

Chapter 3

Reducing Sprawl and Delivering an Urban Renaissance in England: Are These Aims Possible Given Current Attitudes to Urban Living?

Katie Williams

Introduction

'...there may be exceptional periods when cities do not simply react to external change, but rather that they create change....' (Robson et al., 2000, p.6)

In the UK, reducing urban sprawl and revitalising towns and cities have been dual, and related aims of the planning system and of urban policy for many decades (Healey, 1997; Jenks *et al.* 1996). However, since the late 1980s these aims have been given a new language: that of sustainability. The 'sustainable city' is characterised in English spatial planning by the idea of the 'compact city'. In physical terms, this translates to cities and towns which are contained, built at higher densities than current averages, and have a mix of uses (Jenks *et al.*, 1996). This implies development processes which reduce sprawl by using urban, preferably brownfield, land rather than greenfield or edge sites.

The reasons why compact settlements are seen as more sustainable are well rehearsed, but worth summarising. Planning policies and guidance assert that by promoting more dense, contained cities urban land is recycled and remediated and rural land preserved. Existing urban infrastructure and services, such as roads, street lighting, schools and hospitals are used optimally, and provided economically. Numbers of trips by fuel-rich modes of transport, such as the car, are reduced as people live near their work and recreation facilities. Also, public transport is supported by high population densities. It is argued that local economies will then flourish, supported by a critical mass of population. Furthermore, compact cities enjoy the masses of population which encourage cultural exchange, creativity and a cosmopolitan way of life (see Williams, 1999a for a summary of the origins of these claims in policy). It should be noted that there is considerable dispute over legitimacy of many of these claims, however

they are all represented in English planning or sustainability policies, guidance and/or strategies (Williams *et al.* 2000).

The shifts in English planning policy and guidance towards a stronger message on urban containment and compaction had several clear drivers. The first were global commitments to develop sustainable strategies for future development following the Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987) and the Rio Earth Summit. Primarily, these led to a concentration on how to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, hence car travel came under the spotlight. This prompted the government and municipal authorities to develop sustainability strategies and policies, including a move to make cities more compact to reduce car trips, and hence emissions (e.g. HM Govt, 1994; DoE and DoT, 1994).

The second and perhaps more important drivers were political pressures arising from conditions within England's towns and cities. By the late 1980s, most major cities in England had been losing populations for decades. They had also lost employment opportunities through industrial change and relocation. Hence, some districts and neighbourhoods within cities had visibly declined, and their remaining populations were experiencing economic problems and related social impacts. In addition, traffic congestion and inefficient public transport systems were making urban mobility a political issue. Simultaneously, an increase of house building activity on greenfield sites was taking place.

Against this backdrop, in 1995, the Government released housing projections for the next 20 years (DoE, 1995). These indicated that 4.4 million new homes would be needed. This figure has since been revised downwards to approximately 3.8 million (Urban Task Force, 1999), but at the time the 4.4 million figure brought the issues of further greenfield development, and urban decline into sharp focus. Hence, during the 1990s the issue of where to locate future housing in England became hotly contested. For these related reasons pressure built up on the one hand for urban regeneration, and on the other for protection of land in the countryside.

In this context, the 'compact city' solution was politically attractive to Government. The logic of simultaneously reducing sprawl and renewing declining urban areas was seemingly a 'win-win' situation. There was also a considerable amount of research to suggest that compaction was a sensible way to achieve some sustainability objectives. Most notably, work on reducing the need to travel through increasing densities and clustering trip ends (Newman and Kenworthy, 1989; Ecotec, 1993) supported sustainability commitments.

Hence, a number of important policy changes were made during the 1990s and early 2000s in England. The most significant were initially in planning policy guidance on transport, (DoE and DoT, 1994) and housing (DTLR, 2000b). *PPG13: Transport*, was revised to advocate clustering trip ends and raising densities to reduce car travel. *PPG3: Housing* was significantly updated to increase housing densities and give priority to urban rather than greenfield sites. This has been described as a sequential approach to land for housing and is seen as a major policy tool in reducing urban sprawl. Another very significant move in the 1990s was the introduction of a 'brownfield target' for housing. This was introduced in 1998 and stated that 60% of all housing development nationally should be built on reused

urban land (DETR, 1998). Targets now have to be reviewed at the regional level in England.

However, these policy changes were all still rather disparate, and progress towards more compact, liveable and sustainable cities was, at best, slow. There was also a clear gap in policy for coherent guidance on urban areas. By the end of the 1990s the issue of housing location was also becoming more politically charged, particularly in over-stretched regions in the South, and pressure was mounting for the Government to take action. As a response, in 1998, the Government set up the Urban Task Force, chaired by the architect Sir Richard Rogers, to identify causes of urban decline, recommend solutions to bring people back into cities, and establish a new vision for urban regeneration. The Task Force was made up of academics, representatives of pressure groups, planning consultants, developers and local government professionals. It published its findings in a comprehensive report on the state and future of English cities in 1999. The report was entitled *Towards an Urban Renaissance* (The Urban Task Force, 1999).

