

## WHERE IS THE 'COMMUNITY' IN THE PLANNING OF LARGE-SCALE URBAN DEVELOPMENTS? Policies and tools to shape new places and identities

### - summary of seminar held on 1 November 2023, Coventry University

This seminar sought to consider the opportunities for local communities in the UK to be more involved in the planning, delivery and occupation of large-scale residential developments.

In many separate places around the UK, large-scale urban developments are under consideration, each involving many hundreds of new homes for the future – in some instances, these will be thousands. On a brief examination of how such new urban areas are to be planned and developed, it is customary to see roles being outlined for members of the local authority, the design and development sectors, and initial landowners to collaborate together on how such developments may take place over time. Whilst the rhetoric of creating places in which people can thrive is a constant theme within the promotion of such planning and development, further examination of who is integrally involved in that work often seems to only engage with local people within an occasional 'consultation' or survey, or through a limited membership of a body to frame future community engagements that other interests have put in motion.

The format of this seminar was undertaken as a series of tight thematic discussions that can consider the nature of 'community engagements' within the planning, delivery and management of large-scale urban developments in the UK. The discussions were informed by the experience of participants drawn from their engagements with, and by, local communities and community 'interests' in range of contemporary large-scale developments, particular from a varied experience with 'community-led' developments.

The overarching context of discussions was to consider the following questions:

- By what processes can local communities be best integrated into the decision-making mechanisms that will shape new large-scale urban developments and can then be evident within subsequent design and management practices?
- How can meaningful opportunities be created for new or local communities to connect with the delivery of new large-scale urban developments and its components, especially where a local community barely exists at present?
- Where it is recognised that barriers do exist to the involvement and influence of local communities in the design, delivery and management of large-scale urban developments, how can these best be overcome?
- How can professional or commercial practice increase its support for communities to be more influential in the planning and delivery of new large-scale urban developments?

## **PRESENTATIONS**

The following presentations drew from first-hand experience of a mix of initiatives.

### **Derwenthorpe, York** (edge-of-city urban extension)

- Key community facilities were provided at the very start of the building programme.
- The nature of incorporating mixed tenures on-site, or on developing procedures for any a 'shared governance' of the area, were not well understood.
- Sequential phase development can risk a degrading of initial aspirations and visions.
- The outcome of the extensive early community engagement is a successful place that has diverse leisure and social activities, plus future collaborations like a local energy company.

### **Graven Hill, Bicester** (new residential quarter)

- The initial aspiration 'to deliver something different to usual UK developments', is now under increasing pressure to revert to mainstream principles and maximise economic returns.
- The early emphasis on individual 'self-build' outcomes is being squeezed by the growing extent of 'custom build' works, which have limited flexibilities for incoming residents
- Residents have need to be focused on dealing with defects and on meetings with Graven Hill Company for the delivery of promised community assets and facilities.
- Use of the skills and experience of the new residents is not being encouraged within plans for successive phases of area development.

### **Right To Build Task Force** (national support agency)

- Policies for the percentages of different kinds of land use for residential development in large areas could designate encouragement for a variety of community-led activities.
- Households need clear opportunities to make a genuine choice from what suits their aspirations from the Self Build / Custom Build spectrum.
- The provision of serviced parcels of land, both for individual dwellings and for group schemes, can be obtained deliberate-worded section 106 agreements.
- There is a need to connect 'community-led' aspirations to the wider opportunities and responses to meet local demand that can be demonstrated by the Self Build Registers.

### **Kennet Community Land Trust, Cambs.** (local village-centred land trust)

- The village residents have been integral to discussion and decision-making at all stages of the new area's planning and designs.
- East Cambs local authority has given consistent promotion to the village and CLT interests.
- The local community is a full partner in the ongoing inter-agency Delivery Board.
- The CLT will manage 60 affordable and 'future proofed' homes, plus other 'Garden Village' open spaces and community buildings.

**Port Sunlight, Wirral** (longstanding residential setting, from philanthropic vision)

- There is holistic support across Port Sunlight households to construct new neighbourhood and community engagements.
- Surveys and meetings are looking at ways whereby new community engagements could support and maintain local heritage assets and shared / public spaces.
- Community development expertise is being engaged that will build on steps to integrate the diversity of local residents and interests.
- Substantial experience from the Black & Ethnic Minority sector from urban and regeneration areas (such as at Belgrave Neighbourhood Co-op, Leicester) can provide useful parallels of engagements with defined households that identify as area members.

**Royal Town Planning Institute** (national Chartered Institute)

- There are potential roles for local participation that could be expanded through 'Statements of Community Involvement' / Neighbourhood Plans / Neighbourhood Development Orders.
- The current 'Levelling Up Bill' will replace Supplementary Planning Documents with what are seen as weightier 'Supplementary Plans', with the scope for specific inclusion of community-focused ideals.
- There are useful recent examples of 'Inclusive Development' policies, such as the 'social value' requirements within the Salford Local Plan 2023.
- Consideration is being given to promoting 'Community Juries' / Assemblies as potential structures or protocols for undertaking local reviews of formal development proposals.

**PLENARY SESSION**

The following points and observations were raised in the final discussion session:

- There is a need for a strong focus on 'community development' matters and dynamics throughout the creation and lifetime of large-scale developments that will substantially involve areas for residential settlement.
- There seems rarely an involvement of a clear and accountable advocate for community interests within the composition of initial master-planning, design, or development *consortia*.
- The ownership and accountability of who steers and oversees how the initial 'visions' of proposed areas are able to influence matters 'on the ground' is vital for the extent to which initial aspirations will be safeguarded and maintained.
- The communities discussed in the seminar demonstrate a common and crucial element of the importance that supportive local landowners bring to a ready promotion of 'community-centred' outcomes.
- It is vital within higher density developments to give due time and effort to promoting the sense in which they can be human in scale and place so that they are accepted and embraced by the adjoining communities.

