

Environmental Audit Committee ; Sustainable Housing

This evidence has been prepared by the Welsh Streets Home Group (WSHG) a residents group in a Liverpool Pathfinder area. The text is based on discussions with over 200 residents in Toxteth, over an eighteen month period, and informed by local and national amenity and advisory bodies, engineers, architects, environmentalists and estate agents.

The jargon of sustainability has been commonly used in communications to residents about housing and community, but this has translated into a confused and measureless practice which lacks definition. Residents have been told they must prove themselves to be a 'sustainable community' by a local government unable to define what this meant or how it would be measured.

It is hoped that this evidence will be viewed as a useful window into local delivery of the Pathfinder aspect of the sustainability agenda, but inevitably the text examines broader development issues and looks at the national picture. Failure to recognise complex webs of inter-dependence threaten to the broadly approved sustainability agenda that the government has outlined, and which the public want.

Whilst there is great confidence in the economic performance of the government, and relief that issues of poverty and decline begin to receive attention, there are deep and widespread concerns that the systems in place do not offer best value to the economy or the environment. It is disputed that either Southern growth areas or Northern demolitions meet current needs or will adapt to future needs.

A1 Can a voluntary code deliver the degree of change needed in the building industry to achieve well designed, energy efficient sustainable buildings which have minimal impact on the local environment ?

A1. summary response – No.

A1(1) House builders enjoy a captive market with few options other than to accept the off the shelf often poorly designed product. The developer is not the end user and energy savings benefit the occupant rather than the builder.

A1(2) The cost of delivering new build to eco-homes has been quoted as incurring £1,800 – £3,000 additional cost. If accurate this figure is low enough to have minimum impact on delivery and

maximum impact on environmental benefits.

Figure for the up-grade of existing houses to Eco-homes targets are not currently available, but since existing stock comprises the majority of units energy efficiency upgrades for existing homes should form the basis of immediate action and fiscal incentive.

A2 Is the Government doing enough to promote the Code, with the industry and the general public, ahead of it's introduction early in 2006 ?

A2. summary response – No, the public will to achieve sustainability is great. Advice and assistance to achieve would benefit from input. The progress made by the construction industry as reported is sluggish, and unlikely to change unless forced to.

A3 Should the Government be introducing fiscal measures to reward higher building quality and greater environmental performance ?

A3. summary response – Yes, and further introducing regulation and penalties for failure to comply.
'An idea would be to convert carbon saving (at construction and in future use) to financial commodity. By doing this a developer can gain credits that can be converted to tax savings etc to encourage refurbishment. A developer would rather do off the shelf new build as it is easier and crucially less time consuming and therefore more cost effective. Financial incentive on environmental performance would therefore persuade developers to see existing structures as an opportunity and not a hindrance (ie VAT on refurbishment actively encourages demolition)'

Rob Hyde ; Student of Architecture, Manchester School of Architecture

B4 Does the ODPM Five Year Plan, Sustainable Communities ; Homes For All ; tackle the impact of house building on the environment or merely pay lip service to it ?

Increasing Supply, Choice and Social Mix Without Building

B4.(1) The Five Year Plan tends to neglect available opportunities to increase the number of homes by means other than house building.

B4.(2) These opportunities include fiscal measures to encourage refurbishment, including the abolition of VAT on refurbishment, regulation to ensure empty homes are occupied, or abandoned homes are repaired.

B4.(3) It may also include bringing previously non – housing building into use for dwellings as exemplified in for example Urban Splash’s Matchworks conversion of the former Bryant and May factory. Factory site in particular tend to have good existing communications and infrastructure already available or repairable.

Empty Homes - Empty Promises

- B4.(4) Current powers providing local authorities with the ability to issue Compulsory Purchase, or enforce repair may appear to offer progress in this area.
- B4 (5) Yet the current output measures of the Pathfinder Scheme have the effect of rewarding abandonment , market manipulation and ‘managed decline’.
- B4.(6) It is worrying that Liverpool has an unusually high number of abandoned and empty homes already in public ownership 34% of the total empty homes as opposed to 16% in publicly owned empty homes in Manchester.
- B4.(7) Liverpool City Council have over a long period of time, along with Registered Social Landlords refused to let, repair, or sell these properties.
- B4.(8) This is despite consistent and demonstrable buyer interest from would be owner occupiers, reputable developers and private landlords.
- B4(9) This has the effect of suppressing and damaging local markets, frightening would be occupiers from renting or purchasing in areas where homes are left to decay.
- B4.(10) Therefore the strategy the increased local authority power to seize empty homes by Compulsory Purchase can only be seen as responsive and sustainable as the local authority in question.
- B4(11) The local authority has already some power to pursue repair of abandoned property in private ownership, but have not effectively pursued the repair of the half dozen derelict homes in the Welsh Streets, despite the desirability of the homes and the blight they inflict on the neighbourhood.
- B4.(12) The new measures for compulsory purchase of empty homes, although seen as a positive step are unlikely to remedy issues of

supply, demand or value unless local authorities are properly accountable and subject to fiscal measures, and regulation themselves.