Some but not all of the Task Force's recommendations were developed and published a year later as the government's major statement on the future of urban England: *The Urban White Paper: Our Towns and Cities, Delivering the Renaissance* (DETR, 2000a). This Paper had much to say about the urban regeneration, but on the important issue of urban form, it continued the aims of previous policies in advocating containment, and facilitating urban compaction and intensification.

While the White Paper was welcomed by many in planning for reinforcing policies to contain and repopulate cities, others questioned the feasibility of achieving the 'urban renaissance' (Williams, 1999b; Lizieri, 1999; Barras, 1999). The main sticking point is that the forces resulting in urban decline, namely residential and economic decentralisation, are so strong in some parts of the country that to bring about a complete turn-about seems unrealistic. While the reasons for urban decline are numerous, most commentators point to people's locational and lifestyle preferences as being key barriers (Breheny, 1997; Williams, 1999). The White Paper, and planning policy guidance before it, pays much attention to the supply of land for housing development, but perhaps the important question is: is there a demand for the urban renaissance? The question of whether it is possible to re-populate cities with high density urban forms, given existing housing and lifestyle aspirations, is the crux of the urban renaissance concept.

The purpose of this paper is to assess the 'demand' for the urban renaissance from the perspective of potential urban dwellers. It addresses questions such as who will the newly urban be? What will make existing urban dwellers stay in, rather than leave, the city? And what types of 'ideal' or 'model' do we have for urban living that are attractive enough to entice people back into cities? Furthermore, given the Task Force's investigation and the Urban White Paper, are we any closer to understanding the extent of the demand for the urban renaissance? Are the solutions now proposed any more sophisticated than previous containment

policies? In short, in prescribing a renaissance, has the best use been made of our knowledge about urban living? The paper is split into three sections. These:

- Set out the context for the ‘urban renaissance’ in England. This section explains why a renaissance is seen as necessary and explains in terms of spatial planning, how the renaissance is to be achieved.
- Review the evidence of a demand for the urban renaissance from the perspective of existing and potential urban residents. This section reviews data on population change and on attitudes to urban living to shed more light on the potential for the renaissance.
- Conclude on the likelihood of a renaissance, given the evidence on attitudes to urban living presented, and raise some issues for discussion.

The Context for the ‘Urban Renaissance’ in England

A range of complex factors has left many, though not all, England’s towns and cities requiring a ‘renaissance’ at some level, or in certain neighbourhoods. A simplified summary of these issues was presented in the Urban Task Force’s Report (Urban Task Force, 1999), and a fuller picture can be found in Robson *et al.* (2000).

In economic terms, continued industrial decline, particularly the accelerated decline of heavy manufacturing in the last thirty years has been the major cause of urban malaise. Whilst this has been coupled with an increase in technology industries, the service sector and self-employment, in some cities it has left whole neighbourhoods and communities decimated. Abandoned, derelict and empty properties are a feature of these areas. Clearly London and some regional cities have benefited from new roles in a global market for finance and business, but the majority of English towns and cities have not profited substantially from this shift. Added to this has been a massive investment by the property sector over the last twenty years in suburban and peripheral housing estates, out of town shopping centres, leisure complexes and business parks. The decentralisation of economic activity is now seen as a profound shift in the economic geography of England (Breheny, 1997; 1999; CPRE, 2001).

The UK has also seen the continuation of major regional economic inequalities, with only London and the South East exceeding the average income per head (DETR, 2000a). Areas such as Merseyside in the north of England had average incomes as low as 75% of the national average GDP per head (Urban Task Force, 1999). In terms of urban sprawl, these inequalities have significant implications. Clearly, people have followed jobs, and this uneven wealth has created disproportionate demand for housing in more prosperous regions. For example, in the South East land for housing is becoming scarcer, whereas in the northern regions greenfield land is being released to stimulate development, when a massive stock of brownfield land exists (DETR, 2000a).

These economic trends have also had major implications for population patterns within towns and cities, which are worth setting out as a backdrop to understanding the potential for change in the future. Outward migration from the cores of cities to the suburbs and beyond has characterised population movements for most of the last century. The movement has been characterised as a population ‘cascade’ with people, and families in particular, moving from urban centres to the suburbs, smaller towns and more rural areas (*ibid*). Those living in suburban areas have also tended to move further out. In most of England’s conurbations, the rates of net out-migration are highest for the better-off. There has also been in-migration, but at slower rates than the urban exodus. International migration and minority ethnic populations have dominated this inward movement.

