Living Places

Urban Renaissance in the South East

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Table 1
List of Case Studies

(Showing the numbers of the Exhibits which refer to them)

	Case Studies	County *	Population **	Type of Area	Type of Town	Exhibits
1.	Reading	Berkshire	213,000	Western Arc	Industrial	2, 13, 25
2.	Horsham	West Sussex	43,000	Rural West	Market	14, 16, 23
3.	Milton Keynes	Buckinghamshire	210,000	Rural West	New Town	20
4.	Portsmouth	Hampshire	190,000	South Hampshire	Port/Industrial	21
5.	Brighton	East Sussex	177,000	Coastal Strip	Resort	2, 21
6.	Chatham Maritime	Kent	70,000	Thames Gateway (Kent)	Institution	10
7.	Guildford	Surrey	66,000	Western Arc	Market	6, 10
8.	Gravesend	Kent	60,000	Thames Gateway (Kent)	Industrial	25
9.	High Wycombe	Buckinghamshire	60,000	Western Arc	Industrial	22
10.	Eastleigh	Hampshire	50,000	South Hampshire	Suburban	13
11.	Ramsgate	Kent	38,000	Coastal Strip	Resort	16, 18, 22
12.	Winchester	Hampshire	36,000	Rural West	Historic	3, 17
13.	Canterbury	Kent	36,000	Rural East	Historic	15
14.	Farnham	Surrey	36,000	Western Arc	Market	24
15.	Borehamwood	(Hertfordshire)	29,000	(Eastern Region)	Suburban	18
16.	Reigate	Surrey	22,000	Western Arc	Market	11
17.	Caterham Barracks	Surrey	20,000	Western Arc	Institution	12
18.	Sandwich	Kent	5,000	Coastal Strip	Historic	20
19.	Shenley	(Hertfordshire)	4,000	(Eastern Region)	Institution	15
20.	Groningen	(Netherlands)	175,000		Industrial/University	7
	Example Case Studies					
21.	Southampton	Hampshire	210,000	South Hampshire	Port/Industrial	12
22.	Oxford	Oxfordshire	110,000	Rural West	Historic/University	17, 19
23.	Cambridge	(Cambridgeshire)	92,000	(Eastern Region)	Historic/University	
24.	Basingstoke	Hampshire	86,000	Rural West	Industrial	19
25.	Hastings	East Sussex	81,000	Coastal	Resort	24
26.	Tunbridge Wells	Kent	60,000	Rural East	Historic	3
27.	Rochester	Kent	20,000	Thames Gateway (Kent)	Historic	23
28.	Faversham	Kent	17,000	Rural East	Historic	14
29.	Lewes	East Sussex	15,000	Rural East	Market	11
30.	Lille	(France)	180,000		Industrial	7

** or former County*
***1991 Census Population*

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by **URBED** (Urban and Economic Development Group) *&*
The Bartlett School of Planning, University College London

for **The Government Office for the South East** *&*
The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions

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Acknowledgements

Living Places was written by Christopher Cadell and Dr. Nicholas Falk of URBED with assistance from Karen Elmes. The drawings were by David Rudlin. Report design and layout were by Jason Crouch of mFifteen.

The research on which the report is based was carried out between October 1999 and September 2000 by URBED and The Bartlett School of Planning. URBED (Urban and Economic Development Group) is a leading independent research and consultancy firm specialising in the fields of urban regeneration, local economic development, sustainability and urban design. Further information can be found at http://www.urbed.co.uk The Bartlett School of Planning at University College London is one of the premier research centres in Britain in the fields of urban and regional planning, urban regeneration and urban design. Its team was led by Dr. Matthew Carmona, Senior Lecturer in Planning & Urban Design, with support from Professor Sir Peter Hall.

The research was overseen by a Project Steering Group whose members were: Colin Byrne, John Hack, Ralph Dickens and Begoña Vilaplana (GOSE), Peter Bide (DETR), Andrew Jamieson (GOER), Katherine Harrison (GOL), Paul Hudson (SEEDA), John Best (Milton Keynes Council) and Ron Tate (Portsmouth City Council).

Additional advice and comments were sought from an Advisory Group which consisted of: Cllr. John Ballance (Brighton and Hove Council), Cllr. Sarah Hohler (Kent County Council), Lesley Punter (Reading Borough Council), Michael Mallinson (formerly English Partnerships), Greg McGill (RTPI), Will McKee (British Property Federation), Michael Gwilliam (Civic Trust), Dr. Sohail Hussein (Crime Concern), Anthony Langan (House Builders Federation), Kelvin MacDonald (ROOM), David Lunts (Prince's Foundation), Stuart Lyell (Allied London Properties Ltd), Alisdair Chant (Berkeley Partnership Homes Ltd), Graham Anderson (Peak Quality Homes Ltd), S Sangha (Towncentric, Gravesend) and Professor Mike Jenks (Oxford Brookes University).

The project team is extremely grateful to the members of the Steering Group and the Advisory Group for their help and advice during the project, and would also like to thank all the Local Authorities that provided information for the case studies and exhibits. However, all the views and opinions expressed in Living Places and the Technical Report are those of the project team and are not necessarily those of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the Government Office for the South East or the Local Authorities consulted. Nor do they necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the individual members of the Steering and Advisory Groups.

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INTRODUCTION

This report sets out a framework for the comparatively new concept of urban renaissance as it applies to the South East of England (excluding London) and gives examples, drawn from a range of towns in different parts of the region, which show what is already being done to help bring it about. It is primarily intended for councillors and officers in local authorities in the South East who are concerned about the future development of their towns. It should also be of interest to others involved in investment in urban areas and their professional advisers.

Urban Renaissance

The term 'urban renaissance' first appeared in 1980, in a Council of Europe campaign for improving historic towns, and has now become widely used following the publication of the Urban Task Force's report *Towards an Urban Renaissance*. While much of the focus of that report was on larger, declining cities, with Barcelona being cited as a leading example of a place that had successfully transformed itself, this report shows that there are many places closer to home, and on a smaller scale, to which the concept can equally apply.

In the South East, a highly prosperous region with few large cities, urban renaissance is a controversial subject. Many people see it as being primarily about building more housing – at a time when there is a widespread perception that most of the region is already full up. It has therefore become associated with largely negative issues, such as stopping the continuing loss of countryside to suburban sprawl, or the need to confine as much new development as possible to brownfield sites. There are even those who

believe that urban renaissance does not apply to the South East at all, but only to the towns and cities of the Midlands and the North that are in need of basic economic regeneration.

Fundamentally, however, renaissance is a positive and optimistic idea. Urban renaissance is about creating a quality of life in towns and cities that will make many more people with choice wish to spend time in and live in them – and be able to do so without being too dependent on a car. Furthermore, it is of crucial relevance to the South East as it offers a way of reconciling continued economic and household growth with the need for much greater emphasis on sustainability, reduction in traffic congestion and the preservation of the countryside – all of which are key issues in the region. Indeed urban renaissance is now at the forefront of regional planning policy. *Draft Regional Planning Guidance for the South East* (RPG9), published in March 2000, states: "The vision for the South East… is to bring about an urban renaissance", just as SERPLAN's 1998 *Sustainable Development Strategy for the South East* said: "The strategy has at its core the objective of promoting an urban renaissance".

However, bringing about urban renaissance on a significant scale will not be easy. It implies reversing the 'flight from the cities' which has been such a dominant trend in Britain for over a century. It will require a shift in attitudes as well as action and investment on many fronts. It will be a long-term, multi-faceted process. It is not just a question of building more, higher density housing in towns, but also of creating really attractive living environments within easy reach of a range of facilities (including jobs), and of tackling some of the main disadvantages associated with urban living.

Furthermore, although there is a growing body of planners and politicians who see it as the way forward, not everybody is convinced. Also, while there is a growing awareness that sustainability is a serious issue for the future, few people are as yet willing to make significant changes to their lifestyles because of it. As a result, there is still some resistance to the concepts of urban living, reducing travel, and becoming less dependent on the car. The Urban White Paper, *Our Towns and Cities – the Future: Delivering an Urban Renaissance*, sets out the vision for our cities and towns, and explains how the Government is pursuing a range of policies aimed at improving the quality of life of those who live in them. This report, by showing examples of what is already being achieved in the South East, is intended to provide practical guidance and further information to local authorities and others in the region who are interested in bringing about urban renaissance.

What Urban Renaissance Means

"Achieving an urban renaissance is not only about numbers and percentages. It is about creating the quality of life and vitality that makes urban living desirable".

Lord Rogers, Introduction to *Towards an Urban Renaissance.*

"Urban renaissance is about creating the quality of life that makes urban living desirable, making better use of land and energy and increasing the sense of community throughout the South East".

Draft Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (RPG9)

Background Review and Case Studies

The report is based on an extensive review of recent research and policy guidance on issues relating to urban renaissance (the 'Background Review') and on 30 case studies of what is already being done in this field. These included 2 comprehensive case studies (Reading and Horsham) and 10 brief 'example' case studies (see **Table 1 – *inside front cover***).

The great majority of the case studies are drawn from the South East Region itself, although a few come from other parts of the old ROSE area (and exclude Greater London which as a world city is on a very different scale from anywhere else in the South East). They have been drawn from a range of different types and sizes of towns, and from different parts of the region, so that more people will be able to find situations that they can identify with. However, one case study and one example (both focussing on public transport) are drawn from mainland Europe. Lessons from the case studies are included as Exhibits in this report. They are referred to by numbers in brackets in the text. The Background Review and the full case studies are contained in a separate Technical Report which will published on the Internet at http://www.detr.gov.uk/

Aims of Report

The report was commissionedby the Government Office for the South East (GOSE) and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR).

Its aims are to:

- *Explain why urban renaissance is important for the SouthEast (**Chapter 2**), and where it is likely to be most relevant (**Chapter 3**)*
- *Describe what urban renaissance entails (**Chapter 4**)*
- *Show how different places in the South East are already implementing various aspects of urban renaissance (**Chapters 5 – 8**)*
- *Draw conclusions on good practice (**Chapter 9**).*

Key Issues in Background Review

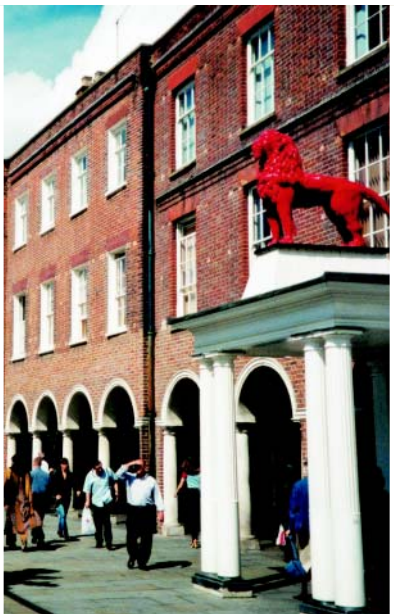
1 Sustainability and Travel

2 Urban Quality and Design

3 Intensification and Mixing Uses

4 Public Perceptions and Involvement

5 Planning and Governance



2 WHY URBAN RENAISSANCE IN THE SOUTH EAST?

The new South East Region stretches from Buckinghamshire round to Kent, taking in the counties or former counties of Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Surrey, East Sussex and West Sussex. It does not, however, include Greater London. Overall it is a highly prosperous region and, although it contains very diverse areas with different characteristics [1], it is one of the main power houses of national economic growth..

While some areas, such as those close to the borders of London, along the Thames Valley, or in South Hampshire, are heavily developed, much of the region is rural. Around three-quarters of the land is subject to some form of designation (e.g. Green Belt, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, or Grade 1 or 2 Agricultural Land) with the intention of limiting development. Nevertheless, over the years, the pattern of settlement has become increasingly dispersed and suburban. The region has few large towns (with populations of over 100,000), but many medium-sized and smaller towns, often made up largely of suburban housing estates served by out-of-town retailing.

Until quite recently the region might have been thought of primarily as part of London's hinterland, with many of its residents commuting to work in the capital, especially by train. However, more and more employment has moved out of London, and important new growth points have emerged, such as Heathrow and Gatwick airports, the M4 corridor, and New Towns like Milton Keynes. Increasingly people are living in one place, working in another, and possibly shopping or pursuing other interests elsewhere – all in different locations outside London. As the region has become increasingly car-dependent residents are prepared to travel greater distances, especially to work, and there is growing pressure for more housing in remote villages as well as on the edges of existing urban areas.

Given the region's prosperity and its position as the main gateway between the U.K. and Europe (and other overseas destinations), its growth is set to continue, not only in economic terms but also in population, as it is seen as one of the most desirable areas of the country in which to live and work. Furthermore, given the continuing fall in average household size – and the continuing rise in the number of single-person households – the number of new households being formed and the demand for new housing (often in small units) are predicted to grow substantially over the foreseeable future. As the Background Review shows, there is widespread concern that if this growth follows the patterns of the past it will lead to:

- intolerable traffic congestion and pressure on other infrastructure
- unacceptable travel times
- destruction of the character of many parts of the region, including its smaller towns and villages.
- further loss of countryside
- unaffordable house prices for many people providing essential services or without high paid jobs.

