

Urban regeneration: Success or failure?

Written by Christopher Mawdsley
with Irmani Darlington

The leader of Manchester City Council, **Cllr Richard Leese**, opened the day's discussion with an observation that urban regeneration is an immense task and one that is often underestimated in terms of what needs to be accomplished. In outlining 'urban regeneration in a major city' Cllr Leese painted a picture of just how complex and difficult regeneration activity actually is.

Infrastructure in cities like Manchester has suffered from long periods of decline exacerbated by decades of under investment. The aim of urban regeneration has to be as much about reversing this trend, and the culture that urban areas are bad. Cllr Leese argued that 'urban regeneration has ... become a cultural task' as people have come to believe decline is the norm and little change can be expected. The two key lessons to take away are 'what we do has to be deliverable' and has to be 'sustainable in the long term'. As Cllr Leese quite rightly points out 'regeneration is a fragile thing, the successes are fragile and what they need is nurturing and supporting'.

Taking forward the urban regeneration agenda

Louise Ellman MP reflected how, in 1997, the creation of the Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) was indicative of the Government's approach to urban regeneration. In 2001 Labour moved to reject this approach through the removal of the environment portfolio and created the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR). Developments in May 2002 saw further changes to how urban regeneration will be approached for the remainder of Labour's second term when the links between transport and local government and the regions were broken.

Louise Ellman argued that if we are to learn anything from the past decade then it must be that services need to be brought back together. The 'impact if you look individually at the issues' is inadequate. It requires a joined-up



Tony Durrant (right), CEMVO, in discussion with a delegate

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approach to all the individual elements that make up regeneration. Transport does matter for the regeneration of our towns and cities, so that certain areas are not left at the periphery to become economically marginalised. Transport has to be part of a holistic regeneration programme.

Turning to the question of success or failure, Louise Ellman advocated a balanced approach. While the statistical approach remained important, the perceptions and feelings of the people counted just as much. Do people think they are involved? Do they think things have changed? Government is looking at both these areas, but methods of measurement do not bring success. Three specific practical actions were outlined as to how success can be achieved:

- through making power and resources work
- by pioneering new ways of looking at economic development
- by pushing the powers to the limits.

David Liston-Jones from the Urban Policy Unit, charted the evolution of urban policy from its beginning in 1968 with the Urban Programme, through to 1997, and how the emphasis of urban policy had changed from inner cities to focusing on the wider urban area. In June 1999 the Urban Task Force chaired by Lord Rogers published its report *Towards an Urban Renaissance*. This was the first real development on the urban policy agenda from the Labour Government. The report identified the key drivers of urban renaissance: information technology, ecology, and social transformation. These laid the foundations for the Urban White Paper *Our Towns and Cities: The Future Delivering an Urban Renaissance* in November 2000.

David Liston-Jones turned his attention to the issues at the fore of the urban policy agenda. Competitiveness and cohesion, a new phrase to describe 'economically competitive and socially cohesive' towns and cities. Core Cities, of which there are eight, is a concept looking at the role core cities play in creating regions and how those regions can compete with comparable regions

around Europe. Liveability refers to the way in which measures can be taken to improve the environment. Housing, specifically demand and availability, remains high on the agenda providing a link between the broader urban policy agenda and neighbourhood renewal.

Since 1997 urban policy and the neighbourhood renewal agenda have had a major impact on tackling deprivation. Structural changes – the development of the Urban Policy Unit and the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit and coordinating bodies (urban sounding board), plus extensive organisational changes at the local (LSPs) and the regional (RDAs) levels – have taken place. Monitoring is another area where urban policy has altered with the development of key indicators for urban analysis at the heart of the change.

Changes in the last four years:

- 'mainstreaming' rather than area-based initiatives
- broader focus on towns, cities, regions
- neighbourhood approach
- design, public space
- new language: cohesion, liveability, renaissance.

Things that stayed the same:

- emphasis on partnership
- comprehensive approach across housing, jobs, crime etc
- importance of involvement of local people.

From strategy to delivery: regional and local perspectives

Baron Isherwood, North West Development Agency, introduced the session by questioning if we have moved too far away from communities. The trick is to understand spatial implications and how they relate to the individual

communities. He strongly advocated the need for a comprehensive and holistic approach to regeneration.

Paul Evans, of the London Borough of Southwark, remarked that the success or failure of regeneration cannot be measured as a single shot. The key to urban regeneration is in the '*permanent management of the processes*' and getting regeneration programmes towards their objectives.