However, now, after decades of decline, there are early signs that the losses in some central urban populations are slowing, and some core areas are beginning to re-populate (Urban Task Force, 1999). Urban regeneration policies have been successful in some of England’s largest cities such as Leeds, Newcastle and Manchester. In parts of these cities the image of urban living has been overhauled and a flow of new residents has been achieved. However, overall the pattern is still of counter-urbanisation, and many neighbourhoods consistently under-perform on all indicators of economic and social well being.

Given this backdrop, the issue of where to locate new housing becomes complex. In common with much of Europe, England is currently witnessing a very slowly growing population, but a steep increase in number of households. There were 19.21 million households in England in 1991, but this is projected to grow to 24 million by 2021 (ONS, 2003) Hence England expects an increase of 19% in its household numbers over the next 20 years. The biggest factor in this increase is the number of single person households: a projected 70% of the growth (or 2.7 million) (*ibid.*). These households will comprise young people living alone, divorced and unmarried people and older people. Many of these new households are also likely to be on low incomes. However, there is considerable political pressure to resist locating new homes on greenfield or edge of city sites, and there is little serious consideration of new settlements by central government. Environmental pressure to protect the countryside and to reduce car travel have all but killed broader discussions about new towns or cities.

The White Paper sets out starkly the threat of locating the new housing in locations that it deems might contribute to urban sprawl. It states four consequences:

- ‘continuing pressure for the expansion of towns and cities into greenfield development with a continuing legacy of underused land and buildings within urban areas;
- a wider social impact on rural communities with local people being priced out of the housing market...;
- previously healthy communities near city centres experience increasing social polarisation, with those who cannot move living in a poor local environment with high levels of crime...; and

- wasteful use of natural resources and increased pollution as those who move out travel greater distances to get to work, shops and the places where they spend their leisure time...’ (DETR, 2000a, p. 24).

Hence, with respect to built form, the Paper makes an explicit case for higher density housing, more brownfield development and reusing urban land, calling recent proportions of greenfield development ‘unacceptable’

The Paper then sets out changes required to deliver more sustainable and prosperous cities. In terms of spatial planning these have three aspects: better planning and design, bringing back previously developed land and empty property into beneficial economic or social use and better maintenance of the existing built fabric. It outlines a number of fiscal and policy measures that the government has implemented, is about to announce, or is reviewing, to meet these aims. These range from accelerated tax credits for cleaning up contaminated land, to capital allowances for creating ‘flats over shops’ and a review of planning obligations and impact fees.

The Paper also outlines how recent changes in planning policy guidance are supporting these aims, citing the changes to *PPG3: Housing* mentioned above, strengthened by a new Greenfield Housing Direction (October 2000) which gives the Secretary of State powers over major greenfield developments. The only real mention of an alternative to urban infill is planned extensions, which are seen as the next most sustainable option.

An interesting element of this discussion, which is perhaps worth clarifying here, is that of density. The message in the Urban White Paper (and PPG3) is that new housing needs to be built at higher densities than current averages. The White Paper translates the household projections into ‘spatial consequences’, and warns that if the required homes are built at current average densities for new development they would cover an area larger than Greater London. However, only 15% of Britons currently live in places with inner city levels of population density (50 people per hectare or above gross). Mostly, English people live at suburban densities of around twenty people per hectare (Schoon, 2001). Even at these relatively low densities, 80% of the population live in built up areas of over 10,000 people which only cover 7% of land. This point is made to give a clear picture of the current character and intensity of urbanisation in England.

In summary then, from the Government’s perspective, the reasons for requiring a renaissance are clear. Cities have lost large proportions of their populations, and too much greenfield land is being used for housing. The policy now is to rectify this situation by repopulating cities and building housing on urban land. The renaissance hopes to ‘benefit everyone, making towns and cities vibrant and successful, and protecting the countryside from development pressure.’ (DETR, 2000a, p.7). However, when stripped back to its essentials, the concept of the ‘renaissance’ is largely a new language, or ‘branding’ for a package of familiar policies. These include the move to sustainable cities, urban regeneration, increased compaction, brownfield reuse, reduced sprawl and rural protection.

Evidence of the Demand for Urban Renaissance

Two key sources have been chosen to investigate whether a 'bottom-up' demand exists for the urban renaissance. The first are data on migration and population movements. These are reviewed in order to see if, when analysed beyond the level of basic net trends, they shed any light on the potential success of renaissance policies. For example, can they tell us which areas are attracting people back into urban living? The second source is data and research on attitudes to urban living. These are investigated to see, for example, if there is a latent demand for city life, or a general pro-urban movement which is somehow not represented by the net migration figures.

