

# cles bulletin cles bulletin cles bulletin cles bulletin

*CLÉS Bulletin is a topical summary of articles which have appeared in the professional press. Its aim is to provide a pithy précis of a subject area, drawing out the specific and common issues raised in the individual articles.*

**CLÉS Bulletin No. 17  
November 2003**

## **Market Renewal Pathfinders**

### **Introduction**

Low demand and abandoned housing in the Midlands and North of England has long been recognised an acute problem. The ODPM identified around 1 million homes, affected by low demand and abandonment, spread across over 120 local authorities in the North and Midlands. In response to this, the ODPM set up nine market renewal pathfinders covering areas among the most deprived in the country and with the most acute low demand problems. The pathfinders are made up of partnerships of local authorities and other key stakeholders. This is an innovative new approach and offers a fresh technique in tackling the problems of low demand. It involves adopting a strategic approach to ensure effective partnership engaging a range of local government departments and other stakeholders.

The aim is that they develop strategic schemes for whole housing markets, to ensure problems are tackled permanently and not just displaced or deferred<sup>1</sup>. It is a radical approach aimed at sustained action which will involve a package of options such as demolition and new homes.

Each area faces different difficulties in terms of their unique housing issues and it is recognised that there is no blueprint. It is essential that there is an ongoing

process of communication with those communities directly affected by the proposals, to avoid conflicts and ensure the right issues are being addressed. It is also noteworthy that this initiative is a long-term project to be rolled out over a ten to fifteen-year period resulting in a need to manage expectations, as people easily become disheartened if they see no sign of change in the initial stages.

This Bulletin features a number of articles from the housing and regeneration press, which take a case study approach, focusing on the developments of particular pathfinders. Interestingly, they reflect the common issues and individual nuances.

*Regeneration & Renewal*<sup>2</sup> magazine looks at conflicts in a community of Pendle, which lies in one of the market renewal pathfinder areas. The council wants to demolish 350 houses while the community has launched a strategy to save the homes, proposing an “arms length” company to deliver regeneration, and a community development trust to “empower local people”. This example raises certain sensitivities surrounding proposals to demolish people’s homes. Concurrently, this must be balanced with being able to see the bigger picture and ultimately acting for the good of the wider community.

The article stresses the point that each pathfinder has to show an integrated approach – taking on board housing, economic development, transport and local authority services – which will inevitably cause conflicts.

*Regeneration & Renewal* highlights the importance of collaborating with the community during the process of renewal. TPAS reports on the potential mechanisms of communication, proposing a tenants’ network to address residents’ needs. However, the article also draws attention to criticism of the pathfinders in general, arguing that there is insufficient dialogue with private sector house builders, without which the initiative will falter.

Finally, it highlights concerns that the targeted areas are beyond help, considering the argument that adopting a “worst first” approach could lead to money being spent in areas of irreversible decline and that it is indeed better to invest in the best.

*Inside Housing*<sup>3</sup> focuses on the market renewal pathfinder in South Yorkshire. It reports that the area lost nearly 200,000 jobs between 1971 and 1997 as it struggled with the coal and steel closures. Since the early 1990s, some £1 billion has been poured into land reclamation and economic investment in the area but Government figures indicate that people are still

<sup>1</sup> ODPM *Market renewal pathfinders*  
[www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm\\_communities/documents/page/odpm\\_comm\\_023263.hcsp](http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_communities/documents/page/odpm_comm_023263.hcsp)

<sup>2</sup> Newman, Abi *The first major blow in a war of attrition*  
*Regeneration & Renewal* 28 Feb 2003 pp.18-19

<sup>3</sup> Cooke, Michael *Brassed off with the past* *Inside Housing* 14 Feb 2003 pp.26-28

moving away from the area and that the area is still very much in need of regeneration.

In housing terms this has created problems of abandonment in both public and private sector housing. This oversupply is causing major problems for the local housing market where small terraced homes often go for between £15000 and £20000 at a time when the rest of the country has experienced an unprecedented property boom. It was in fact this tally of figures that prompted the launch of the nine housing market renewal initiatives of which the South Yorkshire pathfinder is the largest.

