at the seams with high tech development, that passed Luton by. Despite its airport and railway line. It's because of the image of Luton. Industry doesn't want to come here." "Outsiders look down on Luton. People come here for leisure but go elsewhere to shop." The population is below the national average in educational attainment, "And so the businesses we want to encourage may well locate elsewhere if they can't find the calibre of staff they need." As a result, "the local authority is burdened with an inferiority complex. And the town does have a poor image. So one of the questions is how can you change that."

High Town is also seen as being infected with the same failing. "There is apathy and inertia in High Town. Where it starts and finishes isn't obvious. There is a lack of confidence there." In part, this is seen as a result of the mixed nature of the neighbourhood's current inhabitants. An elected member commented, "There is a large transient population which creates instability and makes for low expectations in terms of wealth creation." A design consultant agreed, "At the moment, High Town has strong migrant communities. But they are bit like shipping, moving in and out on the tide. Redevelopment is needed to tie people down to the area for longer." These transient incomers impact on the remnants of an older more settled community, "Older residents can be slightly intimidated by the new immigrant shops and it takes a while for local people to use them." Despite this, inhabitants of the area are seen as having a more positive image of the neighbourhood than outsiders, "Local people don't have a bad impression of Luton. Most people feel safe and happy in High Town. But visitors' first impression is poor."

Community members also believe that a sense of belonging is important, "The main barrier is the lack of people calling Luton home." "At one time, people wouldn't say they came from High Town. It is essential that they have pride in the place." But recent changes work against this. "The biggest barrier is the attitude of people. It is a commuter-orientated population now. You see, High Town is close to the trains and the airport. There is no community now." "Because of commuting, people are dissipating. There is no one around during the day." "Young couples don't think that High Town is a good enough start for them. They move away to get a perch on the housing ladder."

Outside decision-makers describe how a more transient population has come to be reflected in the housing in the neighbourhood. "High Town is a student/commuter area. The vast majority are transient residents and the majority of the housing is on short-term lets." "There is already a lot of flatted accommodation of low quality." This impacts on the regeneration process. "There are some long-term residents and some commuters have families. The Council hopes to engage them but it is hard since the majority spend their time outside the area." This is not a recent development. According to the design consultants, it was accelerated by redevelopment in the area in the 1960s and 70s, "As a result of previous demolition, High Town now feels as if it is on the coast, it has lost its hinterland, especially the residential properties which had the drawing capacity to support local businesses." Some of the neighbourhood's problems are exacerbated by these earlier interventions. An elected member commented, "The Radburn estate near North Street has a high incidence of poverty, vandalism and anti-social youth behaviour. It needs a great deal of support but there aren't any immediate plans." A design consultant

agreed, "The Radburn estate really screwed up circulation in High Town. If you walk round it on a sunny day, it looks as if it has a lot of nice green space. But the truth is it's not a great asset to the area."

Community members also deplore the Radburn estate, "The Radburn estate was based on Milton Keynes but there wasn't enough space so it had to be shrunk. And there were beautiful four storey Victorian houses there that had to be demolished. Those houses would be worth £3/4m now." Unfortunately, "To build the Radburn estate, they got rid of a lot of Victorian housing that had stood the test of time."

And there is now growing pressure on house prices in the neighbourhood, "In High Town, until 2 or 3 years ago, a two bedroom terrace was £45-60k. Now they are £120k. And it has made it very difficult for local people to get on to the market." This is being aggravated by the new housing developments, "Milliner Court, an old hat factory, is likely to be our first example of designer flats. There is a lot of concern about that in the neighbourhood and the town." These apartments are expected to be bought by outsiders, commuters. "The old hat factory, Milliners Place, is being converted into 100 appartments. It is assumed that a lot of these residents won't have cars." This assumption, reflected in the parking requirements imposed by the Planning Authority, is not seen by community members as realistic.

Community members regret the lack of families in the neighbourhood, "For some reason, the area despite its relatively low priced stock of three bedroom houses is not attracting young families." But they are also concerned about the change in tenure to private rented. "One of the problems High Town has is that people moving in will accept any accommodation because the housing shortage is so desperate in Luton." "Now a lot of the houses are rented out. All sorts of people are buying them to rent, using them as pocket fillers. And then the people in them get exploited." "Property is being bought up by landlords who convert it to bedsits and rent out on short-term lets." "Rented accommodation is killing the area." "People in rented accommodation pay a hell of a price to live here but they have no care about the local economy. They don't have any roots. They just float about."

But there is also a worrying tendency in the opposite direction, upwards towards more expensive private residential accommodation. This can be just as problematic for the existing community, "Lots of people have moved in to High Town. Charlie Brown's is a new apartment development on the edge of the neighbourhood. There are 1 and 2 bed apartments for £180K. They are not aimed at the High Town housing market. They are aimed at people moving out of London who are looking at Luton as a much cheaper place to live." As a result, "Local people just can't afford to live here any more."

It is not just the price of these new developments that concerns community members. They are also anxious about their density and effect on the urban fabric, "We have a new [housing] development right behind us. We protested but no one takes any notice. It's part of the Council's densification plans." "If people had to live here themselves, they wouldn't be cramming people in like they are." "Town planners are trying to squeeze more and more into tinier spaces." "The High Town recreation centre has just been sold. There will be 1-2 bed houses, not family housing. It won't necessarily be all bad unless it's commuters who don't use the local facilities." Community members are worried that these changes will alter the character of High Town, "Because of the new developments, the area won't retain its village feel."

Community and infrastructure

For GO-East, the issues of how to develop the sub-region as a growth area and how to renew existing neigbourhoods are clearly related, "The issue is how do you design a framework for regeneration which avoids creating new communities that are unattached to the existing pattern of settlement and that leave the old communities unregenerated." In High Town, the concerns of outside decision-makers are are less expansive, much more parochial, "High Town used to be a place where people lived, worked and went to the pub and could walk to the train – all in 5 minutes. But now it has lost a lot of that. So

the question is how to recapture that vibrancy." "There is a breakdown in the sense of belonging and community values. There is an increasing commuter population, an increasing transient population and more refugees." "There is a lack of voluntary groups and service provision for young families in High Town." Local issues and local decisions – the quality of education and social problems like drug use – are what are seen as important here, "People are particularly unhappy with the SATs performance of the high school of the High Town catchment area." "Noah are building a new £3m centre on a derelict site. Part of the community is worried that it will be a disaster. But [the Council's] Social Welfare believe this kind of [drugs rehabilitation] facility needs to be integrated with the community."