- B4.(13) It is feared that in Liverpool these additional powers will add to the perceived long term abuse of existing powers.
- B4.(14) As the largest local employer the Liverpool City Council exerts extraordinary power and influence in the city. The financial leverage available to a local authority in this position may need support and scrutiny if it is to avoid damaging the quality of life and trading and housing opportunities for its residents.

Market Demand and Joining Things Up

- B4.(15) The buyer interest known to WSHG is in the inner core, in Pathfinder areas, but significantly often pre-dating the Pathfinder scheme. Miniscule research efforts have registered over 80 potential buyers for homes in the Welsh Streets area. This is despite the threat of Pathfinder demolition. The potential buyers registered to date are not private landlords or investors, they want to renovate and live in the houses. This interest is currently denied, thus contributing to decline.
- B4.(16) 'The Five Year Plan' speaks of the potential for private sector investment in housing stock, thus providing private sector rental supply. In the light of this aspiration, and clear need, it is regrettable that the Pathfinder has demonised Private landlords in the local press and in its communications with residents.
- B4.(17) It may be helpful to test the market, removing the threat of demolition for homes in which buyer interest has already been expressed and agreeing refurbishment of public areas and basic services. This would release funds to accommodate the increased costs of purchase and resettlement which plague the scheme.
- B4.(18) The local authority waiting list for accommodation is 11 thousand, the RSL waiting list is 18,7100 endure overcrowded conditions whilst simultaneously large swathes of Liverpool are experiencing the blight of empty homes. The empty homes problem is contributed to, if not sustained by the local authority, and registered social landlords.
- B4.(19) Liverpool City Council may benefit from incentives to join up thinking, or penalties for failure to respond to radically changed

market conditions. If improvements in local management are not quickly delivered inhabitants will doubtless depart. Current tensions regarding the apparent excessive council officer power in the city are worrying.

(liverpool Liverpool Echo and Daily Post)

- B4(20) The predisposition to demolish apparently emanating from the CURS research, The Northern Way, The Pathfinder Scheme, Local Authority and Housing Associations is causing avoidable hardship and has the potential to destabilise broader markets, and undermine growth in the North.
- B4.(21) There appears to be a lack of cohesion between the strands of ambition contained in the five year plan, the agencies delivering the plan, and the underpinning rationale. The plan describes sustainability, but produces unsustainable schemes, attempts market renewal, but fails to accommodate an inevitably dynamic market. The division of cohesive communities in pursuit of 'majority support' for schemes of dubious merit is a city wide phenomena but this too flies in the face of Government aspirations.

'In Liverpool, traditional terraced houses are the norm. There is no doubt that these houses do indeed provide sustainable homes for families, but their future may have been put at hazard by some of the HMRI propaganda against them. The power of sentiment in the housing market is strong and if the message were to take hold that such housing is obsolescent, then this could unleash enormous pressures on the demand for alternative forms of housing. People who might have contented themselves with traditional housing would be propelled into the housing market. This would overwhelm any progress made in adjusting the supply of detached and semi-detached suburban housing.'

Instead of supporting a perverse propaganda assault on demand for terraced housing, the Council could act to increase the demand for them – thereby taking pressure off the demand for alternative housing forms. This could include "soft" measures such as marketing the qualities of Liverpool's terraced housing. And, as Highway Authority, it could include "hard" measures such as extensive traffic calming, "Home Zone" protection and more street trees.'

(John Coyne, Software Designer, Liverpool City Councillor,)

- B4.(22) The assumption that new homes with gardens will reduce or remove the primarily social and economic problems which afflict Pathfinder inhabitants is naïve, and has failed in this city and elsewhere many times before.

Ref Mott Macdonald Survey appendix, showing 72% of respondents satisfied or very satisfied with their accommodation, but worried by antisocial behaviour, and crime

Until social and economic issues are resolved the Pathfinder homes whether new or old, will not be the first choice destination for buyers or renters.

If mixed tenure, mixed dwelling type developments are to succeed anywhere, buyers need to be confident that their efforts will not be subject to excessive influence and control from local authorities and Housing Associations. It is viewed as vitally important that existing homeowners are treated respectfully, in neighbourhoods where existing ownership patterns have large numbers of public bodies in control of the stock and / or the land.

Informed Decision Making

B4.(18) The English Housing Condition Survey 2001 estimates the cost of bringing 'non decent' homes up to decent homes standard as £7,181 per average dwelling. Local Housing associations who have experience in this field with regard to the terraces in question quote around £34K for the same work, whilst ITV have performed the task for 24K. Local small developers and national investors report their renovation costs of course vary. These costs would be reduced by multiple purchase in refurbishing whole streets but compare favourably with the economic costs of demolition.

Tonight with Trevor Macdonald renovation of Welsh St home May 2005

B4 (19) Wherever possible compulsory clearance of whole areas should be reconsidered in favour of less drastic interventions. For example, the retention of terraced streets can accommodate loft-style conversions for single person occupancy, and two-into-one conversions to accommodate larger households. Such schemes would allow for loss of floor space caused by adding insulation to the two exterior walls.