In reviewing these two sources of data it is clear that much of it has been collected to support different viewpoints on urban living. Hence, it is useful to recognise this potential bias. Two distinct 'camps' have been characterised throughout the history of the urban containment debate, for example as 'crammers and sprawlers' (Harrison, 2000), or 'centrists and decentrists' (Breheny, 1996). A useful contemporary categorisation is given by Rogers and Power (2000) who summarise pro-urban and pro-greenfield development lobbies. The first group consists of: the pro-city lobbyists; environmentalists, who are anti-greenfield development and anti-car; social environmentalists, who see the urban renaissance as a way to reverse social polarisation; and NIMBYs, the 'not-in-my-back-yard' camp, who oppose further greenfield development or rural destruction. The second group comprises; builders who want easy, more profitable greenfield sites; the 'affordable housing' lobby who believe greenfield housing may be a route to affordability; and the 'affordable movers' who cannot afford reasonable housing in popular inner areas and reject poorer neighbourhoods with cheaper housing, so opt for the cheaper greenfield low-cost quality option. Both camps have support from elements of the academic community, split into those who believe that the renaissance is desirable and possible, and those who, given the evidence, are unsupportive or sceptical. Broadly, these two camps can be described as 'optimists' or 'pessimists' in achieving the renaissance. These terms will be used as shorthand for the two camps described.

The Relevance of Population and Land Use Data

The predominant patterns of recent population change in England have been outlined above: counter-urbanisation has been significant, and continues, but there are some very early signs that this trend might be slowing or reversing. The purpose of this section of the paper is to look more closely at this data to see if these changes do in fact indicate a demand for a renaissance.

Those pessimistic about the potential of the renaissance reiterate that in the 1980s and 1990s net out migration from the main conurbations to the rest of the country averaged around 90,000 people a year (Champion *et al.*, 1998). Every single district of metropolitan England was a net loser through its migration

exchanges with non-metropolitan areas between 1981 and 1991, although the rate of net loss varied between districts. Greater London stood out as the main contributor to out migration (*ibid.*).

However, the optimists argue that the numbers involved in this counter-urbanisation movement are crucial. In his comprehensive review of the state of Britain's cities Nicholas Schoon makes the point that: 'the counter-urbanisation cascade is a two-way street, with more people moving out than in. If the outward flow from the conurbations was reduced by a fifth and the inward flow from smaller towns and the countryside increased by a fifth, the net outflow would cease.' (Schoon, 2001). And it may be that such change is beginning to happen. An analysis of recent migration trends is presented in a report by Robson *et al.* (2000) which was published alongside the Urban White Paper. It makes the point that demographic patterns in the 1990s are markedly different in England from the 1970s and 1980s (Table 3.1). It states that '...the recent migration data ... tell a much more positive story about cities than might commonly be supposed' (*ibid.*, p.16.), pointing out that some of England's main cities such as Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham now have sizeable populations in their core areas.

Table 3.1 Average annual population change in the UK's conurbations, 1971-1997

Conurbations	Average annual population change (%)		
	1971-1981	1981-1991	1991-1997
Greater London	-1.01	-0.45	0.06
Greater Manchester	-0.49	-0.54	0.00
Merseyside	-0.87	-0.88	-0.04
South Yorkshire	-0.16	-0.37	0.00
Tyne and Wear	-0.56	-0.47	-0.01
West Midlands	-0.53	-0.51	0.00
West Yorkshire	-0.15	-0.23	0.02
Former County of Cleveland	-0.03	-0.38	-0.01

Source: Robson et al. (2000).

The most up to date data on population change confirm this, although in terms of actual numbers moving, the trend is not strong. Table 3.1 shows annual population change in England's conurbations over the last three decades. It illustrates a definite shift, with all but three of the conurbations exhibiting gains or balances between 1991 and 1997. Whereas the big cities suffered significant percentage losses of population in the 1970s and 1980s, there has been a widespread turn-around in the 1990s. For example, Greater London's population grew by 232,000 between 1991 and 1997. Even though Merseyside, the West Midlands and Tyne and Wear lost populations overall in this period, the rates of loss were slower than in the two preceding decades. South Yorkshire and Greater

Manchester had populations which levelled and West Yorkshire gained 25,000. Robson *et al.* have pin-pointed this turnaround, even more marked in the latter years of the decade.

This shift can be partly linked with successful urban renewal projects. As Robson *et al.* argue, 'The obverse side of ... patterns of deprivation and collapsing neighbourhoods has been the new vitality that has increasingly been evident in the cores of some older urban areas where there has been significant selective growth in the residential population. This represents a sea-shift in the nature of urban populations.' (*ibid.*, p.17). They go on to suggest that 'Declining neighbourhoods are of concern, but they do not in themselves signal the demise of a city' (*ibid.*, p.17.). This report also makes the important point that migration trends need also to be reviewed against trends in household size, because regardless of whether the conurbations are losing overall population, they are actually increasing their household numbers.

