



Wellesley Road, Croydon

# Why should we invest in our urban centres and neighbourhoods?

Keith Mitchell, Chairman

**It is no secret that the property industry considers urban brownfield development to be difficult, time consuming and expensive – and in the current market, unattractive. Whilst there is funding available for development projects, the focus is currently on finding small to medium-sized projects that are unencumbered and deliverable in the short term. Nevertheless, we should continue to focus on bringing forward urban regeneration in our cities and towns.**

Despite the perceived failure of Copenhagen and the consequent lack of global targets for carbon reduction, the importance of sustainability grows inexorably. Urban regeneration can contribute substantially to achieving sustainability goals in the truest sense, by bringing together significant carbon reduction with wider social and economic benefits.

## Travel and carbon reduction

There are significant benefits to be gained by creating cities and towns that are attractive to walk and cycle around, and by developing urban transit systems in places where they can offer significant CO<sub>2</sub> and revenue benefits. Such schemes bring wider benefits to local residents and businesses by making living and working locally more attractive, thereby reducing dependence on cars for access to jobs and services.

## Waste, water and energy efficiency

Urban areas provide opportunities for the development of integrated solutions to delivering renewable energy, heat and cooling systems, as well as waste reduction and water efficiency schemes. Such schemes can help to make cost effective use of our existing buildings and infrastructure, as well as deliver wider environmental benefits.

“It is not always necessary to burden new urban development with huge infrastructure bills. Ingenuity and technical “know how” can find solutions to these new problems if space to do this is provided through strong leadership and coordination.”

## Enhancing amenity, security and social cohesion

Provision of improved community facilities and infrastructure can strengthen communities, make them safer and more secure places to live and work. In turn, this can foster a more aspirational environment in which people can develop and be economically active.

## Meeting the health agenda

A more sustainable city is a healthier city. Creating places that support improved air quality and encourage active travel and healthier lifestyles will reduce pressure on scarce health service resources in the longer term.

Successful urban regeneration will not happen by chance, however logical our reasoning. We need to drive change, and make it the obvious choice. We need to make better, more cost-effective use of our existing infrastructure. In a world where our ability to increase the capacity of our infrastructure is limited, and where most of the buildings that will be operational in 2050 have already been built, the role of optimisation, re-use, refurbishment and retrofit will have far greater significance. This approach will help us to create environmentally, socially and economically sustainable developments that are attractive, deliverable and play a part in stimulating wider economic growth.



Marketplace, Reading (Before)



Marketplace, Reading (After)

We must resist the temptation to always assume that meeting the additional demand for movement or energy requires an increase in infrastructure capacity. To do this simply serves to reinforce the trends of the past, rather than encourage the sustainable trends we want to perpetuate in the future.

Our vision for urban areas, whether it is reducing demand for travel, or reducing overall energy consumption, must be clear. We have an opportunity to influence demand in the way we make infrastructure provision for the future. We need to devise solutions that support a change in the way people use their urban areas, rather than changing the urban areas to meet increasing demand is the challenge of the future. It is not always necessary to burden new urban development with huge infrastructure bills. Ingenuity and technical “know how” can find solutions to these new problems if space to do this is provided through strong leadership and coordination.

We need find ways of recognising the role of regeneration in stimulating wider economic growth in our urban areas, by identifying new ways of pump priming investment in key projects through public private sector partnering. New approaches to funding have been discussed for years, but these need to be brought to reality.

Achieving our sustainable development goals now lie at the heart of our national ambition. Yet the range of investment, planning, and delivery agencies with which investors need to contend must be at the least bemusing, if not completely off-putting. We need to simplify our approach and bring a clear focus on leadership and delivery.

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This paper is based on a presentation delivered at the launch of the BURA@20 'Framework for regeneration in more for less Britain' at MIPIM 2010.

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