B4.(20) Lack of promotion of the economic and environmental benefits of refurbishment and data regarding the cost of up-grade to eco-homes energy efficiency standards imply predisposition towards demolition at the outset of the HMR scheme.

B4.(21) It is therefore suggested that risk assessments were not informed by market experts and economists, and that no fallback position was investigated or developed.

B4.(22) This leaves residents in impoverished areas further disadvantaged by the threat of demolition unable to exploit their property assets or benefit from the house price rises available in non pathfinder areas.

- B4.(23) Newheartlands the Merseyside Pathfunder has sought an additional 42 Million for clearances, against a very small sum for refurbishment in it's current funding bid, implying that they have no intention of reviewing their bias towards demolition.
- B4.(24) Whereas there is ample evidence from Leed's Headingley, Manchester's Didsbury, and even Liverpool' Sefton Park, that the historic housing stock in Toxteth is precisely the kind of dwelling sought by incomers and 'target residents' it remains largely under threat or blighted..
- B4 (25) The lack of reference to other successful models of market lead regeneration and to the type of homes popular with incomers threatens to undermine Liverpool's new found confidence.
- B4.(25) Unlike **kit built** new build in which incoming developers are accused of failing the local labour pool, refurbishment offers training, skills and earning opportunities for local people which they could go on to exploit across 60% of the national housing stock. This seems a more sustainable approach to housing if the term is viewed as an expansive model of practice.

B5 To what extent does the Five Year Plan address the environmental implications of the geographical distribution of demolition versus new build ?

Don't Put All Your Eggs In One Basket

- B5.(26) The Five Year Plan lays out a disturbingly South East centric series of environmental and economic sustainability theories. The Southern bias in of earmarked 'Growth Areas' and the view of **Sir John Egan** regarding the poor potential of the North is not viewed as realistic, desirable or sustainable.
- B5.(27) The Five Year Plan neglects not only the environmental implications of the geographical distribution of demolition versus new build, but the striking economic and social implications which imply seriously fragmented thinking, and a grotesque misunderstanding of what sustainability entails.
- B5.(28) The proposals to increase dwellings on flood plains which cannot be supplied with water would be comic, were they not in progress.

- Flood resistance is predicted to cost an additional £7k to the costs of these new developments, but it is not know if it is possible to resist or accurately predict changes in sea level, rainfall or temperature change.
- B5.(29) The proposals for the four Growth Areas emerge in a context of scientists, engineers and environmentalists expressing forthright concern, whilst both Northern and Southern populations look on in disbelief. The Southern Region Environment Agency
- B5.(30) The assumption that increasing supply will reduce the cost of housing to householders needs greater analysis and economic interrogation. The profit incentive and drive towards public private partnerships must not be allowed to dictate solutions to problems essentially caused by the influence and power of profit .
- B5.(31) Since property is a vehicle for investment , there appears nothing to suggest that ownership will fall to those with the greatest economic power, those who already own property or who have the means to borrow money.
- B5.(32) The predicted increases in the number of new homes needed to accommodate the population are disputed and require interrogation.
- B5.(33) Thus even if the new build targets are reached there is no evidence to suggest that they will be affordable in enough quantity, that supply for owner occupation will increase in the private sector, or that home ownership will extend to the 3 in 10 who currently rent their homes.
- B5.(34) To an extent current difficulties in the North originate in regional wealth disparity, and form the basis of the exodus of skilled and educated people from Northern cities. This existing imbalance in regional wealth would be exacerbated if the proposed 4 Growth Areas, become a reality, with serious implications for increased poverty, crime and depopulation and quality of life of Northern areas. The Southern bias is not sustainable.
- B5.(35) Whilst The Northern Way offers a forward looking view with regard to transport the assertion that 400k houses needed to be demolished is not helpful, and not adequately justified.
- B5.(36) The vision of a conurbation the length of the M62 from Hull to Liverpool threatens to merely emulate the South Eastern sprawl and repeat the problems associated with large unit development.

- The choice of earnings, but low quality of life in the overcrowded South, or poverty reducing the quality of life in the North where the amenities and green spaces are in fairly good supply.
- B5.(37) It is a culturally impoverished view of future life, and unless new visions for both North and South are devised, the stated aspiration of many young people to leave the UK will become a reality. There is no reason to assume the skill drain will stop at the South East and policy makers must be reminded that young people are a decreasing resource in this country.
- B5.(38) The procurement of such new visions may demand new channels through which wider experience informs progress towards a better balance of wealth and amenities nationwide. The schemes currently under discussion impose monolithic development, and inexcusable destruction of existing green and housing assets.
- B5.(39) It is unlikely that pursuit of either of the currently proposed schemes will be popular, or that they will assist the vital social cohesion now in serious fracture in the UK. They are likely to be expensive and if the aim is to increase the nation's potential as a competitor then it is pertinent to look towards those with whom the U.K. expects to compete.
- B5.(40) Amongst the underlying trends amongst the serious global competitors are extremely effective multi-lingual and multi-alphabet or writing form education systems, the devotion of resources to innovation, reduced regulation in industry and the participation in cultural activity.
- B5.(41) We are not aware that the Federation of British Industry or others has sought radical housing action as a route to 'competitive' improvements, and are concerned about the origin of the underpinning agenda.
- B5.(42) If sea levels continue to rise faster than predicted, dependence on London and the low lying area in the South East may prove a fatally un-competitive example of us-sustainable development.
- B5.(37) There are many wealth creating businesses which depend on a South Eastern location to thrive, but there are also opportunities to relocate some of these earning opportunities to other regions including the North.
- B5.(38) This would demand transport infrastructure. Yet Government refuses the comparatively paltry sums necessary to confirm the

trams for Liverpool , extend the hugely successful Manchester Trams or commit to a new Mersey Bridge at Runcorn.