Overall, this data does display a very slight turn around in urban living, but it needs to be set in context. It is too early to determine if it is evidence of a general demand for a renaissance, or just the result of localised regeneration schemes. Caution is also required in analysing this data because it is of very recent demographic change and may not be significant when longer term trends are considered. It may suggest a slight warming to the idea of urban living, but does not indicate a 'mass movement'. Further analysis of the 2001 Census is now required to see if these trends can be discerned nationally. (Data will be available from August 2002).

Attitudinal Data

A wealth of surveys, questionnaires and focus group activities have taken place in the UK over the past decade trying to elicit attitudes to urban living. These have attempted to find out why people move, what their motivations are, and whether they are happy with their choices. This body of work provides most of the evidence for those pessimistic about the potential of repopulation because the findings paint an overwhelmingly gloomy picture of the demand for the urban renaissance. This apparent contradiction between housing aspirations and reducing sprawl through compaction has been noted since compaction policies were first introduced, but given the major political and fiscal investment in the urban renaissance the case for confronting these attitudes is now stronger than ever.

A report written to inform the urban task force on attitudes to urban living reviewed current research on the subject and concluded: 'For anyone seeking to promote urban repopulation, this work makes depressing reading since it suggests that anti-urban sentiments in the British public remain as strong as ever', (Urbed, 1999) A similar conclusion was drawn by Champion *et al.* when they analysed this literature. They reported: '... the English are, by and large, a nation committed to living in the countryside or as near as they can get to it (1998, p. 70).'

What both these reviews found was a mass of evidence showing people's dislike of city living. As Schoon states: 'The key urban hates, expressed in survey

after survey, are high levels of crime, especially violent crime, bad schools, heavy road traffic and the noise and pollution which attend it, and a lack of greenery and open space. People want to escape from dilapidation and incivilities – graffiti, litter, rowdiness, out-in-the-open drunkenness and drug dealing. They do not like living close to places that are often noisy and crowded.’ (2001, p. 117). He goes on to add two other key issues: the fact that people want to park their cars near to their homes and racism. He had found in several surveys that people want to move out because there are ‘too many non-whites’ in inner city neighbourhoods. These studies all more or less tell the same story: English people dislike the physical aspects of urbanism related to built-up, congested cityscapes, and also perceive urban social problems as leading to harsher lifestyles.

Unsurprisingly, in contrast, most people see rural or ‘small town’ living as representing a quiet, tranquil existence. Almost all research in this area shows a preference for small town, village or country life. For example, a survey carried out for the government’s Countryside Commission, found that while less than a quarter of the population resides in the countryside or a village, 54% of all adults wanted to live there while only 6% would prefer a home in the inner city (quoted in Schoon, 2001). This view tallies with results of research asking people why they might leave urban areas. Schoon states: ‘Would-be urban emigrants see smaller and rural communities as kinder, less stressful and more closely-knit places with a stronger sense of community. They are looking for a change in the social, as well as in the physical, environment. The village is idealised by millions as a place where everyone is known and where the class struggle is suspended; differences in wealth do not cause the same envy and tension as they do in cities. Real villages may not be at all like that but the dream lives on.’ (*ibid.*, p.107).

A similar picture emerges when people are asked about the types of home they would like (Levitt, 2000; Harrison, 2000; Day, 2000). Recent research by opinion poll company, MORI, for the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment surveyed 1000 people in random locations in England and asked where they would most like to live (Telegraph, 2002). They were shown a sample of dwellings characteristics of different urban settings. The results were that a bungalow in a seemingly suburban or rural setting was the most popular (30%) followed closely by a traditional village home (29%), a 1930s semi-detached house, Victorian terrace, a modern semi-detached house, a loft apartment (2%) and finally a tower block, in which no-one wanted to live.

Perhaps a glimmer of hope for the urban optimists can be found in national research into people’s satisfaction with where they live. In the recent national research on housing attitudes 87% of households reported general approval with their locations, and this percentage has risen in England over the last decade (quoted in Todovovic and Wellington, 2000). But even this research shows that urban residents are less satisfied overall than their suburban or rural counterparts (*ibid.*). Breheny had noted this trend in the mid 1990s, also quoting findings from the British Housing Attitudes survey showing that there is a clear progression with the lowest levels of satisfaction in urban centres and the highest in the most rural areas. But even in 98/99, 16% of heads of households in urban areas expressed

dissatisfaction with their area, compared to only 7% of households in suburban areas and 3% of households in rural areas. Those who have analysed this data point out that there is a clear relationship between satisfaction and deprivation, and the most deprived areas are also mostly in urban settings. Satisfaction levels also drop with higher proportions of renters, unemployed, lone parents and homes in poor condition, all of which are disproportionately located in towns and cities (Todovovic and Wellington, 2000).

