From New Towns to Growth Areas

Learning from the past

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Acknowlededgments

Sustainable communities and the Growth Areas

The Growth Areas identified within the Sustainable Communities Plan represent the most ambitious housing growth policy since the 1960s. Achieving sustainable and economically successful communities on this scale is a significant challenge. ippr is looking at how the Growth Areas can meet their social and economic objectives and seeking to answer the questions: Who is going to live in the Growth Areas and what types of new communities are they trying to create? This paper, the first from this project, identifies relevant lessons for the Growth Areas from previous housing growth policies.

About the author

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Summary

There are critical lessons for the Growth Areas that can be drawn from the successes and failures of previous housing growth policies. Although the New Towns programme was developed and delivered in a very different political and policy climate, many of the issues that the Government, the New Towns Development Corporations and local authorities grappled with are similar to those that will need to be addressed in the Growth Areas. This paper draws out the following key lessons from the New Towns experience which the Government and its partners need to consider in relation to the Growth Areas.

Community

- A vision is needed of whom the housing in the Growth Areas is for, and the types of new communities to be created.
- Comprehensive delivery plans with clear objectives about who is going to live in the Growth Areas are required. They should to set out the appropriate range of housing types, including social housing, which need to be delivered within mixed communities, as a guide to planning decisions.
- The provision of housing at higher densities, in high-quality neighbourhoods, must not be compromised by the drive to reduce building costs.

Economy

- Strategies for developing mixed local economies in the Growth Areas to ensure that there are a range of jobs to meet the needs of diverse communities, should be a key priority for the Regional Development Agencies and local authorities.
- Learning and Skills Councils and Job Centre Plus must be given resources to improve skills and support access to jobs for newly arriving and existing lower income households in the growth areas.
- Mechanisms for financing up-front capital investment in infrastructure and sufficient capacity within mainstream funding for public services to expand alongside housing growth are needed.
- Sufficient capital funding to support the provision of social, cultural and community facilities will be crucial for the social and economic success of the Growth Areas.

Delivery

- Consideration should be given to making greater use of Urban Development Corporations or other special purpose bodies with greater powers, resources and capacity to provide the strategic interventions necessary to create new sustainable communities.
- More focused and accountable leadership is required to co-ordinate the multiplicity of agencies responsible for the delivery of the Growth Areas.
- Responsibility and resources for social development needs to be allocated to agencies with the capacity to deliver support to new communities.
- Government must have capacity for monitoring delivery and comprehensive evaluations of each of the Growth Areas.

The Growth Areas are well placed to avoid past mistakes, but there are still important lessons that need to be taken on board to ensure their success. This paper sets out those lessons.

Introduction

It is a priority of the current Government to reduce regional imbalances in housing supply and demand in England. The Sustainable Communities Plan (ODPM, 2003) has identified four growth areas[1] where an additional 200,000 homes, over and above previous regional plan targets[2], will be delivered to reduce the shortage of housing in the south of England.

The most significant major housing growth programmes prior to the Growth Areas were the New Towns and Expanded Towns programmes. The large scale and focused approach proposed for the Growth Areas shares most in common with the New Towns. The Expanded Towns approach was more dispersed, and with the exception of Swindon and Basingstoke, the scale of growth was relatively modest. This paper identifies the key lessons from the New Towns programme that will be relevant to successful delivery in the Growth Areas. Although it looks at the programme as a whole, it focuses on New Towns located in the South of England as being most relevant to the Growth Areas.

The New Towns programme was a response to the housing shortage and poor housing conditions prevalent in urban areas after the Second World War. Over the course of the war almost a quarter of Britain's stock of 12.5 million homes had been damaged (Nuttgens, 1989). The population was growing and there were significant shortages of both materials and labour for building. The New Towns Programme was a significant part of the Government's plans to build new homes to address the shortage.

Even before the war had ended, concern was growing about poor housing conditions in urban areas. Government thinking about planning was heavily influenced by the Garden Cities of Letchworth and Welwyn that had been built following the ideal set out by Sir Ebenezer Howard in 1898. The plan for reconstruction of the Greater London area prepared by Professor Patrick Abercrombie in 1945 was predicated on decentralization to reduce overcrowding and encourage the development of industry outside of the capital. The plan proposed the development of ten new satellite towns 20–25 miles from London.

> **Key recommendations of the *New Towns Committee Report* (1945):**
> - New Towns should be located sufficiently far from their mother city at least 40km from London and 20km from other metropolises.
> - They should target a population of 20,000 to 60,000 inhabitants.
> - They should feature predominately single-family housing, at low densities.
> - They should be built, as far as possible, on quality greenfield sites, but outside areas of exceptional natural beauty, which had to be preserved.
> - A green belt should be created around the New Towns.
> - Housing should be organised in neighbourhood units around a primary and nursery school, a pub and shops selling staple goods, and a meeting-room for clubs and voluntary groups to meet.
> - The New Towns should seek to attract a balance of all socio-economic groups.
> - In order to be self-contained, the development corporation must offer every business moving into the new town one housing unit for each job created.

Following the end of the war, Lord Reith was appointed to chair a committee to examine how New Towns, along the lines suggested by Abercrombie, could be established 'as self-contained and balanced communities for working and living' (New Towns Committee, 1946). The committee proceeded at great haste and reported in July 1946, although the plans for designation of Stevenage, the first New Town, had by this stage already been announced.

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[1] The four Growth Areas are the Thames Gateway, Ashford, Milton Keynes-South Midlands and the London-Stansted-Cambridge Corridor.

[2] Current regional planning targets are for 1.4 million homes by 2016 for London, the South east and East of England. These targets are about to be revised by new regional plans.