- B5.(39) Moreover the quality of life in the South despite the earning factor is such that there is likely to be a continued flow North of 'downsizing' southerners, people who can no longer live with endless commutes, scarcity of open space, or any number of scarcities. Their comparative equity wealth threatens inflation of the Northern housing markets. This and general investor activity may well keep even fairly affluent Northerners out of the housing market.

Development agenda ; New Houses and Their Builders

It is vital in discussion of housing as a commodity that it's unique cultural and financial status is recognised.

Housing is more than essential shelter from the elements, it is a place of personal freedom, security and comfort, it is the home. It is a signifier of status and power, it is a vehicle for the investment of capital, it is capable of producing income.

Unlike other essentials such as food, water and transport it is currently reliant on technologies and construction practices of historical origin.

There is clear evidence that the building industry is inevitably motivated by the needs of company shareholders, rather than in developing new housing products which contribute to the 'common good.'

Thus it is likely to prove impossible to deliver existing, and eventually further Eco-Homes energy efficiency targets in new developments without not only the introduction of fiscal measures, but the enforced delivery of such outcomes through regulation.

Clearly the increased skill- base to oversee, and cost required for this aspect of building inspections will require increased resources.

Additionally the requisite research and development resources which could enable UK based production of MMC Eco-homes are viewed as an urgent priority for spending.

MMC is not without risk, in particular the ability to repair or replace prefabricated panels requires large scale investment and centralised production, and the relative benefits must be assessed against use of local materials and production.

The apparent expertise available outside the UK in the field also threatens an

import base house supply, which compound the UK's dependence on imports for food and power.

Adapt or Die

'It is time that we in Britain, so good at fundamental science also came fully to appreciate the intellectual challenge behind product development. We seem culturally unable to realise that this can be more challenging than fundamental science and requires the very best minds. In my view this has already been grasped in India and China which in my view is pleasing because after all technology is the means by which the developing world can increase its standard of living but if we do not join the race to advance technology we face serious consequences not least that we will fall behind in our own intellectual, social and material development.'

Lord Broers, Reith Lecture 'Technology Will Determine The Fate of The Human Race' 2005

The long term risk in failure to invest in engineering and technology research, and UK manufacturing is well rehearsed and a matter of pressing concern This want has significant impact on sustainability.

The extent to which primary and secondary education still fail to provide a solid foundation from which mathematicians, scientists and engineers are likely to spring demands immediate and significant investment.

Similarly the lack of breadth in education is identified by Lord Broers and countless others as a significant impediment to the development of skills in the U.K.

The lack of design awareness and the added value enhanced environments provide further points to the failure of education to give broad foundations to later specialisms.

This lack of broad education foundation can be viewed as a significant contributor to the current skill shortages in Civil Engineering, Town Planning and other disciplines relating to housing and infrastructure development.

Failure to attend this pressing need will result in continued damage. Since building companies are on the whole defined as small to medium scale businesses operating as independent fragments, there is a need to develop adequate research collaboration and support for the development of new building solutions.

The competition for developers to produce a 60K home, and the provision of demonstration model of good practice is woefully inadequate investment in research and leadership of such vast and costly schemes. The

current approach is not appropriate given the ongoing and increasing environmental, social and economic challenges. It merely confirms the 'window dressing status' allegations contained in the 2005 Select Committee Report 'Housing; Building A Sustainable Future'

Similarly the personnel currently engaged in regeneration delivery lack significant skills necessary to ensure successful outcomes. The culture of the commonly local authority, or RSL employee, does not easily engender creative problem solving or communication, being based in systems designed to assimilate and follow central directives.

Thus the model of development operation is tending to fall short, lack imaginative and innovative input and would benefit from inclusion at early stages, creatives, designers, scientists, architects and environmentalists. This human resource pool might benefit from international input.

In particular there appears the tradition of 'criticism' as a tool to seeking best outcomes in the training of creative workers would be useful to transfer into housing and regeneration environments.

The approach we have observed has lacked the facility to make positive use of critical discourse, but instead makes excessive reference to the power and resources available to the joint developer / local authority / housing association / Pathfinder / Government scheme. The imbalance of power is amply clear, but may not necessarily yield the best outcomes.

It is not felt that CABE have to far had enough input in design solutions for New Build developments having this month assessed 94% of homes built in the North as below standard in terms of their design criteria..

North falls short on housing design

Ben Willis, Regeneration & Renewal - 18 November 2005

Housebuilders in northern England are falling short of national design standards, according to a critique by the Government's architecture watchdog.

