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**FINDING SPACE FOR NEW HOUSING: THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN  
PROCESS AS AN ARENA FOR DISCUSSING HOUSING ISSUES.**

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## **Abstract**

There have been increasingly visible tensions between the House Builder's Federation and developer lobby groups, environmental groups such as the Council for the Protection of Rural England, and rural County Councils over the allocation of land for housing in Structure Plans and subsequent Local Plans, particularly in the South and South East of England. This paper situates this housing debate in relation to the planning system, the development plan and policy-making practices using empirical case study material from Lancashire, Kent, and the West Midlands.

Providing a sufficient flow of land for new housing has been a long-standing development plan objective. The analysis identifies the policy continuity in the 1990s and the tensions in each case study area concerning the amount, location and flow of new housing sites and broader economic, social and environmental concerns. In particular, the paper illustrates how policies on urban regeneration are being recast in the 1990s as key stakeholders negotiate for their interpretation of "sustainable development" and "balanced communities". Overlaying these spatial considerations of where new housing should be located are economic development concerns to regenerate regional economies and market 'places' to attract inward investment.

The analytical approach focuses on the key 'institutions' which are actively and publicly involved in problem definition and housing policy solutions. The active work of building ideas and strategies, forging networks for sustaining strategies and achieving co-ordination through the regulatory framework of the planning system are followed through in each of the case study areas. This examination highlights both the contradictions inherent in the British planning system as well as the conflicting aims of state regulation of land use and the contribution of the development plan as a co-ordinating mechanism. This paper arises from research funded by the ESRC (Project No R0002357\*5) on *Development Plans and the Regulatory Form of the Planning System*. The contribution of the other team members (P. Healey, G. Vigar, S.Davoudi, and T.Shaw) is greatly acknowledged.

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**Abbreviations:**

BC	Borough Council
BCC	Blue Circle Cement
BCI	Blue Circle Industries
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CC	County Council
CNT	Commission for New Towns
CPOG	Chief Planning Officer Group
CPRE	Council for the Protection of Rural England
DC	District Council
DoE	Department of the Environment
EIP	Examination in Public
GONW	Government Office for the North West
GOWM	Government Office for the West Midlands
GOSE	Government Office for the South East
HA	Housing Association
HAT	Housing Action Trust
HBF	House Builders' Federation
LA	Local Authority
LP	Local Plan
LPA	Local Planning Authority
MHLG	Ministry of Housing and Local Government
MOD	Ministry of Defence
NIMBY	"Not-In-My-Backyard"
NWRA	North West Regional Association
OPCS	Office of Population and Census Surveys
PLI	Public Local Inquiry
PO	Post Office
PPG	Planning Policy Guidance Note
RPG	Regional Planning Guidance Note
SERPLAN	South East Regional Planning Conference
SoSE	Secretary of State for the Environment
SP	Structure Plan
UDP	Unitary Development Plan
WMRFLA	West Midlands Regional Forum of Local Authorities

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There have been increasingly visible tensions between the House Builder's Federation and developer lobby groups, environmental groups such as the Council for the Protection of Rural England, and rural County Councils over the allocation of land for housing in Structure Plans and subsequent Local Plans, particularly in the South and South East of England. This paper situates this housing debate in relation to the planning system, the development plan and policy-making practices using empirical case study material from Lancashire, Kent, and the West Midlands.

Providing a sufficient flow of land for new housing has been a long-standing development plan objective. The analysis identifies the policy continuity in the 1990s and the tensions in each case study area concerning the amount, location and flow of new housing sites and broader economic, social and environmental concerns. In particular, the paper illustrates how policies on urban regeneration are being recast in the 1990s as key stakeholders negotiate for their interpretation of "sustainable development" and "balanced communities". Overlaying these spatial considerations of where new housing should be located are economic development concerns to regenerate regional economies and market 'places' to attract inward investment.

The analytical approach focuses on the key 'institutions' which are actively and publicly involved in problem definition and housing policy solutions. The active work of building ideas and strategies, forging networks for sustaining strategies and achieving co-ordination through the regulatory framework of the planning system are followed through in each of the case study areas. This examination highlights both the contradictions inherent in the British planning system as well as the conflicting aims of state regulation of land use and the contribution of the development plan as a co-ordinating mechanism<sup>1</sup>.

Following this introduction there are four sections. The first section introduces the procedural framework set by central government for planning for housing and summarises the settlement planning issues in the 1970s and 1980s in the case study areas. The second section looks at the key spatial issues which dominated the discussion involved in the production of regional guidance in each of these areas. The extent to which the issues deemed pertinent in the formulation of regional guidance have then been influential in the negotiations around development plan housing related issues is noted. The third section unravels the role that key players have in structuring discourse on housing issues, and the arenas and networks they use to influence development plan policies. The issues which cause tension between housing producers, local authorities as regulators, and environmental and residents groups are identified. The final section draws these themes together and identifies the

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policy continuity in this issue area and the misunderstandings about the purpose of and the rationale for the development plan as a regulatory tool over the use of land.

## **2. PLANNING FOR HOUSING : THE PROCEDURAL CONTEXT**

The procedural framework for identifying land to cater for future housing needs was primarily a technical exercise led by county planners up until the 1980s. The key development plan objective was to assess housing need up to some future date, allocate sufficient sites, and estimate the type of dwelling and tenure required. The Conservative government in the early 1980s narrowed the housing remit for town planners to ensuring that sufficient land for market housing would come on stream freed from bureaucratic red tape. This policy objective was secured through central government 'advice' which specified both the procedures to be followed and the operational criteria for defining the location, quantity and flow of housing land. *Planning Policy Guidance Note 3: Housing* (DoE, 1992) contains the latest government advice. This advice on housing provision cascades down and is translated firstly through the Regional Planning Guidance (RPG), then the Structure Plan (SP) or strategic planning document, and finally detailed policies justify the allocation of specific sites in the Local Plan (LP). The 'best estimates' of future housing demand in each region are parcelled out in this way to lower administrative tiers with the district authority being required to ensure that their Local Plan allocates a 5-years supply of housing land with 2 years supply free of physical development constraints.

A catalyst for thinking about future housing requirements is the OPCS/DoE household projections which are revised every 3 years. The timing of these new estimates fall awkwardly into the 5 year review cycle of RPG and development plans. It is argued that the technical leverage of the household projections pulls the discourse on housing towards a mechanistic quantitative debate with the projections being literally translated through the cascade of planning documents from RPG, through development plans and used as a deciding factor in housing appeals against refusal of planning permission.

The affordability of any market derived housing in the future has had a muted presence on discussion agendas at strategic level during the 80s and early 90s. Though district planners have been given a responsibility since the mid-80s of securing, through negotiation, cross subsidy from market housing for social housing needs. This is in the context of continued central reductions in funding for the social housing sector but so far has only levered out a trickle of 'affordable' housing (Bramley, 1991; Cameron et al, 1991; Holmans, 1995). Both the previous government and the newly elected Labour government oppose both a social housing land use class and a prescriptive quota of social housing from all new build. Recently, district planners have found their negotiation for cross subsidy restricted by Circular 13/96 to designated sites above 40 or more dwellings in urban areas; and to 25 or more dwellings in settlements of 3,000 people or less. This ruling does not affect existing arrangements which allow for up to six affordable housing units on non-designated rural sites, provided the development plan has adequately justified the need for such plan exceptions.

There have been little more than crude attempts by planners to use development plans as tools to respond to local housing market conditions and or national economic problems. Often elected members have argued for a close relationship between the future growth in economic performance of an area and the supply of housing, so plan allocations have traditionally oversupplied by as much as 30% (Hull, 1996) to ensure that housing constraints do not foster overheating of the local economy and high house price inflation. Yet, in areas of low market demand, land use designations and policies have not been seen as a way to reduce 'high' rates of vacancy and turn around a 'flat' market. The primary housing role of the development plan has been to ensure that land supply and availability do not inhibit wider policy objectives of realising a district's economic potential.

The decentralisation of industry and services from inner metropolitan areas to the outer suburbs and beyond, since the late 1960s, has thrown up similar policy issues of settlement planning and capacity issues in the case study areas. The relative decline of cities as centres has also witnessed planning responses, which first sought to aid this process of economic change through transferring population and population growth from the metropolitan area to outlying shire districts, and now more recently trying to correct uneven development by encouraging repopulation of central areas through peripheral restraint. Working with the market has been the predominant housing response, so that absorbing metropolitan population out-migration to 'rural' hinterlands has been a long-standing spatial planning issue for negotiation. In Lancashire's case this has been as a receiving authority, with Cheshire, taking overspill from the Manchester and Merseyside conurbations; in the West Midlands, the shire counties playing a similar role for the metropolitan districts; and Kent taking its share of metropolitan London's out-migration.

These negotiations over absorbing household growth have thrown up politico-administrative tensions. Wannop (1995:56) reports that inter-authority working in the West Midlands and the South East was able to sustain a common policy approach on regional strategies which underlined urban containment . Yet, he reports a tension between the conurbations struggling to keep the expanding population within their administrative boundaries or at least close to their influence, whilst the receiving authorities in the shires negotiated to receive any overspill in self-contained towns beyond easy commuting distance. Similar inter authority tensions worked against regional cohesion in the North West before the 1990s. The *1971 Strategic Plan for the North West*, although an able attempt to lobby for more regional aid, threatened Lancashire's growth scenario for the Central Lancashire new town, identifying growth points for south and north Lancashire instead (Wannop, 1995: 144). These growth scenarios all collapsed with the failure of the 1950s growth predictions to foresee a national downturn in birth rates in the mid-60s.

### **3. THE POLICY AGENDAS AND DISCOURSES**

This section seeks to identify what the regulatory task consists of in the policy field of planning for housing. The conceptual approach to the collection of data uses a frame of analysis which considers it important to understand how social, economic and

political forces may have helped to shape and define a particular problem, and bias the process of policy implementation towards certain solutions. The analysis has therefore unpacked the narratives collected through interviews and written documents to understand how the key actors involved construct the policy agenda on planning for housing through their talk. This section draws out how the discourses at regional level has evolved since the late 1980s and influenced the way housing concerns have been defined in Structure and Local development plans. The three case studies are dealt with separately with a commentary drawing out the different approaches to problem definition and solution.