The committee's recommendations (summarised in the box below) were very specific, including principles about what constituted self-contained and balanced communities and ranges for the ideal size of a New Town. The New Towns Act 1946 received royal assent just a week after the committee's final report was published. With the enabling legislation in place, 14 New Towns were designated between 1946 and 1950. Eight were around London and a further six in regional development areas in Northamptonshire, County Durham, Southern Scotland and South Wales. A further 13 were designated between 1961 and 1970.

Since designation the fortunes of each of the New Towns has varied considerably. The extent to which they succeeded in meeting their original objectives has also varied. The New Towns have been held up as an international exemplar of planning policy, and criticised as the antithesis of sustainable communities. As a new programme of large scale housing development begins, this paper highlights the successes and failures of the New Towns programme, and the lessons that they provide for the Growth Areas.

The table below highlights some of the key similarities and differences between the New Towns and the Growth Areas.

Comparison of the New Towns and Growth Areas Policies

The New Towns Programme	Sustainable Communities Plan
Similarities:	
• Objectives to increase housing supply, relieve housing pressures in overcrowded urban areas and provide good quality housing in specific industrial locations.	• Objective to achieve a 'step-change' in housing supply and accommodate economic growth.
• A national programme, although not fully joined-up with regional policy, part of wider housing growth targets.	• Part of a national strategy, with distinct regional objectives.
Differences:	
• Developed mostly on greenfield sites.	• Emphasis on brownfield development.
• Low density.	• Medium to high density.
• Intended to be self contained communities.	• Integrated with existing communities.
• Initial focus on decentralization of people and jobs away from London.	• Accommodating household and economic growth across three regions, alongside significant growth within London.
• Public sector led development.	• Public/Private partnership approach to development.
• The total target population increase for the English New Towns was over 1,500,000.	• Target increase in the number of homes in the Growth Areas is for over 200,000 homes by 2016.

The paper focuses on a number of themes that were key features of the New Towns Programme, and most relevant to the challenges that the Growth Areas face these are:

1. Balanced communities
2. Employment
3. Delivery
4. Commercial and social development
5. Monitoring and evaluation
6. Urban design

Lessons from each of these themes are drawn at the end of each section.

1   Balanced communities

Achieving a balanced or mixed community is widely seen as an important objective of planning, housing and communities policy. This was as true for the New Towns Programme in the 1940s, as it is for the Sustainable Communities Plan today.

Exactly what is meant by a "balanced community" is not very well defined by policy makers, but tends to presume a mix of people of different ages, household types and incomes. The concept of a "sustainable community", as defined by current policy includes the notion of balance, but also a wide range of other components, including economic, democratic, environmental and physical factors (ODPM, 2005). The main public policy mechanism for achieving balance is the provision of a diversity of housing types, in terms of size, tenure and cost within a given area.

The case for creating balanced communities is not based on idealised or utopian groupings. Rather, on the basis of powerful evidence which shows that where polarization has concentrated lower income and vulnerable people in an area, the resulting multiple deprivation becomes reinforcing and is difficult to address (Wilson, 1987, 1997; SEU 2001, 2004; Katz, 2004; Berube forthcoming). It is argued that poor neighbourhoods are not just a symptom of disadvantage, but also one of its causes. Concentrations of poor people tend to suffer from poor housing and environment and poor quality public services. This can go on to create stigma, which limits social networks and is linked to crime and anti-social behaviour (Fitzpatrick, 2004). Although, Gibbons *et al* (forthcoming) argue that while neighbourhood affects risk of crime strongly and educational outcomes modestly, it has no impact on employment. A wide range of Government programmes since the 1980s have sought to correct the problems of concentrated multiple deprivation (Imrie and Raco, 2003). Some of the causes of these problems are now recognised to have been exacerbated by the failure of earlier public policy programmes to avoid concentrating lower income households in the same areas (Page, 1993).

Recently there has been much focus on the problems that can arise in areas with high concentrations of social housing, which due to the limited supply of affordable housing and needs-based allocations policies include high proportions of vulnerable households and low-income families with children (Prime Minister's Strategy Unit/ODPM, 2005). The return to large scale, concentrated housing growth, where wholly new communities are being created, raises much broader questions about achieving the right balance.

To its credit, the New Towns Programme had the objective of creating balanced communities at its very core. Indeed it was specified in the Reith Committee's terms of reference. The Committee decided that the balanced communities in the New Towns should include all social classes. Partly, this was driven by the belief, prevalent in the 1940s and 1950s, that community membership (what might be called social networks in today's language) was weak within poor urban neighbourhoods (Bridge, 2002). Also, the post-war social optimism that dominated public policy at the time encouraged politicians to believe that the social class structure was dissolving.

In the New Towns it was hoped that, with the right mix of housing, tenures and community facilities, a "socially homogeneous community" would be created. There was a presumption that if the middle classes could be attracted to the New Towns they would provide a kind of social and cultural example to the masses of lower class urban residents relocated with them. These issues are explored further in section four.

Thinking on social networks and neighbourhoods has changed significantly. In the late 1950s, research in east London by Young and Willmot revealed that poor urban neighbourhoods had very strong supportive social networks which completely contradicted the assumptions of policy makers in the first half of the twentieth century (Young & Willmot, 1957). They argued that policies of decentralization had a detrimental effect on communities by breaking up those social networks.

So although the New Towns' pioneers should be applauded for setting out to achieve balanced communities from the outset, some of the assumptions underpinning their thinking were wide of the mark. Also, their concept of balance was exclusively focused on the issue of social class, in terms of

income and status and did not consider wider issues such as age, household types and race. Achieving the balanced mix of social class that they envisaged for the New Towns was to involve a mix of housing tenures and an appropriate mix of employment opportunities. The question of employment mix is examined below, but in housing terms, the objective of balance was never really achieved in the early New Towns.

