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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. 5

The Urban Summit

This CLÉS Bulletin looks at the Urban Summit, highlighting the key issues as discussed recently in the media. We will examine the press coverage in the week leading up to the Summit, looking at the main concerns as presented in each of the different fields of regeneration, housing, local government, planning and the urban environment. We will also look at the reports as featured afterwards.

Regeneration and Renewal magazine featured a number of articles in the run-up to the Urban Summit, including *Ten Posers for Prescott*¹ in which the following ten key questions were posed as key issues to be raised at the Summit:

- ❶ How is the rhetoric about diverting more mainstream public spending into deprived areas going to be turned into reality?
- ❷ How can we avoid overloading community groups?
- ❸ Why do transport funding procedures still discriminate against deprived areas?
- ❹ How can we kick-start the development of regeneration skills?
- ❺ How can we bring an end to the existence of sink schools?
- ❻ How can we make our key provincial cities more competitive with European regional capitals?

¹ Ten posers for Prescott *Regeneration and Renewal* 25 Oct 2002 pp.18-19

- ❼ Why don't we have a Cabinet Minister for regeneration?
- ❽ How is the Government going to increase the flow of private investment into deprived areas?
- ❾ What more will the Government do to level the playing field between brownfield and Greenfield development?
- ❿ Isn't it time we confronted the need for managed decline?

The article expanded on each of these questions, explaining why each point is particularly relevant and why answers are needed at the Summit.

Regeneration and Renewal also asked four respected regeneration practitioners, *how well are we doing?*², two years after the publication of the Urban White Paper.

Jon Rouse, Government Adviser and Bill Wicksteed, Economic Development Consultant, both argued that systematic and long lasting regeneration is needed and that we are only now starting to implement programmes that tackle the physical, social and economic needs of communities. They also stressed the importance of thinking, planning and committing long-term.

Debbie Matthews, Community Business Director, points out that one of the biggest successes has been the devolution of decision-making and prioritising to a regional level. While Dick Atkinson, Neighbourhood Manager, suggests that although many of the right policies are in place, there is far too little renewal, activity or cohesion at ground level.

After the Summit, *Regeneration and Renewal* looked at the key issues raised,³ including those in John Prescott's speech, in which he called for greater density rates when building new housing.

The importance for higher density was echoed in Lord Rogers' speech, also covered in *Regeneration and Renewal*. Rogers told the Summit that the country is still 'pretty grim' despite the successful revival of civic centres such as Birmingham, and he called on the Government to renew its commitment to reversing the flow of people away from urban areas.

New Start magazine⁴ was interested in a new interim report on urban competitiveness published at the Summit, entitled, *Cities, Regions and Competitiveness*. The report says that the UK's big provincial cities are slipping behind both London and their Continental counterparts. It also identifies five areas where English cities fall behind and adds that England's cities are characterised by insufficiently cosmopolitan cultures,

² How well are we doing? *Regeneration and Renewal* 1 Nov 2002 pp.18-19

³ Urban summit news *Regeneration and Renewal* 8 Nov 2002 pp.6-9

⁴ Blackman, David Bright lights, big city *New Start* 1 Nov 2002 p.16

social polarisation, poor environments and fragmented governance structures.

As a remedy, the report proposes introducing more social and economic weighting into the decision-making which influences the location of such research. It also suggests that transport links must be improved, with intercontinental air connections seen as the key factor that puts cities on the international map.

After the Summit, *New Start*⁵ focused on the winners of the ODPM Urban Renaissance Awards – Northampton's Blackthorn estate. *New Start* identifies its success to Caspar - the Crime and Safety Partnerships that moved into the estate in 1999 when housebreaking was rife.

New Start explains that the accomplishments in the estate could not have been achieved without taking along the people who lived and worked in the areas, who identified the issues and solutions, and started taking ownership.

*Housing Today*⁶ took a general look at the state of regeneration in the run up to the Urban Summit, arguing that the visible successes may fool some observers into thinking the urban renaissance is going ahead smoothly, but in fact, it argues that nothing could be further from the truth.

Housing Today looks through the successes achieved by the Government, but argues that despite the very visible achievements and the enthusiasm of the Government, problems remain. *Housing Today* identifies part of these problems as lying in the complexity of the task, as each regeneration project is different and needs a unique approach.

Housing Today also highlights the 'money maze', discussing the need to simplify the funding process. It looks at the different funding schemes available for regeneration, including the Single Regeneration Budget, the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and New Deal for Communities.

*Inside Housing*⁷ featured a short article from Nicholas Schoon in which he looks at the positive and negative aspects of the Summit. He argues that this was another major conference on regeneration rather than a Summit (an international political event) and that although lots of options were put forward (some more feeble than others) there were no surprises or big news.

Schoon saw the real worth of the Summit as existing in the dozens of themed sessions and fringe events which took place, and in the hundreds of meetings and conversations happening outside of any programmed event, which he believes will lead to new ideas and

approaches being tried out. He concludes that the gains of the Summit lie in the months and years ahead.

*The Municipal Journal (MJ)*⁸ looked at Lord Rogers' speech at the Summit in which he told delegates that central government must promote urban renaissance by giving local civic leadership 'greater autonomy'. He also called for more funding to improve the quality of the urban environment and criticised the Government for failing to understand the role of the physical environment.