### 3.1 The development of policy: the story

#### West Midlands

Two key themes emerged from the first strategic guidance (DoE, 1988) which advised on strategies for the metropolitan districts only. Firstly, an emphasis was laid on regenerating the inner city and secondly on revitalising the sub-regional economy through investment to the north and west of the region. The guidance was unable to suggest a 'spatial' policy beyond giving advice on the phasing, implementation monitoring and the quantities of new dwellings required by 2001. The phasing of housing provision should "*encourage the re-use of derelict and disused land*", which could be monitored through "(i) efforts to stimulate housing development (without specifying brownfield locations) (ii) trends in factors affecting housing provision (iii) and the success of the green belt in restricting the outward growth of built up areas" (DoE, 1988:para 5). The clearest policy advice proved to be dwelling numbers specified for each district and to be built by 2001. The guidance suggested that a third of these new dwellings would be required to replace expected demolitions mainly in Birmingham and Sandwell.

It became apparent by the early 90s that the urban regeneration policy of maximising the development of derelict and vacant urban sites in the conurbation was not being achieved at anything like the rate originally intended. The draft regional guidance (GOWM, 1994:18) noted that both completions and allocations in the more rural areas were exceeding the SP allocations by a considerable level, allowing developers to pick and choose sites outside the conurbation. Coupled with the continued clearance of unsuitable inner city dwellings, and improvements to personal mobility, this failure to restrain new housing developments will have accelerated the trends to decentralise in the late 80s/90s.

RPG11 (GOWM, 1995) sought to address this issue of out-migration from the metropolitan area by doubling the dwellings required there between 1991-2011 (Middleton & Dixon, 1996:137). The whole issue of quantity and location of future dwellings caused disagreement between GOWM, local authorities, the House Builders' Federation (HBF), and the Council for the Protection of England (CPRE). LAs accused GOWM of "*selling out to the house builders*" with the issue headlined in the local press as "*casting a shadow over our greenfields*". The heat was turned down on the debate with RPG11 proposing that the West Midlands Regional Forum of Local Authorities (WMRFLA) should undertake a study to look at the implications of the 1992 projections.

The second strategic theme in RPG11 implicitly addressed the issue of sustainable development, through diverting new housing and employment along mass-mover transport corridors spreading out from the conurbation to the north and west of the region. Roughly a third of the housing and employment growth is expected to take place within the two conurbations (West Midlands and North Staffordshire) to maintain the economic and social infrastructure there. It is also accepted that housing will need to be provided in the Central Crescent, on the edge of the green belt, to keep potential commuting distances down.

**BOX 1: RPG11: Key phrases on housing and sustainable development**

*"The capacities of existing urban areas should be maximised in as far as is consistent with securing quality of the living environment".*

Priority should be given to accommodating new housing development within the metropolitan area, and, next at free-standing towns beyond the Green Belt. *"Development within the existing urban fabric ....helps to reduce the need to travel; minimising the loss of greenfield sites, and maximising the use of existing infrastructure".*

Greenfield locations to be used only in exceptional circumstances. *"When proposing greenfield sites in development plans, authorities should clearly demonstrate that there are no suitable alternatives within the existing built up area".*

*"Authorities should promote the re-use of sites by bringing forward land in their ownership, [and by considering] more sustainable patterns of development"* when planning permissions come up for renewal and on development plan reviews.

Sustainability in the urban context can also mean *"environments with quality open spaces"*, improving the quality of the existing housing stock wherever practicable and demolition where it is beyond repair.

Sustainability is linked to concepts of *"self-containment"*, and keeping housing and employment growth in balance

Underlying the strategic debate on diverting future growth to the north and the west of the conurbation, has been ensuring that effective mechanisms (sticks and carrots) to control the location of such growth are put in place with their supporting development plan rationales. The WMRFLA has undertaken a technical analysis of the regional implications of the latest projections for the region, extending their brief to examine wider housing issues (including vacancy levels, migration, and the availability of resources) which influence the processes of provision for different types of housing need. They have also taken on issues regarding the housing capacity of settlements as well as the extent to which housing need is converted into housing demand both through the market and through social programmes. (WMRFLA, 1996: Annex 1 para 3.1 ).

The Forum has sought to link housing need and affordability issues, with what they consider to be sustainable locations for new-build, more forcefully at the regional level in order to influence the preparation of development plans. That these are difficult issues for the key actors to address is acknowledged, but they propose that regulatory mechanisms are put in place to ensure that spatial policies on housing are linked. They suggest 4 necessary components to operationalise an effective plan policy on housing:

#### **BOX 2: HOUSING MARKET POLICIES**

1. Social housing targets should be identified for each district.
2. Land allocated for housing should be categorised as brownfield or greenfield.
3. Greenfield land should be released on the basis of one of the following criteria: there is less than a 5 year's supply left; or that it will be developed in tandem with brownfield land, or where at least 50% of dwellings will be social housing.
4. The operation of the housing market and these policies should be rigorously monitored.

#### Kent

The discussion on strategic housing issues in Kent has revolved around three themes: accommodating Greater London's overspill; redressing the east-west imbalance in the South East; and addressing new ideas about sustainable development. In the 1960s, the Maidstone/Medway area and Ashford were designated as 'medium growth areas' as part of the restructuring of the London metropolitan region in line with the decentralisation of employment and to provide a choice of environment for both employers and workers (MHLG, 1967, 1970). Progress on this has been affected by inner London and outer London disagreements and inaction in the 1970s over sites for new houses (Wannop, 1995:76). Maidstone and Medway were to be developed first, being of sufficient distance away to detract, it was thought, from commuting into Greater London, and Ashford's housing growth was seen as contingent on both attracting balancing employment growth and the Channel Tunnel development. These two housing growth points dominate the planning documents until the 1990s, and whilst supportive of restraint in west Kent, arguably failed to grapple with redeveloping vacant land in urban areas or controlling the release of housing sites on the rural fringe.

Growth projections from the late 1980s heightened tensions about Kent's continued ability to absorb both indigenous growth and in-migration. The South East Regional Planning Conference's (SERPLAN, 1989) review of housing figures increased Kent's housing requirements by 55%. Similarly, RPG9 (GOSE, 1994) increased the housing requirement for Kent on the basis of the 1989-based household projections. The 1992-based projections indicate the need for Kent to cater for a further 87,000 households, in total 116,000 additional dwellings between 1991-2011. Kent CC's SP Third review (deposit version) had specified that land for 109,300 dwellings should be allocated in LPs between 1991-2011. Just before the SP was due to be adopted in 1996, the SoSE (John Gummer) directed Kent CC to meet its share of the regional guidance for the SE, ordering the authority to raise its allocation by 2,500 homes

between 2006 and 2011, to achieve the regional guidance figure of 116,000 dwellings.

The second strategic theme stems from SERPLAN's 1980s strategy to redress the east/west imbalance through a regeneration package for the east contingent on job opportunities and better transportation access. Housing was seen as allied to this, as part of a balanced development approach, supporting the economic development of the East Thames. There was little policy consideration given to the Dartford/Gravesend area before 1993 as an area for housing growth, because of its history of significant net out-migration and its outstanding problems of accessibility and image. The Llewelyn-Davies study of that year argued for an eastern growth point in the Dartford-Gravesend-Ebbsfleet area to counter balance the London influence (DoE,1993). The Government the following year were heavily criticised for hindering this emerging sub-regional vision in the draft RPG9A, through its failure to set down a robust strategic framework for the area to demonstrate its political commitment (Crookston, 1995, 23).

The third theme which structures housing discussions in Kent revolves around the issue of sustainable development. RPG9 (GOSE,1994) defined this as essentially looking towards the long term future needs of the Region, through promoting economic recovery by co-ordinating planning and transportation policies. This also involves 'optimising' the use of urban land and recycling land; taking advantage of the least congested parts of the transport network; and promoting a distribution of development that will help to establish a sustainable relationship between homes, workplaces and other facilities, and to minimise unnecessary travel (GOSE, 1994: para 5.10). Proposed development in Thames Gateway is seen as a positive example of sustainable development. This is further reinforced in RPG9A (GOSE, 1996: para 5.3.6) which suggests a sequential approach to new housing developments with priority to developments which involve the recycling and re-use of vacant and under-used urban sites, before considering the release of greenfield land.

This is essentially a strategy which seeks to sustain the working of the market through ensuring the efficient use of resources and infrastructure. The protection of good environments and the regeneration of poor urban areas (rundown, vacant, derelict and contaminated sites) is seen as linked to regional competitiveness. This overlays the existing environmental strategy to restrain development in the areas of landscape and high value agricultural land principally in West Kent. Whilst broader environmental quality of life issues are also becoming more prominent for the Districts, this is limited in RPG9A to the aesthetic *"benefit[s] from a waterfront location which can provide a highly attractive residential environment"* and *"in seeking these development opportunities those features of local importance - those which enhance an area's environment and character - should not be eroded. The green hillsides and backdrops of the Medway Towns are particularly valuable."* (GOSE, 1996 paras 5.3.7 and 6.10.9)

Issues of social sustainability are mentioned in passing in the regional guidance with local authorities being advised to assess housing need and site suitability. The numbers of households on local authority waiting lists by district are given in the appendix, but no specific policy line is suggested beyond that the *"larger opportunity*

*sites*" in Thames Gateway should provide for a "*reasonable mix and balance*" of house types and sizes to cater for a range of housing needs (GOSE, 1996: 5.3.10).

### Lancashire

Three themes dominate the discussion of housing issues in Lancashire. Like the other two case study areas, catering for conurbation overspill, has been discussed since the late 1940s with Lancashire seen originally as an reception area for Liverpool's growing population. In the mid-1960s the new town of Leyland-Chorley was designated. By the 1990s catering for overspill had been pushed to the backburner with regional guidance formulated on the assumption that future household growth would now occur in the Greater Manchester metropolitan area rather than the shire counties of Lancashire and Cheshire (NWRA, 1993). The reduction in net outward migration is acknowledged in Lancashire's SP, but does not detract from the growth scenarios they aim for. As in the other two areas the regional association has been asked by the SoSE to review the spatial implications of the 1992 household projections (GONW, 1996).

Two other themes have recently cornered the strategic housing debate; sustainable development and urban regeneration. The future level of house building in the West Lancashire sub-region (Chorley, S Ribble, W Lancs, Lancaster, Fylde and Blackpool Districts) is constrained in the SP "*at a level slightly below market demand*" whilst allowing limited employment growth in an attempt to contain the high levels of out-commuting by the working population of Chorley and South Ribble, and protect valued landscapes (Critchley et al, 1995). The excess housing demand is to be redirected to other locations in the County, particularly in the Central West-East Corridor (notably Wyre, Blackburn, Hyndburn, Burnley, Ribble Valley, and Pendle Districts).