In the first wave of New Towns development was delayed by the expenditure cuts in 1947/8 and competing demands from the wide range of reconstruction taking place after the war. This delayed house building, such that in Stevenage, where 3,000 homes had been projected by 1951, only 28 were built at that point (Orlans, 1952). When house building did get going the majority of homes provided were rented homes, built and owned by the New Town Development Corporations. Plots were made available for individuals or developers to encourage the building of private homes for sale. However, high building costs discouraged individuals, and developers were reluctant to speculatively build in the New Towns. Some of the New Town Development Corporations built houses for sale, but the labour and materials shortages that affected the cost of new homes made them expensive (Schaffer, 1970). This immediately limited the scope for providing the mix of tenures, and therefore social classes that Reith envisaged.

Furthermore, although the homes for rent were public housing, they were relatively expensive. The New Towns had to set rents that were "economic", which meant that they had to reflect the cost of building and ongoing maintenance. They were also subject to rent raising restrictions which limited future rent increases. The high cost of financing through sixty-year loans at high interest rates from the Public Loans Works Board meant that the initial rents were much higher than equivalent rents in local authorities (Aldridge, 1979).

The combination of the high rents, allocations policies (see below), and the lack of homeownership opportunities severely limited the profile of early residents. Right up to the 1970s the socio-economic profile of the New Towns was dominated by skilled manual workers (Cresswell & Thomas 1972; Aldridge 1979). In some of the New Towns around London, higher socio-economic groups began to move in as more opportunities for homeownership arose and the new industries that had moved to those New Towns included enough professional and management positions to support this (Schaffer 1970).

This relative lack of balance did not create any immediate problems for the New Towns themselves. However, the lack of balance mean that the New Towns did not provide direct relief to the housing pressures faced by London local authorities. The high rents and employment-linked allocations policies effectively barred lower income households from accessing the housing in the New Towns. Waiting lists in London for housing for rent remained persistently long in the post war period. Given that part of the rationale for Abercrombie's 1944 plan for decentralization was to provide relief for those suffering poor housing conditions in inner London, this was a significant failure to meet the original objectives of the New Towns. Essentially, at the end of the 1940s the Government faced a choice of whether need or employment should be the overriding determinant for allocations, and it opted for the latter. The London Local Authorities argued that a balanced community would still be achieved with a proportion of homes being set aside for people in need (Cullingworth, 1979). But this was rejected out of hand as being contrary to the principle of self-containment, with the supply of homes exactly matching the supply of jobs. This prevented the replication of inner city problems in the New Towns, but at the same time provided no relief for the badly housed poor that were left behind. It also precluded the possibility for economically inactive households to move to the New Towns. The new town vision of balanced communities did not have any room for retired, working age unemployed and disabled people.

The case for opening up access to the housing in New Towns was made again in the 1960s (Heraud, 1966), but it was not until the New Towns programme had been reviewed by the Commons Expenditure Committee in 1974 that priorities within the allocations policies of New Towns were amended to give greater priority to housing need, a full twenty-five years after the programme started (Aldridge, 1979).

In the case of tenure diversification to attract greater numbers of higher-income households, action was taken earlier. In 1967 a circular was issued by Richard Crossman to the New Towns to encourage them to move to a 50:50 split between renting and ownership. It was primarily aimed at the New Towns that were designated in the 1960s, which would achieve this balance through their planned intake and by allowing homes to be built by the private sector. In the older New Towns owner occupation was to be increased by sales to tenants. The policy was not coupled with as much pent-up demand or ability to buy New Towns homes as had been hoped. Many simply could not afford the cost of new town homes and some were frustrated by building societies' unwillingness to lend money for new town houses. The non-standard design and materials used in some of the houses made lenders question whether they would retain their value on resale (Aldridge, 1979).

Owner occupation in the New Towns did not take off until the Conservative Government and the new Minister Peter Walker instituted a policy offering tenants a 20 per cent discount on the purchase of their homes, as a pre-cursor to the later Right to Buy policy of the 1980s. The attractiveness of ownership was then accelerated by the Housing Finance Act 1972, which shifted the subsidy from the dwelling to keep rents low, to the individual as a rent rebate. This significantly narrowed the difference in costs between renting and ownership. Subsequently there was an explosion in house prices, which in turn created problems of affordability and also, with increasing interest rates, recent purchasers getting into difficulties (Aldridge, 1979). The upsurge in ownership was therefore shortly followed by a surge in demand for rented homes, so that when Labour was re-elected in 1974 a moratorium on new town house sales was called, and the Development Corporations reverted to building up their supply of rented homes. By 1976 a policy of allowing sales to tenants was re-introduced.

Lessons

The New Towns approach was underpinned by a strong vision for the types of new community that they sought to create, albeit one limited to a focus on a mix of social classes. This vision was influenced by the theories of Ebeneezer Howard and the practical need to relocate industries away from London. However, the balance of the communities in the New Towns was effectively determined by the prevailing economic conditions, the levels of public finance available to provide affordable housing and the material and labour supply constraints on housebuilding.
The privatisation of the residential development process that has occurred since the 1970s means that the challenges facing the Growth Areas are very different from the New Towns. However, there is a danger that the balance of communities in the Growth Areas could be determined by public expenditure constraints and the limitations of planning policy, rather than what is appropriate for community sustainability or addressing housing need. Particularly given the Sustainable Communities Plan does not set out a clear vision for the new communities in the Growth Areas.

