



## CITY PEOPLE: CITY CENTRE LIVING IN THE UK MAX NATHAN AND CHRIS URWIN

### EXECUTIVE BRIEFING

#### Background

- Over the past 10 years, British cities have got better. The growth of city centre living is the most visible symbol of urban renaissance. Understanding this wave of city centre living is important. It tells us more about the nature of urban renaissance, the large communities in the heart of our cities – and any wider impacts on cities' social and economic performance.
- *City People* examines the size and nature of the city centre living phenomenon, focusing on the historic cores of Dundee, Liverpool and Manchester. It asks why it has happened, who is living in the heart of the city – and how long they plan to stay. It then assesses the economic and social benefits of city centre living.

#### Key policy messages

- **City centre living is real, and here to stay.** City centre populations grew by nearly 100% in Dundee, around 40% in Liverpool and by nearly 300% in Manchester between 1991 and 2001. By 2001 there were 2,900 people living in the centre of Dundee, 13,500 in Liverpool and 10,000 in Manchester. These numbers have risen since 2001 – for example, in 2004 the city centre population in Manchester was probably about 15,000 people.
- **Today's city centre residents are mostly young, single and don't stay long. City centre living is a 'conveyor belt' phenomenon.** Britain is evolving a distinctive model of city centre living, dominated by young single people. Students, young workers and those on low incomes are the key groups. Convenience and buzz are the main attractions. But most people move out after a few years: churn is three times higher than the UK average.
- **City centres aren't for families.** Most residents leave the city core when they start families, because of lack of space, lack of services – and because they prefer the suburbs. These preferences will be hard to shift, and expensive. Instead, we should encourage families into the inner ring neighbourhoods that surround the city centre.
- **City centre living can help cities perform better. But its wider effects are limited.** By improving perceptions of the city centre, it can encourage investment and can start a virtuous cycle. But city centre living reflects a city's economic performance more than it drives growth. It does best in cities that are doing best. Small cities won't get that much out of it.
- **The next big challenge is improving inner ring neighbourhoods. This will help cities keep hold of working families.** City centres have got better, but many nearby places have stayed the same. Building more flats will not help these areas improve. Over the next decade, policy has to focus on the doughnuts of deprivation that surround city centres. These inner suburbs are potentially good places for key workers and middle-class families. But they need security, more space, good quality houses and better public services.