Community members are, unsurprisingly, more concerned about the effect of change on High Town's sense of community than outside decision-makers, "High Town used to be a village within a town. We had everything you wanted here, from birth to death. Now we have Sweet Fanny Adams. Everything has gone now." "I've been away. When I came back, the feeling of community spirit that used to be here was gone." "There are people who are moving out because they don't like students or other incomers. And the younger element who are coming in are working away, out of the area five days a week." "The worry is that if you don't have children in the area, you don't have any community because that's how people get together, through their kids." "There aren't any youngsters here to be involved in the community." "The area lacks young people." "The older generation especially are worried that they may lose their Post Office/chemist."

These statements voice a clear sense of loss, of cherished elements from the past no longer present. Other statements reflect undesirable elements now present that weren't experienced before, "We used to have a High Town festival. But there is no respect left for the area. Kids don't go out to play. They're too frightened." "High Town has a problem with petty crime. People are a little bit frightened. There is a high burglary rate." "Things have got worse in the last few years. There is a lot more crime, including a couple of murders. And it gets to people eventually." And, for some community members, the Council is about to make this situation worse, "They are building Noah for recovering druggies and alcoholics right in the middle of the community, right next to the school and to housing. Can you imagine that?" "Children from school will have to walk past the druggie centre to get to the community centre. But what can you do about it. The councillors we have now are about as much use as a chocolate oven."

In part, community members recognise that these effects are the result of broader, outside social changes, "Changes like shopping in larger stores, using cars, not walking, lack of respect for property and people, having more money, and multi-cultural living have reduced High Town to an area of deprivation." "Unless there is more discipline in schools and young people have things to do, there will be trouble." In part, they are looking for local solutions, "At the moment, although the area is very close to the town centre and to the railway station, there aren't many facilities." It is hoped that the Community Centre will alter this. "It will be a problem if the community doesn't adopt the Community Centre. You can bring people in from outside but it won't be the same." "The problem is that there is not enough for young people to do in High Town. And you have to provide somewhere without the sting of authority. And you have to be consistent and provide on a regular basis or people won't come."

For GO-East, "Urban extension is the big issue and there is huge growth in planning permission for development in the green belt and plans for new roads but this won't come on stream until 2009-10." How this will affect Luton and its neighbourhoods is as yet far from clear. As one Council officer commented, "No one is thinking about the 25,000 new homes planned for the outskirts. These are bound to affect High Town but it is not clear which way things will go." For the moment, High Town is struggling to cope with its present, let alone gearing up to deal with a much changed future. And, as one of the design consultants working on regenerating the neighbourhood identified, "High Town looks just like a northern mill town, like Accrington. But it is close to losing what it once had – a sustainable community."

Looking in from outside, policy makers and service providers describe community members as clinging to an outdated vision, "People still want to keep High Town Road as a thriving shopping street as it was in 60s and 70s. But high streets have disappeared because shopping habits aren't daily or local any more." "People want to preserve the image of the High Street. They don't understand that that isn't a function of local authority planning. The Council isn't responsible for providing shops or retail premises." Attempts to recapture this past are already seen as having failed, "Pedestrianisation won't work in High Town. The shops don't have enough of a pull." "When pedestrianisation was experimented with, after six months six big firms had already disappeared from the area and four or five more that were on the edge also went."

This situation is seen as aggravated by High Town's isolation from the town centre, "High Town is not well connected with the town centre." "The biggest barriers to regeneration are the railway line and the footbridge which cut High Town off. There is a difference in level because of the geography of the town and there is no immediate engineering solution." Nor is the neighbourhood helped by the station that stands between it and the town centre, "Luton station has been judged one of the three worst in the country." "The railway station is awful. The operators want to give it a lick of paint when Luton needs a new station." "The footbridge is a filthy eyesore. It's one of the reasons Luton was voted worst town in England." As one of the elected members judged, "High Town has great potential. The main reason it hasn't happened yet is poor accessibility from the town." "At the moment, High Town is difficult to get into. You either have to go under the railway or across it. There is that link but it is not attractive." "High Town is almost a village in itself. It was in the 1860s. It was severed by the railway. The bridge that links it now is a real eyesore."

On the other side of the railway, closer to the town centre, change is already envisaged, "At present the northern quarter of the town is dominated by the dreadful bus station car park. That is going to be demolished. That's one aspiration of the political leadership. You need to get rid of it to get increased pedestrian movement through the town." But it isn't clear that developments on its boundary will necessarily be to High Town's advantage, "Developments like Power Court [on the other side of the railway] will take the spotlight off High Town." And "The plan to build a new link road to Junction 10 is a concern. High Town will be even more cut-off."

Despite this, Community Development staff report that, amongst community members, "The relationship between High Town and the town centre was not an issue in the renewal plan. That is seen as an external issue." Instead, "People are concerned about car parking and congestion." "Although people are happy about the new flats, they are worried about the lack of car parking provision." This is because, "Most of the free places in High Town are taken by commuters and shoppers to the Arndale Centre." Even before being part of a growth area, "28,000 a day commute out of Luton to work in London and elsewhere. 29,500 commute into town. This generates a lot of traffic, far too much of it in cars." As the neighbourhood closest to the central railway station, High Town suffers from this, "The area can be grid-locked in the rush hour."

Policy-makers and service providers are also concerned about High Town's commercial area, "The industrial area is underused with some very poor buildings. The Council accepted some very cheap ones because it was keen to get businesses into there." "I am opposed to reallocating [commercial] land for housing. I'd prefer to see main employment uses in High Town, close to the town centre." Instead "We are likely to see the area of poorest quality retained for employment and the highest quality given over to residential. I think it should be the other way round." However, it has not proved easy to kick start renewal of existing business and commercial properties, "The project to refurbish shops had to offer a 90% grant to get it off the ground. This goes back to the value of property. People don't see value in commercial properties but everywhere else." It is a different story with residential properties, "There is a very high demand for housing improvement grants. Two years to get on the waiting list and then two years to get to the front." Rather than improve their commercial properties, owners are waiting for the land to be rezoned for residential use.