The South East Region
SOME BASIC FACTS

Area	19,100 sq km	(7.9% of UK)
Population (1999)	8.1 million	(13.6% of UK)
Growth (1981-99)	+ 11.1%	(UK = 5.6%)
GDP (1998)	£116 billion	(15.7% of UK)
GDP per capita	£14,529	(UK = £12,455)
Unemployment (1999)	2.4%	(UK = 4.3%)
Households (1998)	3.3 million	(13.8% of UK)
Growth (1981-98)	+ 24.9%	(UK = 18.5%)
Owner occupied (1998)	75%	(GB = 68%)
Nº. of cars (1998)	3.7 million	(15.5% of UK)
Households with no car	19%	(UK = 28%)
Households with 2+ cars	36%	(UK = 28%)

Source: Regional Trends (Office for National Statistics)

Exhibit 1:
The South East Region

The South East is a diverse region. As well as containing many different types and sizes of town it is also made up of at least six main areas with different characteristics:

- **Western Arc:** The area of main economic pressure around London, to its west and south
- **South Hampshire:** The developing conurbation in south Hampshire, around Southampton and Portsmouth
- **Thames Gateway (Kent):** The area of former industry along the Thames, now part of the largest urban regeneration project in the country
- **Coastal Strip:** Areas along the coast, which have been affected by their own special factors
- **Rural East:** Other areas in the east of the region, where demand is generally low
- **Rural West:** Other areas in the west of the region, where demand is likely to be high.

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In other words, the present pattern of dispersed growth is unsustainable, and will lead to a general lowering of the quality of life in the South East if it continues unchecked. The recent, much publicised, resistance to the numbers of new households to be accommodated in the region in the coming years shows that this point is now widely accepted. The disagreement is over how (or whether) a solution can be found that will satisfy enough people to be implemented. The Government's view, put forward in a succession of policy documents including the new PPG3 (*Planning Policy Guidance Note: Housing*), is that most new housing development should be concentrated in existing urban areas – and where possible at higher densities, on brownfield sites and near public transport.

In a congested region, it is clearly advantageous if more of those who are willing to live an urban lifestyle (at higher densities and with less use of a car) can indeed be persuaded to do so – so that others who prefer suburban or more rural lifestyles will be able to do that too, without more and more of the countryside being used up. However this will only happen if urban housing and urban environments are created that are sufficiently attractive for people with choice to wish to live in them.

While there are demographic and other factors which are likely to make more people interested in urban living, it is only if the quality of life in towns and cities matches today's high, and rising, expectations that significant numbers of people will choose to live at higher densities. The aim of urban renaissance is to make a more sustainable lifestyle more attractive. Renaissance literally means rebirth, and so implies a substantial change of image. This is usually associated with a marked improvement in the quality of a town's public spaces and with more people wanting to spend time (and money) there. In the crowded South East, however, there is the added implication that more people should wish to live in the town too, so as to accommodate as much as possible of the predicted growth.

However, urban renaissance is not just about accommodating more people in towns, but about doing so in ways that also create attractive, enjoyable places and provide a high quality of life. Urban renaissance in the South East will not only strengthen the region's towns, but will also make the economic growth and prosperity of the region more sustainable, and help to reduce the pressure on its countryside and infrastructure. Successful urban renaissance is therefore very much in the interests of both town and country in the South East. Although it involves changing attitudes, and thus will take time to implement, it offers a positive way of tackling some of the key problems of the region – including those caused by its undoubted success.

Also, in an ever changing world, the concepts of urban renaissance are just as relevant for places that are doing well as they are for places that are not. Successful places will need to keep getting better if they are to retain their attraction. While, in the short term, it might be possible for individual towns to reject the idea of urban renaissance, this is not an option for the region as a whole. Furthermore, in the longer term, when high quality urban living has become fashionable again, places that cannot offer such a lifestyle will lose out.

3 WHERE IS URBAN RENAISSANCE SUCCEEDING?

[2] Brighton: Seafront

The essence of high quality urban living is to have many things to do close at hand, and many people living nearby to do them with, in a lively and pleasant environment. If car use is to be minimised, this requires an area of reasonably high density housing, close to a town centre or linked to it by safe streets and good quality public transport, in a town of sufficient size to support the required range of facilities. Thus urban renaissance is most likely to succeed in areas close to (or closely linked to) the centres of medium-sized and larger towns – where attractive environments can be created and maintained. **Brighton** and **Reading** provide good examples of places that have transformed their image and attractions over time and now contain places where people really want to be [2].

Urban living tends to suit those who like a busy lifestyle; put a premium on meeting new people; like having access to a range of entertainment; and have a reasonable amount of money to spend. Thus it suits many 'non-traditional households', such as young people who have not yet had children, childless professionals, older single people and couples whose children have left home, home-based entrepreneurs and other minority groups – the very types of households that are fast becoming the norm and are fuelling the need for new housing.

Even in large town centres, there can be quiet residential areas that are away from the noise and bright lights. Furthermore there are those, including many elderly people for example, who do not want a great range of activities but wish to live close to shops and other basic services. They are often happy to live in the centres of smaller towns, especially ones with character, such as historic towns or resorts. These too can provide opportunities for urban renaissance, as for example in Winchester and Tunbridge Wells [3].

Exhibit2:

Promoting a Positive Image

Although very different types of town, Brighton and Reading are both undergoing urban renaissances They are transforming their attractions and their images.

Like most seaside resorts, **Brighton** lost its traditional holiday trade to the Continent and began to go downhill. In recent years, however, it has succeeded in changing its role and its image. New people began to move in attracted by the two universities, fast trains to London and alternative lifestyles. Initiatives were undertaken to improve the environment and reduce the impact of traffic. Restaurants and specialist shops flourished. A beautiful new boardwalk transformed the seafront, attracting new businesses and stimulating private investment. As the image of the town improved it became easier to attract conferences and meetings which now account for a significant amount of income from tourism, and the outflow of businesses and jobs has been reversed. The rise in house prices has been among the fastest in the country and this is encouraging higher density development.

Reading used to be known as an ugly industrial town and a traffic bottle-neck. During the past few years a series of schemes have opened up the heart of the town to pedestrians and given access along the River Kennet. Traffic has been routed round the centre and park-and-ride introduced. New housing and offices have been developed along the river, and a new shopping and entertainment centre, with exceptionally high quality public spaces, has been opened, showing Reading in an entirely new light. It is now rated as one of Britain's best towns to work in and this, as well as its proximity to Heathrow, continues to attract new employers.

[2] Reading: Oracle Centre

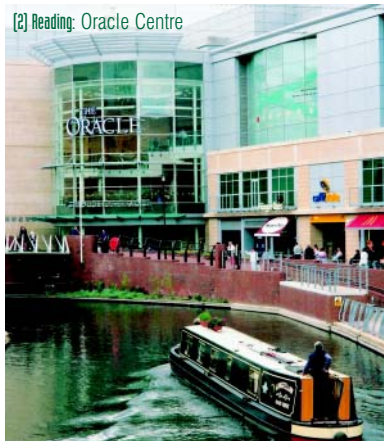


Exhibit 3:
Reviving Historic Towns

Historic towns, including their centres, have traditionally been seen as desirable places to live in, and so are likely places to find signs of urban renaissance. Both Winchester and Tunbridge Wells, for example, have made efforts to retain and enhance their historic character, and are seen as highly successful.

[3] Winchester: Peninsula Barracks

In **Winchester**, the old barracks in the city centre, which were going to be largely demolished as they were no longer required, have now been converted into around 140 housing units in a well designed high density scheme of terraced houses and flats which meets high standards. It is very popular, too, and extends the public realm. Sensitive conversion and infill schemes have enabled the city to increase the number of households in its core area by about 8% per decade and to maintain a steady population.

Tunbridge Wells is an interesting example of urban renaissance because it had a long history as a fashionable inland resort. The Georgian elegance of the Pantiles has been restored, with many specialist shops, and the town centre is thriving. The elongated centre is gradually developing a series of distinctive roles. For example, it is now seen as a good place to find somewhere to eat. The town's image for good quality food is also being enhanced by a monthly Farmers' Market, which has some 30 traders and is highly successful. There is now a concerted effort to reinforce the quality of the town centre, and this in turn is attracting a wide range of people to live there. 'Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells' is a thing of the past.

[3] Tunbridge Wells: Well kept streets

Rural living is clearly seen as very different from urban living. It values independence, tranquillity, the countryside and distance from the 'evils' of the town. However, it is now recognised that the 'rural idyll' is often a myth, with many of those who live in the countryside suffering from isolation and a lack of basic services, and with many areas also affected by rising levels of traffic and congestion. Furthermore, almost by definition, comparatively few people can live in the countryside. It is suburban living, not rural living, which is the real alternative to urban living in the South East, and against which it must make headway if a renaissance is to be achieved.

Suburban living has been the usual option for most people, particularly those with families, for many decades in the South East. It aims to provide the best of both worlds – independent, reasonably tranquil living within range of many facilities (including some sporting ones not found in towns) but often requiring a car to reach them. While suburbs vary enormously in location and type, their prime characteristic is that they are medium to low density housing developments of mainly detached and semi-detached houses with gardens. It is this kind of development that has come in for criticism where it has spread out further and further into the countryside, as in areas around places like **Didcot** [4].

Most suburban areas have their own schools and local centres, often based on the villages around which they grew, but they are too small or too dispersed to sustain the range of facilities that people now aspire to. Thus car use is very much part of suburban living, and many households now have two or more cars.

Those without cars can be quite isolated, as public transport is not economic at low densities. (The Urban Task Force report gives 100 residents per hectare as the density needed to support a good bus service. The LGMB Sustainable Settlements Guide gives 100 residents per hectare as the minimum requirement for a sustainable bus service and 240 residents per hectare as being required for a tram service. Given the average household size in the South East, these equate to about 40 and 100 dwellings per hectare – far in excess of the 23 dph average of what is currently being built.) Higher density is one of the keys to sustainable urban living. Over the years densities have tended to become lower and lower, and are now well below those associated with previous ideas of good urban living [5].

Exhibit 4.
Checking Suburban Sprawl

The alternative to planned development tends to be the gradual loss of fields on the edge of towns, particularly off new roads and roundabouts.

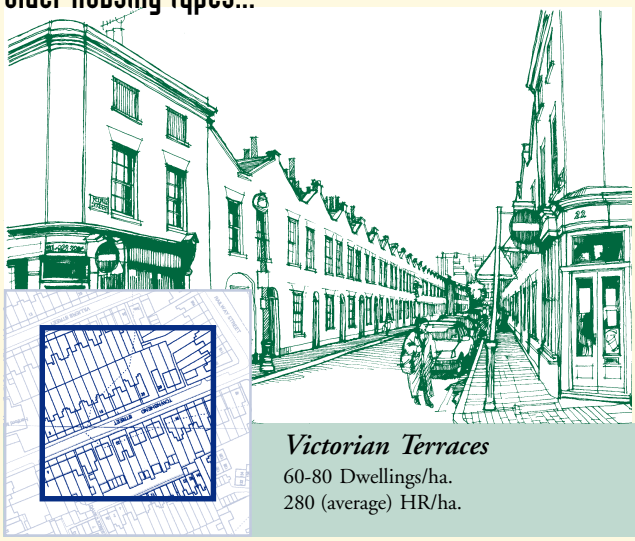
Examples such as **Didcot** in Oxfordshire, with its detached 'little boxes', have led to opposition to new housing developments for creating extra traffic, eating up the countryside and spoiling the views. Furthermore, they are often served by out-of-town shopping schemes, which also invade the countryside and take trade from traditional centres. Yet without new development of some form, it will be increasingly difficult for many people to find somewhere affordable to live.

[4] Didcot: Spreading out
(Image supplied by aerofilms.com)

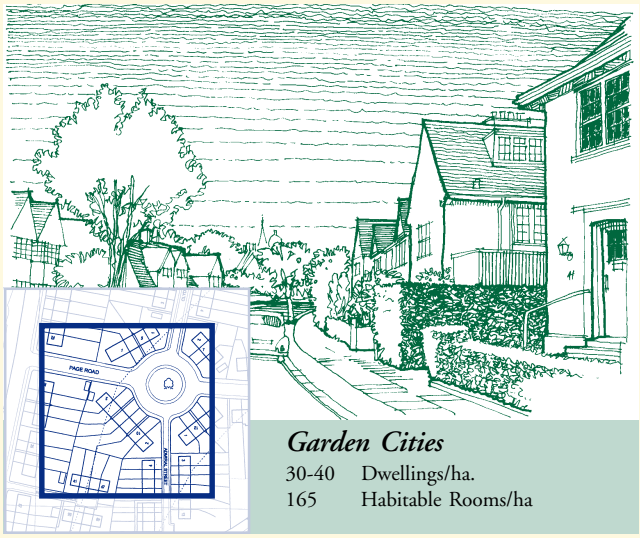
Typical densities – of dwellings and people – have varied greatly over time. Most recent developments have been built to much lower densities (in dwellings per hectare) than those of older housing types. However, some alternative approaches show that higher densities can be achieved through good design.

Exhibit 5:
The Meaning of Density

Older housing types...