An audit published this week by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment of 93 new housing developments in the North found 94 per cent to be either average or poor.

The audit is Cabe's second suggesting that house builders are not responding to pressure to improve design standards. Last year the watchdog looked at 100 developments in the South-East growth areas and rated only 17 per cent to be good or very good.

Cabe chief executive Richard Simmons said: "The design quality of new housing is a

national problem. We are planning to build the largest number of new homes for decades and yet almost a quarter of them built in the past three years are judged to be poor."

It is essential that if new developments are to succeed the powers available to , and input routinely sought from organisations such as CABI at preliminary stages of projects need to be hugely increased.

This would demand a clear definition of what CABI consider to be 'good design, and communication with the construction industry to discover why two years after the launch of the 16 'Building For Life' criteria the outlook remains **'bleak'**

(Matt Ball Policy director CABI)

Our pathfinder Scheme seems similarly unlikely to listen to CABI, having apparently little regard for the CABI critical tests.

CABI's three "Critical Tests" for Pathfinder schemes:

"1. Nothing should be demolished unless its real value has been established - and that means value as assessed by the community, which has to be at the heart of decision making."

"2. Nothing should be demolished unless there is a really clear strategy as to the kind of place you're trying to recreate or change, and that takes time and consideration."

"3. Nothing should be demolished unless it is absolutely guaranteed to be replaced by something that is much better than what is currently there."

(Joanna Averley ; CABI)

An unsustainable interpretation of Pathfinder HMR ; Old Houses and their status

Close to the city centre, transport links, amenities and large green spaces and surrounded on two sides by conservation areas - the Welsh Streets neighbourhood was already attracting young professionals, families and locally born residents. With demand exceeding supply, initially for the large town houses on Kelvin Grove but increasingly for the smaller terraces following the rise in house prices and rents. Newcomers had joined the longstanding dynamic and sociable community amongst 13 small businesses and a school.

This neighbourhood is viewed as disposable by some, and valuable by others .

The Merseyside Pathfinder company Newheartlands shocked the nation on the

'File on Four' radio broadcast, BBC 8.3.05 when it's managing director Pauline Davies inferred that the demolition of homes in the Welsh Streets were not informed by the condition or desirability of the houses, but by the value of the land on which they are built. This was confirmed in a conversation between a local resident and John Glester, the chief executive of Newheartlands on 29.3.05 after both were interviewed on BBC Radio 4 'Today' programme.

This prioritisation of land value, and the scale of 'land parcel' made available to private developers, (above all other issues) raises doubts as to the ability of the local Pathfinder company to deliver the broad and commendable aims of the scheme, and sheds doubt on the organisational understanding of sustainability.

The dependency of the Welsh Streets Scheme on a volume house builder as developer is less than helpful in ensuring the outcomes are of a quality and nature appropriate to a unique historic district, community in a World Heritage City adjacent to a world renown Victorian park.

Further the protection of the interests of the private developer and it's shareholder has been at the cost of a once cohesive community, 13 small businesses, and many, many households amongst whom there is a mixed view regarding the scheme and a deep exhaustion with regeneration.

The local authority has stated that capital receipts from the proposed demolition zone, would be re-invested in the neighbouring estates, a practice which seems dubious in legal, ethical and moral terms, since these receipts come at the cost of individual aspirations and investments of the demolished – the regeneration refugees.

Property values nationally have increased beyond predictions. The slight increase in Liverpool's population and the award of the Capital of Culture status have seen unprecedented increase in property values in the city. In Spring 05 Liverpool saw 22% increases, whilst the national average was around 9. exceeding all expectations.

The Pathfinder are keen to point out their designated action zones still lagged behind the city average increases, and the national average increases. The accuracy of their assertion is not known but must be viewed in context. The Pathfinder scheme has decanted many residents for over a year, 'tinning up' and increasing the empty homes and blight in the area. Prior to the scheme vacancy and void levels were not significantly below average.

This city price increase unsurprisingly includes the Welsh Streets in Toxteth

cited by local estate agents James Kersh and national investment advice service . Independent analyses for Toxteth & Granby do not accord with the view of the Pathfinder.

<http://propertyinvesting.net/content/ripple-effect-lpool.htm>

Local owner occupiers report the rise in the value of their properties following independent valuations

2005

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|---------------|---------------------------------|
| Gwydir Street | increasing 11 fold in two years |
| Kelvin Grove | increasing 8 fold in six years |
| Madryn St | increasing 3 fold in .//////// |

ssuming this meant the housing market was in recovery, residents asked their MP Louise Ellman to ask two parliamentary questions . We have responded to the answers we received but our concerns remain un-addressed at this time. (Attached as appendix)

Both questions relate to the concept of value.

HOUSE OF COMMONS WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION

For answer on: Wednesday 16 March 2005

Date answered: Monday 21 March 2005

ODPM Ref: 1372

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside)

Housing (Liverpool)

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what independent structural survey has been undertaken in the Welsh Streets in Liverpool 8 to assess the state of the properties; and where this information is available to the public. [222661]

Keith Hill: It is understood that Liverpool city council propose to make a compulsory purchase order, to acquire and demolish a number of houses in the Welsh Streets area, as part of their Housing Market Renewal programme. It is for the city council to determine what independent advice they seek, in order to explain why they believe the area is in need of redevelopment.