Informed community members are concerned about the direction in which High Town is being developed, "PPG3 is driving a 24-hour economy. Our town centre is very small and this is affecting High Town. Everything is turning into student accommodation. People are moving to being short term. Everything is fluid. And that is impacting on the schools which have falling rolls." "Planning policy is encouraging higher density and this is cramming people in and creating slums of the future." "The Council is encouraging high density development when High Town is trying to regenerate. This is not going to improve the quality of life of people in High Town" "They are building on postage stamps. I'm sure that this wasn't what Prescott meant. I'm sure he meant big 55 acre sites like Vauxhalls. But we are doing it in people's back gardens." "They are converting old hat factories into multiple occupancy for 4 or 5 bedsits. That's not quality stuff, it's just cramming.

And, as community members remind you, this is happening, "in one of only two remaining conservation areas in the town." The concern here is that densification is being achieved at the expense of quality of life, "My vision is that new development will be slums because you are cramming people. And, unless you manage it right, you'll get accommodation crammed, and streets crammed, because of all the traffic." "Prescott and his pals are saying we must have roofs, more roofs, But what we are trying to do in High Town is improve people's quality of life." And this is before the impact of being in a growth area is felt, "This will affect Luton terribly.

Economy and education

From the vantage point of GO-East, the history of Luton's problems is easily listed, "Luton has suffered decline in its main employer, the motor industry, and has areas of overcrowding, poor private housing and long council waiting lists." "Luton is characterised by poor educational attainment and has a large black market economy."

For local policy-makers attempting to free the town from these shackles, new concerns continue to arise and have to be tackled, "Aircraft engineering is going to be a big pull in the future." Unfortunately, "Luton University doesn't have a long-term vision to what sectors it should be going into. It's aiming at Creative and Media because we are in the golden triangle (London, A1, M1, M40). But there is a big gap on the engineering side." As one elected member commented, "The University has reduced its science and engineering base and are concentrating on Media and IT. I'm not sure this is best for the town. " The new fear is that "We won't be able to deliver the trained people needed for the new emerging industries". This is compounded by other factors, "The pull of London raises the issue of commuting. So there are issues of both the number and the types of jobs that are needed locally." As a result, "There is too much uncertainty about growth and the economic future of the town".

In the Local Plan, "High Town Road was restricted to retail shops. But the area was suffering so badly that the Council let wholesalers come in at the lower end of the market." Subsequently, "there has been a policy to allow other uses in High Town Road – restaurants, coffee bars, solicitors and estate agents". From the Council's perspective, "The trouble is that people still see the hope value of their premises rather than the real value. So the ground floors in High Town Road are in shops but businesses come and go quickly. The real value is on the upper floors which are used for residential purposes." "We are having to confront the problem that in High Town demand for commercial land is low whereas demand for residential is high." Because of this, "Owners are letting land and property run down in the hope that they will be redesignated for residential use. Commercial land is only worth £350k, residential over £1m."

The Council see itself as being faced by a conundrum, "The question in the industrial area is, if the rents are low, why aren't businesses moving back in." Two answers are offered, "All the ingredients are there for private sector improvement to take off but it hasn't happened. Partly it is a legacy of the property recession. In Luton, it has taken a long time for areas to come out of recession." "It's because of the hope value of the owners who are asking too high a rent. They'd rather keep them empty for residential development." Design consultants see a need to move High Town's commercial activities up the value chain, "The industrial area doesn't need firms that hire out JCBs. The

employment opportunities are too low there. Instead you need more and better jobs created." And they see grounds for hope here, "The consultation process has identified that there are negative feelings about High Town and Luton. But the economic analysis [conducted for High Town's master planning] has discovered that there are all sorts of interesting things happening that weren't necessarily being recognised."

Some of the community members who can remember back that far trace High Town's decline back 30 years, "Any good shops High Town did have went amiss when the Arndale Centre was built in the 70s. Then, when shopkeepers retired, they sold their shops and there was a rapid decline in the variety. Wholesalers came in and bought things up." "If I were in business, I wouldn't have a shop on High Town Road. There's no profit to be made there." "There is nothing to draw people in. No specialised shops." Others locate the decline in the broader local economy, "The community declined when jobs became so poor in the area." And there is concern that rezoning land use in the neighbourhood could make its social and economic problems worse, "The area would turn into commuter land, with no community feel about it, if the commercial property was demolished for housing." "The fear is that, if High Town is rezoned for housing, that firms will relocate to industrial units on the outskirts and people will lose jobs here."

Process and leadership

Regeneration needs external funding. But as policy makers signal, even when this has been won, it brings its own problems, "The SRB/Objective 2 programme totalled £15m. That is a huge management task." In addition, "Concentrating on managing a relatively large sum of money, like SRB/Objective 2, means you lose track of the wider picture." "Not all that was identified in the 2000 plan has been achieved. That will be carried forward into the 2005 plan." And, "If we look at the size of the neighbourhood renewal agenda, then although the budgets are large, they are actually small in terms of really changing things." "Community engagement can only happen with external funding. If the Council wants real community-based decision-making, it will need three times the current amount of resourcing on a regular basis." "Providing neighbourhood renewal workers is a costly process" and "the Council has probably seriously under-estimated the cost and effort needed to engage with the community."

There is also the problem of what to do when external funding runs out. As the design consultants noted, "At consultation meetings you hear, 'But who is going to pay for all of this?' So High Town is up for the 21st century while hanging on to its 19th century roots? But there is no big pot of money on Luton's doorstep to do this." Policy makers understand this dilemma, "We don't have oodles of money for the regeneration of High Town. Even what we have is soon going to run out. But how to access funds to finance capital schemes, we currently don't know. What renaissance and regional funds there will be is currently unknown." Community members share this concern about the lack of continuity and the pump-priming nature of external funding, "There is no follow-through on SRB-funded community-based projects. They can never be self-sufficient. Units that tackle social exclusion need funding. You can't expect young people to pay. If it costs, they won't come."

So, as both outside decision-makers and community members recognise, "The real problem with High Town is how to get serious inward investment." "High Town's problem is that it needs Housing Market Renewal money like is being put into the North. But that kind of money is not available in Luton." The Council has already been advised by its design consultants that "money for implementing a lot of the development in the town centre will have to come straight from private developers." But this is also likely to be the case for regenerating High Town. How this is going to be achieved is by no means obvious.