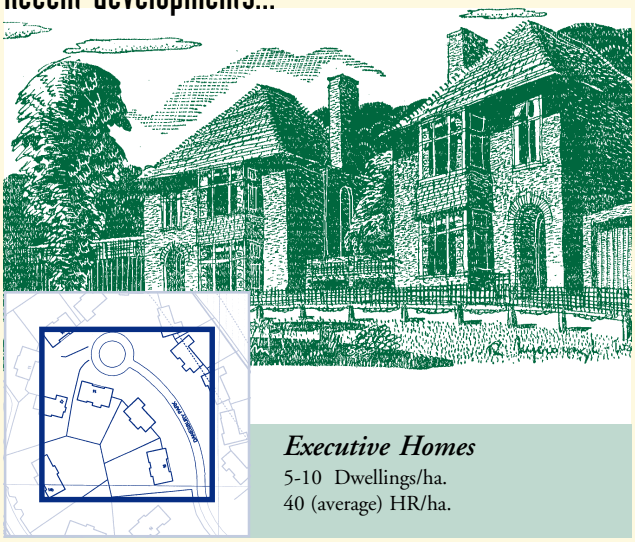


Victorian Terraces
60-80 Dwellings/ha.
280 (average) HR/ha.

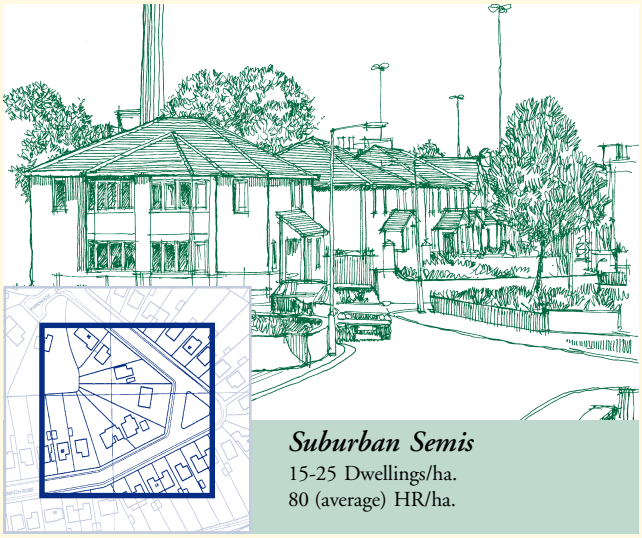


Garden Cities
30-40 Dwellings/ha.
165 Habitable Rooms/ha

Recent developments...

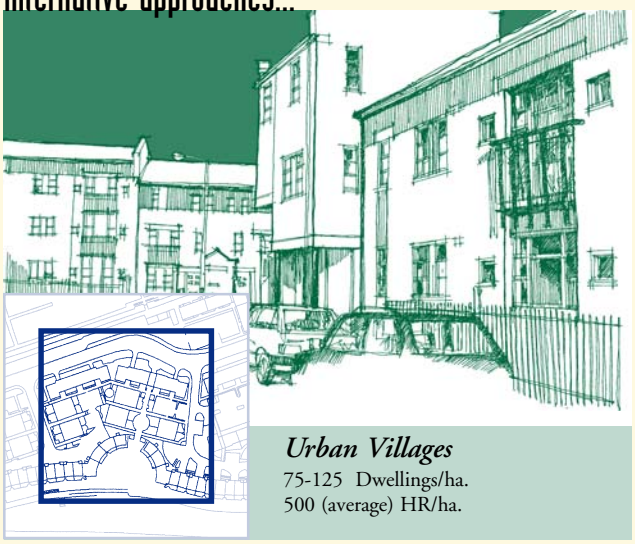


Executive Homes
5-10 Dwellings/ha.
40 (average) HR/ha.

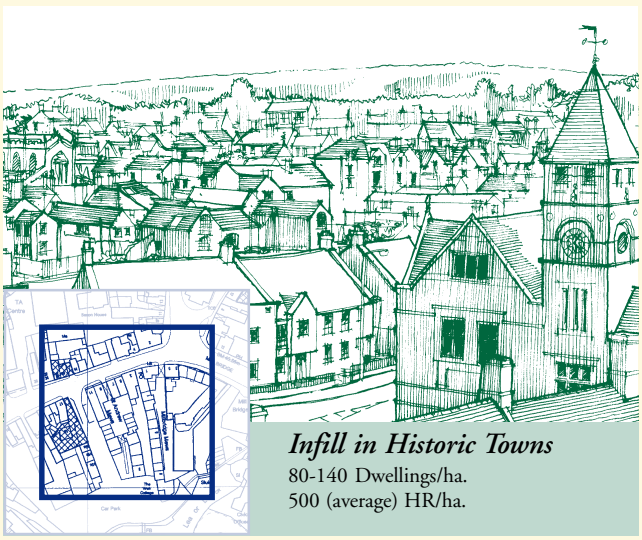


Suburban Semis
15-25 Dwellings/ha.
80 (average) HR/ha.

Alternative approaches...



Urban Villages
75-125 Dwellings/ha.
500 (average) HR/ha.



Infill in Historic Towns
80-140 Dwellings/ha.
500 (average) HR/ha.

Each inner box encloses one hectare (or 2.47 acres)

Lifestyles Have Changed

"I am retired but my wife works and we run two cars. In the suburban cul-de-sac where we live, the four other families have 10 cars between them, including two huge "off-roaders", and the to-ing and fro-ing of all these vehicles – to school, to dancing classes, to horse-riding, Scouts, Guides, swimming, tennis, shops – is almost constant.

Fifty years ago, I walked to school. My parents had a tandem, not a car. Our lifestyle was totally different…"

Letter in *AA Members' Magazine, January 2000*

Many suburban estates and small towns provide a highly desirable lifestyle, especially for the traditional family. They are undoubtedly 'urban' in the sense that they are within the built-up area of the town (although new development tends to expand it), but in other respects, such as their philosophy of 'getting away from the problems of towns' and their overwhelming reliance on the car, they are far removed from 'urban living'. Nevertheless since so many people in the South East currently live in such locations, it must be sensible, while encouraging a revival in urban living, to ensure that suburbs too are improved and remain attractive and viable, so that there is less pressure to create new, greenfield housing.

Although the current research did not uncover many examples of urban renaissance in suburban centres in the South East, there is undoubtedly scope (and need) for extending the concept to them, especially where there are opportunities for increasing occupancy levels of existing buildings or for developing new housing close to public transport nodes, such as railway stations. As the region contains so many suburban towns there should be much to be gained from 'suburban renaissance' too.

Thus while larger towns and historic towns are the most likely places in which to find signs of urban renaissance, there is scope for urban renaissance in many different types of towns, as the examples in this report show. There are still relatively few examples in strictly suburban areas, but in many medium-sized towns, which can support a range of facilities, there may be opportunities to take steps towards renaissance, especially where, as in **Guildford** or **Hertford**, there is underused urban capacity which could allow additional development [6]. While there is an understandable concern about 'town cramming', research has shown that careful examination and thought (for example by means of an urban capacity study) can reveal additional opportunities for new housing even in towns which seem to be highly built-up. Well-designed housing can enhance, not spoil, an area.

Exhibit 6.

Tapping Urban Capacity

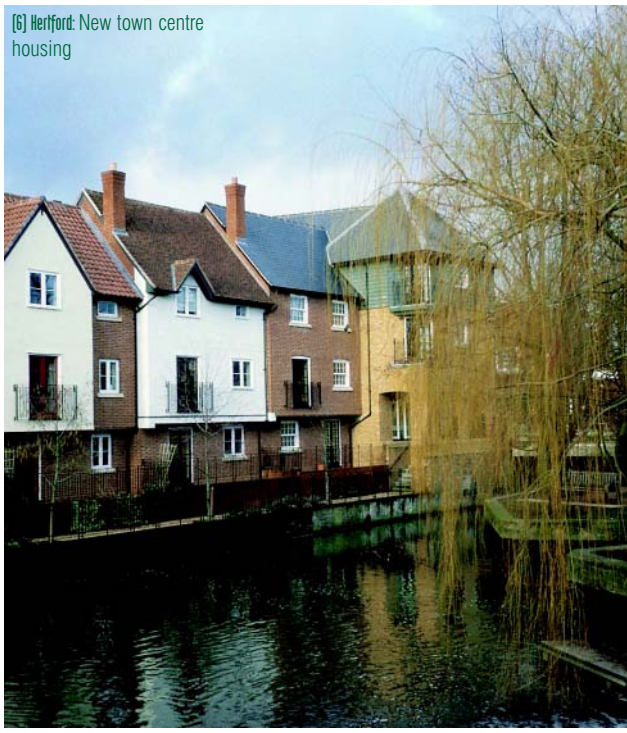
Although towns in the South East often seem 'full up', closer inspection can often reveal a range of possible sites for new housing.

[6] Guildford: Site by the River Wey

As well as former industrial sites alongside waterways, as for example in **Guildford**, most towns have a variety of neglected or underused land and buildings which might be considered for more intensive development. These can include land used for parking, vacant properties, unused space above shops, large houses capable of subdivision and even back gardens that householders no longer want to look after.

At first sight, **Hertford** is a compact town in which all the urban capacity had been used up. It has several attractive, small-scale housing developments in its centre. However a preliminary survey by consultants found almost 100 more possible sites in the town, with a total potential for 650 - 1,300 new residential units, and a full-scale study covering the whole county is now under way. By improving urban quality, building well-designed housing at higher densities, and restricting unnecessary through traffic, towns can be pleasant places both to live in and to shop in, without feeling overcrowded.

[6] Hertford: New town centre housing



4 WHAT DOES URBAN RENAISSANCE INVOLVE?

[7] Groningen: Cyclists predominate

While there is no universal definition of urban renaissance, in the South East it is fundamentally about changing attitudes towards towns and cities and making them places where people really wish to live. In order to make urban living a more attractive option for the 21st century, it is necessary first to overcome the perceived drawbacks of living in towns and then to ensure that new development is attractive and sustainable. Once the realities of living in towns change, attitudes are likely to change too.

In mainland Europe urban living has remained more fashionable than it has in Britain, and standards and facilities seem much higher there, even in towns such **Groningen** in the Netherlands and **Lille** in north eastern France [7] which are not 'premier league' cities or in particularly prosperous regions. In particular, public transport in urban areas has been given higher priority, even though car ownership (but not necessarily car usage) is still high. The centres of many of Britain's provincial cities, such as **Birmingham** and **Manchester**, are also showing signs of renaissance, and people are starting to be attracted back to live in them [8]. Thus the tide may be starting to turn, although as the Urban Task Force report makes clear there is a long way to go.

The case studies carried out for this project show that there is no simple way of creating a high quality of life in towns. Even those with most going for them, large towns and historic towns, have all had to make changes on many fronts – economic, environmental, social and managerial. Furthermore, urban renaissance takes time as it involves taking a wide range of actions and making substantial investment in both private facilities and the public realm. Also, as standards and expectations keep rising, urban renaissance needs to be thought of as an on-going process, which may have

Exhibit 7.
Achieving Continental Standards

With an increasingly global economy, and faster international travel, the pace is being set by European cities that offer the best quality of life. High quality public transport is an important ingredient.

Groningen, a Dutch university town 170 kms north of Amsterdam, has become a high-tech success story. The town is currently bringing in gas-powered buses while its new tram system is being built, and a new station on the dedicated 'magnet' rail line to Hamburg will make it peripheral no longer. Although car ownership is higher than in Britain, usage is less, and 55% of trips are made by bicycle. Prefabricated 'tunnel' housing (concrete cast on site but clad in traditional materials) has cut construction time and building costs. This has enabled larger apartments to be built than are usual in England, and most are rented from housing associations. Municipal acquisition of development land and design competitions are used to ensure good quality in major building schemes, and an active architectural centre helps to build consensus and secure higher standards.

Lille, in northern France, once thought of as an industrial city in decline, has received a major boost from investment in a modern rapid transit system. This includes a new £700 million underground railway, linked to frequent buses, and an upgraded tram service. Its new station on the European high speed rail network forms the core of a new urban quarter, and the city is now seen as a vibrant and attractive regional centre.

[7] Lille: Lille Europe station

Exhibit 8.
Revitalising City Centres

The centres of many of Britain's provincial cities are undergoing a transformation, often in response to competition from regional out-of-town shopping centres and retail parks.

[8] Birmingham: Brindley Place

Birmingham, which once suffered from the image of a concrete jungle, has made the most of its canals to create highly successful meeting places around its International Convention Centre and Brindley Place. It has supplemented them with an extensive network of pedestrianised streets and new squares. The result has been a revival in city centre shopping, and the ugly 1960s shopping precincts are being redeveloped. It has also led to a huge increase in demand for living in the centre, including a new 'urban village' on the edge of the old Jewellery Quarter.

Manchester, too, has made the most of neglected assets like canals and empty warehouses. It has invested in a highly successful rapid transit system that has drawn people from their cars. The population of the city as a whole has now stabilised after a long period of decline, and people are moving back to live in the centre. Its new image as a lively 24-hour city has led to booming universities and the foundations for a new economy.

[8] Manchester: Metrolink tram
(photograph © Anne Worthington)

phases with different intensity of activity but which does not necessarily have a fixed ending. None of the towns looked at in the case studies could be said to have completed their urban renaissance.

It is clear that urban renaissance in the South East implies more than just improving a town, and particularly its town centre, although this does appear to be an essential step in the process. To be complete, it should lead on to a significant increase in the urban population, through the development of attractive residential neighbourhoods with high quality environments. It is also clear that, with so many programmes to be co-ordinated, the local planning authority must take the lead. The case studies show that bringing about urban renaissance in the South East requires proactive planning, as well as vision, leadership and good management. In many parts of the region the task is made easier because of the strong economy and the positive climate for investment. However, unlike in many areas that have undergone traditional urban regeneration, most of the investment needs to come from the private sector. Attracting and orchestrating appropriate investments so that they contribute to a successful long-term renaissance, as well as satisfying the investors' financial criteria, is therefore also an essential part of the process.