The *MJ* went on to look at John Prescott's speech, in which he talked of the great improvements that have been made in urban areas in recent times but admitted that there is still a long way to go and a lot to learn.

*Planning*⁹ magazine looked at the impressions of four RTPI delegates who attended the Summit, outlining their impressions of the event.

- ① Vincent Goodstadt was struck by the level of commitment by the Government, the diversity of interests that were brought together and the sense of a collective desire to make a difference to the quality of life in our major towns and cities. He saw that although the range of issues covered were vast, two key issues emerged:
 - urban design must be given greater attention and resources.
 - the importance of planning to the delivery of the new regional agenda.
- ② Nick Davies identified the highlights of the Summit as John Prescott's opening address, Gordon Brown's speech, which reflected his pursuit of 'joined-up thinking', and the networking opportunities.
- ③ Don Alder commented on the big changes in Birmingham itself, the host city of the event. He found there was obvious strong support from the Government at all levels for urban renaissance, and talked about the value of the themed sessions and fringe meetings.
- ④ Kevin Murray saw the significance of the Summit as lying in its recognition that those working in the fields of planning, regeneration and urban design are doing something very important. He did argue, however, that there could have been more discussion of alternative models of funding local and regional government and of exploring mechanisms for facilitating community change in a psychological sense.

⁵ Downer, Susan Gritty wins out over pretty *New Start* 8 Nov 2002 p.11

⁶ The state of regeneration *Housing Today* 24 Oct 2002 pp.20-25

⁷ Schoon, Nicholas Scaling the summit *Inside Housing* 8 Nov 2002 p.22

⁸ Carroll, Nicola Lord Rogers issues civic challenge *Municipal Journal* 7 Nov 2002 p.5

⁹ Achieving the urban renaissance: impressions of the urban summit *Planning* 15 Nov 2002 pp.23-24

*Urban Environment Today (JET)*¹⁰ featured an article written by Martin Crookston, a member of the Urban Task Force, in which he brought up the challenges he felt the Urban Summit needed to address. He looks at the areas most in need of attention – renewal initiatives, affordable housing in the south east, public transport and education. He argues that the reality of the situation is the financial cost involved in addressing these matters and stresses the need for the Urban Summit to not only scale the issues but to define responses to the problems.

*UET*¹¹ also looked at each of the chaired sessions to be held at the Summit, looking more in-depth at the following:

- involving the private sector with Chris Brown, Chief Executive of the Igloo Regeneration Fund;
- combating crime, chaired by Sara Thornton, Assistant Chief Constable of the Thames Valley Police;
- progress towards renaissance with Jane Todd, Director for the Government Office for the East Midlands;
- developing skills with Jon Rouse, Chief Executive of CABE;
- competitive cities, chaired by Joe Docherty, Chief Executive of Tees Valley URC;
- creating flourishing town centres with Joyce Markham, Chief Executive of Harrow Borough Council;
- future towns and cities, chaired by Shared Intelligence Director, Lee Shostak.

*New Urban Futures*¹² portrayed the key message of the Urban Summit that it is no longer necessary to go overseas to be inspired by the potential of urban areas to meet the demands of 21st century living.

It also explained how the 24 Towns and Cities project, showcasing urban renaissance achievements and obstacles, reflects a new way of working between government and towns and cities.

*New Urban Futures*¹³ also focused on the importance of the private sector in urban renaissance, after Lord Rooker stated clearly at the Summit “**we cannot deliver the urban renaissance without the massive contribution of the private sector.**” *New Urban Futures* points out, however, that despite the

Government’s best intentions, only three per cent of the 1,600 delegates were from the private sector – the rest being from public and voluntary organisations or consultancies.

*Urban Design Update*¹⁴ highlighted a recurring theme at the Urban Summit - reforms to give planners greater powers to specify the character of new developments are crucial to ensuring urban renaissance spreads beyond city centres.

It also discussed the call for minimum design standards to be applied to new developments, because the current planning system will constrain house builders’ willingness to put urban design at the top of their agenda.

The common theme in the press seemed to be that the success and value of the Summit lay in the massive networking opportunities, and that the real results may come out of the conversations and individual sessions held there.

Each discipline seemed satisfied that their area had been given its due attention and the importance of each area was seen as necessary to the whole progression of the urban renaissance.

With regards to urban regeneration itself, the widely held view seems to be that despite the obvious successes in some areas, the Government still has a long way to go before achieving a true urban renaissance in this country.

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¹⁰ Crookston, Martin Signs of urban recovery must not obscure need for more change *UET* 3 Oct 2002 p.8

¹¹ Summit aims to recharge urban renaissance efforts *UET* 5 Sept 2002 pp.6-8

¹² Jarvis, Sarah Success stories provide home-grown lessons for urban renaissance *New Urban Futures* 8 Nov 2002 p.6

¹³ Ludmon, Mark Bridging the gap to keep private sector in urban renaissance *New Urban Futures* 8 Nov 2002 p.7

¹⁴ Dark, James Summit debate calls for draconian measures to reform housebuilding *Urban Design Update* 8 Nov 2002 p.7