Recent evidence shows that new affordable housing provision is currently falling, in spite of increases in the level of subsidy available for social housebuilding (Monk et al., 2005). The increasing proportion of social housing development taking place through planning agreements with private developers is important because it can deliver social housing in high cost areas in mixed tenure developments. However, it appears that this may be at the expense of overall numbers of social housing units. The challenge for the Growth Areas will be whether enough affordable housing can be delivered in mixed developments to achieve balanced communities and maximise their contribution to housing needs in the wider south east.

The key lessons that we might draw from this experience for the Growth Areas are:

1. The need for a vision for the new communities in the Growth Areas.
2. Priorities about who the additional housing is for should be part of comprehensive plans for delivery in each of the Growth Areas.
3. The need for clear objectives about the appropriate housing types, including social housing, which must be delivered to achieve mixed communities.

2   Employment

The relationship between housing and employment was also a key feature of the New Towns Programme, and is similarly an important dimension of the Growth Areas, although the relationship is hazier.

The decentralization proposed by Abercrombie's Greater London Plan was not just about moving people to new and better homes, but also relocating industry away from the capital. The objective for the New Towns was that they would be fully self-contained and that no one living there would need to commute to their place of employment.

The heavy emphasis on this approach was informed by the experience of the inter-war London County Council estates that were built in places like Becontree and Dagenham. Housing for over 100,000 people was built without any provision for local employment, or in fact schools, health care or other facilities. The rents were relatively high and the cost of travelling long distances to jobs across London was also high. This left these households with little disposable income, which combined with the dearth of local facilities, meant that they had a poor quality of life, albeit with better housing conditions (Durant, 1939; Young 1934).

The negative experience of these estates, and the rapid growth of London that had taken place between the wars, resulted in a strong aversion amongst planners to development that would require residents to commute. In the New Towns commuting was completely rejected, and they were planned to be 'self-contained and balanced communities for working and living' in a very literal sense (New Towns Committee, 1946). The New Towns took a very *dirigiste* approach to linking housing and employment growth, both at the strategic and individual level.

The Industrial Selection Scheme involved a complicated link between London Local Authorities waiting lists and the allocations scheme of the new town, via the Local Labour exchange or an employer. The only way to be allocated a home in a new town was to already have a job with an employer relocating there, or to apply for a job with an employer already located there. Initially, each of the New Towns around London had explicit relationships with some London Local Authorities. This meant that when an employer was seeking to recruit, the local labour exchange would contact those local authorities to see if they had anyone with the appropriate skills on their waiting list. These people would then be offered the opportunity to apply for the job, with the successful candidate becoming eligible for a home in the New Town. Given the complexity of the scheme and that this was the only route for people in need in London to access housing in the New Towns, it was not surprising that the New Towns provided such little relief to those suffering most from the housing shortage. Some of the London boroughs had hoped to be able to directly nominate people on their waiting lists to homes in Stevenage or Hemel Hempstead, and were very frustrated initially by the slow rate of housing growth, and then by the limitations of the housing allocation policies of the New Towns (Aldridge, 1979).

The scheme continued into the 1970s, although it changed name to the New and Expanded Towns Scheme. Increasingly employers bypassed this bureaucratic process for recruiting employees, and between 1961 and 1971 only 10 per cent of the migration to the London New Towns was planned (Commons Expenditure Committee, 1974). The scheme failed both as a means of selecting tenants and as a route for people in need to access homes in the New Towns. Most of the residents got jobs with New Towns employers through other routes and where then allocated a home at the employers request.

The 1950s saw a sustained period of growth in manufacturing and the New Towns had no difficulty in attracting relatively mobile manufacturers to locate there. The London New Towns were well placed to accept light engineering and electrical manufacturers from London (Luttrell, 1972). The prospect of a plentiful supply of decent housing for key workers and room for growth and development made the New Towns a more attractive option than London. The only brake on attracting industry was a lack of joined-up policy between the New Towns programme and the development areas policy governed by the Board of Trade. This resulted in some companies

experiencing problems in relocation. They could get planning permission for their new factories from the New Town Development Corporation without any difficulty, however, if the new town in question was outside the development areas, it could be harder for them to get an Industrial Development Certificate, which at the time it was necessary to have from the Board of Trade. These inconsistencies hampered the growth of some of the New Towns (Rodwin, 1956), but the level of expansion in manufacturing meant that these bureaucratic barriers did not derail New Towns growth altogether.

In addition to ensuring that the supply of homes and jobs in the New Towns was well balanced, the Reith Committee was concerned that there should be a diversity of employers so that their economies would not be over-dependent on just one source of jobs. In the case of the London New Towns this was successful, with many of them succeeding to attract office developments as the growth in manufacturing that sustained them in the early days fell away. Some of the other New Towns, built specifically to serve particular industries, such as Corby and Peterlee, have suffered as those industries have declined. Although the mixed economic strategy of the of the early London New Towns has been more successful, their performance has been mixed with some being significantly more deprived than the surrounding area (Gardiner, 2004). In these cases it may be that they have never truly overcome their tenure balance being dominated by social rented housing at the outset, and the unpopularity of their design and architecture.

The second generation New Towns, including Milton Keynes, Peterborough and Northampton have had more consistent economic performance (Gardiner, 2004), through a combination of being larger than the earlier New Towns, attracting employers from sectors that have achieved sustained growth, such as electronics, IT and financial services, and achieving the more balanced approach to new housing development, with a proportion of homeownership as well as rented housing. Although the later New Towns took a careful approach to managing the balance of jobs and housing supply as they developed, the rigid approach of their predecessors had been abandoned as unworkable and too exclusionary following the New Towns white paper.