As the Background Review showed, urban renaissance needs to overcome the principal ills associated with urban living – noise, dirt, congestion, lack of space, pollution, social exclusion, antisocial behaviour, threat of crime etc. – and to deliver the key ingredients for an attractive quality of life. This background work, which is summarised in the Technical Report, focused on clarifying the concept of urban renaissance, and concluded that:

- There are no simple answers but a combination of often complex solutions
- The concept requires changes to attitudes, re-investment and positive leadership
- It represents a set of processes rather than clearly defined solutions
- It encompasses a combination of 'joined-up' social, economic and environmental concerns.

On this basis, an urban renaissance can perhaps best be visualised as a three-dimensional matrix, not unlike a 'Rubik cube' [9], made up of:

- **Programmes and Outputs** – in the form of products, policies and procedures (economic, environmental, design and social)
- **Management Mechanisms** – through which the programmes and outputs are delivered and co-ordinated
- An **Overall Renaissance Process** – through which the vision is turned into practical reality over time.

The first dimension represents the main ingredients of urban renaissance – the practical achievements which, taken together, will add up to a renaissance. In some sense, virtually anything that helps to improve a town could be said to be contributing towards its renaissance, and the Urban Task Force report stresses that action needs to be taken on several fronts in order to bring renaissance about. However, in practical terms, there are advantages in focusing primarily on a limited number of key issues, and the Background Review shows that there are a few recurrent themes that could be considered to be especially important. These are reflected in the ten outputs shown in Exhibit 9, which range right across the Task Force's own urban renaissance objectives of: *economic strength, environmental responsibility, design excellence* and *social well-being.*

While the precise programmes and outputs will no doubt vary from place to place according to particular circumstances, the case studies confirm the importance of these outputs and, especially, the necessity of addressing such a wide range of issues.

The second dimension shows five 'Management Mechanisms' which can help ensure the successful delivery of specific programmes and outputs. Achieving an urban renaissance is a complicated task and will often require people from different disciplines and backgrounds and from different types of organisations to work together. While all the normal principles of good project management will apply, particular attention needs to be paid to mechanisms that promote inclusive thinking and working, such as *'joined-up thinking', packaging resources, working in partnership, involving communities* and *monitoring and communicating progress.*

The third dimension (the 'Overall Renaissance Process') reflects the long-term nature of urban renaissance and the necessity of developing, managing and sustaining a process for achieving and maintaining it. It is the overall result that matters, rather than just the individual outputs. Even if many worthwhile projects are carried out, they will not necessarily add up to an urban renaissance, unless there is a vision and a goal-oriented strategy to guide and drive the whole process. Objectives and priorities must be set, preferably with widespread support; allies, especially those with relevant resources, must be identified and brought on board; programmes that tackle a very wide range of issues must be implemented and co-ordinated; ways must be found to overcome, or work around, major obstacles – and to take advantage of new opportunities that appear; and momentum and support must be maintained.

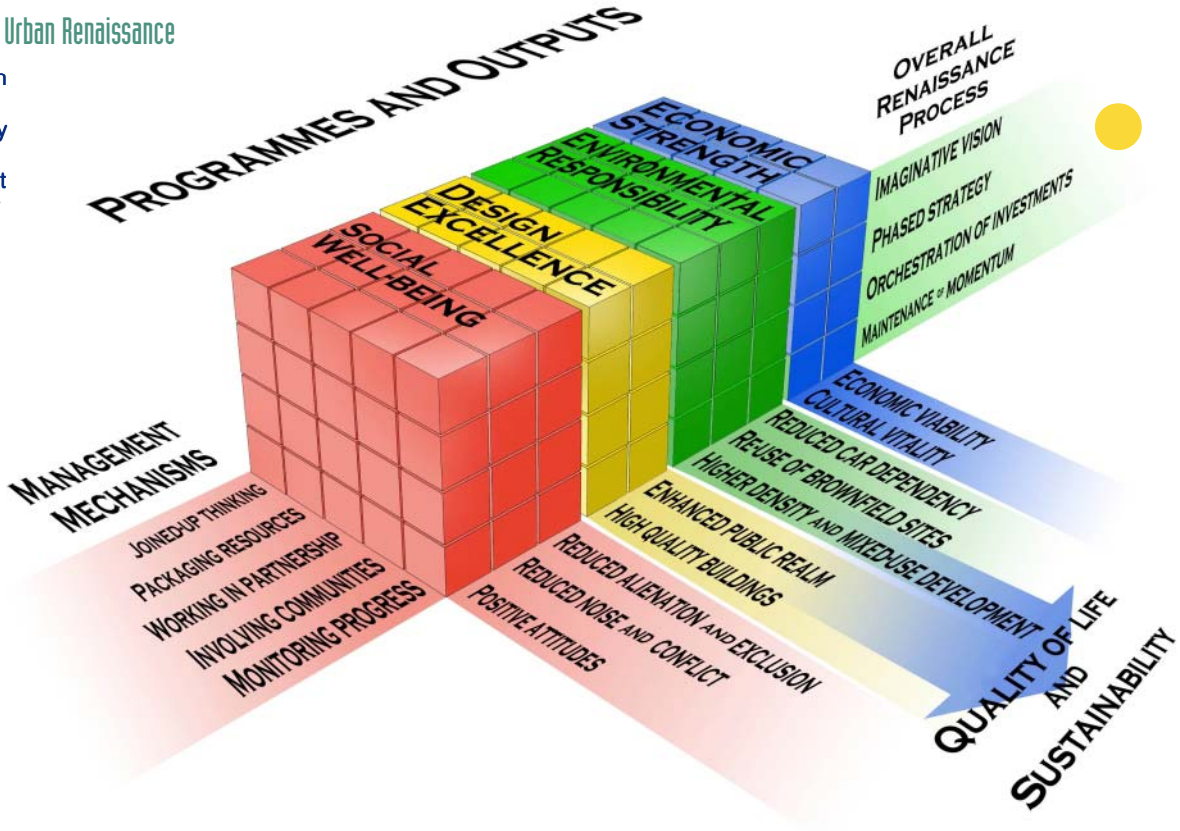
Furthermore a renaissance is probably never complete. It is an evolving process. Even successful places need to understand what it is that makes them special and to have a strategy for remaining successful in a changing world. Many factors vary over time, including basic economic and political factors, and to be successful overall the renaissance process needs to be managed strategically, and in some senses entrepreneurially. It is this that makes the third dimension so important.

The following chapters focus on each of the main elements of the overall renaissance process: *developing the vision, carrying out a phased strategy, orchestrating investments* and *maintaining momentum.* The Exhibits, which draw on the case studies, give examples of how specific urban renaissance issues are being addressed in different types of towns. They do not, however , imply that the towns referred to have completed an urban renaissance. On the contrary urban renaissance in the South East is still very much in its infancy. Nevertheless there is much that is relevant that is already being done, and although circumstances will inevitably differ from place to place, it should be possible to learn from others' experience so far.

Exhibit 9:

A Framework for Urban Renaissance

Successful urban renaissance depends not only on what is done, but on how well it is done and how well it all fits together



5 DEVELOPING THE VISION

[10] Guildford: Linear park at Millmead

Exhibit 10.
Rediscovering Waterfronts

Most towns grew up alongside waterways, but in the 19th century these were taken over by industry and later became neglected or no-go areas. However, waterfront areas can be very attractive and research suggests that people will pay a premium to live with a waterside view, but first the area has to be safe and accessible.

Guildford is an extremely busy town, but the River Wey which runs through its centre now provides a valuable oasis of tranquillity and a pleasant pedestrian link. The riverside, which was previously an industrial area, has been improved incrementally to provide an attractive linear park containing a range of uses, including pubs, a cinema and two theatres - the Yvonne Arnaud and the Electric (which is in an old electricity generating station).

Chatham Maritime is a mixed-use waterside development being carried out by SEEDA, which has a large residential component. Up to 1,650 homes are proposed, 1,000 of which have been completed so far. It is being built on the site of the old naval dockyard at the edge of Chatham, as part of the redevelopment of former industrial land along the Thames and Medway. While a great deal of public investment has been required to improve access (to what was previously a walled-off security zone) and to remove contamination, the housing has been designed to take advantage of the views over the water which will add to the attractiveness of the development and lead to increased values over time.

[10] Chatham Maritime: Taking advantage of waterside views

While 'urban renaissance' is a fine sounding phrase and its benefits are generally accepted in cities and large towns, it is often viewed with suspicion in the medium-sized towns that predominate in the South East. It is either thought to imply 'town cramming' or to lead to importing the urban problems which so many people want to avoid. Thus those who wish to bring about a renaissance for their own town need to develop a compelling vision of its future that can be widely shared and which will guide the whole renaissance process.

Often the impetus will stem from a specific concern, for example:

- Brighton linked its renaissance vision to its bid for city status
- Reading faced a threat from a proposed major out-of-town shopping centre
- Horsham feared it would be permanently overshadowed by nearby Crawley New Town, unless it made a determined effort to differentiate itself
- Winchester wanted to reduce traffic in the centre, and to cope with pressures for new housing
- Eastleigh was tired of its nickname 'beastly Eastleigh' and decided to promote an entirely new image of the town through the arts.

Whatever the vision, it must be both realistic and sustainable if it is to stand the test of time. It needs to be appropriate for the size and type of town in question. It needs to be broad enough to allow all the main aspects of quality of life to be delivered. While it might start with an opportunity or threat, the vision must be capable of leading over time to actions that will encourage people with choice to live in the town at higher densities.

At the root of a successful vision will lie a clear understanding of what it is that can give the town a special character – something that will indeed make it a more attractive place to live. Historic towns or those with special settings undoubtedly have an edge, but there are many factors that can make a place special. An audit or a simple SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) can provide a good basis for bringing people together to think about their town. There are some advantages in having outsiders take a fresh look at a place and several firms of consultants have experience in this field. However such work can also be carried out internally.

In developing a renaissance vision it may well be possible to build on some of the analysis and consultation carried out in connection with other programmes, such as Agenda 21, Single Regeneration Budget or specific local projects. The process should also tie in directly with the new 'community strategies' that local authorities are required to produce under the Local Government Act 2000, drawing on the advice of the 'Local Strategic Partnerships' which will help prepare them. Indeed as urban renaissance involves such a wide range of issues, it is important that it dovetails with other existing initiatives, while still keeping the long-term attraction of the town firmly in mind. Sustainability is an important aspect of urban renaissance in the South East and so there may be opportunities for linking these two concepts together. For example, Hertfordshire County Council, one of the leaders in promoting sustainable development, has launched a *Campaign for Town Renaissance* which includes a series of studies into ways of unlocking further housing capacity within its towns [6].

Thinking about the key resources, and how they might be used to attract and satisfy the needs of the various groups that can bring life to the town, is a good way of articulating the vision. Should housing, offices or more public uses (including retailing and entertainment) be promoted for key sites? How can an attractive balance of uses be encouraged – and the mix made to work? **Guildford** and **Chatham** have both focused on making the most of neglected waterfronts [10]. Towns as different as **Reigate** and **Lewes** have paid particular attention to finding good uses for redundant buildings [11].

Exhibit 11.

Re-using Redundant Buildings

Many towns are having to find new uses for empty shops and buildings that have become redundant, including some that make an important contribution to the character of the town.

Reigate is one of a number of towns to take advantage of the growth in the 'evening economy'. Investment in recreating a sense of pride in the centre, through a Town Centre Forum, has paid off with the conversion of several empty shops into cafes and restaurants. New businesses have also opened up. In addition, with a new supermarket in the heart of the town and new offices on its edge, Reigate is enjoying a renaissance, and several hundred new homes have been built within easy walking distance of the town centre.

Lewes is an old market town which has turned redundant space to good use. An old factory, acquired by the County Council for redevelopment, was converted instead into managed workspace for small businesses, offices for the Health Authority, a very popular cafe and some specialist shops. There are no less than three buildings in the town that now provide studios and specialist shops, making it a much more attractive place to visit. Action has also been taken to encourage walking and cycling, and to discourage unnecessary use of the car, for example by designating '5 mph zones'.

[11] Lewes: The Old Needlemakers

[11] Reigate: Café society

Thinking about the quality of life in the town and how it might be improved – not only for those who already live there but also for those who might be encouraged to move in – is another way of starting to develop a vision. Raising the standard of services and the quality of the environment are likely to be important factors. Furthermore, in thinking about wider long-term goals, the basic practical issues of cleanliness, safety and proper on-going maintenance must not be overlooked as they greatly influence the way that the town is perceived by both current residents and potential investors.

Drawing up a vision is partly creative and partly diplomatic. Urban renaissance is such a multi-faceted concept that it needs allies and support if substantial results are to be achieved. An individual's vision, however imaginative, cannot succeed unless it becomes 'owned' or shared by those who would otherwise have the power to block it. A number of towns have found that it helps to involve the community from the start, and there are a variety of 'action planning' and consultation techniques that can be used to help develop a shared vision, as for example has happened over the redevelopment of **Caterham Barracks** and in **Southampton** [12].

One of the benefits of involving many interest groups and sections of the community in helping to shape a vision and strategy is that it establishes who the key allies (or opponents) might be. It also helps to reinforce community spirit - a vital ingredient of urban renaissance - as well as to build the partnerships that will be required to take the vision forward.