In analysing the policy framework, Paul Evans claimed there is a '*fair degree of coherence*' across the policy arena yet contradictions are still visible; neither does urban policy link as smoothly with other policy areas. He expressed the view that Government is not nearly as influential as it thinks it is.

Cllr Eric Ollerenshaw based his presentation on a report recently published by the Greater London Authority's Economic Development Committee. The report reviewed '*the progress of publicly funded regeneration schemes across London as a whole*'. The conclusion it came to was '*regeneration does work, what we are trying to do on a regional level is to make it work a bit better*'. The picture isn't all rosy, difficulties still inhibit regeneration efforts.

While Government rhetoric is about joined-up approaches and rationalisation, the incoherent introduction of new initiatives delivers complexity and confusion. Unrealistic expectations are also being placed on communities to become involved in the partnership process so inhibiting the regeneration effort.

Measurement of previous regeneration programmes proved to be a concern. Only minimal evaluation work has been undertaken and what does exist is unreliable. Cllr Ollerenshaw argued that '*if all this effort is being put in to outputs, if they aren't going to be used and carried out and be robust, then what is the point?*' Gaps existing in the information means diminished value-for-money in deprived areas.

Bob Colenutt outlined the structure and the delivery of the local urban regeneration programme in the London Borough of Haringey. He spoke of linking the broader regeneration programme into the neighbourhood renewal agenda and the challenges this presents.

The first set of challenges is structural in nature, with concern that *'targeting small areas may not drive strategic change'*. This is often due to a neighbourhood's lack of control over local services – a situation that is unlikely to be resolved because of the council's ambivalence on devolving power down to the neighbourhoods.

The second set of challenges refers to the delivery mechanisms on the front line. Bob Colenutt suggested that attempting to join up services on the front line would be a *'huge challenge'*, and one not made easier by the under funding the services have endured over a long period. Community partnership building was recognised as complex and controversial. The most difficult challenge is that poverty and transience are problems beyond the influence of neighbourhood renewal.

Integration between strategic regeneration and neighbourhood renewal is imperative if it is to succeed. Alongside this, a radical change in the funding of front line services, and the resolution of the dilemma over devolution or centralisation needs to be addressed. Underpinning these actions is continuous community development.

Jenny Lynn spoke of regeneration from a Yorkshire perspective, asking just how much has changed since 1997. Starting upbeat she noted how there has been economic improvement in the region as a whole. GDP has been rising and at the same time Leeds continues to gain prominence alongside the development of the Humber Trade Zone. Royd's Regeneration was the first community organisation to be an accountable body for its own SRB scheme; this was held up as an example illustrating just how seriously people in Yorkshire take the *'notion of community-led regeneration'*.

The future, however, does hold concerns for those in Yorkshire. Global economics will affect the regions and create disparities, especially in relation to London. So is it sufficient to leave regional development to the idiosyncrasies of market forces?

Fragmentation at the heart of Government in the administration of regeneration, in part exacerbates

many of the problems. Recently Government has moved to break the links between neighbourhood renewal and the economic regeneration agenda.

Successes have been achieved but work needs to continue to meet the challenges of the new dilemmas

Nicholas Schoon, Campaign for the Protection of Rural England, presented key findings from his work *The Chosen City*. He stated that the single biggest challenge facing Britain was transforming the major towns and cities. Inner cities remain deeply unpopular places to live; poverty and poor neighbourhoods dominate in regional cities. London's success is in part due to the constant influx of young people who maintain the social and economic base of the city. Failure to replicate this process has had a negative impact on other major cities. His answer to urban decline is to entice back these economically active people.

'Poor people are better off when better off people live next door,' he said, and proposed a major policy objective to bring people back to the inner cities – by having properties for sale in deprived areas. There is also a need for programmes in health, education, job related training and parenting – though he recognised that these schemes were often spurned by those at whom the courses are aimed. Nicholas Schoon believes the Government's target of no-one being disadvantaged because of where they live in 10 years time is both noble and ambitious – but much has to be done if it is to be achieved.

Neil McNroy, CLES, spoke of the frustration felt by many in the regeneration field. *'No matter how much money is spent, some neighbourhoods seem impervious to regeneration schemes.'* Although many changes have been wrought in communities, poverty is still the main problem facing our inner cities and the people within them. He believes a radical and fresh approach is

required. Traditionally, the limited impact of regeneration funds has been based on three points – poor identification of problems, poor implementation of policy, and a lack of local ownership. He believes that this view misses the main point – that the underlying inequalities in society which create poverty in our cities, like a poor benefits system, and a lack of local and regional intervention, are the real problem.