Lessons

Unlike the New Towns, in the Growth Areas the goal is not to create self-contained new communities. Indeed, much of the debate about the Growth Areas has focussed on whether the proposed investment in transport infrastructure will be adequate to support the levels of commuting anticipated from the Growth Areas to regional economic centres. This approach is consistent with viewing the greater South East as an economic mega-region, with a highly integrated labour market, within which the success of the Growth Areas will depend heavily on the quality of the transport connections, particularly to existing economic centres. However, with an objective of creating mixed communities it will be important to develop a mixed economic strategy that can provide local jobs within the growth areas, including lower skilled, entry level employment and part-time jobs. It will also be essential that support for unemployed residents with poor skills and qualifications to access employment opportunities is provided. Ensuring that the Growth Areas are well connected to economic centres should not be at the expense of a strategy to ensure that, as well as housing growth, the Growth Areas become points of focus for economic and jobs growth.

The key lessons from the New Towns for economic policy in the Growth Areas are:

1. Housing growth must be linked to economic growth. The most successful New Towns were those with a broad economic base.
2. In order for new communities to be sustainable, strategies for developing mixed local economies are needed to ensure that there are a range of local jobs to meet the needs of mixed communities, as well as transport connections to provide access to regional economic centres.
3. Supporting the development of local economies in the growth areas should be a key priority for the Regional Development Agencies and local authorities.
4. Specific provision through the Learning and Skills Councils and Job Centre Plus to improve skills and support access to jobs for newly arriving and existing lower income households in the growth areas will be essential.

3 Delivery

The inception of the New Towns programme occurred during an unprecedented period of social optimism following the end of the Second World War. In spite of the scale of the problems the country faced, in terms of reconstruction there was enormous faith in the ability of the state to deliver solutions. The New Towns programme would have seemed like a very achievable proposition alongside the extension of the welfare state, a reformed state schools system and establishment of the National Health Service.

The delivery vehicles for the programme were the New Towns Development Corporations (NTDCs). These had what would today seem like swingeing controls and powers with virtually no accountability except to central Government. It was only within the climate of post-war reconstruction that such a statist policy response could have been conceived. It could be argued that it was the simplicity of the NTDC model, co-ordinating planning, housing, infrastructure and social development in a single body that was a significant factor in their ability to deliver so much growth. It could also be said that the overarching nature of the NTDC's powers, with no local accountability, led in part to some of the New Towns fundamental problems, particularly in urban design and architecture.

One of the key aspects of the powers of the NTDC was that they could purchase the land at present use value. This meant that designation had no effect on the price of the land for which compensation had to be paid. The Development Corporation thus got to benefit in all of the uplift in the value of the land arising from the proposed building of the new town.

The choice of sites for designation involved the balancing of a wide range of different factors. Inevitably, apart from choosing a location for its economic potential, some consideration may have been given to environmental issues. At the time the environmental lobby was less developed than it is now, and the objections to new town development occurring on greenfield sites often focussed on the loss of agricultural capacity (Sharp, 1972; Schaffer, 1970) rather than the case for protecting the countryside *per se*. Overall, the additional cost of developing brownfield sites and the legacy of Howard's garden city vision, of discrete settlements surrounded by countryside that influenced the recommendations of the Reith Commitee, meant that most were built on greenfield locations.

The powers of the NTDCs as both the planning authority and the landowner were sweeping, but they still needed to rely on local authorities for the provision of some infrastructure and services. The only exception to this being water and sewerage, for which the New Towns had powers to become the statutory agency for this purpose on a temporary basis, and local roads. The combination of the NTDCs being imposed on those local authorities without any accountability to them and the expenditure cuts imposed by central government at the beginning of the programme meant that relations between the New Towns and their host councils were not always cordial. These tensions were often brought into sharp relief over the issue of infrastructure (Aldridge, 1979). The conundrum of how to finance infrastructure in advance of getting any return from it was not properly addressed by those responsible for the New Towns, in both the first and later generations of New Towns.

A lack of direction from central Government meant that it was up to the NTDCs to thrash out complicated agreements with local authorities over the financing of infrastructure. This meant that each of the New Towns had to come to its own arrangements and this led to a range of different outcomes and much duplication of effort (Aldridge,1979). The problem for the local authorities was that they had to provide services and infrastructure in advance of the population. The gap between the expenditure having to be incurred and the resultant income from rates and subsequent additions to the Rate Support Grant from Government when the population increased was a significant problem for host local authorities. This was particularly acute in the second generation New Towns, when local authorities responsibilities had significantly increased and they were under pressure from central government to make cuts. The powers of the New Towns enabled them to make payments to compensate local authorities in such circumstances, but there was no guidance from central

Government as to how the level of compensation should be agreed and no specific funding was available to support it. This inevitably led to tensions between the New Towns and local government which delayed the provision of infrastructure (Schaffer, 1970).

The infrastructure problem was exacerbated by the failure of the central government departments responsible for the New Towns to liaise with relevant departments over the provision of hospitals, schools and roads when a new town was proposed (Expenditure Committee, 1974). Even during times of expenditure cuts officials responsible for the New Towns programme did not plead with other spending departments on behalf of the New Towns. Things had improved little by the time the second generation of New Towns were developing. For example, the lack of facilities for health care was as much a problem for Milton Keynes (Milton Keynes DC, 1975) as it had been for Stevenage.

The difficulty in delivering infrastructure did not hold the New Towns back indefinitely, but it is likely to have affected the quality of life for those early residents, for example, having to travel long distances to receive hospital treatment. The delays and difficulties agreeing the finance for the infrastructure would also have added to the overall costs of development.