While there is little in any of this research to support the optimists' views, perhaps these findings should be treated with some caution. Most of the research takes the form of 'wish lists' and ignores practicalities of everyday life. The optimists argue that people need to make trade-offs, for example they need to be near work and schools, and urban environments provide these opportunities. Furthermore, as many of the reports cited above point out, most people do not move because of their area but for other personal or job related reasons. In fact, only one in ten people who move identify moving to a better area as the main reason for their relocation, and job reasons are the most important reasons for those moving into or within urban areas (*ibid.*).

Another perplexing counter-argument to the overwhelmingly negative attitudes reported in most research on this subject derives from an analysis of who has actually moved out of cities. Research by Champion and colleagues tried to determine if there were any specific underlying characteristics of those parts of cities that lost the highest proportions of their populations. They found that the areas which fuel out migration most tend to be higher status areas. The more heavily losing areas had: above average proportions of well-off people in the family building ages (24-34); low unemployment rates; and high scores on social class and house price. The research also found that 'Areas with less attractive characteristics tend to have less migrating populations, or at least more people who move only rather short distances.' (1998, p.34). In geographical terms, districts further from the core, not inner city districts, lost higher proportions of their populations. In-migration also showed similar patterns. The research found that 'The characteristics which are associated with areas recording the most in-migration are a below average proportion of ethnic minority members, a strong representation of persons in professional and managerial occupations, above average life expectancy and a high level of negative equity.' (Champion *et al.*, 1998, p.38). These areas are clearly attractive to better-off people. Hence, in terms of perceptions of people fleeing inner cities to suburban or rural settings, the image is not accurate. What actually happened in the 1980s and into the 1990s was a lot of movement of the better-off, in 'suburban' districts. The core populations were moving far less, or only moving short distances. Champion *et al.* characterise this movement as a 'general turnover effect' by the better-off, rather than a fleeing from the harsh realities of urban life from inner city residents.

Yet another criticism of the attitudinal research given by the urban optimists is that much of this work is not sophisticated enough in picking up why some people are also attracted to cities, and also why city living might be right for certain groups of the population at certain times. Clearly the data show that large

numbers of people do move into cities, but in terms of assessing demand for the renaissance, it is difficult to get accurate information explaining why. Schoon states that 'Opinion surveys show ... that towns and city living exert their own strong pulls. People put living near frequently served bus stops and train stations, being close to schools, shops their workplaces and leisure facilities such as cinemas high on their list of priorities. This explains why people are moving into cities all the time, even if there is faster flow in the other direction. (Schoon, 2001, p. 117).

Two groups often quoted as being more in favour of urban living are the young and single people. If the migration data is examined, 16-24 year olds are one of the few groups that defy the 'counter-urbanisation cascade' (Schoon, 2001). This group generally moves from smaller to larger places for work and further or higher education. The 'single' households which are also presumed to favour urban living more than the population as a whole are made up of childless households (these could be couples), the never married, the divorced and widowed. Arguments have been put forward that these groups do not require large houses, may not want large gardens and may be attracted to the social life of cities. They may also not have the benefit of double income and therefore not be able to afford much space.

However, evidence on whether smaller households are actually likely to prefer urban living is mixed. Some attitudinal research shows that, in an ideal world, they are no more likely to want urban living than other groups (CML, 2000). They still prefer larger houses with gardens if they can afford them, and have the same urban dislikes as other groups in terms of crime, incivility, congestion and over-development (Schoon, 2001). But other research has found clear variations in attitudes on urban living with age. One survey cited younger people (under 30) from social classes 1 and 11, with no children as the group most likely to consider urban living. This group favour urban life and proximity to jobs and education (MRAL, 1995). And it is largely this group which characterise the 'newly urban' housed in some urban regeneration and demonstration schemes in England. Detailed data from Central Manchester highlights this. The core population of the city rose from less than 300 in 1988 to 3000 by 1995, and according to estimates it had hit 6000 by 2000 (Robson *et al.*, 2000). The area received massive investment in urban regeneration during this period. A survey of those now living in the area showed 40% were single person households, over 50% were two-person households, and only 3% had children. Most were in professional occupations and worked in the city (95% in Greater Manchester). There were also many students, with over 30% of households including at least one student. Many of the households had moved from outside the region.

These data are important in England as a number of new models of urban living are currently under development and highlighted by the Urban White Paper. The main aim of these is to attract those with economic choices to live in central areas, i.e. those in professional and technical managerial occupations. Examples of such schemes are the CASPAR (City Centre apartments for single people at affordable rents) blocks in Leeds and Birmingham (JRF, 2000). These demonstration projects have been developed to attract single people and childless

couples back into urban living, and demand has been high. Similar schemes in Glasgow have also proved popular (Rogers and Power, 2000, p.244).