Neil McNroy also challenged the concept that community empowerment is a necessary part of a regeneration scheme.



Neil McNroy, CLES Policy Director

'I'm not saying we should go back to the bad old days of the 60s and 70s – there should be consultation – but it is a bitter irony that if you are poor you are morally obliged to get empowered, shouldn't the poor have a right not to be empowered.'

He argued that community empowerment is a sacred cow, immune from criticism. He believes that people should have a choice of participating or not, and that resources should really be focused on improving services and getting things done.

Local democracy is also being slowly eroded, and the role of local councillors as democratically elected representatives of the people has been lost in many regeneration initiatives. Regeneration through local government and partnerships has a place, but which is the most effective in any given area depends upon the political climate and local political culture.

Tony Durrant, Council for Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations, started by asking whether community cohesion and urban regeneration can exist side by side. He referred to the regeneration of Hulme, which had been extremely successful, and had engaged communities in the process. However, much of that regeneration had proved to be unsustainable for local people. Properties originally developed as affordable housing were now far too expensive for those on a low income.

He argued that gentrification, while having benefits for the city as a whole, has severe consequences for the most socially excluded – especially ethnic minority communities. When new buildings are built in deprived areas, a proportion of these should be held back and sold cheaply to members of the displaced community. The remainder of the homes should be sold off at market value. This would enable individuals to build up an equity stake which would increase their personal wealth and help to remove some of the inequalities present in the current system.

He viewed regeneration as doing something for others unable to do it themselves – which is ultimately not sustainable. What local communities need is role models and cohesive regeneration programmes which address training, jobs, housing and the environment – too many programmes concentrate on one at the expense of the other.

'The logical mind can spot the wrong answer, but it takes a creative mind to spot the wrong question,' and it is with creativity that **Tom Manion** has approached his job as the Chief Executive of Irwell Valley Housing Association (IVHA). He looked at the way traditional housing organisations spent the majority of their time dealing with negative issues – rent arrears, vandalism and evictions.

In devising the Gold Service, IVHA aims to reward positive behaviour and punish unacceptable behaviour. Initially only 40 per cent of tenants were eligible to receive the Gold Service. The challenge faced was to create demand for the service and this required a root and branch reinvention of the services IVHA

provided. The Gold Service was invented as a bottom up strategy, its essence encompassed by the phrase *'rights and responsibilities'* – used not just in reference to the tenants but also the IVHA staff. The approach seems to have been broadly successful, with higher rent collection rates than others in the field. He sees the future for Irwell Valley continuing to develop, and Gold Service changing to a new Platinum Service. *'It's what I call a pigs can fly housing service.'*

Conclusions

Urban regeneration is a tale more of success than of failure, but the message from the conference was *'avoid complacency'* there is still work to be done. Outlined below are the five main issues that should be taken away from the 2002 CLES annual conference:

- 1) Role of central government:** structural implications, support the regeneration agenda, resources sufficient to enable more success to be made
- 2) Complexity of urban regeneration:** a situation complicated by a plethora of initiatives each with their own aims and floor targets, all complicated by a lack of coherence
- 3) Inherent difficulties in measuring 'success':** it has to be a mixed approach bringing together statistical evidence as well as incorporating the perceptions of those involved throughout the process
- 4) More developed role for local government:** it operates in a more localised context than central government and has the ability to react more quickly to changes on the ground
- 5) Programmes and policies imposed from the top-down need to be individualised:** to meet the specific needs of each locale. It is naïve to expect one-fits-all approach.

Speakers:

- Cllr Richard Leese
Leader
Manchester City Council
- Louise Ellman MP
Liverpool Riverside
- David Liston-Jones, Urban Policy Unit, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
- Paul Evans
Director of Regeneration
London Borough of Southwark
- Cllr Eric Ollerenshaw
Chair of Economic Development Committee
Greater London Authority
- Bob Colenutt
Head of Urban Regeneration
London Borough of Haringey
- Jenny Lynn
Independent Adviser to the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit
- Nicolas Schoon
Author of *The Chosen City*
Head of Communications
Campaign for the Protection of Rural England
- Neil McInroy
Policy Director
Centre for Local Economic Strategies
- Tony Durrant
North West Regional Director
Council for Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations
- Tom Manion
Chief Executive
Irwell Valley Housing Association

Chairs of sessions

- Cllr Roger Jones
Salford City Council
GMPTA & CLES
- Baron Isherwood
Director of Regeneration North West Development Agency
- Cllr Kath Sainsbury
Stockton-on-Tees Council