Luton has already suffered from its press and TV coverage. Policy-makers acknowledge that this has been compounded by past promotional campaigns, "We had a 'Luton's looking up' campaign. And the problem was that the schemes were over-hyped. People became very concerned about that. So we have to be very careful what we say." Now instead Luton could be swamped by too much too soon, "There may be so many

simultaneous capital projects that it might seriously disrupt the town." "There is too much change and growth in too short a time." Community members can share this concern, "It is difficult to keep up with all the development that is going on. And it is impossible to see how one thing will impinge on another." This may be a novel position, In the past, "Development took too long. The Capability Green Business Park has taken 20 years to get going."

This raises concerns about whether Luton has the capacity to cope, either as a Council or at the neighbourhood level. "One of the problems is if you talk to the Chief Executive and the chief officers about the environment, they think you mean street cleaning." "It is difficult to sustain community engagement with a loose network of volunteers. You need to co-ordinate and make sense of this." "Community workers have done what they can to engage with the community but it isn't easy. The Council lacks development workers with the right skills." Service providers worry about a lack of capacity for effective community engagement, "The Council cannot expect the community to respond in terms it can deal with easily. It needs to adapt both its language and its processes." "The Council has to start from the premise that the community has the capacity to engage. What it needs is the right attitude." "Having one neighbourhood worker in post is the minimum engine room you need to drive the neighbourhood agenda forward." In 1999, "the Council failed to get funding for regeneration because the regeneration service and community development were not working together with the same agenda. Now there is a co-ordinated neighbourhood renewal agenda." Despite this and despite the existing mechanisms for consultation, there remains a concern that, "There is a lack of responsiveness in the Council, at the whole systems level, to the needs of neighbourhoods." "Community engagement can be made to work if agencies are responsive to the deliberative process."

At the neighbourhood level, service providers identify that, "The biggest barrier is engaging the community. People need to take greater ownership and more people need to get involved in looking after their environment." At present, not all stakeholder groups have been successfully engaged, "Landlords haven't had a voice in community engagement to date." "There aren't any developers or business people taking a lead in the regeneration of High Town." "Consultation needs to be on-going or people lose interest." But there is a fine path to tread here since, "Over the past year, the community has been bombarded with consultation exercises and they are suffering from consultation fatigue." This concern is shared by community members, "There is so much consultation going on that the Regeneration Department are doing – so many going on at the same time involving High Town people. People have been consulted for a good 6 or 7 months on different schemes." And this has been compounded by how the consultation has been conducted, "One of the problems with consultations is that the consultants are not speaking to each other. There's not enough joining up."

Service providers understand that community members have to be shown easy wins earlier to encourage them to continue to commit. Otherwise, as a community member explains, "People go to one or two consultations and then they don't bother. And so people don't have a great enough input." Instead, as service providers concede, poor management of the regeneration process in High Town Road has had the opposite effect, "The shop owners are very angry about how the street improvements on High Town Road were mismanaged. They were angry about their loss of trade over Christmas and the reduction of on-street parking." "You need to get some pace into the street improvements in High Town Road. Instead traders have chaos outside their door. The way it is occurring in High Town, it is just compounding the problem."

Community members are also concerned about how the Council is managing the regeneration of High Town. They too deplore the extended period for undertaking the environmental improvements to the shopping street, "The problem with the street improvements was the result of poor consultation. People just couldn't understand what was being said. And, anyway, the Council has changed it. It was going to be paviours all the way down. Now it is going to be blacktop. They say it is because there isn't enough money. But the whole of High Town has been like that. Everything that has been done has

been spoilt for a ha'p'orth of tar." This mis-management is a repeated refrain, "Ideas that start well, like the Welbeck Centre for youth and training, that is now closed because it doesn't have any staff, will depress people." "Projects get delayed or miss-timed. That is the Council's fault." "There have been too many promises that have never materialised. Money has been lost to the community because of inaction during the allotted time." But these examples are also seen as symptomatic of poor local governance.

Community members feel that the Council consults them about regeneration of their neighbourhood but that they are not in control of the outcomes, "We have been helped by having an Area Committee, that has helped engagement. So we have consulted but the Council doesn't delegate decision-making." "But if you ask when is decision-making going to be devolved to the Area Committee and Area Forum, the Council runs like chickens. No, they say, we've got other priorities." "In High Town, there are lots of consultations but I feel that essentially they don't make decisions. The Council does and tells us about it afterwards." At worst, community members think that their expressed wishes are simply over-ridden, "I have talked, worked, laughed and cried with people in this area for many years. I have seen terrible decisions taken by the Council which it has then reversed." "The decision of the Council, against the majority of people's wishes, to locate the Noah Centre in the area will not help regeneration." "Really the consultations are a problem of local governance. The truth is that it's the Executive that decides."

Elected members, senior policy makers and service providers remain to be convinced that Luton has the quality of leadership required to drive effective regeneration on a scale commensurate to its place in a growth area. "If you are going to do a Birmingham in city centre regeneration, you have to have the courage to say no." "There have been too many instances in the past where the Council has just rolled over to placate business interests and people have taken liberties." "Because industry didn't want to come to Luton, the Council accepted people regardless of what they were offering. Now we have a legacy of poor quality buildings. So design quality is seen as a pressing issue for the town, "Luton is too keen to have development to improve the quality of designs. We need to be strong enough to say no to proposals of poor quality." "In the last two years, the Council has given permission for residential use and the developer has bought the site cheaply and walked away. Neither the Council nor local people have benefited from any planning gain." "One problem is elected members. They wouldn't understand what good design is if it hit them in the middle of their foreheads." But local government officers are seen as part of the problem too. As an elected member commented, "One of Luton's problems is the quality and lack of vision of those in charge of landscaping in the town." There are new capabilities that have to be developed here, of the sort CABE is established to nurture, "Council managers need to be able to look at the physical appearance of a place and understand how it contributes to the benefit of the area".

Community members are also concerned about the quality of leadership being displayed in the regeneration of their neighbourhood, "High Town has suffered because of the Council's inaction and inappropriate decisions". The siting of the Noah Centre is seen as indicative of Council's inability to engage its citizens successfully in deliberative decision-making, "There are places more suited to dealing with drinking and drug dependency than High Town. But the leader of the Council was determined to put it here and he got his way."

