

# Campaign to Protect Rural England



West Midlands Region

Regenerating Housing - Providing Homes  
in Which People Want to Live

*“Should We Refurbish Housing Stock or Redevelop?”*



Terraced housing in  
the 1960s - should we  
aim to retain it?



A Discussion Document  
April 2005

## **Refurbishment v Redevelopment**

### **Background**

In February 2003 the Deputy Prime Minister published the Government's Sustainable Communities Plan. Included in this national plan was the provision of £500m to be made available over the next two years to 9 market renewal Pathfinder Partnerships to tackle low demand and abandonment, which affects around 1m homes across 120 local authorities in the North and Midlands.

Two of the Pathfinder Partnerships are situated here in the West Midlands, one in North Staffordshire and one in Sandwell and North Birmingham. During the first quarter of 2004 the two respective specially convened teams submitted their Prospectuses to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. In June 2004 the two housing market renewal pathfinder plans were approved by the Deputy Prime Minister.

Everyone agrees these plans are an important component in revitalising the most deprived parts of our urban areas and in stemming the unsustainable migration of people out of our major urban areas into the Shires, currently running at 11,000 a year (net) in this region. But questions remain. Are the Pathfinders going to deliver communities people want to live in? Are they going to take account of what local residents want and so gain support? Are they going to protect our environment and heritage? Are they going to ensure land is used efficiently? And are they going to create environmentally friendly communities, with good open space, public transport links and provision for people without a car? Are they going to discriminate against the sort of housing which minimises land take?

But perhaps the biggest question is have lessons been learnt from the past? From the Second World War up to the sixties and seventies many urban communities were

swept away because it was claimed no one wanted to live there. The replacement was soul-less estates which have not stood the test of time. A key element of any Pathfinder strategy must be that communities are built up not thrown away and aspirations to improve our urban areas are met with imagination and sensitivity, not high-handedness.

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### **To Refurbish or Redevelop**

In terms of RPG 11 and the forthcoming Regional Housing Strategy: Refurbishment means renovating dwellings without demolishing them. Redevelopment means building new dwellings on sites where dwellings or other buildings have been demolished.

Regeneration is a much wider term encompassing both of the above and other action such as environmental improvement, the provision of infrastructure and services etc – as in for example 'urban regeneration'.

In each of the two West Midlands' based pathfinder areas there are a number of localities where the problems associated with failing housing markets, poor housing conditions and lack of maintenance are so widespread that area based regeneration will require restructuring of the local housing market and redevelopment is the only practical option.

The principal reason behind the need to propose redevelopment/refurbishment projects is that there is such low demand for homes in the subject area, that many of the former residents have moved away, many of the houses have become vacant and abandoned, their condition has deteriorated and the remaining community has become unsustainable.

Low demand for housing has significant

implications for community sustainability because evidence of deprivation is recognised as the principal constraint on demand. Once the vicious cycle starts it can become harder and harder to get out of.

As demand falls further, the impacts on quality of life increase. These cut across environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainability. Some of the implications are direct and obvious. Others, such as those on resource use, the damage to the environment and heritage are indirect and less obvious.

When areas reach this level of decline, most of those who are able to leave do so. The number of residents with a long-term stake in the area declines. The inevitable result is that some of the most vulnerable members of society end up being concentrated up in the lowest demand areas.

Neighbourhoods become stigmatised. When these communities are racially polarised, racial tensions result from decisions to prioritise one area for renewal over another.

However, it is not always as easy as it appears to judge when an area is beyond redemption and many areas are uncomfortably on the edge of this downward spiral. Decisions to demolish, including in adjacent areas, can undermine attempts to regenerate an area and lead to a self-fulfilling prophesy.

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### **Why are CPRE WM concerned?**

RPG 11 – the new spatial strategy for the West Midlands encourages a renewed emphasis on urban renaissances and its policies bring the need to balance redevelopment and refurbishment sharply into focus.

Chapter 4 – Urban Renaissance states the view *‘that fundamental to Urban Regeneration is the creation and marketing of sustainable*

*communities in which people will choose to live, work and invest.’*

Whether they are the result of continuing high demand or of redevelopment or refurbishment projects - or a combination of both - successful, sustainable urban residential developments, should dilute the threat of urban sprawl and discourage urban out migration into the rural countryside areas, However, to achieve enough housing in urban areas, it is critical that houses do not eat up land and are built at a reasonable density. Equally, there are cases, particularly at the smaller end of the market, where demolishing existing houses is likely to decrease densities, particularly where extra land is taken for off street car parking.