Best Value ?

WSHG have asked the local Pathfinder delivery agencies for the same information i.e. where are the building surveys, engineers reports and budgets

which demonstrate that these properties are not viable for refurbishment and this information has never been made available.

This leads to concern that this basic investigation has never been sought, and the refurbishment of the 469 houses scheduled for demolition has never been considered.

It is felt that if this evidence does exist, it would have been presented, if indeed it supported demolition as the most cost effective and environmentally appropriate course of action.

From our experience of the process of stock assessment the proposal for demolition was presented months before the main stock assessment process was conducted.

Prior to the main stock assessment activity a only small number of owner occupied dwellings were surveyed. Owner occupied dwelling make less than 30% of the total housing stock in the area and of these only (//////// ref 'Include' for data) were surveyed.

This seems a very small sample to base the demolition of a considerable area of usable housing on.

The surveyor who carried out inspections on Welsh Streets houses reported to residents that there was 'little or nothing wrong' with many of the houses, and stated his view that repairs and up-grades would be inexpensive and easily performed.

Independent surveyors, and engineers are reporting the same lack of physical evidence to support clearance, and are baffled by reports of subsidence and underwater streams which the pathfinder delivery agency cites as problems with existing homes.

WSHG are still requesting evidence that budget comparissons were made by the Pathfinder and it's delivery partners. It is assumed that cost comparators would need to have been presented in order for the delivery agents to form a view as to the viability and cost effectiveness of refurbishment and or clearance.

Further evidence is emerging, that instead of accurate cost comparators, or the sustainability agenda informing the promotion of demolition we are seeing the implementation of a pre-determined plan to demolish re-usable houses.

This same request for cost comparators was given little or no consideration by the Local Authority Housing and Community Safety Committee (8.9.05) upon who's advice the Executive Board of LCC took the decision to demolish 469 homes. (9.9.05)

It is therefore concluded that central process in affording too much power to local authorities in Pathfinder schemes is flawed, and would benefit from greater external scrutiny, the imposition of directives regarding refurbishment, sustainability and the environment.

For answer on: Wednesday 16 March 2005

Date answered: Monday 21 March 2005

ODPM Ref: 1371

Housing Market Renewal Areas

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what criteria are used to measure the success of a Housing Market Renewal area. [222660]

Keith Hill: "Homes for All", the Government's five year housing plan sets out our aim to close by a third the gap between the level of vacancies and house values in pathfinder areas compared to the regions by 2010.

Our long-term aim is to eradicate the problems caused by low demand housing by 2020.

Specific targets for the period up to March 2006 are included in each pathfinder's funding agreement with the Government.

Manipulation of Housing Resources and the Distortion of A Market ?

On October 5th 2005 David bebb , chief executive of a Housing Association with significant property holdings in Toxteth was interviewed by BBC2 (see attached transcript)

The interview reveals that LHT had been willing to spend money on their property four or five years ago, but decided against this due to uncertainty generated by the Pathfinder. Instead, it did a deal with the local authority to leave a house empty and boarded up. We believe it likely that this deal explains why Liverpool RSLs hold an anomalous number of empty homes.

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Since the key performance, as defined by Keith Hill in his answer to the Parliamentary question above indicator is the reduction of vacancies by a third, concerns arise as to the clear ability of the Pathfinder RSL partners to manipulate and control vacancy levels. This is seen as contrary to the admirable aims of the Pathfinder and not in the public interest.

The Need For More and Strategic Performance Indicators

It is suggested that government needs to insist that existing housing stock is not

wasted merely because it occupies prime site land, and overhaul it's performance outputs.

Failure to do so would confirm the allegations contained in the previous Select Committee report that use of the term sustainability is mere window dressing, but further damages prospects and stability for people already suffering deprivation.

Since this is a market influencing exercise it is an oversight that actual cost, or rate of value increase is not included as a measure of the recovery of the market.

- 44 Failure to include price in the output measures makes a mockery of the affordable homes initiative, and threatens the ability of the scheme to benefit as many people as possible.

Current performance indicators reward and even encourage abandonment and neglect.

Partners in the scheme ; the local authority registered social landlords, and their joint organisation, the delivery agency 'Include' have behaved perhaps inappropriately with regard to both the sustainability agenda, and the limits of their own remit. see attached transcript BBC 2 How to Rescue A House

Since this agreement to abandon public housing in Pathfinder areas predates the 'public consultation' there is cause for concern regarding both the nature, and the vulnerability of consultation processes.

We are informed that in the early stages of the consultation process residents were informed there would be no demolitions, later that there would be selective demolition and finally that there was no option other than demolition. This is less than helpful and split a once peaceful community.

In the later stages of the consultation process the delivery agency insisted that if demolition of the entire site did not take place , that no regeneration would take place. Unsurprisingly residents have developed a mistrust of the scheme.