The Urban Futures game

Aspirations

Wall charts 1 and 2 show the results of the first part of the game. Each dot represents an aspiration prioritized by one of the participants. At first glance the spread of aspirations in the two towns looks similar. There are dots in all the columns which means that there is a wide range of priorities in both towns. This complexity reflects what we learnt from the interviews – there are many ideas about regenerating these places and different people value different things.

Nevertheless there are differences between the two towns. In Burnley the focus is on the Economy and Education columns, while in Luton it is on Community, Infrastructure and Process.

There are also clear areas of agreement and disagreement between different interest groups. We have lumped policy makers and providers together since, unlike community members, these stakeholders have a professional rather than personal interest in the neighbourhoods concerned.

In Burnley everyone agrees that regeneration depends on the regional economy. Policy makers/providers then choose aspirations that describe current policy initiatives, while residents of Burnley Wood seem to be thinking more holistically.

In contrast, in Luton policy makers/providers are thinking more broadly in choosing to focus on the neighbourhood/town link and on continuity, while the community members choose issues closer to home that will improve the prospects of High Town.

Wall chart 1

Burnley

		Policy makers Providers	Community
1	Burnley's role in the regional economy has to be the major driving force		
2	Regenerate neighbourhoods to benefit whole town not just existing residents		
3	Provide and market a new identity for the town that people can take pride in		
4	Greater university provision to attract and retain university students		
5	Insist on adaptable high quality housing using renewable energy		

Wall chart 2

Luton

		Policy makers Providers	Community
1	Initiatives need to continue, but with real muscle, for 10 or 20 years.		
2	There is a need for a better natural link between High Town and the centre.		
3	We need to get people into High Town to spend money here.		
4	We need a greater variety of properties to enable people to bring up a family.		
5	The basic need is for a place from which to organise.		

Concerns

As one might expect from the diversity of aspirations given priority, wall charts 3 and 4 indicate widespread concerns about regeneration. In Burnley the overriding concern is about the economy while in Luton the primary focus is on infrastructure and the environment. This is not surprising. Burnley has a long history of false dawns and Luton, as Pevsner noted, has a tradition of poor architecture.

In Burnley, as one might expect, both sides are concerned that the town will still be struggling in 20 years' time. In sharp contrast though, policy makers/providers are more concerned about introducing more aspiring households into the neighbourhood and raising the expectations of those who already live there, while community members are more concerned about the lack of vision and whether the current Pathfinder programme, with its focus on housing market renewal, stands any chance of working.

In Luton, policy makers/providers are most concerned about High Town's physical and social isolation. They think that people hark back to the past rather than look positively to the future. People in the community put a more positive spin on this. They want a thriving neighbourhood with local shops where people take an active role in the community. Residents are also more concerned about quality of life and worried about increasing density, which they see as cramming.

In summary, there are significant areas of agreement in both towns. The differences revolve around to what extent the existing community and existing residents are to be protected, and in particular, in Burnley, about the effectiveness of demolition as a regeneration mechanism.

Wall chart 3

Burnley

		Policy makers Providers	Community
1	In 20 years time Burnley may still be struggling because the town has no economic reason to exist		
2	We need to get back to the community owning and tackling their own problems		
3	The town is working class with low expectations and poor education		
4	Doing something to housing won't fix the economy		
5	To manage the process of transition successfully you need a vision to communicate to people		

Wall chart 4

Luton

		Policy makers Providers	Community
1	The key issue in High Town its relationship to town centre and railway.		
2	People aspire to what it was like 20 or 30 years ago, but you can't go back.		
3	People want High Town Road to be a thriving shopping street.		
4	The biggest barrier is engaging the community. People need to get involved in looking after their environment.		
5	There's lots of consultation, but the council decides and tells us afterwards.		

Options

At the workshops people were asked to assess the options for regenerating towns and neighbourhoods like theirs over the next 10 to 20 years. Despite the abstract nature of the options on offer, none of participants had problems doing so.

What is immediately striking in wall charts 5 and 6 is that no single option is favoured in either town. This means that the preferred solution is likely to be a package of measures. The danger of course is that the plan ends up as a mish-mash of ideas trying to satisfy everyone.

In both towns all interest groups marginally prefer Option 3 *Small business incubator*. This obviously reflects their focus on education and economy. They also like Option 1 *Commuter village* that would exploit each town's relatively cheap housing and proximity to a major conurbation.

Beyond this there are some differences. In Burnley, policy makers/providers prefer Option 4 *Design-led regeneration* while the community is prepared to consider Option 2 *Urban wood*. In Luton, perhaps because of the town's poor record in this area, both community members also prioritise Option 4 *Design-led regeneration*. A new footbridge, crossing the canal in the case of Burnley and the railway in Luton, was mentioned at both workshops as an example of a *Design-led* intervention.

At both workshops, the consultants responsible for the, as yet unfinished, master plans for each neighbourhood were very interested in and drew on these outcomes.

Wall chart 5

Burnley

	Policy makers Providers	Community
Option 1 Commuter village	3rd	2nd
Option 2 Urban wood	–	3rd
Option 3 Small business incubator	1st	1st
Option 4 Design-led regeneration	2nd	–

Wall chart 6

Luton

	Policy makers Providers	Community
Option 1 Commuter village	2nd	3rd
Option 2 Urban wood	–	–
Option 3 Small business incubator	1st	1st
Option 4 Design-led regeneration	3rd	2nd

Success criteria

The final exercise at the workshops considered the success factors people would use to measure whether change has been effective in 10 or 20 years' time.

Although there are differences between the two towns, strikingly there is much more consensus about success criteria, in other words about where people want to get to, than about aspirations and concerns.

In Burnley the focus is on the Education, Economy and Process columns, while in Luton the focus is on Community and Economy.

In Burnley both interest groups focus on educational attainment and the socio-economic status of future inhabitants. In Luton both groups choose quality of life issues and pride in the town.

The game identified real opportunities here for consensus building. From this it would be possible to build an agreed platform about the way forward and also identify areas of conflict that need to be harnessed positively to bring about successful regeneration.