CPRE WM is concerned about the sustainability implications of where people live and believes sustainable communities should have the following characteristics:

- *Make efficient use of land; e.g. provide dwelling units at 40 plus homes per hectare, with ideally no more than 1 car-parking space per family and in some cases less.*
- *Where possible replace condemned houses at a better than 1 to 1 ratio.*
- *Be efficient in their use of energy and construction materials.*
- *Minimise the need to travel for leisure, jobs and services.*
- *Contain a mix of housing types to accommodate a range of needs; and*
- *Fully involve the public in decisions about change.*

Some of these criteria are reflected in the Government’s National Policy Statement (PPG 3) on housing which seeks to minimise land take and encourage good design.

## The West Midlands Pathfinders

How do our 2 'Pathfinder' plans measure up to CPRE WM's sustainability criteria?

### North Staffordshire

Plans for the North Staffordshire area cover the local authority areas of Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme. £67.5m of funding has been secured over the next 2 years to start work. And over the next 20 years it is reported that it will cost £2.3bn to complete the programme. A total of 63,000 properties are said to be currently in low demand, *'with the low house prices increasing more slowly than the regional and national averages. There is evidence of absolute decline in some areas with prices falling and vacancies increasing rapidly'*

The published plans give considerable weight to a **Redevelopment** approach. With the demolition of 14,500 homes and the building of 12,500 dwellings, a replacement ratio of 0.86:1, alongside the proposed refurbishment of 36,000 properties.

This, in itself, raises question marks about what consideration has been taken of RPG11 and PPG3 both of which encourage a 1 to 1 replacement ratio?

There is also the question as to whether it is appropriate to demolish 14,500 largely Victorian and Edwardian terraced houses?

Evidence from the CPRE's North West of England study into that region's low demand housing areas *'Useless Old Houses'* suggests that the type of housing does not play a major role in contributing to low demand and that the emphasis placed on gardens and car parking in what is often called *'obsolete housing,'* is misplaced. In fact the key determinants in low demand were boarded up housing, threat of demolition and social issues, such as crime not tenure.

One of the main policy recommendations of the N.W.E. report was the need to renovate some terraces, control the number and location of new dwellings, and to limit new development to encourage mixed housing and communities. We believe this is correct.

We do not believe a large scale clearance of terraces is likely to provide an efficient and sustainable solution to many of the economically driven problems of Stoke on Trent, nor do we believe it is likely to lead to a revitalisation of the housing market as long as strong markets are encouraged in adjoining rural areas, where house building continues strongly.

The Sustainable Communities action programme document itself calls for *"a range of household sizes, ages and incomes"* to be a key requirement of a sustainable community.

We accept, therefore, that house clearance should be considered where properties are beyond economic repair, unfit for modern living, in areas of extremely low demand or it is necessary to improve the better functioning of local housing markets or the overall improvement/regeneration of an area. In our view this could be achieved through a much more selective programme, which included more emphasis on refurbishment

Our early understanding of the Pathfinder team's plans would encourage radically lower housing densities in the area.

Government guidance PPG 3 considers that developments of less than 30 dwellings per hectare make inefficient use of land and should be avoided. Densities at greater than 50 dwellings per hectare should be sought at places with good public transport accessibility such as city, town, district and local centres or around major nodes along good quality public transport corridors. While excessively high densities should be resisted in some areas due

to fear of ‘town-cramming’, density should not be confused with intensity. If well designed, high density housing delivers vitality and improves security. Density is a fundamental factor in sustainable communities.

Pre-1919 terraces were typically built at a density of 80-100 dwellings per hectare, often in locations with good public transport accessibility and pedestrian access to shops and services. The majority of those remaining nationwide are (or could be made) energy efficient and provide comfortable accommodation to members of very many mixed communities. Forty years later there remain many hundreds of Victorian terraced streets in the North East England, which provide comfortable accommodation to a large number of lone residents in the area of their families. These homes would have been cleared in ‘slum clearance’ programmes long ago had they not become the subject of imaginatively conceived ‘revitalisation’ plans that refreshed both individual homes and terraces and neighbourhoods.

English Heritage’s 2003 report confirms their strong interest in working closely with the Pathfinder teams to pioneer new approaches to adopting this traditional housing to the needs and aspirations of modern households. *‘Both street patterns and houses themselves contribute to the heritage of the urban areas, whether the Victorian and Edwardian terraces built for factory workers or the different styles of council house/housing association developments through the 20<sup>th</sup> century.’*

Our own work in the North West suggests that where terraced house markets are failing such houses can be made attractive to live in if social issues are addressed.

CPRE urges the pathfinder teams to involve English Heritage experts in their deliberations.

Members of CPRE WM’s regional team and

the Staffordshire Branch are very concerned about the large scale clearances proposed and particularly the low density at which some of the replacement housing is planned. We would welcome further opportunity to input to the North Staffordshire ‘Redevelopment’ plans and support the need to achieve early sustained stimulation of demand for housing in the Pathfinder area so that the recent migration from the area to the North Staffordshire Moorlands can be curtailed and soon reversed.