Image is key to the problems in South which has been fuelled by bad press and films such as the *Full Monty* and *Brassed off*. A major factor in its regeneration lies in raising the profile of the areas and building on its positive aspects.

The importance of a holistic approach is made clear, as the significance of good transport links within a town is highlighted. People are prepared to travel to work and if a town has a good standard of transport, it raises the chances of attracting new people to new houses in the area.

*Inside Housing*<sup>4</sup> also goes on to look at the Manchester-Salford market renewal pathfinder, in particular the area of Beswick. A key issue is to develop mixed tenure in the pathfinder areas to promote diversity and a balanced community. This article flags up the importance of effectively engaging the private sector in regeneration, suggesting that the key is that private developers need to feel confident that any area they are investing in will eventually stabilise and values will start to rise.

Crime levels and lack of opportunities meant that economically active people tended to leave the area and the pathfinder hopes to encourage more home ownership and provide more opportunities. It is also seen as important that developers realised the public sector was fully behind the regeneration of the area, otherwise no developer would want to invest in it.

Around 1,000 new homes are planned for the area, mainly family homes with gardens, as it is believed that the retention of family homes is extremely important to the sustainability of the area. By changing the type of housing available they are essentially reversing a historic trend that saw Beswick dominated predominantly by council housing.

Consulting the community is key to the sustainability of the pathfinders and *Inside Housing* emphasises the extensive resident consultation undertaken in the area. It included a neighbourhood planning process which saw a local resident steering group set up, drop-in

events, visits to other estates and newsletters outlining the process.

*Housing Today*<sup>5</sup> looks at two of the North's housing market renewal pathfinders – Hull and East Riding and South Yorkshire – focusing on the challenges they are facing with regards to making their partnerships work. The examples of both pathfinders drive home the important issue of joined up working which is predominant in the market renewal initiative.

The South Yorkshire pathfinder, called Transform, involves four councils working together, and covers 140,000 low demand homes in the area. However, the pathfinder has also affected the way Registered Social Landlords work and they have formed the South Yorkshire RSL forum to raise the profile of RSLs and influence strategy.

The Hull and East Riding pathfinder has to contend with 56,000 homes at risk of low demand, accounting for 51% of Hull's housing stock. Of those at risk, 70% are social housing, but West Hull in particular has a high number of owner-occupied and privately rented properties in low demand.

Hull Council and East Riding Council have formed a new joint structure plan to tackle the problems in both areas. The pathfinder has also reinvigorated the pre-existing RSL forum, which will discuss joint management on multi-landlord estates, and think about joint management in pathfinder areas. It will identify issues that bring areas into decline and it is believed the pathfinder will make RSLs focus more tightly on collective responsibility.

These examples highlight the holistic approach of the pathfinders which cover economic development, education and quality of life issues as well as housing, and points out that the partnership approach inevitably means local authorities having to push aside personal agendas and work towards a common goal.

## Conclusion

A significant amount of funding has been invested in the pathfinders in the hope that it will reverse the decline blighting these areas.

Each of the pathfinders covered in the media show the importance of a holistic approach, in that, regeneration is not just about the physical aspects, but encompasses a whole range of interrelated issues such as transport, housing, economic development and community needs. They also flag up the issue of diversity and the importance of creating a balanced community, which appeals to a wide range of people.

---

<sup>4</sup> Hitch, Kim *Sporting chance* Inside Housing 10 Oct 2003 pp.41-42

---

<sup>5</sup> Knutt, Elaine *The road to recovery* Housing Today 10 Oct 2003 pp.26-28

The media has however, highlighted a number of problems which include tensions in developing the partnerships required, problems in balancing the needs of the community with sustainable positive action. Nevertheless, it appears that they are off to an encouraging start and there is long-term commitment to the progression of this initiative. However, as with any scheme of this size, proof of success can only appear in time.

For more information on this topic please contact:

**Siân Thomas**  
**Information & Policy Researcher, CLES**

---

***The Centre for Local Economic Strategies***  
Express Networks, 1 George Leigh Street, Manchester  
M4 5DL  
Tel 0161 236 7036 Fax 0161 236 1891  
Email [sianthomas@cles.org.uk](mailto:sianthomas@cles.org.uk) Web [www.cles.org.uk](http://www.cles.org.uk)