Burnley

		Policy makers Providers	Community
1	Level of educational attainment in comparison to rest of country		
2	Socio-economic status of population (especially percentage of middle class)		
3	After short term funding disappears, no void left in capacity to continue to deliver regeneration		

Luton

		Policy makers Providers	Community
1	Range and quality of business, commercial and leisure activities		
2	Level of pride shown in neighbourhood/town		
3	State of community relations, social cohesion and racism		
4	Range and quality of specialist shops		

The results of the workshop show both the strength of options as a futures technique and the practical utility of the game-based exercises built around them. Amongst the stakeholders present at the workshop a clear convergence began to emerge about the most appropriate future for High Town. This convergence could be used as a platform on which to build a wider consensus between policy-makers, service providers and community members.

Lessons for elsewhere

There is a strong human propensity towards growth. We associate growth with advance and progress. We desire to reach higher and further, to grow bigger and richer. We seem to find it psychologically more difficult to shrink. Yet both growth and contraction are merely different aspects of change that can be managed well or badly. It's possible to downsize successfully as it is to grow, it just needs a different strategy.

Abode, Harlow, Essex

Towns like Burnley and Luton and their way of life are vulnerable to change. What was once required is no longer necessary. Industrialisation and the flight from the land that gave birth to these towns left rural areas depopulated and abandoned. Yet affluence and the motorcar have now made the countryside highly desirable. One of the most potent of current 'ideal home' dreams is for a country cottage and a rural life-style. Yet the people who aspire to this village life will not be working in agriculture. Few people still earn their livelihood on the land. Most of these people will be working in local service industries or commuting near and far to jobs in towns. In a similar way small town life may become popular. The industrial past leaves a strong legacy in ex-manufacturing towns and the image of millwork and factories may be something that people can buy into without having actually to work at a loom or on an assembly line. Small towns offer a range of services and amenities and a life style that may become increasingly attractive to future families.

Towns like Burnley

Nowhere is the legacy of the industrial age expressed more strongly than in a Northern mill town like Burnley. The evidence of past enterprise and expansion, contrasts alarmingly with present decay and abandon. As one approaches the Calder Valley from the north, the chimneystacks and stonework form a strong impression on the mind. Everywhere one goes in the town there is evidence of past glory and present decline. Everywhere there is evidence that places change. And the response to this has been a flight of the young and the best, and inarticulate shock and resentment amongst the remaining townsfolk.

But things may change again, and places like Burnley, that are currently despised, may one day become popular. What is now rejected may one day become desirable. There is much to admire in the ways of life in a Northern mill town: a place of work and community, of trades and skills; a working class town and a working man's, and woman's, world; a place where people left school early to learn a trade; where apprenticeships and manual work were valued and where the technical college and the library were the twin hubs of self-improvement. It was a world of workmates and factory; of corner shops and back yard conversations; of the pub and chapel; of walks on the moors and day trips to Blackpool.

These days are gone, but who knows whether a nostalgia for this lost world might not create a new way of life that takes aspects of the old and melds them into a new dispensation. In the same way that hippies found Hebden Bridge and settled there in the sixties, might not a new generation find a haven in a place like Burnley. Might people buy into aspects of the life-style of mill towns, adopting the congenial without the drudgery and crippling danger of work in the mines and mills. The skills and technical know-how and the solidarity of close-knit communities have an attractive Quaker-like feel about them. One can imagine a fusion of new age environmentalism and down-to-earth practicality

producing something entirely new; a new philosophy that would find a home in a place like Burnley and a use for its abandoned buildings, a philosophy that would find value in traditions of work and community. These people might be makers of things – hand crafted furniture, metalwork, jewellery or art. They might be people wanting a simpler life-style away from the city rat race. For now Burnley must wait and its people endure. They must concentrate their efforts on defining what they value. They must demand better buildings, better connections with Manchester and a better life. They must fight apathy and trumpet the potential of the town with faith that new people will come and help them fashion a better future for their town.

Towns like Luton

Like Burnley, Luton has successively lost its main industries and its reason for being. First it was the hat industry and now its car manufacture. But towns like Luton are in an area of intense growth and re-invention. There is general agreement amongst those interviewed about what needs to be done to regenerate High Town. Three of the options we offered people were favoured: commuter village, small business incubator and design-led regeneration. Most believe that the neighbourhood suffers from being cut off from the centre of town and from not having enough people around during the day. So there is also a strong case for building a new footbridge linking High Town to Luton town centre. The main idea is to increase the footfall in the area through a combination of policies that promote local businesses, increase higher education provision in the area and improve the shops on High Town Road. People would like High Town to retain its mixed land use character. They like the idea of businesses, education and jobs near people's homes. They want to see their area revitalised, but not necessarily through gentrification nor a focus on housing. They don't want all the brown field sites to be used for new, high density apartments housing commuters who may have little allegiance to the locality.

There is also substantial support for measures that encourage families to locate in the neighbourhood and that enhance a sense of community by improving local amenities and reducing property crime and anti-social behaviour. People are broadly positive about the waves of new immigrants from Eastern Europe and West Africa who are setting up businesses, renovating shops and flats and bringing new energy into the neighbourhood. People are also very keen to improve the quality of the built environment. This means protecting and enhancing the open spaces, renovating old buildings with character or heritage value and, above all, promoting good design in new building, whether that be housing or non-domestic architecture.

Using 'futures techniques' to manage change

What this study has shown is that the use of futures techniques, in particular options, is a useful way of engaging policy makers/providers and the community in thinking about the longer term future of neighbourhoods and towns.

Options are a powerful way of engaging policy makers/providers and the community in thinking about the longer-term future of neighbourhoods and towns. They offer an early opportunity to explore possible futures and help people to make leaps of the imagination.

Options can be employed to clarify the range of choices that confront a community. They can be selected to give voice to all the types of stakeholder involved and illustrate the underlying motives and intentions, fears and aspirations of each of these groups, regardless of their current power to impose their own preferred solutions. For instance, options can be chosen so that they make explicit what is cherished in a locality and what is seen as expendable.

Options should be based on realistic but aspirational assumptions and tested against economic, social and environmental criteria to identify the option that performs robustly against all three criteria. Any option that performs well on some but badly on others should be viewed with suspicion.

Options can be used to test the viability of proposals over an extended period of time – for example, beyond the current generation handing over to the next. They can also be employed to expand the scale and the scope of what might be done. Any option preferred by stakeholders can be treated as a desired end state. Backcasting techniques can then be employed to identify what needs to happen for this desired future to be brought about successfully.