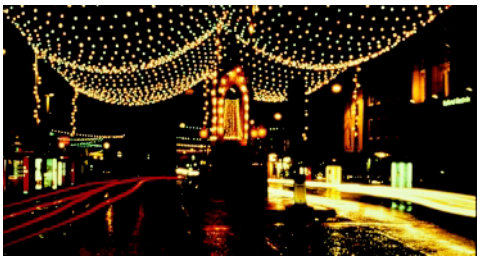


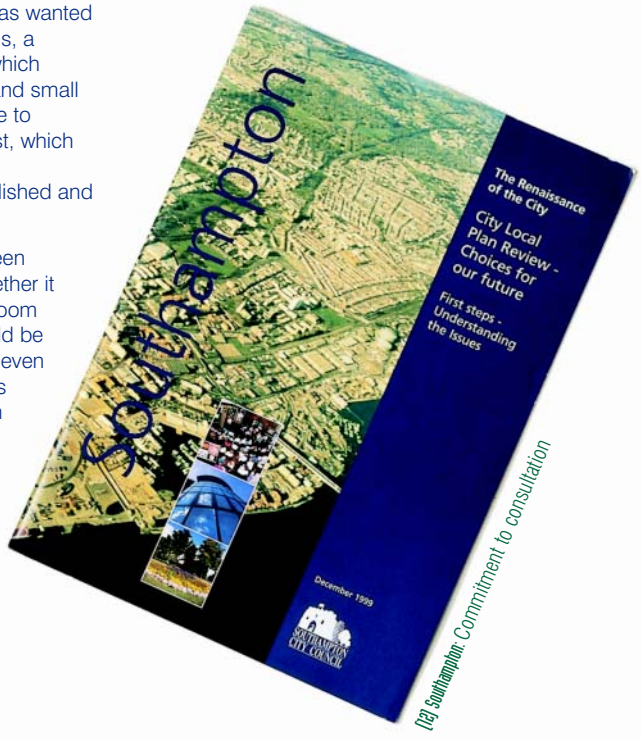
Exhibit 12.
Involving the Community

A number of towns in the South East have been careful to involve their local communities in developing the vision for new housing in their areas. This can lead to more positive attitudes as well as to improved schemes.

[12] Caterham Barracks: A place for young people

The new village being built on the site of the former **Caterham Barracks** was originally opposed by nearby residents until a community planning weekend secured agreement on what was wanted locally. After a series of five consultations, a comprehensive agreement was struck which provided for facilities for young people and small businesses, as well as a new bus service to minimise traffic. A locally controlled Trust, which will help to maintain consensus as the development proceeds, has been established and endowed.

In **Southampton**, the City Council has been consulting widely on such issues as whether it should try to provide more 1 and 2 bedroom houses, and whether new housing should be built to higher environmental standards even if this increases its cost. Southampton is also applying the principles of the Urban Task Force report in promoting an image of being more like a Continental city than a typical British one.



[13] Southampton: Commitment to consultation

6 CARRYING OUT A PHASED STRATEGY

[13] Reading: Cinema and cafes at the Oracle Centre

While a vision provides a guiding light for the overall renaissance process, results will actually be delivered through projects and programmes that need to form part of a co-ordinated and phased strategy. The details of the entire strategy do not all need to be known in advance, but it is important to have some published document that potential developers or investors, as well as local people, can refer to. The overall approach that is required is one of 'proactive planning' – using the planning system to guide the actions and investments of many bodies, including private sector ones, to achieve renaissance goals over a period of time.

The precise elements of the strategy will vary according to the requirements of the particular situation. The timing of particular projects will also depend on factors such as the availability of sites, the economic and investment cycles and the availability of public and private finance. Making progress often depends on being able to seize opportunities that arise, but they must of course be opportunities that contribute to the right long-term goals. This is another reason why having an effective overall vision is vital. It also means that there is no one path to follow to bring about renaissance. Nevertheless the case studies suggest that there is an approximate sequence of actions which local authorities tend to take in the early stages of renaissance.

[13] Eastleigh: The Point arts centre

Exhibit 13:

Securing a Mix of Uses

The most successful towns are those that offer a mix of uses and a range of attractions, rather than relying on retailing alone.

One of the best examples in the South East is **Reading**, which once had a very negative image. Over the last two decades, the town centre and the image of the whole town have been transformed. The process originally started with a local initiative to make better use of the River Kennet, and became urgent when an out-of-town shopping centre was proposed. Reading had to fight back. The pedestrianisation of the town centre was undertaken to a high standard, partly as a result of securing contributions from property owners and occupiers through s106 agreements and voluntary contributions. However, the crowning glory has been the development of the Oracle Centre, which has given the town a mixed-use scheme of the very highest quality. There is now a leisure complex on one side of the river and new shopping on the other, linked by a memorable public realm that benefits from a 'percent for art' policy and an Arts Lottery award.

Suburban centres have often suffered from losing trade to larger towns and out-of-town centres, but **Eastleigh**, a 'railway suburb', provides a much more positive model. Having first upgraded its old shops, with new canopies, and introduced a traffic calming scheme, the town has helped overcome its image of being "beastly Eastleigh" through the imaginative re-use of the redundant Town Hall as an arts centre. Backed by Arts Lottery funding, the new centre supports a wide range of voluntary groups, as well as acting as a regional centre for dance and a popular evening cinema. It is now becoming involved in making the most of the town park which links it to the town centre.

[14] Faversham: The old market place

Securing a mix of uses

If the essence of urban living is having a wide range of facilities within easy reach of where people live, then there need to be areas with a variety of uses close to, or closely linked to, residential areas. The residential areas in turn need to be of sufficient scale, and therefore density, to support the facilities and make improved public transport viable. Town centres are the traditional mixed-use areas, and one of the most obvious ways of promoting urban renaissance is to make it possible and desirable for more people to live in, or within walking distance, of established town centres.

Although urban renaissance need not be limited to the town centre and its immediate surroundings, it must include a healthy town centre. The health of the town centre must be addressed early on, for if the town centre does not attract in a sufficient number of people from its catchment area, it will not be able to support enough facilities to attract more people to live there. Successful town centres do not just rely on retailing, but provide a broad range of facilities (such as employment, entertainment, transport, cultural and other facilities). Planning for new uses as well as for housing, and ensuring that the centre is attractive and easy to use, are key steps in bringing about urban renaissance. Towns as different as **Reading** and **Eastleigh** show how it is possible to improve urban quality by developing a mix of attractions in ways that make the town centre special [13].

Exhibit 14:
Creating a Better Environment

Faversham is a good example of a town where investment in conservation and high quality urban design is paying off in housing expansion. Cars are still allowed access to the town centre, but pedestrians have priority, and there are no yellow lines. Imaginative landscaping makes the main street very memorable, although there is still work to be done to improve the linkages with the surrounding area. Part of a redundant brewery has been turned into an edge-of-centre supermarket, and further adaptive re-use is likely. Within the town centre, the shopping area has contracted, but specialist shops and places to eat are filling the remaining vacant units. Town Centre Management is promoting a rich programme of events and starting to succeed in putting the town on the visitor map. Now that house prices have risen, and the centre is looking so attractive, redundant industrial sites are proving very attractive to housing developers.

Horsham, a pleasant market town, has made great efforts recently to highlight its character as a traditional country town. Great stress has been placed on improving and maintaining the environment. The centre has been mainly pedestrianised; public spaces, such as Carfax, have been paved to a very high specification; lanes and alleys have been emphasised; pedestrian areas have been brightened up with small gardens and extensive planting; art works, including a dramatic fountain, have been introduced. The work has won many awards and has contributed to making the town one of the 'housing hotspots' of the region.

[14] Horsham: Shelley Fountain

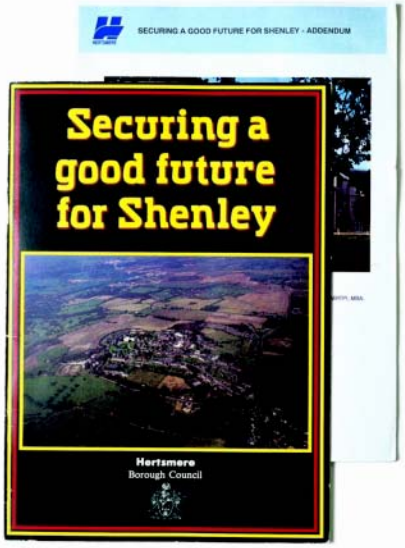
Exhibit 15:
Using Development Briefs

A number of local authorities have managed to secure much better developments, and some community benefits too, by issuing development briefs for key sites, rather than just reacting to planning applications.

Canterbury has been particularly successful in diversifying its economy, through new universities and tourism. It has also expanded the amount of housing within the city walls and built student housing along the ring road. A much quoted success has been the development of the Canterbury West goods yard by three developers, assisted by a development brief. This is being followed up by the replacement of an ugly 1960s retail development with a mixed-use scheme called Whitefriars, which will also provide the community with a new library and bus station. The local authority first held a limited competition to produce design guidelines and a master plan, before going out to select a development partner.

[15] Canterbury: New housing by Canterbury West station

A new village in the grounds of **Shenley** Hospital in Hertfordshire was made acceptable, in part through the handing over of some 45 of the 155 acres of land as a park to a development trust, with an endowment to maintain it. Another condition was that 20% of the housing to be built was affordable. The District Council prepared a development brief with help from consultants. This was agreed with the County and Parish Councils before the Health Authority put the site up for development in a series of phases. The development brief importantly specified the density of development (12 houses to the acre, or 30 per hectare) and the mix, including for example the amount of shopping, but left it up to the developers how the housing was to look. By involving a number of house builders the completed village looks distinctive and varied.



[15] Shenley: The Development Brief

Exhibit 16:
Building on Underlying Strengths

In a highly competitive world it pays for a town to be distinctive in some way, as well as providing the facilities that people expect. Different places may have special features, or underlying strengths, which can help make them special in some way.

Horsham has a long history as a small market town, but its position was threatened by the continuing growth of Crawley New Town only a few miles away. Crawley, however, was built in a very different, modernist style to that of Horsham - which was traditional, even perhaps old-fashioned. By emphasising this traditionalism, improving the environment and public spaces, and ensuring that all new work was done to very high standards, Horsham was able to capitalise on its underlying strengths and clearly differentiate itself from functional Crawley. The two towns provide a stark contrast, and indeed Horsham's undoubted renaissance has been based on thinking intelligently about its competitive strengths and weaknesses.

[16] Horsham: Town Centre (The Carfax)

[16] Ramsgate: Harbour

Ramsgate, an ancient port and a resort since Regency times, has a fine harbour and a legacy of splendid houses many of which have fine views over the sea. In all it has over 1,000 listed buildings. Although the town, like many other coastal resorts in Britain, suffered a serious decline in the 1960s and 1970s, a consultant's report highlighted its great underlying strengths. This convinced Kent County Council and Thanet District Council to establish a major programme to revive the town, based on restoring its built environment and encouraging the use of the harbour. The town is now seen as a desirable place once more, both as an attractive place to live in and as a place to visit. In summer it can be packed.

Enhancing the environment

Improving the quality and safety of the public realm is also fundamental, and many of the case study towns reflect this. Expectations are rising, and people will not spend time in surroundings that are unpleasant or feel threatening. One of the reasons for the success of managed shopping precincts like Bluewater has been their ability to control all aspects of their environment. However there are many examples of environmental enhancements in towns that can achieve similar results, for example in **Faversham** and **Horsham** [14]. Furthermore these towns also put emphasis on maintaining their public spaces to high standards, as this not only continues to attract people to them but also gives confidence to potential investors and helps build long-term trust. In addition improvements to the 'gateways' to a town (such as the railway station), while still rare, can make a particularly strong impact on the first impression that the town creates, as in **Basingstoke** [19].

Raising standards

As the Urban Task Force has emphasised, good design and quality in both buildings and the public realm are keys to creating successful urban areas. When several activities take place in the same location, the likelihood of conflict increases. Careful planning and design,

[17] Oxford: Coach station

Exhibit 17:
Switching from Cars

While traffic tends to dominate much of the South East, there are a number of places where progress is being made in reducing unnecessary car use, and promoting alternatives.

The **Winchester** Movement and Action Plan has been a model for promoting a better deal for pedestrians, improved bus services, and a park-and-ride scheme (with new car parks on the edge of the city linked to the centre by free buses). Between 1995 and 1997 there was an overall reduction of 3% in the number of vehicles entering the city, and public transport usage rose by 1.5%. The next steps are to increase the number of park-and-ride spaces from 250 to 800, using land previously occupied by the Winchester Bypass, and to encourage more through traffic to use the motorway instead.

[17] Winchester: Park-and-ride

Traffic congestion is a particular problem for historic cities like **Oxford**, where cars can spoil the experience for pedestrians, and building bypasses or relief roads is extremely difficult. Oxford has therefore been a leader in developing park-and-ride, with over 3,500 spaces in operation. A study in 1994 showed that traffic flows in the city centre still remained at their 1970s levels. This has led to the adoption of a new £17 million package of measures to reduce traffic and improve the environment in the city centre, which has included removing through traffic from the centre, and increasing the frequency of buses so that a timetable is virtually unnecessary.