So far, this discussion has concentrated on whether people want to move in or out of cities and towns, but another important factor in the feasibility of the renaissance is the attitudes of existing urban residents to increased development within their neighbourhoods, especially at higher densities. Research on this subject was undertaken for the UK government looking at residents' attitudes to urban intensification (Burton *et al.* 1998). The research asked people who lived in twelve intensified areas in the UK how the process had affected their neighbourhood. They were asked to comment separately on increases in activity (such as more people living in the area, working there or visiting) and development (in the form of new building, redevelopment, extensions etc.). The impacts of both forms of intensification were found to be negative, but activity intensification was seen to have had a far more detrimental effect than built development (see Figure 3.1).

Perceived effects of development and activity intensification on the local area (% of respondents)

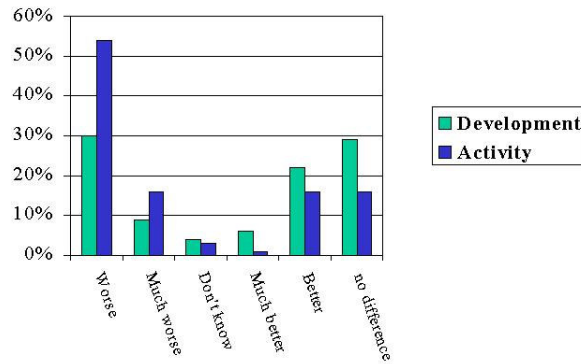


Figure 3.1 Perceived effects of development and activity intensification on the local area

Residents were also asked to comment on the effect of intensification on a series of specific urban issues (Table 3.2). Again, their responses were

overwhelmingly negative, especially on the effects of intensification on traffic and parking. The only hints at benefits were to public transport and shops, which were seen as having been positively affected (although percentages were relatively low). This general picture does however mask findings in a few of the case study areas where responses were far more positive and residents reported that facilities had improved and community spirit was better due to more people living in the area.

The key difference in responses depended on many factors, including the character of the area being intensified and the type of intensification occurring. In general, less prosperous areas, with higher proportions of people in lower social classes (by occupation) were more positive about intensification. In these areas it was seen as modernisation and upgrading. However, in more prosperous areas especially lower density suburbs, it was seen as having a detrimental effect, and was associated with town cramming. The results also showed that intensification was more unpopular when associated with people from outside the area or with people of a different ethnic group, class and/or lifestyle to that of the existing residents. Particular dislikes were tourist- or through-traffic, commuters, unemployed people, hostel tenants, students and foreigners.

Table 3.2 Issues affected for better or worse by intensification (% of respondents)

Issue	Better	Worse
Parking	4	66
Traffic	1	85
Air pollution	1	70
Noise	1	70
Road safety	3	71
Public transport	25	17
Education facilities	7	10
Health facilities	11	13
Recreation facilities	14	18
Shops	25	18
Amount of open space	2	47
Quality of open space	6	41
Job opportunities	11	20
Privacy	3	43
Amount of greenery	5	44
Quality of greenery	6	39
Crime	2	54
Local character	10	45
Neighbourliness	8	24

Source: Burton, et. al. (1998)

Interestingly, density *per se* did not seem to affect people's satisfaction with their locality, but increases in density were significant. It appeared that those who had chosen to live in low or medium density areas wanted them to stay that way, whilst those in higher density, mixed-use environments were far more amenable to future increased densities. Hence, the conclusion of the research was that overall the experience of intensification is negative. But in some places, if properly managed, further development can improve quality of life. This said the type of development and activity increases have to be carefully matched to the characteristics of the area. The research showed that the quality of development was far more important than absolute densities.

From these findings, the researchers developed the notion of 'social capacity' (Williams *et al.* 1996; Burton *et al.* 2000). This is a measure of the acceptability of urban intensification which was related not just to physical capacity in terms of built form, but also to 'softer' variables such as the character of the existing urban environment, and the type and quality of intensification taking place. This measure of capacity is important as it highlights that further urban development may lead to existing residents becoming more dissatisfied with the places in which they live, and potentially contribute to decentralisation trends. Hence, the message for those seeking to deliver an urban renaissance through higher density housing is very clear: this will only lead to perceptions of improvements in very specific circumstances.

In summary then, evidence of a 'bottom-up' demand for the urban renaissance from the English population seems slim. This is not to say that when questioned people do not want to see improvements in towns and cities, but they do not aspire to living there themselves. Although most people are satisfied with where they live, and most people live in urban areas, overwhelmingly, preferences are for homes in smaller less urbanised settlements. There may be exceptions for some groups in society, namely the young, childless or single, but even these groups do not necessarily desire high-density housing. Furthermore, those who already live in cities do not, on the whole, want more change. Unless further development is clearly associated with renewal in run-down areas, then most existing residents resist it.

The Prospects for Renaissance

Given this evidence then, what appear to be the chances of reducing sprawl and delivering an urban renaissance in England? Overall, it seems that we are potentially at a critical point in time, when the data are beginning to show very small glimmers of hope for the urban optimists, but preferences for economic and residential locations are still following predominantly outward trends. The Urban White Paper has certainly captured a mood of optimism about city life from some pro-urban sectors, but this is not shared by the population as a whole. Hence, big questions arise from the evidence surrounding the extent to which the mechanisms

set out to achieve the urban renaissance match peoples desires in terms of lifestyle, because there is undeniably a mismatch.