Addressing both economic and environmental degradation has been a regional issue since the early 1970s (MHLG, 1971). RPG13 (GONW, 1996) identifies this as a continuing problem both for the conurbations and the large number of medium sized towns that developed rapidly in the 19th century. For Lancashire, urban regeneration is a key structuring objective for the 1993 SP. Background SP reports detail the extent of unfitness in the housing stock in East Lancashire (18% stock) and the rate of clearance over the previous decade. Yet the overlaying of this west-east urban regeneration axis with a north-south growth corridor led to concern expressed by the EIP panel over the impact of the bi-corridor growth strategy on urban regeneration of East Lancashire and the Manchester metropolis. They proposed linking the growth strategy to sustainable development criteria so that growth locations would be concentrated on transport nodes and be determined in the light of their accessibility profiles for public transport (Critchley et al, 1995:16).

*"Any extensive development of growth points outside the main urban areas in a County with the regeneration problems of Lancashire would risk jeopardising that regeneration and creating undesirable encroachment on the countryside. There may also be risks that whatever the intention in the way of an appropriate mix of development, the housing will come first and the employment a long time after - if ever. However, in areas where there is a*

*clear need to plan for growth, and a realistic prospect of a sustainable mixed development, such an approach may be appropriate, especially if involving development of brownfield sites. If private developers are to provide the necessary basic infrastructure, and there is to be appropriate provision for balancing employment, a long term target of the order of 1,000 new houses seems likely in most cases to be necessary as a supplement to the existing development base" (Critchley et al, 1995:para1.64).*

Despite this particular piece of guidance, priority is not, however, given to the reuse of inner urban sites in either the RPG, the SP or the EIP report leaving one with the feeling that well-resourced developments will be allowed on greenfield sites and that small-scale sporadic development in the countryside remains possible. Rather RPG13 presents a menu of policy initiatives for urban regeneration: maximising the amount of new housing in existing urban areas with particular priority placed on the reuse or conversion of existing sites and premises, some of which will need to be rezoned for housing; ensuring that the existing stock is fully utilised; and to phase the release of greenfield sites to support the re-use of urban land.

### **3.2 Commentary**

At the strategic level, the planning task in thinking about housing presently involves three components. Firstly a rudimentary analysis of the household projections, quantifying the element of indigenous growth from net in-migration. This usually involves an attempt to explain the trend figures in spatial terms: either the result of past growth due to new town completion, or the continuation of urban to rural migration. The second task is to work out how to cope with the projected household growth. This involves allocating/disaggregating the shire total between the districts. This is essentially a process of negotiation between the county and individual districts, and then between the county, the districts and the HBF. As part of this process, technical assessment of the housing capacity of different settlements and the 'urban area' and local feelings towards growth expressed by participants and others (eg CPRE) are significant. The third task is to link future housing allocations to other strategic spatial policies where an element of housing growth might be significant in implementing these policies.

The household projections hold the key to understanding some of the spatial tensions between the metropolitan districts and the shire areas. The historical context in each of the case study areas has involved the shires accepting substantial household growth from the metropolitan area at particular growth points agreed in advance. All three SPs were prepared using the growth assumptions of the 1989-based projections which intimated that future growth would impact significantly on the shire counties. The 1992-based projections, published in 1995, 'skewed' the growth towards the metropolitan areas. These latter projections impact on the case study areas in different ways. Lancashire, being a past receiver of population, finds that at a time when it's territorial extent is being reduced by local government reorganisation, future population growth will be at a slower rate. Kent finds that much of its growth is indigenous - as a result of previous overspill policies - but that their attempts to respond to district concerns of ever increasing growth scenarios and impact on quality of life, have incurred the wrath of the SoSE. The West Midlands authorities, in

questioning the need to cater for 'substantial' household growth through new-build, have been asked by the SoSE to check again that their proposed land allocations are sufficient for the latest projected growth scenarios.

Implicit in strategic debates about how to manage urban region change is that new housing provision, as a component of future growth, will be used to revitalise the sub-regional economy. Economic growth strategies are linked in one way or another to transportation corridors in each of the three case studies, with new housing at appropriate points along the corridor providing a quality environment as well as a 'necessary' lever to future investment. In Lancashire the N-S transportation corridor is a pragmatic spatial co-ordinating concept to lever in investment acknowledging that the Commission of New Towns (CNT) has substantial housing land waiting to develop along its spine. Housing allocations in Kent are similarly being used to lever in government and private sector investment, but in the case of Thames Gateway, to turn around an urban area with a poor image as part of a wider project to regenerate a substantial area of rundown, vacant, derelict and contaminated sites.

There is a weak discourse on sustainability which wraps around the debates on the role of housing in regional competitiveness but the criteria and data to assess both the environmental capacity of specific areas as well as the 'sustainability' of historic development commitments have not been clearly identified yet. Feeding into the strategic growth debate are district concerns about the capacity of their areas to absorb housing growth strengthened by long-standing concerns to protect designated landscapes. In the Lancashire SP this takes the form of a specific policy restraint on new housing in the West Lancashire sub-region to conserve high quality agricultural land and reduce the growth in out-commuting. S Ribble and Chorley members saw this as "*some sort of salvation to resist further growth*".

In many ways the emphasis on ensuring a sufficient flow of housing land to meet market needs detracts from urban regeneration objectives which lack specificity and fail to address the substantial problems of housing fitness and under occupancy, and issues of dereliction and the quality of urban environments. This long-standing failure to use planning instruments to tackle urban regeneration has encouraged out-migration by households to better quality environments. Regional strategies to stem the exodus from the metropolitan areas are still relying on steering new build. Debate in the West Midlands though, is moving from sheer numbers to qualitative issues and trying to understand the working of the housing market in terms of (i) the geographical interrelationship between the metropolitan and shire markets and (ii) the vertical structure of the market, for example, what effect does building more 4-bed-homes on greenfield sites have on the bottom end of the market - on social housing and starter homes? Does the trickle effect really work? It is uncertain how the debate will unravel because of the entrenched positions of some of the key actors.

### **3.3 The relation to the planning system/plans**

#### West Midlands:

The metropolitan districts rolled forward their existing raft of plans, in the wake of PPG10, to produce the first round of UDPs. Urban regeneration was a key objective

for Birmingham, Coventry, Sandwell, Wolverhampton, Walsall and Dudley. Although PPG10 supported the controlled release of housing land to aid urban regeneration, the lack of definition in the guidance coupled with the substantial site problems of ownership and contamination, meant that housing market considerations over-rode plan intentions. The existing SP noted the rapid deterioration of housing conditions in the former County Council area, and had argued for a tighter definition of the inner boundary of the greenbelt to aid urban regeneration, only for the panel to be swayed by HBF arguments that this might jeopardise regeneration through overspill and negatively affect land values. Coventry took a proposal through its UDP process to assemble inner city housing sites, constrained through multi-ownership, using compulsory purchase powers but this policy was smothered by the time the plan was adopted. Sandwell increased its allocation of housing to reflect the site reclamation opportunities provided by the Black Country Development Corporation and proposed to reclaim more sites for soft uses such as open space in heavily built up areas. Due to the financial resources at the disposal of the two development corporations in the region a high rate of recycling of urban land has been achieved in 1990s so far.

In the 60s and 70s Solihull took substantial numbers of in-migrants from Birmingham and because of its role as the 'desirable' housing area for the conurbation witnessed strong market demand for housing and resulting increased house prices. Members attempted initially to restrain market demand and phase the release of sites in the early 80s, yet by the end of the decade the damage to the character of the area and the quality of the local environment was called into question. The UDP allocated only small scale housing sites distributed in the green belt across the borough to meet short term housing needs. The Solihull UDP was taken through two inquiries on housing and green belt issues, delaying the adoption of the plan. The key issues for debate were whether sufficient housing land had been made available, and in the second inquiry the release of greenbelt land around 6 village settlements to provide for additional housing. The inspector accepted Solihull's proposal for 1,500 homes at Dickens Heath in the greenbelt, yet the CPRE has since taken Solihull to judicial review on this issue.

RPG11 can be seen as an attempt to ensure that decisions on housing land allocations are made within the plan formulation process and to ensure a more efficient supply of housing land to meet household projections. The effect of housing growth on the future spatial form of the conurbation had not been controlled in an orderly way in the past, with development 'jumping over' the greenbelt to the shire districts. There are "*large parts where detailed [greenbelt] boundaries are not yet defined*" (DoE, 1988, para 1) but there is clear separation to the south side of Birmingham. Housing growth is now being controlled in a 'sustainable' way linked to rail and public transport nodes. The WMFLA housing review has linked sustainability to the efficient use of the housing stock and to social issues of affordability. The underlying philosophy is that there is roughly a 8 years building supply of land, and that further allocations would only serve to allow builders to cherry pick greenfield sites and thus negate policy intentions. This has involved a wide horizontal discourse at regional level. Local authorities are unlikely to follow the review policies unless the proposals gain the SoSE's approval. This was not forthcoming from the previous government who supported the HBF's attempts to dilute the social housing policy in Dudley's 1990

UDP, which sought to require that parts of housing sites should be reserved for 'special housing needs' by rewording the policy to read *to encourage the provision of social housing needs in suitable locations*.

### Kent

The context for the preparation of the district plans was set initially by the draft 1990 SP which proposed housing growth in line with government guidance up to 2006, and then at a reduced rate thereafter. Growth was concentrated at Ashford and in the Maidstone/Medway Gap, with restraint at all other settlements except in Dartford. The SP essentially sought to protect the green belt, which had been under pressure during the 80s, from future development pressures stemming from infrastructure investment. Ashford DC were unhappy with their growth scenario allocated it in the SP. They progressed their local plan at the same time as SP formulation, undertaking extensive local consultation on housing growth locations. The plan proposed the development of a new community to the SE of the town; which met with strong opposition during the LP public inquiry from local groups and residents, including European Land who wished to develop Ashford Great Park to the NW of LP proposal. The inspector though praised *"the step-by-step approach by which Ashford BC have finally produced their housing allocations ....The way in which their technical analyses were subjected to wide ranging consultation and criticism followed by consideration and approval by their elected members cannot be faulted"* (Ashford BC, 1993).