The project has been controversial. However an evaluation at the end of 1999 showed that the measures were working as intended. Traffic entering the city centre was 20-30% lower than in the same period in the previous year, and since 20% of the traffic had been passing through rather than stopping, the impact on trade should be small. Journey times by car have hardly changed, but buses are carrying around 9% more passengers. There has also been an increase in the number of people walking.

however, can often prevent this from happening or at least reduce its impact. Good urban design is not just about the way towns look, but about the way they work and enable more people to enjoy a higher quality of life. Good design is not necessarily more expensive than bad design, but it does require more thought and a clear understanding of the context in which any new development takes place.

Counties such as Kent and Essex have produced Design Guides both to set internal standards and to make clear to developers what should be achieved. Surrey is also in the process of preparing a guide, and recent publications such as *By Design* (DETR and the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) and the *Urban Design Compendium* (English Partnerships and The Housing Corporation) provide extensive guidance too. Also planning authorities are beginning to make more use of development briefs to set out the standards required on particular sites and to ensure that certain community benefits are obtained. While this is essentially an extension of the local planning process, it does allow specific and detailed design criteria to be set and wider gains to be achieved, as in the case of the redevelopment of a former goods yard in **Canterbury** and a redundant mental hospital in **Shenley** in Hertfordshire [15].

Building on underlying strengths

Good design requires flair and judgement. It is not just about following a single set of rules. It is usually important to understand and enhance whatever it is that gives a place a special character. This means building on the underlying strengths of the town to help create (or enhance) its distinct identity and develop a positive image for it. Thus **Horsham** has rebuilt its image as a market town with its own distinctive character which flourishes in spite of the proximity of Crawley New Town, while **Ramsgate** has made the most of its harbour as a means of boosting investment in a relatively disadvantaged district [16].

Coping with traffic

Another important aspect of improving the environment is coping with traffic, which if unchecked can make any town centre unpleasant – indeed escaping from the unpleasantness of traffic has been one of the main reasons for people wishing to move out of town. Traffic reduction strategies can reduce the impact of cars, and may also help to fund improvements to public transport, as for example in **Winchester** and **Oxford** [17].

Good transport is at the very heart of urban renaissance. Finding and paying for alternatives to the car are difficult, expensive and long-term tasks, although some of the proposals for the redevelopment of Bracknell show one possible approach, based on a Town Centre Transport Partnership which involves all modes of transport being comprehensively managed together and which is financed by parking charges. However, walking and cycling can be readily encouraged by good urban design and street enhancement. **Borehamwood** and **Ramsgate** provide further examples of places where measures have been taken to reduce the impact of traffic as well as to improve the environment [18].

Exhibit 18:
Calming Traffic

Borehamwood is one of a number of Hertfordshire towns that have been transformed by traffic calming and environmental enhancement measures. These have narrowed the carriageway of the main street, and created new slip roads for parking and loading, with small roundabouts at each end of the street (instead of traffic lights) to reduce stopping and starting. Central reservations and speed tables have made crossing the road easier and safer. Traffic speeds have been cut from 26 to 20 mph, and accidents have been halved. Narrower carriageways have deterred drivers from stopping. They use the slip roads instead, thus boosting local shops, and there are now few vacancies. Extensive greening, with planters that also serve as places to sit, has helped to soften the largely post-war buildings, and create a much more attractive centre. These improvements were largely financed from planning gain from a supermarket which relocated to the edge of town. This left an empty store, which has now been successfully converted into a cinema plus a bowling alley, restaurant and health club.

[18] Borehamwood: High Street enhancement

In **Ramsgate** traffic calming and street enhancements were a fundamental part of the strategy of reclaiming the town's elegant past. As much traffic as possible is now routed round the town, and the shopping area has been made virtually traffic-free. This has not only made shopping and strolling much more pleasurable, but has also allowed extensive environmental improvements to be made, and enabled the pedestrian links between the town centre and the seafront and harbour to be upgraded. Taming the traffic was one of the keys to unlocking the potential of Ramsgate.

[18] Ramsgate: Streets for pedestrians

Exhibit 19:
Improving Transport Interchanges

If people are to be persuaded to use their cars less not only does public transport need to be greatly improved, but it must also be easy and pleasant to change from one form of transport to another. While current standards fall far short of what is being achieved on the Continent, there are some signs of improvement.

Although **Basingstoke's** economy has been booming its railway station was cut off from the shopping centre by a busy road which had to be crossed through an ugly underpass. The Council has promoted a major scheme which has narrowed and downgraded the road (which is now only used by buses and taxis) and created a series of wide, landscaped terraces which enable pedestrians to move easily between the town centre and the station. The resulting landscaped open space is highly popular and creates an impressive gateway to the town. Furthermore a new bus station is being built as part of a new shopping centre and this will be connected directly to the station by a bridge. Thus the links between the station, the bus station, the shopping centre and the town centre will be greatly improved.

[19] Basingstoke: Station approach

Oxford has redeveloped its old coach station at Gloucester Green, creating in the process an attractive place to wait for buses or to change between long distance coaches and rural services. The scheme also includes new housing above shops and a well laid out public square. Very frequent bus services run throughout the city and there is an extensive park-and-ride system, which runs from 5.30 a.m. until midnight six days a week (and from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Sundays). There are also seven bus services that run 24 hours a day. All of this is part of a policy of encouraging people to make use of the city without being too dependent on their cars. 56% of all shoppers now travel in by bus (including those using park-and ride).

[19] Oxford: Gloucester Green

In the medium and longer term, substantial investment will be required to ensure that high quality rapid transit systems are available, in order the provide to reliable and convenient alternatives that will enable more people to switch from congested roads to public transport. This is an area in which the UK as a whole is lagging behind other countries in northern Europe [7]. However there are some existing proposals for rapid transit which are quite far advanced in Portsmouth and Kent Thames-side, and a number of schemes for high quality bus services such as between Crawley and Gatwick Airport or in Gravesend. A good place to start is in improving transport interchanges, as for example in **Basingstoke** and **Oxford** [19].

Introducing higher density housing

Higher density housing, sometimes in mixed-use schemes, is an important element of urban renaissance - but it is only a part of the process. The real aim is to create attractive and sustainable towns in which people wish to live, and housing is only part of this. Understanding the wider urban environment, and ensuring that the new housing fits in well with it, are what matter most. Again this is a matter of good design. Places as different as **Sandwich** and **Milton Keynes** provide examples of well-designed new housing at the densities recommended in the Government's Planning Policy Guidance PPG3 [20]. The challenge now is to secure similar standards in more ordinary towns.

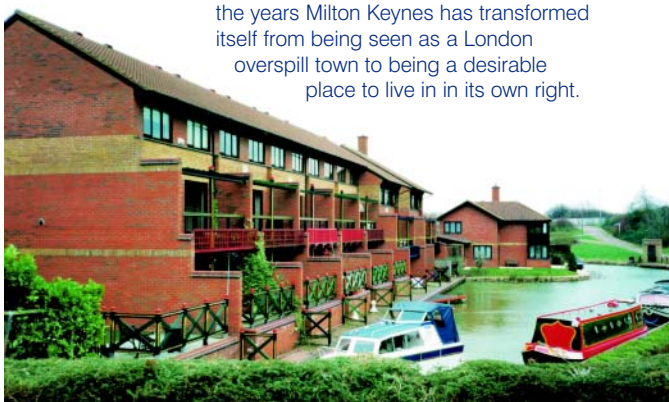
[20] Sandwich: Appropriate new housing

Exhibit 20.
Designing Appropriate Housing

Well-designed housing is one of the keys to urban renaissance in the South East. Not only is it attractive in its own right, but good design can help overcome the objections to higher density living as well as ensuring that the new development fits in, both physically and socially, with its surroundings.

In **Sandwich,** which only has a population of 5,000, a derelict tannery has been redeveloped as 50 terraced homes by a local developer. The scheme is well designed, with high quality materials and good detailing. Although built to a high density it is not dominated by cars as there are a series of rear courtyards for garages. The development has been particularly popular with staff from a major pharmaceutical company which is expanding its research facilities just outside the town. The new housing fits in well with existing buildings and the adjoining site has been developed as a supermarket. This helps to retain consumer spending in the town, as well as enabling people to carry their shopping home without having to use a car.

The New Town of **Milton Keynes** has been one of the main sources of new housing in the South East, and has grown into what is virtually a new city, with a population of over 200,000. It contains a huge range of types of housing development and most well-known architects have worked there at one time or another. The housing has been developed as distinct neighbourhoods, each with its own identity and facilities. Innovative design has been encouraged, first through Homeworld and then through Energy World (which promoted housing with low energy consumption) and Future World (which promoted a range of advanced housing concepts linked to an exhibition). Increasingly the trend now is to create higher density housing, including new blocks beside the city parks and new flats near the centre which have sold well. The latest development is a new village which aims to apply sustainable development principles. Over the years Milton Keynes has transformed itself from being seen as a London overspill town to being a desirable place to live in in its own right.



[20] Milton Keynes: Pennybanks on the Grand Union Canal

Exhibit 21:

Developing Social Harmony

A key part of developing social harmony in the face of change is to involve the community early on in the planning process, and this applies particularly to areas that have been declining.

The centre of **Portsmouth**, which is one of the densest urban areas in the country, had suffered from war-time bombing, ugly post-war development, and the loss of jobs in the Dockyard. The Council has used a wide variety of techniques to involve people in rebuilding their community. These have ranged from surveys and newsletters, to the use of street theatre and the involvement of schools. However the process, which gave rise to a new vision for the city centre, has also been extended to the implementation stage. Single Regeneration Budget schemes to improve blocks of flats (no longer called estates) have involved tenants picking which housing association they wanted to work with. They have subsequently been involved in the design process, for example in making the area more secure and in providing places for children to play. Along with work to General Improvement Areas, this has helped to make the

[21] Portsmouth: Estate renewal

centre a much more popular place to live in. In a recent survey, 88% of residents rated their quality of life as good, and 68% were satisfied with the way the city is run.

In **Brighton** a New Deal for Communities Pathfinder Scheme covers four estates on the eastern edge of the town which have suffered from severe decline. Many of the residents are socially and economically excluded even though much of Brighton is doing well. The initiative started with a series of capacity-building exercises, involving a broad section of the community. For example, residents were trained to carry out an initial household survey of the area and were represented (along with people from the voluntary and business sectors) on the East Brighton Community Partnership which established a ten year action plan for the estates. An early project was to train women in child care, so as to allow others to go out to work. Major priorities include tackling crime (with more than £400,000 being spent over three years on a community safety scheme and £75,000 on neighbourhood wardens). Another priority is reducing unemployment. One project involves linking up with job opportunities in the town centre and further afield (e.g. at Gatwick Airport). Communication has been an important part of the programme, both at a local level within the community and wider level through its Internet site.

[21] Brighton: http://www.ebndc.co.uk/

Successful urban housing requires a very different approach, from both planners and developers, to that which has dominated the South East during the past century. Some developers are beginning to gain expertise in this new field, but often neither they nor the planners have the necessary experience. As the recent revisions to PPG3 indicate, a new approach and new procedures are needed. Visiting other relevant places and projects, obtaining feedback from residents, and promoting awards for good design can all help to generate the information required.

Ensuring social harmony

Much of the reason why village life is thought to be better than life in towns is due to perceptions of community. People in villages know who everybody is, take care of each other and their environment, and broadly speaking get along with each other in spite of social disparities. In towns and cities (especially where the density of housing is high) people do not necessarily know their neighbours nor take their interests into consideration. This may lead to litter, noise, isolation and crime etc. – the well-known 'urban ills'.

However, this need not necessarily be the case, particularly if sufficient effort is made to manage and maintain urban neighbourhoods. The changes in the images of Brighton, Eastleigh, Reading and Reigate suggest that if a concerted effort is made to improve many aspects of an urban area, a sense of social well-being may follow. **Portsmouth**, a city which does have many of the problems associated with northern

industrial towns, and **Brighton** both provide examples of places that have involved the community in actions to turn unpopular estates into places to be proud of, through projects that help integrate them into the wider town [21]. In other places too, like Gravesend, there are innovative projects which seek to link poorer neighbourhoods with the town centre.

Managing projects

Good project planning and management mechanisms are also essential to the success of individual projects as well as larger programmes. In particular, urban renaissance almost always cut across local authority departments and may involve working jointly with other organisations, including the private sector and community groups. It is essential for the local authority to identify, consult with, and involve all the key stakeholders in the urban regeneration process. This requires that particular attention is paid to working in partnership, involving local communities, and monitoring and communicating progress.

Good communication between all the interests involved is a fundamental part of all types of project management, and joint working parties and progress review meetings have become almost a way of life. Written guidelines, like the development briefs and design guides mentioned previously, are also important ways of communicating both what can be done and what is required. Consultation with local interest groups, including local residents, can also sometimes help improve designs and lead to less resistance to new development.

Modern technology can help to make communication and consultation more accessible, for example through the use of GIS (Geographical Information Systems) to allow people to see the impact of different options and policies pictorially, as for example in plans for the extension of Cambridge. Consultation can already be carried out over the Internet, and this is being done in places like **Brighton** [21] to help overcome social exclusion.