- 49 There are concerns that public consultation is also mere window dressing, and that views are only recorded and assimilated if they accord with the wishes of the housing agency. This is true in the Welsh Streets, and repeated in Sefton, where Council Tenants voting against transfer to RSL management have been asked to return to the ballot box.

Refurbishment and adaptation can produce many benefits.

This would see increased financial benefits, since the refurbishment and upgrade to ecohomes and decent homes standards are likely to be cheaper and quicker than demolition and rebuild and offer added value in community cohesion, green assets and environmental protection.

These financial benefits, warrant fiscal incentive.

Even without fiscal incentive schemes the mere removal of VAT on refurbishment costs would place refurbishment and conversion on an equal footing with new build costs.

It is regrettable that there has been inadequate explanation from the chancellor regarding the issue of VAT on refurbishment, and it is recommended that this be the subject of continued informed debate.

There is currently no incentive for the Pathfinders to develop options which exclude or reduce demolition. Therefore they have not presented Welsh Streets residents en masse with any option other than demolition.

Big stakeholders and small stakeholders

It should be noted that the delivery agency is formed of the local authority and the registered social landlord CDS Housing, and that at the time of the public consultation CDS owned around 65% of the housing stock in the clearance zone.

The CDS tenants had reduced capacity to voice their views feeling that their landlord would ultimately have the power to insist on their departure. Others who were tenants of social landlords and the city council reported similar vulnerability and continue to do so.

The owned occupiers, who were a minority were also vulnerable to manipulation. Evidence is emerging (see attached BBC transcript How to Rescue a House) that the local authority and the RSL's had effectively conspired some years earlier to depress the value of property in the area, and had suffered the blighting impact of abandoned property on the physical and fiscal value of their homes.

This is not, what we understand 'involving communities' to mean, nor is it consistent with sustainability.

Some abandoned properties are owned by private landlords, but this is a small number, primarily of property which genuinely is difficult to repair due to root damage from trees.

Many private landlords maintain their properties properly and it is

regrettable that local councillors , the managing director of Newheartlands and the ODPM seem to have attempted to blame the decline of the area, and the empty homes on Private landlords.

In August of 2004 The Welsh Streets Home Group wrote to councillors, regeneration officers and the board of the delivery agency 'Include' expressing concerns of many local residents regarding the high number of demolitions, and lack of regard the scheme had shown for existing structures, green assets, community cohesion and small businesses.

Powerful and Power Empty.

This coincided with local authority officers beginning to decant residents and seal properties with tin sheet. This attracted fly tipping and arson. More than a year before the Housing Committee visited the area, and the executive board had taken the decision to support demolition in September 2005 .

This tactic has resulted in people leaving because they feel they have been and always will be beaten by the combined legal and economic power of the local authority, their exit provides £3,400 in compensation and would seem to confirm low demand.

However there is no reason to assume they have left because of the quality or condition of the buildings they occupy. In many instances there are other reasons motivating the departure.

Strangely those who have remained, and who support demolition ; an estimated half of the original community as confirmed in the LCC NRA declaration March 05 complain of unfit, damp and rat infested homes.

There is no doubt that this is the case for some residents, but begs the question – why have they stayed on in such awful conditions when re settlement offers were abundant. These people want all the houses demolished, as they have been assured that unless all the houses are demolished the developer won't take on the site, and they will not have a new house with a garden in the areas they love. So they have been encouraged to promote their desires at the expense of their neighbours

Their neighbours are another group of residents who remain amongst the tinned up empties. They are complaining too - that their homes are decent, cheap to run affordable, wonderful, cosy, amongst friends, and simply better than the re- settlement offers, or the potential to be a part owner in a new house nearby. These people have what they desire. Although they want their neighbours to have new houses if that is their choice, they do object to their much loved homes being knocked down to provide land for new houses.

In a city where 67.1% of previously developed land is now vacant derelict brown field and there is considerable interest from people wanting to move into the area it would seem possible to reach a satisfactory solution. The national average for vacant brown field land is 22%, another Liverpool specific anomaly.

It is likely that the solution will be a long time coming, that the will to demolish will defy logic, and anyone who survives the local interpretation of 'developing a sustainable community' will be forced to commit their scant resources to opposing the scheme at Public Inquiry.

68 The cost of such delays and procedures is high for all concerned. WSHG members wonder how much refurbishment, how many condensing boilers, square metres of rockwool and solar panels could be had for the same money.

It appears that unrealistic outcomes were promoted amongst a sector of the local community, and that the agencies responsible for this have been unable to broker a better solution than the David and Goliath spectacle of Public Inquiry.

Evidence versus belief

The scarcity of accurate research data regarding criteria for assessing the environmental and cost benefits of refurbishment is regrettable but easily remedied. There is considerable interest in this field. The WSHG continue to assist research into the potential cost and environmental implications of upgrading existing buildings, and hope they are not alone in this clearly essential work.

If such research were properly resourced, and delivered by independent organisations, there would be an opportunity to devise directives regarding the application of this knowledge to delivery of HMR and across Housing Stock nationally particularly Victorian Housing comprising around 60% of existing stock in the UK.