#### *North Birmingham and Sandwell*

The recently approved plans submitted by the North Birmingham and Sandwell

Pathfinder team represent a much stronger **Refurbishment** approach with what we consider a more appropriate level of demolitions. Their proposals include the refurbishment of 15,000 homes the demolition of 6,000 properties and the construction of 12,000 new houses, a replacement ratio of 2 to 1. CPRE WM believe they represent a better balance of action, although it has yet to be tested.

This Pathfinder covers Smethwick, West Bromwich, Oldbury, Rood End, Handsworth, Winson Green, Rotton Park, Lozells and Newtown, an area that contains over 60,000 homes and has a population of 150,000. The area has a high number of black and minority ethnic households, suffers from high deprivation and 74% of the local authority housing stock fails to meet the decent homes standard. *‘The legacy of industrial decline remains, much of the housing is old and fails to meet day needs and aspirations, environmental quality is poor.’*

The Pathfinder has attracted £170m of funding for the next two years to improve the choice and quality of housing, improve the environment, promote learning skills and local employment opportunities, and promote an

ethnic mix of residents. It is also closely integrated with a wider regeneration programme for the Black Country, which is being developed as part of the Black Country sub-regional strategy and, more locally, RegenWM's work in Sandwell, both of which CPRE WM has taken a keen interest in.

CPRE WM wants to see housing which is attractive, at a suitable density which fits in with wider sustainability goals in Pathfinder areas.

We believe it is important we do not repeat the post First World War "homes fit for heroes" mistakes. Under that programme council estates were built at low density, often distant from places of employment with poor public transport systems to connect. In many of these areas there has been a marked decline in employment opportunities. Today many people living in these areas cannot afford to leave. *'These monolithic public sector housing estates have become unpopular with residents.'* Altering the balance of tenure can help previously unpopular areas (DTLR housing Research Survey 2000).

We also do not want to see the post Second World War drive to build tower blocks, a time when the planners didn't consult communities who were often moved from war-damaged 'deprived' streets, and did not succeed in creating sustainable communities, principally because these comprehensive redevelopment schemes did not provide any form of community comparable to the old street communities.

If the stated goal of this Pathfinder is *'to capture the best of both city centre and suburban living, appealing to a wide range of people choosing to live in the area because they enjoy the diversity and vibrancy of city living but with a wider range housing choice'* it is imperative that large numbers of that community are encouraged to participate in

planning their communities and that, more importantly, their views are respected and acted upon.

To quote the Deputy Prime Minister from his foreword to the Sustainable Communities Plan,

*"For more than 30 years this country lost its way. We built housing in a way that failed to put the needs of the communities first. We did not invest for the long term. That is why we want to move away from the old, top-down policies of the past where decisions were taken for local communities rather than by them".*

Surveys researching the views of local people in the Pathfinder area and its immediate vicinity highlighted the importance of the quality of the environment as a factor in determining the attractiveness of a neighbourhood, both with existing residents and potential newcomers. However attractive a house it cannot be divorced from its physical environment and the community that it sits within. The Pathfinder team have thankfully acknowledged that tackling deficiencies in the environment of a neighbourhood, issues such as an attractive public realm and concern around public safety will be critical success factors of the 'Urban Living Programme'.

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## Conclusions

To redevelop or refurbish – neither option will entirely solve the problems of our urban areas. We believe a properly researched dialogue with residents and interested parties needs to be developed and a careful balance struck between proposed redevelopment and refurbishment plans. We believe the links between planning, transport and housing professionals also need to be strengthened to ensure housing plans are rooted in the broader perspective of urban regeneration, transport solutions and sustainable development.

In the words of the Deputy Prime Minister,

*“Planners must strive for holistic solutions, working closely with other professionals and most importantly members of the communities, no one solution should be considered independently.”*

In considering whether to demolish buildings full account should be taken of

- *alternative options to redeveloping properties*
- *the knock-on effect on neighbouring communities*
- *the environmental impact of demolition – including the embedded energy costs of demolition*
- *the impact on policies to reduce the need to travel, especially where the provision of car parking could increase car use*
- *the heritage impacts, not only on designated buildings but on broader heritage assets, such as traditional terraced housing*
- *the contribution to achieving density and design targets*
- *the appropriate housing mix in an area*
- *the provision of open space*
- *access to employment*
- *the quality of the replacement housing*

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Campaign to Protect  
Rural England

WEST MIDLANDS

CPRE exists to promote the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural England by encouraging the sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and country. We promote positive solutions for the long-term future of the countryside to ensure change values its natural and built environment. Our Patron is Her Majesty The Queen. We have 59,000 supporters, a branch in every county, nine regional groups, over 200 local groups and a national office in London. CPRE is a powerful combination of effective local action and strong national campaigning. Our President is Sir Max Hastings.