The capital funding that enabled the NTDCs to invest in infrastructure and housing provision came in the form of 60 year loans from the Treasury fixed at the prevailing basic rate of interest. By 1970, the Treasury had advanced over £700 million to the New Towns (Sharp, 1972). The last of that money was paid back to the Government in 1999. Some of the New Towns produced significant surpluses from the sales of land and rented housing. Significant assets, usually in the form of land that had been bought by the New Towns but never developed were transferred back to the Government. Although some of those assets were sold a significant proportion were held by the Commission for the New Towns which later became English Partnerships. English Partnerships now has a lead role in the delivery of the Growth Areas.

The loans that were made to the New Towns gave them large amounts of capital to make upfront investment in land, house building and roads. However, their financing also created some problems. Although there was adequate capital for essential physical infrastructure, the growth in population in the New Towns often preceded public and private investment in basic services and facilities. Local authorities were often saddled with a significant cost burden of service provisions before rates and Rate Support Grant payments reflected the increase in population (Commons Expenditure Committee, 1974). The fixed rates of interest, which were very high for the second generation of New Towns designated during the 1960s, saddled the development corporations with significant debt servicing costs. The NTDCs were prohibited from borrowing money from any where other than the Treasury. In order to reduce these costs some New Towns entered into lease-and-lease back deals (Commons Expenditure Committee, 1974; Wells, 1972), in essence and early model of the current Private Finance Initiative. In later years the claw back arrangements in place on former new town assets, such as the receipts from the sale of rented homes, have put the local authorities that have inherited those assets at a disadvantage compared to other councils (TLR Select Committee, 2002). Furthermore the financial position of the New Towns was further undermined by the selling off of much of the public land holdings in the New Towns in 1980s and 1990s (Gardiner, 2004).

Lessons

The limitations of the Government's approach to delivery of the New Towns were the lack of accountability, joined up central Government and direction over the funding of infrastructure. Development is no longer led by the public sector and is now led by the private sector within the planning framework. The delivery vehicle for the New Towns, the NTDC was both the landowner and planning authority and therefore very powerful. In the case of the Growth Areas delivery will be

much more complicated, with a range of different agencies[3] having the responsibilities that the NTDCs had, working to develop much more complex sites, with a much greater degree of private sector involvement. In the Growth Areas delivery will be much more accountable at the local level. However, some of those involved in the NTDCs have commented that the Growth Area delivery vehicles do not compare favourably with the NTDCs, and have questioned whether they will be able to deliver the Growth Area's social and economic objectives (Gardiner, 2004).

Delivering sustainable communities on the scale proposed for the Growth Areas will be a significant challenge. The key lessons from the New Towns are:

The New Towns approach to delivering housing growth was only possible through the NTDCs. In the Growth Areas only very limited use is being made of the modern equivalent, Urban Development Corporations (UDCs), which are locally accountable. Consideration should be given to making greater use of UDCs, or other special purpose vehicles with greater powers, resources and capacity, as they provide a level of strategic intervention that is not available through normal approaches to planning and regeneration.
Joined-up Government for the Growth Areas is achieved through the Cabinet Committee for housing growth. However, there is a need for more focused leadership and accountability to co-ordinate the multiplicity of agencies responsible for successful delivery across the Growth Areas.
A mechanism for financing up-front capital investment in infrastructure which does not create unsustainable long term financial burdens on delivery agents is essential. There also a need to be sufficient capacity within mainstream funding for public services to expand alongside housing growth.

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[3] Delivery in the Growth Areas will depend on a range of different statutory bodies, including the ODPM (as the lead central Government department), local authorities, regional bodies, English Partnerships, the Housing Corporation, the Regional Development Agencies and special delivery vehicles including three Urban Development Corporations and a number of public-private partnerships.

4   Commercial and social development

As set out in the section on balanced communities, at the time of the Reith Committee, thinking about communities was dominated by the presumption that in our urban centres there was only weak community membership. The Reith Committee clearly struggled to avoid excessive paternalism stating that:

It is not possible, and even if it were it would not be wise, to prescribe the social and cultural pattern of new town.

Yet they went on to suggest the exact nature and number of cultural facilities, theatres, concert halls and art galleries that a town of a certain size of population would require. They even recommended the provision of a civic rather than a commercial cinema, to increase the proportion of documentaries shown in New Towns (New Towns Committee, 1946). Other social and cultural activities were ignored, but greyhound racing was positively singled out to be avoided for 'while there may be a demand, it would bring in its train consequences likely to be specially objectionable in a new town'. While there may have been some desire to avoid paternalism they were clearly unable to help themselves (Aldridge, 1979).

The specifics of the Reithian vision for the New Towns is to a certain extent academic, because they were not necessarily reflected in later practice or what the New Towns were actually in a position to deliver. However, the Reith Committee report did underpin a lot of the New Towns' approaches to social development. The report's overall approach also reflected a wider point about social policy at the time, which continued to dominate New Towns' thinking through to the 1970s. There was clearly a sense that with the right physical environment, employment opportunities and a mix of residents, seemingly to provide a positive social role model for the working classes, social homogeneity would be the long-term outcome. This very passive approach to addressing inequality, without any explicit redistribution of wealth, continued throughout the New Towns programme. Through the 1960s as Labour became more accepting of the mixed economy and the Conservatives of centralized direction of capital and labour the New Towns became apolitical (Pahl & Winkler, 1974).

During the economic expansion that took place during the 1960s policy for the New Towns remained dominated by responding to employment growth. The view was that the New Towns should accommodate the more affluent society rather than lower the barriers for those on lower incomes to access housing (Aldridge, 1979). This reflected the thinking in both main political parties, that the more that could be done to foster economic growth, the faster the rate of improvement in the circumstances of the poor. This passive approach, described by Willmot and Young (1973) as stratified diffusion, and developed into the 'trickle down' theory in the 1980s, has since been shown to be ineffective at addressing the income poverty of the poorest 10 per cent (Hills, 2004).