The lack of urban design and management skills appears to be a problem in some local authorities. It is unlikely that sustained urban renaissance will occur unless staff have the skills required to develop and carry through a coherent vision for their towns. One of the reasons why historic towns may be more successful than other towns in bringing about urban renaissance is that they do value design skills and employ people who have them. This, of course, does not prevent other places from doing the same thing. In **High Wycombe**, for example, an in-house urban designer has helped the co-ordination of important projects, and in **Ramsgate** several members of the dedicated team which led the revival programme had design skills [22]. In other cases consultants have been used.

Exhibit 22:
Using Urban Design Skills

In **High Wycombe**, the appointment of an urban designer has proved valuable as a means of injecting greater vision into proposals, and of helping to co-ordinate key projects. Indeed, much of the urban designer's time is spent in trying to overcome the traffic, land ownership, financial and institutional barriers to bringing sites forward. In addition, design consultants are occasionally employed on an ad hoc basis to help develop better design solutions on key sites when applications are poor. The authority is actively engaged in expanding its in-house urban design resource.

[23] High Wycombe: a car-free housing scheme

Ramsgate, although linked with Margate and Broadstairs under Thanet District Council, is a comparatively small town with a population of 38,000. The revival programme that it undertook, starting in the late 1980s, required much high quality design work in order to restore the town's former glory and ensure that any new development fitted in with it. Through Kent County Council's Impact scheme a dedicated team was able to lead the regeneration effort for a fixed period of time. Apart from planners, the Impact team included an architect and two landscape architects, enabling projects in Ramsgate to receive experienced professional input at the time it was most needed.

[22] Ramsgate: Design skills were provided by the Impact scheme

7 ORCHESTRATING INVESTMENTS

[23] Horsham: Strong interest in new proposals

Exhibit 23:
Orchestrating Investments

While local authorities carry the renaissance vision, most of the investment in the South East must come from the private sector. Thus councils must find ways of facilitating and orchestrating the required investments even though they do not directly control the resources.

One of the best examples is provided by **Horsham**, which has won a number of awards for its comprehensive improvements to the town centre. The keys to success have included building up trust with all the partners around a vision aimed at making the most of the town's distinctive character. The trust has been reinforced by the success of the environmental enhancement schemes that have created a very high quality public realm. The works were largely funded through a deal with a superstore which moved from the centre to the edge of town. A separate deal with another supermarket helped bring in finance to complete a vital road scheme which took traffic out of the town centre. Another important partner has been a major insurance company, the largest employer in the town, which has given the Council's strategy strong support by reinvesting heavily in the town.

The historic city of **Rochester** has had to cope with the closure of the naval base at nearby Chatham, and has invested in making its centre a very attractive place to visit. In order to promote mixed-use development of the high quality envisaged in its masterplan, the Council had to assemble the required sites. Unusually for the region it made use of compulsory purchase powers. An architect/developer competition generated strong schemes, and the winning consortium will not only be creating attractive new housing, but will also be contributing to linking the town and the river together again. Without the orchestrating efforts of the Council (backed by SEEDA) the project would not have got off the ground.

A key difference between urban renaissance and traditional urban regeneration is that, in the prosperous South East at least, the main part of the investment will have to come from the private sector. It is a great advantage that people actively want to invest. However this does not mean that a local authority need only take a reactive role. Private developers have their own objectives and no individual investor will have the full range of interests required to bring about urban renaissance. An important role for the local authority, therefore, is to harness together and steer a range of other people's investments, so that eventually its own urban renaissance goals are adequately met.

This is not necessarily easy, especially when important sites are not in the local authority's ownership. Furthermore, private sector investment is likely to fluctuate with the various economic cycles, and because of this it may be difficult to co-ordinate the public and private elements of a long-term programme. It is important, therefore, to be able to take advantage of upswings in the investment cycle, without losing sight of the overall renaissance objectives and standards.

[23] Rochester: High Street

The South East's Key Advantage

"We've got more capability here than in any other region [to deliver an urban renaissance] because we've got the land values"

Anthony Dunnett, Chief Executive,
South East of England
Development Agency

The main lessons from those authorities that seem to have made most progress in this field can be summarised as:

- Articulating a clear vision for the future of the town and make sure that it is widely understood and supported
- Identify the key potential partners for the renaissance process and understand their objectives and requirements over time
- Establish appropriate development partnerships and plans
- Identify core projects, focus efforts on bringing them to fruition (even if it takes longer than expected) and fit other projects around them as necessary
- Ensure that the statutory local plan provides the right framework for the agreed renaissance
- Provide general design guidance to ensure that required standards and quality are achieved
- Issue specific planning briefs for key sites
- Be prepared to commit the authority's own resources when necessary to make crucial projects happen.

Horsham provides a good example of a place where all these steps are being taken, and **Rochester** is following a similar type of approach [23].

In some other places, for example **Farnham** and **Hastings**, local Development Trusts have played an important role in helping to make the most of neglected urban assets. These in turn have been used to generate funds to contribute to the continuing renaissance [24]. There is no reason why these two approaches could not work together.

Exhibit 24:
Using a Trust to Innovate

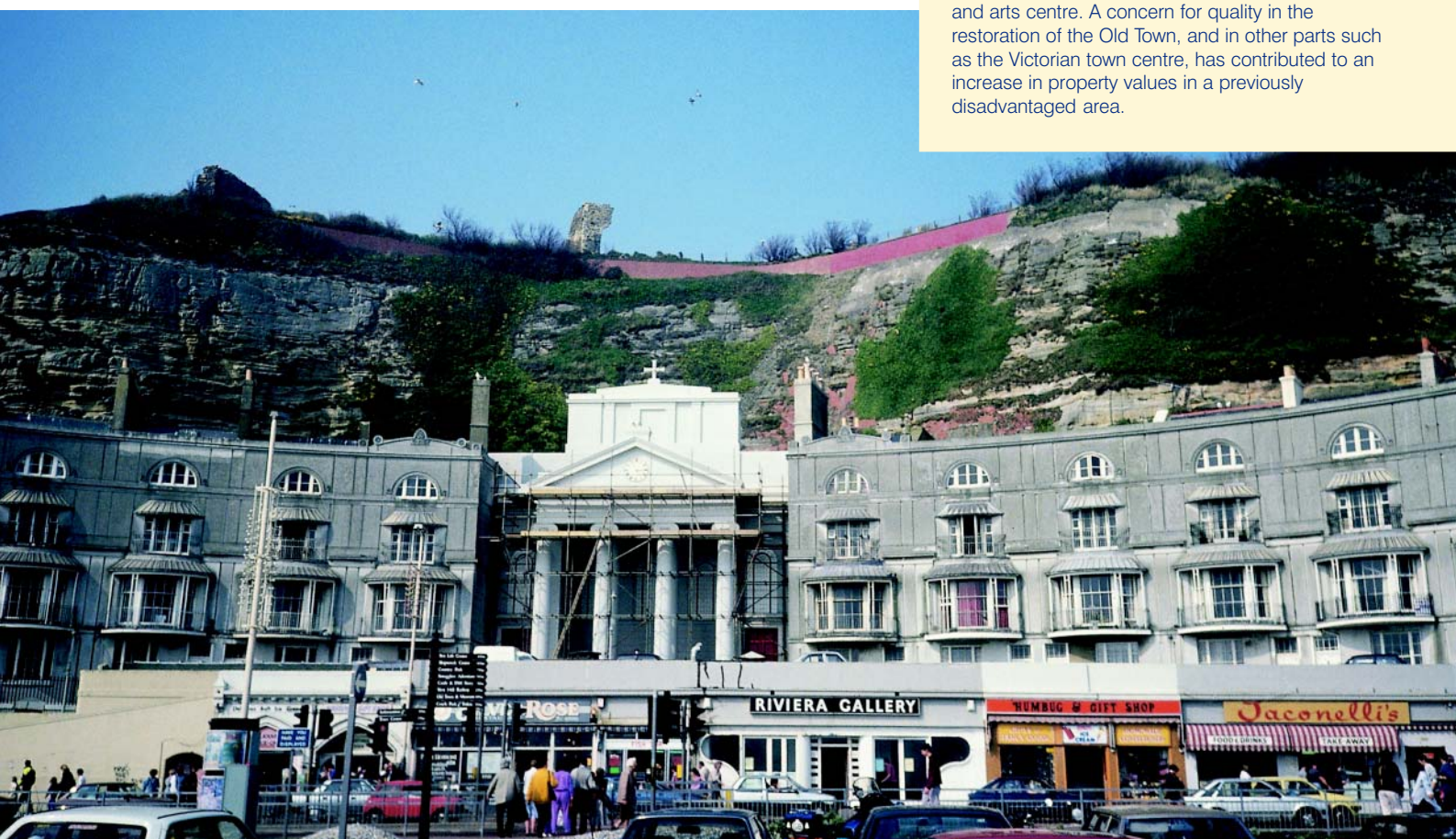
There are a number of situations, such as the re-use of old buildings, where private developers can be slow to see the opportunities, and where not-for-profit Development Trusts can make a difference.

One type of trust is the Building Preservation Trust, which uses a revolving loan fund to acquire buildings, restore them with a combination of grants and loans on favourable terms, and then sell them off. One of the pioneers was the **Farnham** Trust, which has helped to make the town one of the most attractive and successful in the South East. Starting initially with cottages, and then going on to help bring the old Maltings back into use, the Trust's latest scheme is the restoration of an old working pottery on the edge of town, part of which will continue in operation.

[24] Farnham.

Another variant, which is supported by the Development Trust Association, focuses more on meeting community needs, and a good example is in **Hastings**. Here community action is helping to revive the town's fortunes as a place to live in and visit. A number of alternative-minded people were attracted by the town's neglected character and relatively cheap housing. The scheme for St. Mary-in-the-Castle saved a key building from dereliction, and has provided a fine new performance space and arts centre. A concern for quality in the restoration of the Old Town, and in other parts such as the Victorian town centre, has contributed to an increase in property values in a previously disadvantaged area.

[24] Hastings: St Mary-in-the-Castle, Pelham Place



8 MAINTAINING MOMENTUM

Urban renaissance, whatever particular strategy is pursued, is a long-term goal. Important steps will almost always include improving the town's centre and other facilities; enhancing the environment; coping with traffic and reducing car usage; and developing well-designed housing. But the process must not stop there. The ultimate objective is to create and maintain an environment, or a range of environments, in which a growing number of people will wish to enjoy a sustainable urban lifestyle. It is therefore necessary to keep up enthusiasm and maintain momentum until this is achieved. Then it will be necessary to keep taking action to maintain and refresh what has been achieved, and to keep up with what will be ever-rising standards and ever-growing expectations. (see **Table 2** – ***see inside back cover***), taken from the Background Review, summarises a whole range of possible initiatives.

The two aspects of maintaining momentum - physical maintenance and the maintenance of enthusiasm - are equally important. Both are necessary for gaining and retaining the trust of local residents and potential investors, which is vital for the achievement of long-term goals. Investments, especially property investments, take time to pay off and their returns may well be affected by the state and character of their surroundings. Proper maintenance, particularly of the public realm, is an essential and on-going part of urban renaissance. Poor standards of maintenance, or signs of neglect and carelessness, will strongly discourage potential investors.

However, nothing succeeds like success, and people take pride in being associated with it. There are many examples of steps that can be taken to maintain enthusiasm and momentum. They nearly always involve positive publicity and good communication, but they are only effective if the underlying results are positive. Town Centre Management has now become an accepted way of co-ordinating and promoting efforts to improve town centres, and an extension of this concept could apply to wider renaissance issues. **Reading** and **Gravesend** which have both been pioneers in Town Centre Management are now extending it beyond its normal retailing role [25]. Both lay stress on the quality of the information used to plan and monitor their town's development. Other places are using individuals or professional firms as 'town champions' to help see the renaissance process through and to help change attitudes towards their town.

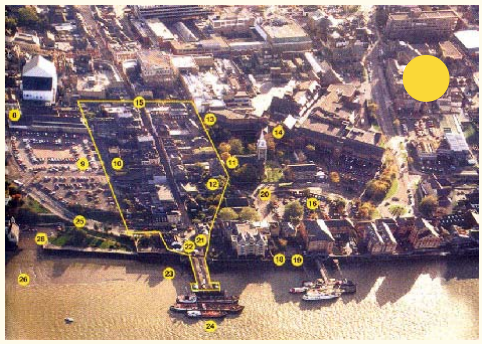
[25] Reading: Housing and offices in the town centre

Exhibit 25:
Developing Town Centre Partnerships

Town Centre Management has played an important part in the fight to protect town centres from decline. Initially it was just concerned with keeping the streets clean and safe, but it has gone on to bring the public and private sectors together around visions and strategies for the future of the whole town centre.

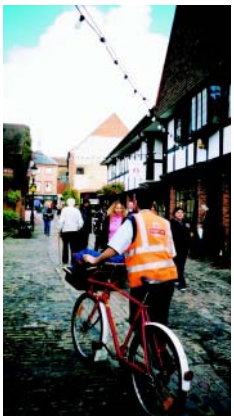
Reading has taken a number of steps in this direction. It was one of the first local authorities to adopt the concept of Town Centre Management, which has had a key role in the town's renaissance. The success can be seen not just in the quality of the investment, or the popularity of the centre in the evening as well as the day, but also by the change of image that is taking place. Ten years ago, very few people would have considered living in the centre of the town, now they are queuing up to acquire smart apartments. People from all backgrounds are enjoying the transformed centre together, and the continental style of the public realm. The public-private Town Centre Board is now having to think through the issues of having a growing resident population as well as a commercial one.