The EIP panel report into Kent SP 3rd review directed Kent to allocate another 3,000 dwellings in the period 2006-2011. The EIP report and RPG9A identified the Districts to absorb more housing and suggested actual locations in many cases. The panel increased Dartford BC's total to 10,500, since they considered that Dartford had been too cautious in its housing capacity assessment of Eastern Quarry, formerly in the green belt. RPG9A advised that the quarry *"is large enough to accommodate a high quality, compact, mixed use development in the form of an "urban village"*(6.8.11). Gravesend's total was increased by 4,600 because of the Ebbsfleet international Channel Tunnel rail station proposal, which could *"also underpin a quality housing market, necessary for securing lasting regeneration"*(6.5.4). The recommended housing provision in Swale, Canterbury and Maidstone DC's was also increased despite, in the latter case, the need to encroach on agricultural land to increase the capacity of the Kings Hill development (Planning 1995,1103).

### **BOX 3 Assessment of Strategic Housing Potential in Thames Gateway**

	1991-2006	post - 2006	total
Kent Thames-side	10,000	19,000	29,000
Medway Towns	11,000	7,000	18,000
Swale	7,000	6,000	13,000
Thames Gateway	59,100	39,300	98,400

Source: GOSE (1996) Table H1. nb. includes only sites of > 5 units

RPG9A published in 1996 provides a long term planning framework for Thames Gateway, co-ordinating land use planning, infrastructure provision, and the private sector by a combination of market forces and 'bending' and focusing public programmes to achieve the scenario (GOSE, 1996 para 3.2). This in many ways addresses Blue Circle Cement's concerns on the difficulty of getting planners to take a long term perspective on housing supply issues. *"They [local planners] feel totally and utterly exposed because they have no policy framework on which to rely"* when faced with a development proposal 20-30 years ahead. RPG9A *"should inform the exercise of the wider responsibilities of the local authorities concerned. This means the specific environmental and development needs of Thames Gateway will be taken into account in their local roads programmes, the environmental quality of their own installations, and in the management of their corporate functions and identities."*(GOSE, 1996 para 3.4)

Future planned growth in Kent Thameside will presumably take some of the pressure off Maidstone/Medway Gap and the Medway Towns which, despite local discontent have played a growth point function for a number of years. Maidstone have contested their proportion of County housing growth on a number of occasions. Issues of local and rural housing need, and stock regeneration are key problems for the East Kent districts which with local migration patterns and housing land supply are only being discussed at District level.

### Lancashire

Urban concentration has been a County policy for some time and has been recast in the 1993 SP as a 'sustainable' policy but with little new substance. The overall approach is pro-growth with some attempt to skew housing to particular locations through capping housing demand and commuting trends from Chorley and South Ribble districts. There appears not have been wide ranging discussion on housing before the deposit SP. County planners seem to have discussed only with South Ribble and Chorley BCs, both of which have absorbed two decades of growth during the development of the Central Lancashire New Town, and West Lancashire DC with its specific landscape and agricultural designations.

For many of the Districts housing was not just about the locational decisions of brownfield/ greenfield arguments, rather housing allocations were tied up with questions of infrastructure. The withdrawal of capital finance for infrastructure meant that Districts were wary of accepting additional allocations. 5000 of Preston's SP original allocation of 9,400 houses are covered by planning permissions given to CNT by the SoSE, which previously in the new town days would have been well resourced with facilities, but now would possibly not be forthcoming with the wind down of CNT. There were similar issues of infrastructure funding for Lancaster CC and Chorley BC. Lancaster found that a critical mass of housing is needed in order to negotiate for community facilities and had released larger sites or a combination of sites for housing development using the plan and development briefs in tandem. Chorley were asking for a 100% financing of infrastructure up-front from developers on their two premium housing sites at Gillibrand and Eaves Green. The LPI inspector responded to the HBF objections and changed the plan wording from 100% to a *"contribution"*.

Growth scenarios, in each of these districts, have fuelled public opposition to greenfield development locations, so to ensure development proceeds with the requisite infrastructure provision (roads, community facilities), the districts have been keen to negotiate specific sites through the development plan process. One such site, Cuerden Ponds has been progressed through the SP process as a Policy 1 settlement for 330 homes. District concern with employment attraction has also influenced the translation of SP housing strategies. When South Ribble and Chorley BCs missed out on the Royal Ordnance site for a premier employment site, housing had to be secured to get the site going on sub-regional terms. Housing and roads have been key issues in terms of representations at LP level for many of the districts, but more agreement has been reached this time round than ever before on district allocations, due to the joint working between the districts.

#### **4. THE INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS**

The relationship between metropolitan districts and their surrounding counties and districts has been a key factor in locational decisions on household growth. Party politics and inter-institutional politics have both played their part in the course of strategic decisions on housing. Also important have been the role of planning studies carried out by consultants identifying future options for accommodating spatial change which have interplayed with LA conurbation studies on urban form. Sometimes the DoE has been the initiator of regional proposals at other times playing the role of arbiter. Central government has intervened through designating new towns at Dawley (now Telford) in 1963 and Redditch in 1965 in Worcestershire, and at Central Lancashire. This account describes first the institutional story from the 1980s onwards, then looks more closely at the stakeholders, arenas and networks before commenting in relation to the planning system.

##### **4.1 The key players and arenas in policy development: the story**

###### West Midlands:

There are two institutional networking processes which link into strategic housing issues. Firstly there is a horizontal local authority alliance. The WM Regional Forum was formed on the dissolution of the metropolitan CC in 1986 to maintain and reinforce a 'regional view' on issues such as housing, widening out to incorporate the shire districts in 1994. The Forum played a proactive role in the late 1980s in defining the strategic rules underpinning PPG10 rather than give the DoE the upper hand. Because of officer solidarity and working relationships built up in the metropolitan county days, agreement was reached during the initial strategic planning conference by the Chief Planning Officer's Group (CPOG) over levels of out-migration from the conurbation. Housing issues held the key to the urban regeneration strategy with the phasing of housing land release an important plank of this. This process of articulating a sub-regional strategy for the metropolitan area and then widening this out to the whole region, linking the metropolitan area with the shires, was very important to retain public sector influence in the face of government support for private sector initiative. The public sector resolve had to be imprinted on the RPG, SP, and LPs and underpinned by technical knowledge of the housing market

using consultants' reports where necessary. With each new household growth scenario, or persistent HBF lobbying, the WM Regional Forum has worked for a co-ordinated LA line and to get the 'right' balance of growth between and within the metropolitan area and shires. This frequently involved planning officers from Birmingham City ensuring that the elected members of both shires and mets were prepared to toe the line agreed between the CPOG.

In the lead up to RPG11 the Regional Forum held a 2 week regional issues conference in 1993 chaired by former DoE controller David Saunders. Here the metropolitan authorities and shires agreed on 50/50 rough split on housing, which would have led to a 60,000 shortfall in dwellings in the metropolitan area on the basis of the then policy. This working agreement was undermined by senior officers on prompts from members. Here the success of the long-standing policy of outright regeneration was questioned and the conference concluded that planning policies of the last 20 years - such as, urban containment through the green belt, selective peripheral growth, growth of free-standing towns in the 'middle ring' and growth points at the new towns of Telford and Redditch - may no longer meet the region's aspirations. The alternative spatial strategy emphasised cross boundary relationships between the metropolitan area and the shires - giving something to both parties using the nodes along transport corridors to fix growth.

The second network is a centralised vertical alliance down from central government but which draws in key actors at specific points in plan formulation and around particular arenas. This vertical network emanates from GOWM, which using its delegated plan monitoring role, attempts to stitch LAs into negotiated agreements on the quantity and location of new housing. Preparation of the RPG provides an open consultation forum for house builders' representatives, LAs, individual landowners, and the CPRE to negotiate for what they consider to be the appropriate level of housing required during guidance time scales. The participants seek initially to influence the local authority forum's advice to the SoSE but can use their dissent to request more frequent reviews of household projections to ensure that demand will be met. This process in the West Midlands has increased the housing required between 1991-2011 by 16% between the draft 1994 guidance and the 1996 WMRFLA's review. The average increase for the shire counties 17% (23% for Staffordshire) and for the metropolitan area 14%. Allocations to Wolverhampton increased by 43%, Coventry by 25%, and Sandwell by 20%; whilst Dudley's allocation declined by 8%. RPG11 considered it important for Coventry to remain a focal point for housing to reduce commuting from S Warwickshire. Solihull worked to reduce their housing requirements below market demand, preparing to take Birmingham's premium industrial sites on a quid pro quo deal. It was a time-consuming struggle for Solihull with the HBF prompting two inquiries into their UDP.

#### Kent:

A 3 tiered hierarchical LA network is played out in Kent, linking the regional strategies of SERPLAN to the county and then down to the districts. SERPLAN since the mid-80s has provided the regional vision for the SE outside London, and therefore has influenced the household growth that Kent should absorb. Kent, in turn, through its policies, skews household growth to the districts. Kent also networks in

horizontally to the London boroughs in East Thames and up to GOSE. SERPLAN's strategy in the late 80s to switch housing growth from west to east in line with the emerging government initiatives for East Thames corridor, eventually led to a new partnership approach with landowners and developers in North Kent. The main prerogative is economic regeneration with housing being seen as a necessary component to kick-start investment. Kent CC played the initial strategic role through the North Kent Joint Consultative Committee in the 1980s, and then in 1994 setting up North Kent Success bringing together public, private and voluntary sectors in partnership to boost the area's image, encourage new investment and pull together the work of all the main actors.

Both central government and district authorities have been characterised as dilatory in approach by other partners to the regeneration initiative. Local authority action has been castigated for its under-achievement in the amount and types of new development secured; with *"a lack of ambition and a readiness to accept uninspired development leading to a self-reinforcing cycle of environmental degradation"* (quoted from Llewelyn-Davies in GOSE, 1996 para 2.5). Central government delayed their commitment to fund Ashford international passenger station and to announce the criteria for bids for Ebbsfleet until 1993 just in advance of Kent SP EIP and RPG9A.

A key actor and landowner in Kent is Blue Circle Industries (BCI) who manage their land holdings through an interactive, proactive approach working directly with the LAs concerned. They have spent 15 years 'talking', negotiating through housing developments, outside the development plan process, first in the Medway valley in Tonbridge and Malling DC. More recently in Kent Thameside, as the landowner of visually intrusive power generation facilities and derelict former mineral workings, they have been lobbying local and central government for a supportive framework and long term certainty to turn round the area; a framework which provides an overall vision (not a comprehensive plan) which addresses improvements in road and rail links, actual and potential land contamination, and the re-zoning of sites.