Although the Reith Committee set out some very specific recommendations about social and cultural facilities, given the delays and financial difficulties in delivering some of the fundamental elements of infrastructure, commercial facilities were not prioritised. Town centres and commercial development had to wait until sufficient housing development had taken place to make them economically viable. The New Towns were pioneers of pedestrianised shopping centres and given the changes in shopping habits in the 1950s, commercial developers were soon to realise the potential that the New Towns presented (Schaffer, 1970).

In the later New Towns the shopping centre model was sufficiently tried and tested so that it was relatively easy to attract private investment. In Milton Keynes the shopping centre was built through a partnership between the development corporation and a pension fund, such that 100,000m^2 was developed in a single phase. The centre was very successful, and attracted shoppers from other towns and cities. However, it was so successful that it undermined the development of retail sub-centres and more local shopping facilities, contrary to the planners' objective of avoiding over-concentration of retail development (Edwards, 2001).

Given the level of concern that the Reith Committee had expressed about the social and cultural aspects of the communities in New Towns, it is not surprising that this was a significant focus for the New Town Development Corporation's activities. This was reflected in the master plans that they drew up, investment in social infrastructure and staff within the corporations whose role it was to foster social development.

In the master plans housing and services were arranged in neighbourhoods. Some interpreted this as a translation of the Howard's Garden City concept into public policy (Bell and Newby, 1976). In fact the Reith Committee did not support the idea of social development at the neighbourhood level. Their view of neighbourhoods was as:

' a natural and useful conception, but it should not be thought of as a self-contained community of which the inhabitants are more conscious than the town as a whole' (New Towns Committee, 1946).

The pragmatic approach to organising New Towns in neighbourhoods was just to ensure that there was an appropriate level of services available nearby. If even if the neighbourhood system was purely a pragmatic conception, alongside other aspects of the urban design in the New Towns it may have in fact contributed to the sense of isolation in the New Towns.

The corporations employed significant numbers of staff in social development. Their aim was to help foster social networks between the new residents and help them to settle into their new homes. Undoubtedly this would have been important service in the early days, as families who have moved long distances, faced the prospect of moving to an unfurnished new home, surrounded by other houses still being constructed and possibly without any local shops, services or public transport. The media often included stories about the problems of loneliness and adjustment faced by families earning the tag of "new town blues" (Pitt, 1972). Social development continued to be a significant function in the development corporations for many years. The areas of activity that they were engaged in fell into three broad categories:

- Community development – encouraging the engagement in sport and social activities, including supporting new residents;
- Social planning – inputting into the planning decisions to ensure that they were sensitive to social issues;
- Information and participation – in spite of their lack of accountability, ensuring that residents were involved in planning decisions (Brooke Taylor, 1972).

The effectiveness of the investment in staff to support the development of social networks has never been formally evaluated, yet the fact that the later New Towns still had a strong emphasis on social development would suggest that it was perceived as having benefits (Gardiner, 2004).

The work of the social development officers in tackling social isolation in the New Towns was made harder by the absence of shops and amenities. In the early years of the New Towns the private sector would not invest in shops and leisure facilities like pubs, dance halls and cinemas until there was sufficient population to support them. Upfront investment in the essential infrastructure meant that other investments from the public sector had to wait, although tenants meeting rooms could be provided through the housing revenue account. Funding for community centres, sports facilities, parks and playing fields was not available until in 1963 when a major amenity fund was introduced. This provided £4 *per capita* of incoming population for the new town development corporation to invest. Large scale projects like sports centres were often delivered through partnerships with local authorities (Aldridge,1979).

Lessons

The paternalistic nature of the New Towns thinking is very different from current practice in relation to communities and neighbourhoods. However, the scale of the Growth Areas and the bringing together of new and existing residents in the new communities that will be created, will provide a significant challenge for local agencies. The ODPM's five year plan sets out a definition of a

sustainable community which places significant emphasis on cohesion and local culture (ODPM, 2005). In the New Towns there was a strong emphasis on related issues, and a clear responsibility on the development corporations to deliver this though social development officers. Their progress in achieving these goals was undermined by the lack of capital available for investment in social infrastructure. The lack of social and commercial facilities would have contributed to some of the stigma that built up about the New Towns, which in the long run impacted on their ability to attract further investment.

The key lesson for the Growth Areas is that large scale housing growth requires skills and capacity to address social development:

1. Responsibility and resources for social development needs to be allocated to agencies with the capacity to deliver support to new communities,
2. Capital funding to support the provision of social, cultural and community facilities will also be essential to the creation of sustainable communities.

5   Monitoring and evaluation

One of the key weaknesses in the New Towns programme was the absence of any formal monitoring and evaluation. Given that the New Town's model was seen as a bold social experiment, it is surprising that more was not done to evaluate its successes and failures. If more had been done in this area then it might have helped the later New Towns to avoid some of the mistakes that were made in the first New Towns twenty years earlier.

The lack of monitoring and evaluation was simply due to there not being enough resources within central government dedicated to the New Towns programme to undertake research. At the inception of the New Towns programme a dedicated research and intelligence unit was established, but was then cut in the rounds of expenditure cuts at the end of the 1940s and was never replaced. Similarly resources were not dedicated to commissioning a comprehensive independent study of the programme from outside Government. Most of the information about the New Towns comes from research that the New Towns carried out themselves and data in their annual reports. Without adequate resource in central Government this data was never properly collated. The lack of rigorous analysis of the programme was exacerbated by the fact that the main body outside of Government with an interest in the New Towns, the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA), were uncritical cheerleaders for the policy (Aldridge, 1979).