Finally stakeholders can use their judgement to make an impact assessment of the options. The key issues are: what timescale does the option operate over, can its implementation be phased, what are the costs and benefits, who bears these, and what might stop the option happening. In this way a probability ranking might be assigned to each option.

- Select options that illustrate the hard choices available
- Construct them so they give voice to all the stakeholders involved
- Look for options that perform robustly against a range of criteria
- Use them to extend the time scale and scope of what is being considered
- Treat preferred options as desired end states and use backcasting to identify how to reach them

People

People who live in towns like Burnley and Luton can find themselves trapped by feeling inferior, with low aspirations and expectations. In order to think of a better, brighter future, they need to break out of this trap. Those running regeneration initiatives can help them to transcend these limitations. Designers and community workers, in particular, have key roles to play here. But to do so, they have to act sensitively, starting from where people currently are and then moving them on supportively. They have to work actively to help people understand both how they can break free of current constraints and how they can realise their aspirations for something better.

Action: Use futures techniques, such as options, as an early opportunity for exploring possible futures. Options can help people to make imaginative leaps as well as to be clear about what their underlying motives and intentions are. Futures techniques can make these explicit before they become increasingly hidden behind more solid physical representations in master plans.

Housing

Solutions to housing problems lie elsewhere, not in housing alone. Regeneration initiatives have to create the conditions in which market solutions can operate sustainably, especially over time. No Government intervention can mobilise enough investment for long enough to replace the continuous effect of a buoyant local economy. Economic and social solutions are needed that effectively address jobs and crime, for instance, as well as housing renewal. Where Government does intervene, its aim should be to create conditions where individuals and groups are willing to invest in properties they own or occupy in accordance with their own social aspirations.

Action: Select options that make clear the range of different economic, social and environmental choices that confront a community. When choosing between options, explore how each would contribute to solving the specific economic, social and environmental problems that confront each type of stakeholder that makes up the community.

Community

Communities are made up of many different types of stakeholder. Consultation techniques have to try to give a voice to each of these. Some stakeholders are more difficult than others to enrol into consultation. The business community and absentee landlords appear to be particularly difficult. Without their engagement, regeneration plans can be thwarted or seriously derailed. Other types of stakeholder may be easier to enrol but they are also easy to disillusion and alienate if their choices are ignored or over-ridden.

Action: Use consultation techniques that give voice to all the types of stakeholder involved. Select options that illustrate the underlying motives and intentions, fears and aspirations of each of these groups, regardless of their current power to impose their own preferred solutions.

Infrastructure

Slowly, over time, the built environment becomes a physical embodiment of the character of a community or neighbourhood. Buildings, streets, open spaces and the other facilities come to stand for not just the spirit of a place but of the community that inhabits it. Destruction of a built environment is often interpreted as a direct attack on the community that occupies it. It is comparatively easy to clear away one built environment and replace it with another. It is hugely more difficult to invest the replacement with the characteristics that a community will cherish and care for.

Action: Use consultation techniques to elicit what is cherished in a locality and what is seen as expendable. Employ options that make explicit what happens when cherished elements are maintained or swept away in the name of progress.

Economy

Each town needs a clear economic rationale, a clear economic reason for its continued existence. When one rationale disappears, not only does the economy decline, but social disintegration also occurs - especially when a lack of well paid jobs leads to poverty. Any regeneration initiative has to respond to economic and social imperatives as well as caring for or improving the physical attributes of a place.

Action: Options need to be based on realistic but aspirational assumptions. All options should be tested against economic, social and environmental criteria. Look for the option that performs robustly against all these criteria. Be suspicious of any option that performs well on some but badly on others.

Education

Education needs to extend beyond the qualifications and skills sets necessary to keep the local economy buoyant. It has to include building up the capacity – the social capital – of stakeholders in the local community to thrive in the face of their current and foreseeable circumstances.

Action: When options are tested against each other, one of the tests applied should be – what is the capacity of each set of existing or proposed new stakeholders to thrive in the new set of circumstances that the option will usher in.

Funding

Funding regimes have a critical impact on regeneration initiatives. They strongly constrain what can and cannot be done. Funding regimes do not necessarily operate in the best interest of sustainability – either of an existing community in a renewed neighbourhood or any replacement proposed. The common focus on initial capital funding of physical fabric and facilities, as opposed to longer-term revenue costs of operation and use, threaten the continued viability of a proposal, especially where it fails to address underlying social or economic problems.

Action: Use futures techniques to test the continued viability of proposals over an extended period of time – for example, beyond the current generation handing over to the next. When choosing between options, select those that are robust against social, economic and environmental criteria not only under current circumstances but against a range of what is foreseeable in the future.

Regeneration process

There are real differences between regeneration initiatives that seek to benefit the existing community in a particular neighbourhood and those that seek to renew a specific area for the benefit of a whole town. Those who fund and run regeneration initiatives have to be open with community stakeholders about which of these two objectives is being pursued.

Action: Use options as a front-end technique for illustrating these two quite different intentions. Options can be used to clarify the range of hard choices available and the social, economic and environmental goals that drive these and their consequences.

Leadership

Leadership is a critical function in regeneration initiatives. Good leadership, especially that which is capable of drawing contributions effectively from different types of stakeholder, is clearly very difficult to find. Small towns may find this particularly hard. They may only have a very small pool of local talent on which to draw. Expertise parachuted in from outside runs the risk of lacking sensitivity to local circumstances and leaving an unfillable void when it leaves just as rapidly. Leadership is particularly critical for the development of vision. Small towns may have low aspirations and expectations, especially if they have witnessed earlier false dawns. Most forward thinking is not only parochial but operates over a very short time scale, often not much more than the life of the next round of funding.

Action: Use futures techniques to expand not just the time horizon being contemplated but the scale and the scope of what needs to be done. Treat the selected option as a desired end state. Then employ backcasting techniques to identify what needs to be put in place, by when, for the desired future to be brought about successfully.

Conclusions

Futures methods are largely absent from the toolbox currently being used for urban regeneration and neighbourhood renewal. Yet their effective use could help to mitigate many of the shortcomings identified in the Urban Futures study.

The use of cards to represent stakeholders' aspirations and concerns makes sorting and prioritising them fun. But the cards are also democratic. They mean that everybody's voice is brought to the table, anonymously, for joint consideration. Displaying participants' individual choices via wall charts is a good way of making opinions transparent, and aggregating these helps to identify shared and unshared preferences. This aids consensus-building as well as signposting areas of conflict that have to be managed positively.