The competitive nature of securing the intermediate international and domestic station for Ebbsfleet rather than Stratford, led to a joint effort and working partnership between BCI, Kent CC and Dartford and Graveshend DCs. Central government's wish to lever financial commitments from the developers ensured the lead body in the area's team would be BCI working with the other organisations set up to promote the vision for the Kent part of the Thames Gateway. The working arrangements for implementing the vision and the partnership between LAs and developers had been laid down in RPG9A. Owners should have realistic expectations of land values and developers need to adopt the new approach to sustainable development (*"the environment"*). Both public and private sectors are advised to *"focus on damaged land"* without major preparation costs first. Whilst *"judicious"* public investment in support of the private sector will lead to improved location and accessibility and thereby increased land values, *"which will help to bring forward the more difficult opportunities for recycling land"* (GOSE, 1996 para 3.12). The emphasis in RPG9A is on supporting economic regeneration, but a *"new environmental standard"* expected of all developments will enhance the value of land.

## Lancashire

Being a county in a larger region, the networks in Lancashire overlap and branch out as in Kent. LA views on housing growth issues will have been aired in the North West Regional Association (NWRA) meetings and the regional guidance steering committee. It is unlikely that housing issues will have been discussed at any length between the top 30 companies in Lancashire in their NW Business Partnership meetings. Lancashire will have interacted with Cheshire, Manchester and Liverpool authorities, and the two government offices in the NW in commenting on the draft RPG13, particularly over assumptions on inter-regional migration.

The publication and consultation procedures for the deposit SP and its testing in the EIP where the key arenas for involvement of interested stakeholders and discussion of housing issues. The EIP provided an arena for the Districts to protect and enhance their own LP policies, the HBF and the CPRE to advance their particular viewpoints of where housing should be provided, and various housing associated developers to protect their interests. It was important for the County to ensure that key flagship sites involving the CNT obtained agreement this SP review since CNT land holdings will revert to English Partnerships in 1998. County politicians and Lancashire Enterprises worked very closely with CNT on Cuerden's future and to progress CNT's housing sites to lever in substantial sums of investment, particularly for infrastructure. Inward investment sites through their location exert a strong pull on new transport and housing investment. With the key stakeholders playing political football with the Cuerden (backers CNT, Lancashire Enterprises Ltd., and the CC) and Royal Ordnance sites, the latter as loser received additional housing (from 500 to 1000) to strengthen its mixed use portfolio.

Only Preston, South Ribble, and Chorley BCs actively sought to influence their housing allocations, forming political alliances with each other based on financial concerns over housing development infrastructure. Preston BC tried to influence the SP by progressing its own LP concurrently with SP preparation. Other Districts with hindsight felt excluded from the strategic decisions in the EIP arena, bearing in mind that it is at district-level and the local plan arenas which will have to sort out the conflict. *"By the time it gets down to local plan level and you stick lines on maps that's when the fun starts"*(interview with Local authority planner).

The CPRE tried to shift discussion at the EIP to the issue of how to meet the full range of housing needs identified in the household projections. They argued that a higher proportion of new dwellings should meet the needs of single person households in the places where these needs are generated, and the needs of those unable to compete on the open market for housing. The HBF countered that this was best left to the market and that smaller households should not be assumed to demand smaller houses. The HBF and regional house builders sought to consistently increase the County's assumptions on in-migration, vacancy and second homes, whilst reducing household size assumptions.

On the interpretation of the household projections, the EIP panel thought it necessary to remind the Lancashire authorities that *"since much of the growth in prospect is in*

*numbers of single person households, their housing needs may well come in part to be met through higher sharing rates, and use of apartment and flat dwellings rather than individual houses. Conversions associated with renewal of older residential property may well contribute to this. Such possibilities are implicit in the GONW caution against too literal translation of new household projection into new housing requirements".*(Critchley & Smith, 1995:9) Interestingly when considering sub-regional housing growth, the EIP panel erred toward caution, but when discussing components of housing demand the EIP panel increased the total housing provision by some 1,400 dwellings to allow for second homes, a higher estimate for likely vacant dwellings, and recommended that local plans should include an element of contingency against the possibility that some of the land allocated for housing may not become available in the Plan period.

The HBF used the EIP to question the SP regeneration strategy which sought to open up development opportunities in the East through restricting such opportunities in the West. *"Demand cannot be moved around like chess pieces"* (HBF interview). They argued that it is naive to believe that land use policies on their own, without sufficient subsidy for housing renewal and public transport, could achieve LA sustainability aims. Tinkering with the housing and economic development allocations in SW Lancashire would not constrain the levels of commuting to work outside these districts (HBF, 1995). CPRE, on the other hand, argued that constraining the demand for new housing, both spatially and temporally, could help to divert demand to urban areas to revive the housing market there and reduce the high levels of private sector vacancy levels. The HBF were, however, not making these connections. Rather as a separate issue, they felt that the SP should address those areas of East Lancashire where *"there is simply no market"* because the cost of building a new house exceeds the purchase price of existing properties. The HBF, expected to see SP policies that addressed the condition of the housing stock, or which through *"major public and private investment ...overcome physical and infrastructure constraints over and above what has already taken place"* (HBF, 1995).

Whilst the HBF used the EIP to clarify any market restrictions, the CPRE sought to move the debate away from figures to the environmental implications of accommodating the levels of development envisaged, in an effort to make the link between growth locations and the SP's environmental policies. They argued that testing the RPG figures requires county based assessments of environmental capacity based on ecological and sustainability principles. The HBF, on the other hand, were making links between environmental restrictions, 'town-cramming'; a likely shortage of land to house the projected growth, and the unimplementability of policies that fly at market trends. They particularly criticised the lack of careful justification for the environmental designations.

#### **4.2 The expansion of stakeholders and the widening out of arenas**

The key actors in the development plan arenas network out to link into the wider grouping of those who have a stake in housing issues to bring resources of authority, knowledge and popular support to their argumentation. This section examines the way these resources are used by the key players in our story so far and the arenas in which wider housing issues are debated.

## West Midlands

Two sets of arenas at regional level have opened out to wider comment and ideas, and to reach some consensus on housing problems and necessary action. These are the 1993 conference on regional strategy chaired by Saunders, and the RPG requested review of the 1992 household projections. The regional conference was an attempt to open up strategic debate to public scrutiny but was criticised because, as with many council committee format discussions, participants came with fixed political and professional positions to display, and the feedback through minutes was unnecessarily protracted (Cherry, 1993). The conference though was probably the arena which gestated a 'new' strategy on spatial form to bring forward development proposals based on emerging ideas of environmental sustainability and greenbelt flexibility:

*"Firstly, we should sacrifice the green belt in a small number of locations around the clock face of the conurbation. These deletions would provide the scope to form development corridors based on rail routes into the built up area, which could have substantial spare capacity at relatively little cost. Next, we should establish, more extensively than is presently envisaged, a network of urban green spaces running through and penetrating to the heart of the various conurbation towns".* (Smith, 1993).

It is a strategy which possibly draws inspiration from two previous LA orchestrated strategies which failed to find favour with central government when proposed. The 1948 *West Midlands Conurbation Study* in examining options for the relief of housing need through urban reconstruction proposed a conurbation of 'green suburban settings'. In 1971, *A Developing Strategy for the West Midlands* advocated a growth axis (a NE-SW corridor), together with associated islands of growth on the periphery of the conurbation but detached from it (Wannop, 1995:91-99). This new strategy finds favour with the HBF and individual builders who prefer growth nearer the periphery of conurbations where demand is strong, rather than in new settlements beyond commuting range. The HBF have been key players at regional level since the late 1980s; a role they are having to share increasingly with the CPRE and other groups now. Their influence has been significant; increasing the draft housing figures by 25,000 for the final RPG. They similarly lobbied MPs, LPAs and Paul Beresford the Conservative planning minister to ensure that the 1992 projections would be incorporated early on in the next RPG review. There has been a close working relationship between Wimpey Homes, Bryant Homes and Birmingham City Council to bring about the Birmingham Heartlands Development Corporation out of which the new Bordesley urban village development (700 new and 350 refurbished homes) is well under way.

The second arena impacting on housing issues is the RPG requested review of the recent household projections being undertaken by the WMRFLA with input by HBF and the CPRE. The initial scoping meeting for the study involved not only planning and housing departments, the HBF, CPRE, GOWM, but also a wider range of organisations including the Housing Corporation, churches and pressure groups. On this basis the study widened out to encompass issues of housing for whom and where, looking at the way the housing market works in the West Midlands and whose

housing needs it addresses. Halcrow-Fox were commissioned to take a quick and impressionistic look at housing markets in the region.

### Kent

In Kent, strategic locations for housing have been negotiated outside development plan arenas with King's Hill development and now Kent Thameside. Housing development issues have been firmly linked to economic regeneration and land values. In the Kent case study, a major landowner (BCI), developers and their consultants are key stakeholders, with whom to jointly negotiate restrictive land use regulations. Since Kent Thameside is the country's premier development site other bodies, such as the Environment Agency, have sought to influence outcomes. The Environmental Agency has developed "*mutual understanding*" with developers and influenced choice of sites and planning conditions in Dartford. The problems of coordinating all these actors and securing government commitment to infrastructure funding have led to calls for a strategic body, properly resourced, to implement policies for the Thames Gateway, with the powers to undertake on-going management of infrastructure and environment (Planning 1996).

In Kent Thameside Blue Circle Industries has centred debate around the development proposals for their own land holdings, using their own master land use plan to consult with Dartford, Gravesend and Kent CC since 1991 outside development plan arenas. BCI are credited with the lobbying skills to implement the Thameside vision; submitting their outline application for development around the proposed international passenger station at Ebbsfleet, one week before the government was due to decide on the consortium to build the rail link. Their proposal (covering only Ebbsfleet) includes around 3,200 new homes as well as schools, hotels, retail and community uses, phased over 15-20 years (Planning, 1996). This questions the role of the development plan in Kent when the "*big guns can override it*" (developer).

The HBF does not seem to be a key activist in the Kent Thameside/North Kent Success networks, seemingly content to haggle for additional land release and increased housing totals within the planning arenas of the development plan process and in quarterly meetings with Kent CPOG. They have lobbied for more certainty on these issues at the regional level in the future, and have sponsored research by the Chelmer Institute on the demand for 4/5 bed houses and the use to which inherited money is put in order to justify their traditional market focus on 4/5-bed houses. They have sought to undermine LA policies for urban regeneration and the sequential search for housing sites through focusing on the quality of life issues, the enormous cost of maintaining the existing stock, and the unimplementability of inner urban policies.