Gravesend has had to fight back against decline and out-of-town competition. A start was made to boosting confidence in the town through high quality environmental improvements in the main shopping area. The strategy was then extended to include restoring the historic High Street, which leads down to the River Thames, and encouraging more people to live there, through a partnership with local housing associations and support from English Partnerships. Other schemes include a 'healthy living centre' to link the town centre with surrounding estates and help improve the quality of life for local residents. The next phase will be to rekindle the visitor/tourist trade, and then, in time, to ensure that the town benefits as much as possible from the new Channel Tunnel rail station to be built nearby. In all these plans the Town Centre Initiative team, with its links to the private sector, has been closely involved because it realises that a medium-sized town like Gravesend cannot do well by just being a district shopping centre. It must provide a range of good quality attractions and facilities, including being an attractive place to live in. This is what urban renaissance is all about.



[25] Gravesend: Extract from the town centre strategy

9 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS



This final chapter summarises the main conclusions from the Background Review and the case studies, and the progress that is being made in bringing about urban renaissance in the South East.

Background Review

The review of recent research and guidance on issues relating to urban renaissance covered nearly 100 reports and other publications. Several key points emerged.

Urban renaissance is highly relevant for the South East. It offers a way of reconciling continued economic growth with the need for greater emphasis on sustainability, reduction in traffic congestion and the preservation of the countryside. There is general agreement that the past patterns of dispersed growth and increased travel are unsustainable, and that without some form of urban renaissance the present quality of life enjoyed in the South East will be diminished.

Urban renaissance is a challenging concept. It goes beyond conventional development planning, and it is not just about building more housing in towns. It requires finding solutions to economic, environmental, design and social issues. It involves harnessing investment potential and co-ordinating many policies to:

- Make towns and cities much more attractive places to live in and do business in
- Meet the high and rising standards of quality that are now expected
- Ensure that there are a wide range of facilities within easy reach of where people live, which are accessible by foot, bicycle or high quality public transport
- Tackle social exclusion, and
- Change attitudes towards urban environments.

There is widespread agreement among professionals, and often politicians, on the benefits that urban renaissance would bring, and on what needs to be achieved. Furthermore, the types of actions required are extensively covered in Government advice (see **Table 2**) which is reinforced by the recent Urban White Paper.

However, public opinion (or some key sections of it) remains more sceptical of the appeal of urban living. Strong preferences are usually expressed for rural or suburban lifestyles, although some research and recent demographic changes, especially the growth in single person households, indicate that alternative markets are emerging.

For urban renaissance to be successful, people must see it as bringing clear benefits. In particular:

- Successful urban renaissance must not just be about carrying out programmes and delivering outputs, but about doing them so well that people start to see the towns they know in a different light
- It requires changing attitudes, investment and positive leadership. (In many cases the first instinct is to argue against more housing locally, but to support the idea of new development elsewhere)
- Change is inevitable. It is how well it is planned and managed that is critical
- Successful urban renaissance, which accommodates most of the growth in households in towns, will still enable those who wish live in suburban or rural areas to do so without more and more of the countryside being used up. It is very much in the interests of everybody in the South East.

Delivering urban renaissance is a complex, long-term undertaking. There is no universal set of rules:

- The South East is far too diverse, with different pressures in different areas, for there to be a standard solution
- Different types of town have developed in different ways, and have different underlying strengths and opportunities.

Delivering urban renaissance requires an effective strategic process as well as successfully implemented policies and programmes, because:

- There are a very large number of measures that might be taken (see **Table 2**)
- Co-ordinated action is required on many fronts, and over a long period of time.
- It is the overall results (a desirable and sustainable place to live) that are important, not just the outcomes of the individual programmes.

Urban renaissance in the South East can be visualised as having a 3-dimensional framework (see **Exhibit 9**), with:

- A series of programmes and outputs to deliver the core objectives (identified by the Urban Task Force) of *economic strength, environmental responsibility, design excellence and social well-being*
- A set of management mechanisms to co-ordinate and deliver successful programmes, including '*joined-up thinking*', *packaging resources, working in partnership, involving communities* and *monitoring and communicating progress*
- An overall renaissance process, starting with an *imaginative* and preferably shared *vision*, and carried through by means of a *phased strategy* which pays particular attention to the *orchestration of investments* and the *maintenance of momentum.*

Case Studies

The 30 case studies and examples covered a range of types and sizes of towns across the region (see **Table 1**) and included a few places in the old Rest of the South East (ROSE) area and further afield. They were chosen to illustrate what is already being done to tackle urban renaissance issues in a variety of different situations. Nevertheless some general conclusions can be drawn.

A great deal of work on improving towns is already under way in the region:

- This work is not just confined to large towns or historic towns, although most progress does appear to have been made in such places
- As the Exhibits illustrate, many medium-sized towns and towns of different types are also taking action.

Although it is too early to point to any full-scale renaissance, **tangible benefits are being achieved in many towns:**

- The images of some towns are being transformed
- High standards in the public realm are leading to livelier places and encouraging private investment
- Some towns are successfully promoting alternatives to the car while still maintaining accessibility
- Higher density housing developments close to town centres are proving to be highly sought after and there is evidence of people beginning to move back into town centres
- In addition there are other potential benefits, such as a wider mix of uses, improved pedestrian environments, a healthy evening economy, new uses for fine old buildings, and the rediscovery of waterfronts.

All this suggests that well-designed and well looked after centres can create attractive living places, and that the tide of urban renaissance in the South East may be starting to turn:

- There would seem to be much that could be gained from, and little to be feared, in starting down an urban renaissance path
- There are many examples of successful initiatives taking place in different types of town, and many other places could benefit from their experience.

The case studies confirm the importance of taking a long-term, strategic approach:

- Those places that appear to be making most progress have developed a *vision* for their town that appeals to both existing residents and potential newcomers, and are following a *phased strategy.* This enables some successes to be demonstrated early on, which helps build confidence and trust
- In the South East, where most of the resources need to come from the private sector, local authorities need to give particular attention to *orchestrating investments* made by other parties to ensure that they do in fact contribute towards the overall renaissance strategy
- Finding ways of *maintaining momentum* is also important. Not only is it necessary to ensure that the overall results will be achieved, but, as expectations and standards are ever-rising, urban renaissance is likely to be an on-going, perhaps permanent, process. Furthermore, while much of the progress will come through capital investment, maintenance of the physical environment and of standards of service are just as essential.

The case studies also confirm that the renaissance process is manageable:

- Some local authorities have been implementing what amounts to an urban renaissance process for several years and have made substantial progress
- Many others have already started tackling key renaissance issues that include *revitalising the town centre*, *securing a mix of uses*, *enhancing the environment*, *raising quality standards* and *coping with traffic*.

But what characterises the best examples (and is brought out particularly in the fuller case studies on Reading and Horsham) **is a commitment to manage change, rather than just be a victim of short-term pressures.** This included taking initiatives aimed at:

- promoting a positive image
- building on underlying strengths
- controlling development on key sites through planning briefs
- tapping urban capacity
- promoting well-designed higher density housing
- working in partnership to implement complex projects
- ensuring high standards are maintained.

Finding good examples from suburban centres proved difficult, although there are a few cases where good urban design and the arts have been used to start changing attitudes. Also, although transport is a major concern in many places, and high quality public transport is seen as a crucial factor in urban renaissance, there is still a shortage of good examples to draw on in the region. In the case studies too, there was more emphasis on physical, economic and managerial issues, rather than on social issues such as the integration of new residents and existing communities. This may be because urban renaissance is still in its infancy in the region, and social issues (and therefore examples of how to address them) are likely to become more prominent in the later stages, which have not yet been reached.

Making Progress

This report shows that, although there is still a long way to go in bringing about urban renaissance in the South East, progress is already being made in many different places throughout the region, and there is a growing list of examples for others to draw on. There is no shortage of good policy advice or of ideas for action, and there is now a general framework for tackling urban renaissance that many may find useful.

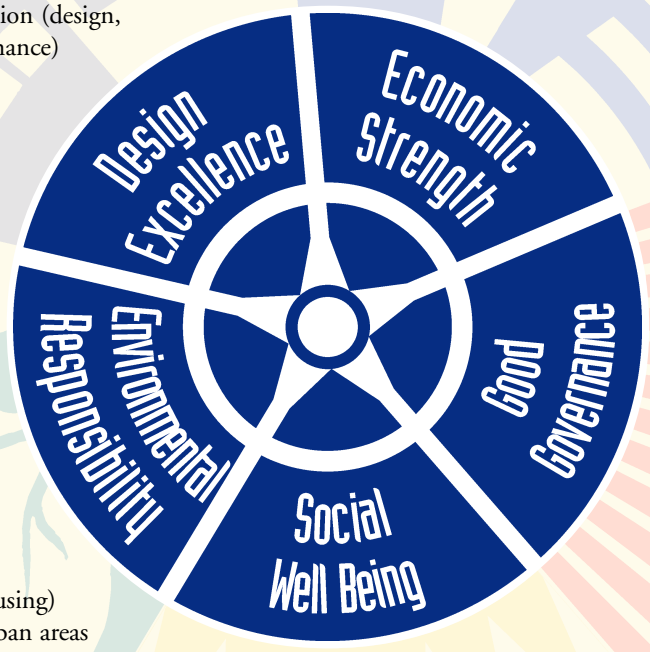
- Mounting renaissance campaigns
- Publishing design guides
- Organising seminars and awards
- Revising planning policies and issuing briefs for key sites.

Urban renaissance is an idea whose time has come. It is likely to remain a key issue in the South East for the foreseeable future. The challenge is to make all the region's towns and cities into attractive and sustainable 'living places' that match the standards of the best and will stand the test of time.

Table 2
Checklist of Actions to Promote Urban Renaissance

- Plan for variety to keep streets attractive and lively
- Undertake traffic calming, improved lighting, wider pavements and better road crossings
- Promote better urban design and building design
- Encourage more terraced and town housing
- Place the needs of people before cars in designing residential layouts
- Develop design policies, supplementary design guidance and planning briefs
- Promote and deliver 'home zones'
- Adopt 'urban villages' principles in established and new developments
- Adopt a design-led approach to building new homes
- Promote connected, accessible environments
- Appraise design context
- Utilise design frameworks/strategies
- Develop a long-term renaissance vision (design, sustainability, regeneration, maintenance)

- Strengthen existing local centres
- Increase the vitality and viability of retail centres
- Develop a wide range of attractions and amenities in town centres
- Attract continuing investment in the development or refurbishment of existing buildings
- Support the evening economy
- Support focused urban regeneration activity linked to delivering quality
- Pump-prime the recycling and redevelopment of old sites
- Support job creation and preservation i.e. skills training, grants, etc.
- Encourage private/public partnerships



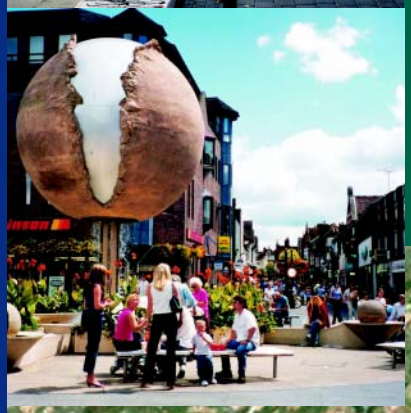
- Plan for work, home and leisure in closer proximity
- See existing urban heritage as an asset
- Support measures to reduce pollution
- Protect urban green spaces
- Reduce levels of traffic, noise and pollution
- Direct new housing to town centres
- Concentrate development and employment in urban areas
- Encourage walking, cycling and use of public transport
- Promote development (particularly housing) at highly accessible locations within urban areas
- Limit parking provision for developments (review standards)
- Require higher density housing in areas of better public transport access (review standards)
- Encourage reuse or conversion of existing sites and properties
- Encourage mixed-use development
- Plan for good accessibility to centres
- Undertake urban capacity studies

- Require a mix of market and affordable housing
- Provide a wide range of facilities at the local neighbourhood level
- Plan out crime
- Encourage mixed and socially balanced communities
- Require a better mix in the sizes and types of housing
- Work towards a healthy environment
- Reduce crime and the fear of crime on public transport
- Tackle deprivation and social exclusion
- Tackle public attitudes on design and resistance to higher density living
- Educate for tolerance and consideration
- Provide opportunities for participation/ community involvement

- Extend urban renaissance principles to suburban areas
- Invest sufficient resources (financing on a very large scale)
- Use town centre management
- Invest in better urban maintenance
- Utilise congestion management techniques
- Enhance skills in design, planning, regeneration, and community and urban management
- Reflect principles in strategic plans
- Use land assembly and compulsory purchase order powers
- Plan, monitor and manage housing demand
- Adopt '20 mph zones'
- Produce integrated local transport plans
- Supply attractive, convenient and safe parking for shoppers in town centres
- Adopt a sequential approach to the use of land
- Utilise town centre health checks
- Prepare town centre strategies
- Use design panels/awards/centres.

Source: Background Review

There is a general agreement that past patterns of dispersed growth have been unsustainable. Urban renaissance can help achieve better use of land, reduce congestion and help protect the countryside by making urban living desirable. This good practice guide produced for GOSE by URBED, in collaboration with The Bartlett School, will assist those intending to bring about urban renaissance in the South East.



Living Places: *Urban Renaissance in the South East*

ISBN 1 851124 36 5
Price £23

ISBN 1-851124-36-5
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