The absence of such research data, or any directives, or performance measures of the HMR scheme implies that the use of the term 'sustainability' by government is currently more an exercise in public relations, or wishful thinking than a serious intent to address issues of sustainability.

further evidence is required with regard to ;

- A The embodied energy in existing buildings,
- B The additional energy and economic resources required to demolish them.

- C The added to the issues of waste disposal and increased landfill.
- D The health issues arising for residents living near proposed brick crushing facilities.
- E The transportation of demolition waste off site, and delivery of new materials to site.
- F The economic and environmental particularly Co2 emission costs of new build homes.
- G The concerns regarding the longevity, desirability and recyclability of new build properties.
- H The potential fire risk and predicted need for air conditioning in the new MMC built homes.
- I The existing community networks and support systems.
- J Loss of existing green assets including mature trees as wildlife havens, Co2 absorbers oxygen producers and natural cooling systems.
- K Loss of irreplaceable heritage assets
- L Loss of affordable homes
- M The factors which encourage people who have the means to leave the terraces, remaining – sometimes in the light of social problems.

The stated intent of the ODPM to reduce carbon emissions, reduce waste to landfill, conserve energy, recycle more, and built on vacant brown field, support communities, ensure equality and safety for residents, and support homeownership are all contradicted in the current HMR proposals for the Welsh Streets.

Material and Energy Losses

- 74 Embodied Energy;
- Engineers have stated around
 - 600 MJ per m sq brick walling
 - 200 MJ per m square of breeze block
 - 1000 MJ per m square of wood

The above values exclude the energy used for transportation of the building materials.

The embodied energy in other materials in existing terraces are far higher, notably glass and metals, but even existing heating systems, floor materials and fittings have neglected embodied energy values.

An average Australian House (no data available for UK housing) Uses 1000 GJ of energy in it's construction, which is equal to 15 years of its operational use of energy.

Glessons the private developers who hope to develop the Welsh Streets site should the proposed demolitions be given permission to do so, were asked about recycling Victorian bricks. These bricks are of a beautiful colour and surface quality, many high fired and of local clay with clear resale value. They keep wonderful homes warm in winter and cool in summer.

Glessons stated that they would recycle the bricks as aggregate. It is hoped we can do better than that. It is hoped that the ODPM will remain true to it's broad sustainability agenda and seek repair, and refurbishment.

High quality building irreplaceable materials.

The roofing material on many of the homes proposed for clearance are high quality extremely durable Welsh slates, which have already outperformed the composite tiles of the 50's houses, and are known to be superior to the Belgian slates imported for roofing.

Their value is recognised by the demolition crews, and lorry loads of them can be seen on the M6, being driven to wealthier Southern areas where they are prized and sold on at a profit.

This practice is neither desirable or sustainable, adding unnecessary transport and handling energy to the environmental impact whilst robbing the heritage of the North to indulge the increasingly bland Southern Housing products.

Heritage Assets and other earning opportunities

It is thought that the birthplace of Ringo Starr adds to experience for the visitor of Beatles Tourists to Liverpool. The demolition of this site has been opposed by those working in the tourism industry.

Thirteen local businesses support an unknown number of family members in the Welsh Streets. This is presumable the king of mixed use and urban grain recommended in the Urban Task Force findings which according to the Daily Telegraph on

24.11.05 have also fallen by the wayside.

Functioning street plan and spatial logic

Pathfinder proposals include altering the logic and reason of existing street plans, again at increased environmental costs, necessitating plant machinery to re-dig new drainage and power pipelines.

Whilst it is likely to be necessary to renew power and water pipe lines, and basic household sewerage services building to a new street plan incurs additional environmental damage.

Huge healthy trees

Two Groves of mature London Plane trees, and a range of green assets in existing local gardens are to be sacrificed, undermining biodiversity, quality of life, the physical environment air quality. They were originally planted 160 years ago to combat air pollution and are classic species for Urban Planting.

Together as they stand the Southern Growth Areas, the Northern Way, and the Pathfinder demolitions are creating a loss of public confidence. This might be seen as a very important loss to add to the balance sheet.

Growing Public Concern

The extent to which vital sustainability considerations are outlined in 'Building a Sustainable Future' are identified, and sidelined in the 'Homes For All ; A Five year Plan" is disturbing.

84 There is a great will amongst the public to repair, recycle and reuse. The contested demolitions undermine other useful recycling and sustainable practice initiatives.

The level of awareness and concern regarding issues of sustainability is perhaps more sophisticated than government is aware. It seems churlish to suggest householders recycle paper, glass and tins cans, walk more, use public transport and insulate their homes when the government lead Pathfinder threatens to destroy decent desirable homes, for which there is a demonstrable market.

There is a disturbing lack of published research regarding the environmental impact of either demolition or new build as is noted in the 'Sustainable Communities ; Homes For All (ODPM 2005) An Environmental Audit is vital in this matter.

The continued pursuit of the demolition of already 'decent homes' in pathfinder

areas is baffling in terms of any delivery of environmental efficiency or broader sustainability targets.

This evidence is prepared by the Welsh Streets Homes Group

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“ ..it is not high density terraced housing nor its location that is a problem *per se*, but rather the social conditions which surround the houses.” CPRE - “Useless old Houses?” March 2004.