Kent CC too has clearly linked into wider arenas on housing issues: "*housing has become highly politically charged*" with the County lobbying MPs and using its influence in the House of Commons. This goes right down to district and parish level. Parishes have been influential in Shepway DC in their opposition to sites proposed by the LA, with the inspector proposing the site the parish council put forward instead. Parish and district council representation is often linked.

## Lancashire

During the later stages of the SP, the County, the more proactive districts, the HBF and the CPRE were negotiating and lobbying for advantage around the regional business site policy. The large landowners (CNT, MOD, British Gas, PO, Health Trusts, British Rail, Railtrack, British Coal Corporation) involved behind these business sites and major housing sites declined to participate in the open SP arenas, presumably lobbying behind the scenes locally or in regional business partnership arenas. Yet their operational needs to release their assets during the plan period obviously structure the debate on strategic housing issues, possibly to the detriment of the regeneration of older urban areas. Professional planners were well aware of the power key actors wield outside the planning system. *"Most big investment decisions are made on whim in any case to some degree"* (district planner). The flagship site of Cuerden was *"stitched (up) by politicians - planners didn't get near the starting gate"*. Politics distorts the planning process and *"nothing is necessarily rational"* (consultant). *"Cuerden the winner in the beauty contest - one of the most attractive sites in the north west due to its greenness"* (pressure-group chairman).

Private sector actors who interact in LP consultation arenas claim that it is now more difficult to influence a LP, partly due to the effort required to become involved with each district but also because of the discretion LPAs are perceived to have at the modification stage because of self adoption. Representations to the deposit plan can be substantial, with local political interests coming to the fore. In the urban-rural fringe where residents have the resource capacity to protect their quality of life, organised groups have mobilised against detailed site allocations in local plans. In this type of area, a District might receive 3000 representations to its plan, mainly concerning housing; *"without being too disparaging you could say they are the NIMBY kind of reaction ..perhaps"* (district planner).

Housing associations operate on the edges of the planning system, regenerating run-down areas and hovering for small chunks of below market value land, but rarely becoming involved in the debates about housing growth. Because they can't compete on price with the private sector, they have to compete with builders to *"grab edges from the development process"* (HA land manager). Increasingly their development role is dependent on public sector asset releases, recycling income from one area to another, and generating profit to cover any commercial risk. Their financing situation necessitates market solutions to wealth creation that are not capital intensive. To turn round places like Burnley, where the problem is one of oversupply of inappropriate housing stock, requires an acquisition strategy to selectively clear property as well improve the stock. The key to turning round such places is not to lock capital up in old rehabs but requires a stock reduction as well as a land development solution. On their own HAs can only tackle a small number of properties. It was felt that financial incentives from LAs, especially on sites they own, would encourage builders onto more difficult sites in urban centres.

### 4.3 Commentary

New housing allocations are the biggest area for conflict between the metropolitan areas and the shires. Kent and Lancashire Counties found that the regional debates on household growth in the past have tended to marginalise them. But at county level they both wield considerable power, with Lancashire painted as an actor who will use national and regional pressure to do what it wants to do anyway. Kent is painted as a proactive, entrepreneurial force. They both perceive their role as developing areas with sufficient space to accommodate the county's development needs. There is a strong political-officer alliance to address issues of economic prosperity and growth. Because of the development opportunities in Kent Thameside the private-public partnership is further developed. Debate at regional inter-authority level in the West Midlands has been marked by a more inclusionary concert to address regional issues, with a specific body providing the arena. Despite the shire-metropolitan tensions, a workable compromise on housing has always been reached.

This consensus in the West Midlands between planners and members is being held together by the overarching concept of transport corridors. Sometimes, as Wannop (1995:101) notes commenting on strategic planning in West Midlands in the late 1970s, divisions of opinion are disguised; others are left for future resolution and a few are overcome by compromise. To reach a compromise the strategy has to be vague. Instead of the traditional planning solution of peripheral restraint using the green belt to control growth and rehousing population in expanded towns in the surrounding counties, the concept is presented as the start of a strategic approach to interlocking problems. The past inconsistencies between the shires on what proportion of households to accept from the metropolitan area, with Solihull and Warwickshire under providing for Birmingham's households and Staffordshire and Worcestershire over providing, are presently being masked by the political accord for the corridor strategy devised in the regional guidance review forum. The emphasis is on redeveloping derelict urban sites for soft end uses, rather than specifically for housing or industry. It is designed to:

#### **BOX 4 TRANSPORT CORRIDOR RATIONALE**

- provide a development pattern which would allow full accessibility for economic reasons but cuts back on car-based traffic;
- protect and enhance sites of ecological value;
- upgrade environmental assets and living conditions in the inner cities, thereby encouraging reinvestment there;
- recycle derelict land in the conurbation more cheaply than at present. (Smith, 1993)

Detailed implementation is yet to follow, but as currently worked out it is seen by the shires as reducing the pressure on the house builders to develop land in the metropolitan area and as giving house builders their preferred option of green land. The HBF are strongly supportive of the first corridor study. The two crucial components which could help the strategy to achieve planning objectives of urban regeneration and social sustainability are the social housing targets and the mechanism to phase the release of housing land. This would go some way to relieving

pressure on the shires, who are generally reluctant to release greenfield sites for new or expanded settlements. The issue of providing housing households can afford seems to be the glue to keep the LA members together and they have pursued this against government instruction.

The HBF will try to weaken any Forum agreement involving social housing targets and phasing of land supply which would restrict their flexibility to act. They effectively lobbied during the draft RPG to undermine the Forum agreement on figures and may succeed in diluting the present regional housing proposals. The shires feel they have different problems of a different sort and scale to the metropolitan districts on housing. Although the mobilisation to change the housing discourse in the regional housing figures review has attempted to integrate economic issues, with social (need) and environmental issues (capacity to absorb), prevarication by GOWM will abate this third attempt by the WMRFLA to determine their own strategy for spatial form. The future does not look good: *"The ball seems to be running away from us a bit"* (district planner).

The intellectual capital on Lancashire's housing problems have not yet been articulated beyond the County Planning Department's background working papers on housing, which characterise the housing challenge as a stock problem, a glut of housing in disrepair, rather than a problem of land development. These are issues which hardly surfaced in discussion in the strategic planning arenas though the broad policy of regeneration of urban areas was by implication meant to address such issues. Much of the stock in East Lancashire is inappropriate in terms of location, quality and disrepair, and mortgages are often withheld. It is an issue understood by the more entrepreneurial housing associations working in Lancashire, but the connections between the two sets of actors have not yet been made.

#### **4.4 The relation to the planning system/ plans**

Because of the political nature of accommodating housing growth through immigration, land release at local level is always a sticking point, with various groups using the development plan arenas to argue their points of view and thereby extending the decision-making process. Formulating the set of land use advice documents for an area (RPG, SP, and LP) is an overlapping repetitive process, due to the varying start dates of different plans which in theory should nest into the one above. Regional guidance is out of synch with Structure Plan reviews and updated household projections, resulting in a final version of the RPG suggesting the review of housing numbers should start again. This impacts negatively on the development plan process in two ways. First, it obscures any local housing strategy that has been reached on the basis of some consensus, and part of this strategy will have been to ensure at least regionally that there is 8-9 years supply of housing land available. The districts and counties are then reluctant to have to renegotiate allocations or to be tied by a revised annual housing figure set for a 20 year period. The housing project in the development plan process is essentially a number crunching exercise which reaches right down from the projections through RPG to the counties setting annual targets. There was felt to be very little local level determination of policy: *"The RPG [is] very wrong in setting figures to come to strategic authorities as a bit of technocracy rather than politics"* (County planner).

Secondly, getting the numbers right holds up draft SP's which can't be published until housing numbers are fixed and leads to increasing uncertainty with the local planning authorities all doing their sums again. The review in the **West Midlands** was considered to be "*a waste of time*" and the government handling of it "*is somewhat naive to say the least*" (County planner). The first round of UDPs were rolled forward from existing plans and quickly produced except for Solihull's, where the HBF dragged them through two public inquiries to test their 'lack of capacity' arguments. Solihull undertook an environmental appraisal, for the second inquiry, of different development options to demonstrate how the character of the Borough would be altered. Solihull had thus to mobilise technical arguments against the HBF's technical arguments, but this enabled a firmer environmental focus for the plan helped by the preparation of a countryside strategy and Local Agenda 21 work. Whilst Solihull's plan is now subject to a judicial review activated by the CPRE, the other metropolitan authorities in the West Midlands are just starting their UDP reviews. Here the question is whether to roll the plan forward again, to "*cherry pick it*", deciding what is necessary to alter not what might it be nice to alter, because it took a lot of effort to get the UDP in place. Birmingham, Bromsgrove, and Wolverhampton have carried out environmental capacity studies and foresee longer term problems for housing land availability, particularly with the new sustainable ideas of green wedges and wildlife corridors. The open land that exists is green belt and is important to separate settlements. If the metropolitan areas are anticipating capacity constraints, this leaves the shires taking the overspill again - hence the idea of transport corridors.

Whilst the districts are progressing quality of life issues through their development plans, the WMRFLA have used the household figures review to argue for a phasing policy (as in PPG10) which links land release to resources for social housing. They argue that a housing strategy driven only by numbers leads to the release of greenfield sites mainly outside the conurbation which will fuel further decentralisation (cf Bramley et al, 1995: 'circular projections'). Future housing provision on the basis of need is difficult to argue against and attractive to some degree and is the one housing issue which will unite the metropolitan area with the shires which are now all Labour controlled. But as yet there has been no support from GOWM.

There is a sense of wanting to work together and to cooperate on housing, but the review objectives will neither be translated into SPs and LPs nor the housing indicators (Box 4) monitored as intended, unless DoE support can be harnessed. This can be considered a test case for the future regulatory role of the development plan in England. It is also a precursor to whether government funds can be harnessed more successfully for regeneration linking funding mechanisms provided through inner city initiatives (Black Country Development Corporation, Birmingham Heartlands Development Corporation, City Challenge/Capital Challenge, Task Forces and HATs) to a land use strategy prepared within the open debating arenas of the development plan process.