A fundamental area of contention is density. The guiding principle of the White Paper is that 'people must come first', but it is clear from almost all research presented that people do not want higher densities, and this is a huge stumbling block. Whilst those who are pro high-density housing often make reference to some of England's most popular and expensive older urban areas, characterised by Georgian and Victorian terraced homes, this quality has yet to be repeated in modern developments. For the majority of the population, high densities are synonymous with low quality. There are new models for urban living, such as loft-style apartments (often in solidly-built old industrial buildings) which attract much media interest, but even these are attractive to only a very small proportion of the population. Overall, examples of modern, high quality, high-density development are noticeably absent.

The opinions of existing urban residents also need to be given more attention. The clear message from those in low to medium density suburbs is that they do not want these areas to become more built up. If the White Paper and planning policy guidance on housing push for intensification in these areas, many people will become dissatisfied with their living environments. Newcomers to suburban areas do not want high-density homes, nor do existing residents want their neighbourhoods intensified. In this context, perhaps losing an area the size of Greater London over the next 20 years would be a reasonable price to pay for housing people at standards they are happy with and protecting urban areas from further unpopular intensification. Further, the types of suburban area which are described in the White Paper as 'wasteful' in terms of land use have been popular residential locations, for families in particular, for many decades.

This issue of further intensification is worth investigating by revisiting the issue of 'social capacity'. As stated above, a study on opinions of urban intensification led researchers to identify a notional 'social capacity'. This was described as a 'threshold' which was related to physical capacity, but not fully explained by it. It was also related to cultural expectations of different types of urban neighbourhood, and experienced differently by different groups of people. This concept is crucial for the success of the renaissance because it suggests types and levels of development above which 'renaissance' turns into over-development, overcrowding or over-urbanity. This conclusion was drawn from attitudinal research in localised areas. However, in their extensive analysis of 'the urban exodus' Champion *et al.* developed a similar hypothesis. After analysing in- and out-migration patterns, they suggest that two types of 'ceiling' can be imagined. These are purely physical constraints (housing, land etc.) and 'socio-environmental constraints that reflect what the business community and residents alike are prepared to accept and beyond which they will 'vote with their feet', (Champion *et al.*, 1998, p. 69). These findings are crucial for the potential of the renaissance because they suggest that there may be a balance in terms of 'socio-environmental capacity' which is more or less self-regulating. If this is true, then this brings into question many of the assumptions on which the renaissance is founded because it

suggests that if we keep trying to intensify our cities and towns this will accelerate people desire to move out. Those who can move will do so, and this will exacerbate existing social polarisation problems.

Elaborating this issue even further then, perhaps a point made by Champion *et al.* at the end of their research is critical. They concluded that 'the key questions arising from this evidence (on migration), concern the extent to which views on city life can be altered and under what circumstances any such change would make a real difference to patterns of migration behaviour' (1998, p.64). In this respect, many of the goals of the renaissance can be seen as attempting to change people's perceptions of urban living, rather than meet existing preferences. Hence, the White Paper can be seen as a major gamble by Government as it attempts to influence deeply embedded, long-held attitudes.

In some respects though, recent urban developments may have begun to reverse perceptions of modern, inner-urban living. There is no doubt that demonstration projects given developers and investors confidence (Sheehan, 2000). However, these 'special' projects account for only tiny proportion of new development. In targeting specific sectors of the population, particularly the young and childless they have begun to develop sophisticated and piecemeal solutions. The question is whether these are part of a longer trend, or just the fulfilment of the demand of a small niche market. What has also remained largely untested is a similar demand for urban family housing. In England there is no real model of urban living for families (although 'home zones' are a notable prototype) and the renaissance only offers the solutions of improving schools and facilities as potential 'pulls' to those with children. Also, it must not be forgotten that much in-migration comprises international migration and the motives for this are largely ignored in the White Paper.

A final comment of the potential for the urban renaissance can be gained by considering broader cultural and global trends and determining the effect these may have on population patterns within the UK. Clearly this paper has concentrated on a narrow set of issues and data sources for its analysis, but other macro trends are also crucial. In particular some geographers have suggested that there are reasons why we would expect reurbanisation in post industrial cities, citing the move away from manufacturing and towards personal and advanced producer services, changing demography, land use policy shifts and changing building technologies (Lever, 1993). In this respect the urban renaissance might help deliver the physical fabric required for more centralised living. It is also important for us to take a close look at international movements akin to the urban renaissance in other countries, such as New Urbanism in the USA (Pollard, 2001), and learn from their successes and failures.

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