Using a range of options prevents participants rushing to a 'lowest common denominator' shared vision. Options help keep the choices available open for longer. They can also clarify the goals that lie behind these choices and the means of achieving them. And this can happen before goals become buried beneath physical proposals in master plans and before funding begins.

Options can also help stakeholders to break free of short-termism and grapple with a longer-term view of what could happen. They can help untangle the complexity of choices and delivery mechanisms – holding them up for comparison, weighing them against each other.

As a result, options are a useful mechanism for building consensus and for harnessing conflicts so that they can be exploited positively. If this clarity is absent and plans push ahead without stakeholder support, then there is a strong chance that a regeneration programme will fail.

If carefully selected, options can be used to explore innovative solutions and the front-end contribution from developers currently absent in both towns. And finally, in line with Building Futures' remit, options can be used to raise awareness of the issue of design quality that has yet to become part of the general currency for negotiating urban futures.

Taken together, the aspirations, concerns, options and success criteria provided workshop participants with a strong but sensitive framework within which to explore possible futures for their town and neighbourhood. Playing the Urban Futures game showed participants in both towns that, despite their widely differing interests, they were able to think constructively about the future if presented with a meaningful framework for explicit and open decision-making.

In both Burnley and Luton the game helped people from different sides of the regeneration process – policy makers, providers and members of the community – to explore their aspirations and concerns and to discuss different options for the future in a positive and constructive way. And the workshop results clearly demonstrate how a broader shared platform for managing change could be built for urban regeneration and neighbourhood renewal in both of the case study towns.

Comparing two towns proved to be very helpful in this study. The process of identifying similarities and differences between the two neighbourhoods and comparing the aspirations and concerns of the different interest groups was most rewarding. This idea of twinning might be a productive idea for other places wanting to use futures techniques. The way it might work is for towns to choose a twin of similar size but of quite different character and for them each to exchange information and ideas.

Appendix: Funding regimes

There is now a bewildering array of mechanisms for funding different aspects of urban regeneration and neighbourhood renewal in England. Each of these is focused on tackling slightly different problems. Understanding these nuances is critical because large sums are at stake. For instance, central government support for implementing its Sustainable Communities Plan now amounts to £38 billion over the 5 years from 2003/04 to 2007/08. Significant money has also been available from the European Union for tackling areas of deprivation. Three funding mechanisms are particularly relevant to this study:

- Housing Market Renewal
- The Single Regeneration Budget
- EU Structural Funds: Objective 2 Status.

Housing Market Renewal (HMR)

The Government's 2002 Spending Review identified the need for long term intervention into areas with housing market failure. These are areas with large-scale housing abandonment and large areas of empty or hard-to-let stock. Nine Pathfinder areas were established in 2002. Significant Government funding has already been allocated to these Pathfinders. Further increased funding is planned. £450 million has been allocated for 2007/08, three times the amount granted in 2004/05. Burnley is part of a Pathfinder. Called ELEVATE, it covers East Lancashire. Burnley Wood, the case study neighbourhood for Burnley, is one of three Neighbourhood Action Areas in the town receiving funding under HMR.

The Single Regeneration Budget (SRB)

The SRB began in 1994. It brought together a number of programmes from several Government departments with the aim of simplifying and streamlining the assistance available for regeneration. The SRB provides resources to support regeneration initiatives in England carried out by local regeneration partnerships. Its priority is to enhance the quality of life of local people in areas of need by reducing the gap between deprived and other areas, and between different groups. It supports initiatives that build on best practice and represent good value for money. The SRB is expected to involve over £23 billion from all sources of funding. High Town, the case study neighbourhood in Luton, is in receipt of SRB funding.

Objective 2 Status

EU Structural Funds are the European Union's main instruments for supporting social and economic restructuring across the Union. They account for over a third of the European Union budget. The UK's allocation from the Structural Funds for the period 2000 - 2006 is over £10 billion. A region may have access to one or more of the four structural funds, depending whether it has Objective 1 or 2 status. Objective 2 aims to support the economic and social conversion of areas facing structural difficulties. Areas qualify for Objective 2 under four strands - industrial, rural, urban and fisheries. This Objective covers nearly fourteen million people in the UK. High Town, the case study neighbourhood in Luton, is in receipt of Objective 2 funding.

Problem definition

These funding mechanisms display shared characteristics.

Competitive

Funding mechanisms are competitive. They pitch region against region, locality against locality, one neighbourhood against another. And so there have to be losers as well as winners. To win, bidders have to demonstrate both their worthiness in terms of the levels of deprivation and disadvantage they suffer and the excellence of their proposals for dealing with them.

Performance-orientated

Typically, funding comes in stages and can be withdrawn for under-performance. Those in receipt of funding have to perform quickly and have to demonstrate that they are being successful in order to win release of follow-up stages of funding.

Time-limited

Funds are typically time-limited. Although some are spread over long time-scales, they are typically finite. Follow-on replacement mechanisms or regimes are not necessarily known during their lifetimes.

Capital investment-focused

They may also be focused on paying for capital investments whose continued revenue costs will have to be borne by other sources.

Failure-driven

Housing market renewal funding mechanisms typically define the problem as one of market failure rather than as inappropriate under public funding. Funding is seen as being required to intervene in the market in order to bring about adjustments. Once these adjustments have been made, government intervention is no longer required and so the adjusted market can be left to operate without the need of further funding.

Public-private partnerships

Despite the past failure of the market, present interventions as well as successful operation of the market in the future are seen as critically dependent on building effective partnerships between the public and private sectors. This may even extend towards expectations about some form of matched funding.

Community engagement

Successful delivery of interventions is often seen as dependent on effective engagement with community stakeholders. This may simply take the form of consultation. It may extend beyond this to capacity building so that a community can survive more effectively once interventionist funding and outside support is withdrawn. Typically it does not extend as far as community members being involved in deliberative decision-making about what should happen in their communities.

These characteristics frame urban regeneration and neighbourhood renewal in England at present as a failure-driven, public sector-led initiative, dependent on short term funding from central government or the EU. Currently regeneration initiatives do not look for solutions that lie beyond short-term rectifying of current market deficiencies.

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