In **Kent**, the Secretary of State through the GOSE has manoeuvred LAs and developers together to link housing growth issues with the development of premium sites. On Thames Gateway: "*we[GOSE] are implementing through planning decisions*". The SoSE is being firm on the issue of housing figures and "*can't be seen*

*to back down. The desire of the SE not to have any more houses won't wash and the SoSE making point to districts and to MPs and being quite hard on [Kent]" (GOSE).*

RPG9A is redefining the role of the development plan for an area of substantial development opportunity, ensuring that LAs undertake an early review of their development plans to provide the context for supporting regeneration and to achieve the aims of Kent Thameside (GOSE, 1966: para 6.85). The role of development plan is to *"help secure an environment of the right quality. This will mean steering land uses which could make poor neighbours to other, more appropriate locations"*(bid, para 6.8.7). RPG9A heralds a new environmental standard which espouses sustainable forms of development to minimise the need to travel. It also sets a kitemark to indicate to developers and local authorities the output targets to be achieved by the planning system:

*"Application of this guidance through the planning system will give confidence that high quality investments will not be undermined by declining standards on neighbouring sites and elsewhere in Thames Gateway. It will contribute to improvements in the overall environment and image of Thames Gateway, as new permissions are given only for development which is consistent with its principles. This will in turn underline confidence both in the increasing value of land and in the prospects of a better return on investment from developing it to high standards"* (bid, para 3.13) The promoter of Ebbsfleet station is also *"reminded of the importance of securing a quality of "civic design" commensurate with the significance of the station's location"*(bid, para 6.8.10).

RPG9A gives more strategic direction to the key actors through setting the key development principles and the importance of increasing the quality of development. The Districts accept the scale of the development opportunities presented to them in Kent Thameside and do not feel that they're in the situation of having something *"foisted upon"* them they didn't know about. *"Rather both sides of the political spectrum seem to embrace the prospect of significant housing growth in [the district] fairly enthusiastically. There has not been a NIMBY reaction to it at all"* (district planner). RPG9A also advises that planning policies should seek to encourage improvements to the quality and amenities of both the housing stock and of the local environment because of the key role played by the residential environment in influencing (developers') perceptions of an area. The role of the existing stock (by inference) is to provide for the changing household size *"through conversions, refurbishment programmes and small scale housing schemes"* (GOSE, 1996: para 5.3.5).

Kent CC is portrayed as toeing the line regionally by generally seeking to resist pressure for greenfield development, as being positive on the economic side but not yet 'hands-on' when it comes to housing issues. The County has promoted Ashford and the East Thames Corridor as growth points, whilst large house builders prefer small scale developments in areas of high landscape value, particularly in West Kent (and Maidstone, Tunbridge Wells and Canterbury), and the HBF have tried to increase housing requirements there through the Kent EIP. The EIP panel agreed with HBF but Kent CC were reluctant to increase figures for Tunbridge Wells. The

County are expected to be proactive in enforcing their own SP at District PLIs, since the districts vary in their protection of AONBs and other policies.

In **Lancashire**, the administrative links between the GONW, NWRA , the County and the Districts seem to be relatively more opaque and haphazard. So although *Greener Growth* (NWRA,1993) set a target of renovating 30% of housing stock by 2011 and the draft regional guidance commented on the implications of failing to act, Lancashire SP failed to continue the policy thread which might have led to district action. The final guidance noted that:

*"No estimate is made of the land take consequences of meeting this target which would arise from replacement for unfit housing. But the Regional Association noted that, if the present problems of unfit housing were not tackled, there would be a future need for large scale clearance which would have a significant land resource implication"* (GONW, Append A para 7).

This is partly a reflection of guidance being out of synch with plan reviews, but also reflects the lack of a strategic view on housing and the extent of LA discretion to respond to purely local concerns. The regional guidance also gave support for LAs who wished to serve completion notices on developers holding outdated industrial consents in the urban core, or historic housing permissions in unsustainable locations. The SP addressed only the latter, with draft SP Policy 45 prohibiting the renewal of lapsed residential planning permissions that are in locations which do not accord with the Plan's settlement policies, and in particular, in locations that would generate excessive numbers of trips by car. The SP's affordable housing policies (policies 43 and 44) whilst setting a target of 20% of new housing being for social housing, are only likely to be achieved in high demand areas. And even then there was little the County could do to ensure compliance. *"There again you would expect the district to buy in - but find some districts are and some not. Some of the more rural ones - people who live in these areas - do not like the idea of social housing near them - even though there's just as much poverty there"* (County planner). *"Success of policy will depend on the political make-up of the districts and how sensitive they are to proposals taking place in pretty villages"* (County planner).

Other participants viewed the role of the counties as *"quite superfluous"*, in Lancashire's case citing the view that the Preston plan now barely meets SP targets and has no long term land available; the County won't object because they *"are totally marginalised....GONW are totally marginalised and they won't interfere"*(developer). The consensus politics of mainly Labour authorities particularly was considered detrimental to taking on a strategic view, leading to district authorities reflecting local NIMBY opinion. Other respondents hinted at the 'failure' to constrain LA discretion as detracting from the usefulness of the higher administrative tiers. The effectiveness of the Lancashire SP in controlling both lower administrative tiers and market actors was therefore questioned. County planners would seem to lack the ability to implement Policy 42 which aims to regenerate the more difficult sites, without substantial government subsidy for both infrastructure and housing, since the SP gives them no powers to decide the total number sites allocated or to control the take-up of the easy sites.

## **5. OVERALL LESSONS**

Assessing housing need over future timescales, allocating sites and estimating types of dwelling provision and tenure necessary has been a key objective for development plans this century. This housing remit was narrowed in the 1980s to identifying and ensuring a sufficient supply of land for market housing, with clear procedures to be followed and criteria for defining the quantity and location of the land. PPG3 effectively centres negotiation on housing provision around the formulation of RPG and County SPs, with their translation into Local Plans. This is a 'top-down' process in which planning authorities need to marshal coherent planning reasons to better the arguments of the other participants in the allocation process. DoE household projections provide crude but forceful estimates of future market demand for housing in each region which require substantial technical information to interpret and frame their implications for different local areas. Getting these projections right for the LA area is at the crux of housing policies in development plans. Examining the way housing issues are dealt with through the development plan process highlights the contradictions/dialectics arising from regulatory procedures, the rationales for state intervention in market processes, and the purpose of the development plan itself.

There is, firstly, an inherent contradiction between market actors's quest for certainty from environmental regulations and the procedural mechanisms put in place to formulate these regulations and the consistency of application. The call from the larger house builders and other developers is for a planning framework which provides a store of information by which planning applications will be assessed. This would contain two elements: (i) a broad spatial framework indicating how land uses would interrelate to guide the development of buildings and infrastructure in areas likely to undergo substantial change, and (ii) sets of criteria in a code (cf. Use Classes Order or the General Development Order) which would be consistently followed by local planning authorities. Application assessment criteria or planning obligations, if known well in advance, can be included in the land deal, if not "*then developer is in stuck.*" House builders currently see themselves "*as saddled with a requirement to build affordable housing*", but would prefer the scale of a planning obligation to be determined on a site by site basis using the builder's local knowledge of market conditions.

To provide certainty for market actors, the timescales for these spatial frameworks would have to look 15-20 years ahead. Plans which can only give policy certainty for 5-10 years (until 2001, or 2006) are seen as undermining the confidence of house builders in anticipating future circumstances. Yet the mechanisms for producing development plans are not delivering a strategy which has permanence and duration. There are two problems here. The first is the lack of technical information or information decay on cause and effects in spatial change. Technical and intellectual knowledge tends to be dripped into the process, so that the outputs of government advice are not synchronised with the plan production by the different administrative tiers. Instead of a relatively smooth production from broad strategy to detailed policy, there are several feedback loops in the process, where policies and decisions are reassessed.

Secondly, the hierarchical nesting of strategic and detailed plans has been diluted and lost in many cases, accentuated by the abolition of many county councils. Although

decisions on land use are guided through the plans hierarchy of PPGs, RPG, and SPs much of the relevance of the district-wide plan is lost or overtaken by events, because of the timing mismatch between RPG/SP/LP processes. Local plans firmed up at the same time as their SP, barely meet SP revised housing targets and often have no long term housing land available. The length of time to reach consensus on housing numbers and growth locations, with new reviews and inquiry processes, is holding back both SPs and local plans. The process of producing local plans, in particular, is seen as too long with inquiries which take years and LPAs who in the end go against government guidance: *"If people are objecting to it, the LA won't progress it"* (developer). The time resources for influencing the district plan are substantial, with involvement from the start of plan production requiring 7 years or more. Actual influence on the plan content was low, unless a stakeholder has been involved *"in the years building up to its production"* (developer) or has been involved in partnership with the LA over particular sites in the plan. The HBF are responding at each stage but delays in process are creating rigidities, which are seen as acting against builders, home buyers and the planning system generally. Their influence on the government regional offices had waned. A large landowner and developer claimed they had rarely if ever changed a draft plan, but noted the success of actors like the HBF in demolishing any social and economic ambitions LAs may have and wish to pursue inappropriately through the local plan.

The vertical chain of authority between the different administrative tiers and the transference of policy downwards are seen as having weakened. The government regional offices were portrayed as interested only in a narrow land use interpretation of PPG guidance, being little more than *"an administrative machine that corrects punctuation"* (district planner). The inspectorate were criticised by house builders as failing to understand the strategic dimensions of UDPs, and counties were impugned for the lack of seriousness over SP consultation because of their powers of self-certification. Information decay meant that 'decisions of magnitude' were being made after only a superficial level of debate at the EIP. Similarly the LP process *"is totally flawed"* since the local authority don't have to take notice of the inspector's recommendations. Both developers and landowners felt their influence on the plan process and the administrative tiers has been reduced. They argue that, in particular, the government regional offices and RPG, are failing to constrain LA discretion. Government guidelines are seen as being deliberately vague so that the development plan is purely at the whim of the LA; *"Its area, its plan ....All they do is tinker about at the edges"*. Because of these deficiencies, development plan-making is perceived to be creaking, the hierarchy is considered long and questions are being asked if all the elements are necessary; *"The SP process is lost"*.

The traditional actors in the development plan process are considered by wider stakeholders as exacerbating these problems. The CPRE resists new development, the house builders produce poor quality, and planning has allowed new development to sprawl which has affected perceptions of the area. The right to a continuing dialogue by participants throughout the plan-making process particularly surprised laypeople who had made plan objections. Many apparently were critical of the waste of local authority resources on this.

It would appear from our many interviews that the planning system has lost its rationale for intervention in market decisions and that this also reflects on the

confusion many local authorities and stakeholders have over the purpose of the development plan as a policy mechanism. Through intervening in the way land and buildings are used the planning system could achieve the following aims, not necessarily all concurrently, but in different geographical areas:

**BOX 5 PLANNING SYSTEM RATIONALES**

- **to support market decisions**
- **to create market value**
- **to rectify market inefficiencies, to reduce negative impacts**

The land use plan and permit system can be used to progress private sector proposals through providing a source of information on market demand in different locations, through removing the constraints on development (land release, removing legal rigidities, providing authority and support for development proposals, etc). The statutory status of the development plan and the permit process could bring together private sector proposals and public sector financial support in a way which changes perceptions of an area and recreates market value. The planning system can ease the acceptance of new development through setting standards of performance and negotiating to ameliorate negative development impacts. The ideological approach of central government at any one point in time will mould these different views of the purpose of planning and the tools which are made available for planners to influence development. Each of these rationales for state intervention in land and property decisions will be examined in turn.

- **The Development plan to co-ordinate investment decisions**

The traditional purpose of the development plan post WW2 was to provide a broad spatial framework to co-ordinate the investment decisions of the public sector, particularly the public sector infrastructure companies, and through this to guide private sector investment. In the 1990s the politico-administrative context has changed. The utility companies are privatised and "*are supposed to be in a competitive situation, but are they hell*" (house builder's representative). The utility charges of the privatised statutory agencies have gone up 10-fold and "*have been disastrous*" for developers. The HBF had to lobby to get exorbitant water infrastructure charges down to £400/house- a charge that comes on top of LA shopping lists. There is an absence of government investment on service provision for transport, for dealing with land reclamation, etc.

The fundamental weakness of the land use development plan is that it is unable to co-ordinate the investment programmes of public sector agencies, never mind the privatised infrastructure companies, which reduces the power of implementation and certainty that such plans could have. This omission impacts on the regulatory performance of the plan, particularly the ease of translating strategic policies into practice at local level, and the political commitment of politicians to new ideas. The difficulty of cascading policies down to local level is borne out in the housing debate. Instead, many councils cling to the old style public service mentality of the council

providing everything; *"they feel if anything needs to be done - they should do it. The ownership of initiatives is not as widely spread as could be"* (county planner). The local political response is to try and control and own every initiative, with a centralised team endorsing each move at every stage.

- **The Development plan as a contract to secure public sector spending to revitalise an area and to increase land values**

This would require two elements: the creation of a vision to market the potential of a run-down area and a negotiated agreement to lever in and bend the investment decisions and operational programmes of key stakeholders. This involves co-ordinating key actors who already have some stake in an area in need of regeneration. A broad strategic framework, which addresses development principles and process issues, is important here to direct and lever in resources from those stakeholders who traditionally negotiate through planning system arenas and those who are at the periphery.

With the fragmentation of the local governance system, unitary districts rarely have the resources to take the lead themselves in recreating market value. The existence of separate planning regimes - a unitary dev plan in part of the area and a joint structure plan in another - may mean the development plan process is sidelined, to be replaced by a market led development using a broader planning framework to lever in substantial public sector investment to fix to a specific geographical area. This process replaces planning values with market values, and downgrades more 'marginal' initiatives to improve habitat richness and ecological management or to encourage recycling of brown-field sites for development would not create positive value on the balance sheet.

*"Raising environmental quality and dealing with contaminated land therefore seems to be a prerequisite for investment and development rather than a desirable end in itself. Throughout, the weight of the approach is on market- and infrastructure-led growth and development, with the environment being accommodated to market 'demands' and 'needs'"* (Gordon, 1993).

Development opportunities are created since *"builders take a view of, if that's where the action is, we'll go there and tailor our product"* (HBF). It's all about 'image' in creating markets and being first to develop in a new market is good for a developer's image. Blue Water park in Kent Thameside will provide an image boost, because the infrastructure is planned in advance. The planned approach to the East Thames Corridor between the public and private sectors has shifted the fringe to down market Gravesend, but not as far as Folkestone, Dover, or Thanet. Value can be created through the manipulation of symbols:

*"We can now create symbolic value in space, in a way that was not before possible....Bringing the TGV through the East Thames Corridor could have literally an enormous symbolic importance in a world where development prospects increasingly depend on the manipulation of symbols. It would mean that the corridor became our gateway into Europe and, conversely, the entry into London from Europe.....The job of building this new Thameside city is going to demand huge*

*public-private sector co-operation, on far more than the scale of a new town. The public sector is going to have to do what the public sector traditionally does, which is basic infrastructure and cleaning up an often degraded environment; the private sector can and should do the rest, including a share of the transport infrastructure.*"(Hall, 1991, pp 7-8).

- **The Development plan as a document/agreement reached through consensus on how an area should change, with specific proposals for land uses and criteria by which development proposals will be assessed.**

Here the statutory significance of the land use development plan would be used not only to '*centre debate*' but also to involve in that debate a wide range of local actors particularly those who have no monetary stake in the plan outcomes. The planning system has specific forums which hold the process to account and provide redress for particular decisions. It also, through the formulation of the land use development plan, incorporates formal and informal arenas to receive different views on how local spaces should change, and looking 10 years ahead, how to address the socio-economic strengths and weaknesses of the authority's area. S54a of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, in increasing participation by business interests, has enhanced both the process of plan formation and debate, and the comprehensive nature of the plan. But continual lobbying for market housing from CBI, chambers of commerce, and market actors generally has skewed the concerns of the development plan away from social policy issues of the affordability of housing provision and the quality of lived environments.

The EIP and the PLI, rather than providing open informed debating arenas, are dominated by inclusionary techno-legalistic debate set within formal procedures. Procedures are designed to enable the panel/inspector to clarify issues and gather information rather than to allow for right of reply or effective debate. Participation in these arenas is taken seriously by the key actors as they struggle to impress the panel/inspector with their arguments over the release of land for housing. It is important for the Districts, the HBF, and the CPRE to get the housing figures right for them, first in the RPG and then in the development plans. LPs are now so important in creating value for new developments through zoning, infrastructure decisions and development assessment criteria, that developers will on occasions be prepared to prompt second inquiries into development plans to preference their landholdings against other developers' interests.

Given the procedural nature of the current plan formulation process it would need to be radically altered to balance it with a more people-friendly open-ended wide discussion of options. LAs are presently criticised for reflecting the concerns of their electorate, particularly local NIMBY anti-growth opinion. Developers find both the consensual politics of Labour authorities and the compromise line taken by the SoSE on housing numbers a weak response. Members are seen to reflect the concerns of their electorate and officers, in turn, are responsive to their members. Officers therefore identify those sites which will give "*the line of least resistance*". Developers are uncomfortable with the more transparent local questioning of both the amount of housing land required and the appropriate locations. Local residents views on this and the horse trading on numbers between the metropolitan districts and the

shires is seen as dominated by the "*lowest common denominator approach*" where the "*technical professional approach [is] hijacked by political shenanigans*". A development plan based on widespread consensus would need the powers and resources to attempt popular involvement, democratic participation and for decisive intervention - otherwise developers would lobby to by-pass the process.

- **The Development plan as a technical document to guide future change in as efficient a way as the current store of planning knowledge will allow.**

One of the criticisms of the present plan process is that decisions of magnitude are taken after only a superficial level of debate because of the insufficiency of information about the functioning of the housing market. The West Midlands has had three regional reviews of housing issues over the last 50 years, each time creating more intellectual capital and understanding of the issue to break down myths about cause and effect and to reach horizontal consensus at local level on what type of quantities and which locations and why.

The only robust technical data which is routinely utilised to inform spatial decisions on housing are the DoE household projections which play a key role re-informing debate on housing numbers. Understanding of the assumptions underpinning these projections is limited to statisticians and a few county planners, although LAs are consulted on migration assumptions and asked to feed back their views. The other sources of information pertaining to housing supply, housing stock and occupancy are the 1991 Census and the DoE quarterly statistics on housing starts and completions. Although this information is normally presented in the background topic papers accompanying SPs, little use is made of information about the growing numbers of private sector vacant dwellings, for example, to inform spatial housing policies. The housing land availability studies which used to be carried out between the HBF and LAs to identify a 5 year supply of housing land in each district, have mostly "*gone by the board now*". These were traditionally hard fought by the HBF ensuring that the marketability of proposed sites were significant criteria, and once chosen provided a 'gentlemen's agreement'. LPAs do them on their own now and "*are less than thorough*" (HBF).

The RPG housing figures review has given the WMRFLAs the opportunity to widen out the housing debate to address future housing need and present unmet needs, the capacity of existing stock and the urban area, and to consider what would make for an effective policy of urban regeneration and sustainable spatial development. Despite the national debate which was orchestrated in 1996 on where the additional 4.4m households could be accommodated by 2016, the West Midlands is probably further along in terms of strategy than any other region. There is a mismatch of demand and supply of housing in metropolitan areas, with vacant properties in areas of low market demand. For these areas, there is a downward spiral at work, such that if housing land is over-provided for, this results in investment being drawn away leaving a weak market in the centre. People then cannot sell their houses, so rent them out which attracts a changed community structure in the area with a younger age mix. The technical review, in the West Midlands, has addressed how to recreate the market in these locations and, with this aim in mind, they are trying to tie in decisions on quantity of dwellings required to the regional guidance development principles -

ensuring a vertical and horizontal link between overarching principles, aims and specific objectives and criteria. Halcrow-Fox, and Llewellyn-Davies consultancies have been involved assessing issues of urban capacity.

A more technical approach to land use planning would seek to integrate economic issues (working of market/high demand/low demand) with social issues (need) and environmental issues (capacity to absorb). Local Agenda 21 is helping to make the links between lifestyles and ecological impact. Local authority planners have so far failed overall to reconceptualise issues about the carrying capacity of the environment so that new initiatives and policies are politically acceptable to their members. The new initiatives on the environment which have been developed, have largely been prompted by the electoral and publicity concerns of members. But, so far, there has been little impact on the traditional political concerns of jobs and economic development, little interdepartmental discussion on environmental safeguards, and little use of the resources held by environmental advisory and pressure groups. So whilst the county planners have been emphasising the impacts of transport on the environment they haven't had the database to assess the ecological impacts to fully protect wildlife designations. The Environment Agency has the opportunity to get involved in development issues, advising for example, on threshold issues and the role that river corridors can play in the conurbation in terms of what they can contribute to the quality of life. From experience, the districts have found that they must be very cautious about the robustness of advice provided them by government environmental organisations; since the quality of their evidence has been undermined by expert opinion at inquiries.

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