Aside from the review of ownership of New Towns in the 1960s, it was not until the 1970s that the policy was comprehensively evaluated. In 1974 the Government issued a consultation paper on the future of the New Towns. The conclusions of this were to leave the policy largely as it was. The only significant recommendations were a suggested approach to avoiding the tensions between NTDCs and their host local authorities, and that the self-containment policy be relaxed to allow some allocations to be made to people in housing need. Otherwise the consultation document has been described as bland, imprecise and self-justifying (Aldridge, 1979).

A more exacting examination of the New Towns programme was undertaken by the Commons Expenditure Committee in 1974. The committee took a fundamental look at the overall objectives of the programme, the process for deciding to go ahead with an individual project and the relationship between New Towns, central and local agencies and the potential for further applications for the New Towns model (Expenditure Committee, 1974). The report was highly critical of the vagueness surrounding the programmes objectives and the process of decision making prior to designation. Most of all, it criticised the lack of any analysis by which to judge the success of the New Towns or to measure the social and economic opportunity costs of the programme. By this time the responsibility for the New Towns rested with the Department of the Environment. Its explanation to the committee for the lack any such analysis was the cost, and a lack of faith in the mechanisms available to quantify social benefits.

Lessons

The lack of ongoing formal evaluation of the New Towns undermined the ability of the later New Towns to learn from the mistakes made and difficulties faced at the beginning of the programme. Given the scale of investment and the long term nature of the growth area plans it will be essential that there is sufficient monitoring of the Growth Areas to help inform delivery.

The key lessons for the Growth Areas are:

1. The need for specific monitoring provisions to be put in place so that progress in delivery can be measured.
2. The need for comprehensive evaluations of each of the Growth Areas against policy objectives.

6   Urban design

The aspect of the New Towns programme that it is perhaps most in the public consciousness is their urban design. The New Town model provided planners and architects working for the development corporation with a unique opportunity to plan and design a whole new conurbation more or less from scratch. Some of the debates surrounding the design of housing in the New Towns are to an extent being repeated today.

In the early New Towns the housing that was built was predominantly two storey houses with private gardens. The fact that the development corporations either had their own architects or employed a single private practice to design the houses gave the early New Towns a particularly monotonous character. The combination of the lack of variety in housing forms with the desire to surround housing with large amounts of open space, resulted in very low densities. This was driven by the fact that the New Towns concept was rooted in Howard's Garden City vision, the preference of people leaving the overcrowded inner cities for houses with their own gardens and that it was cheaper to build at lower densities.

In the 1950s the New Towns were criticised by architects for not being towns at all, rather monotonous sprawling housing estates (Richards, 1953). They argued that the suburban nature and low housing density of the New Towns undermined the new town's social objectives. There followed a fierce debate between the urbanist architects and the town planners wedded to the Garden City model.

The New Towns were seen as an opportunity to experiment with housing design and layout. On the whole these experiments have not stood the test of time. An example of this related to the laudable objective to reduce the risk of traffic accidents by separating car and pedestrian access to homes. The design concept originated in the US where it was pioneered in a development called Radburn in New Jersey. Under this layout the front of the houses face each other and are only accessible on foot. Provision for cars is at the rear of the house. This layout sounded good in theory, but in practice was a failure. Children tended to play in the car access space, defeating the object of the design. The inward looking groups of houses created a claustrophobic space with little privacy, and yet the pedestrian access made them vulnerable to crime (Evans, 1972; Transport, Local Government and Regions Committee, 2002; Gardiner, 2004).

Some attempts were made to avoid the mistakes of the early New Towns in the later developments. In Milton Keynes a greater diversity of housing designs were sought by employing a greater number of architects, and aiming for a greater mix of housing types and densities, with the hope of supporting a more diverse population (Gardiner, 2004).

Even so mistakes were still made. Milton Keynes is perhaps best known for its grid system layout. Originally the intersections of the roads were planned to include traffic light junctions, with 30 mph speed limit on the roads, allowing for plenty of side roads to branch off the main grid into residential areas, or to access schools or shops. Development was planned to be concentrated along the grid roads, and allowing areas to overlap, rather than being confined to discrete neighbourhoods as in the first New Towns (Llewelyn-Davies, 1972). At the time there was a significant increase in the use of cars, and projections had been made for further increases in car use in the future. Where people had the choice to travel by car, it was thought that they would be likely to prefer to do so rather than use public transport. This encouraged the development corporation to abandon the original plan, and allow faster speeds (60 mph) on the grid roads, with roundabout intersections to reduce journey times.

This significantly changed the character of the whole city (Edwards, 2001). The faster roads meant that there could be fewer side roads between intersections. Routes on and off the grid system had to be via slip roads. The amount of land that was set aside for the faster roads had to be increased, and earth mounds and heavy tree planting along the road were needed to reduce noise. This meant that rather than overlapping development along the grid roads, development took place within the grid

rather than along it. This meant that the residential developments were separated from each other by high speed roads and lots of landscaping.

Furthermore, the original planners' aspirations for heterogeneity in housing types and densities were frustrated. The homes built within the grid spaces were of low density, and similar types within each development. Private builders responded to perceived consumer preference for living in communities with similar houses and therefore income groups. Some grid spaces were developed with luxury homes at very low densities. The social housing developed in Milton Keynes was also built at low densities because the cost control provisions for subsidised housing required by the Department of the Environment at the time forced them to do so (Edwards, 2001). Ultimately, this meant that the plans failed to meet the original objectives of having less uniform design and more socially mixed communities. Also, the road system served to isolate the communities from each other and the low densities made it impossible to support public transport.

The legacy of urban design problems that the New Towns have inherited is worsened by the failures of innovative materials and housing design that were employed in the new towns. Many of the New Town local authorities now face extensive repairs, refurbishment and remodelling costs to overcome these problems. Also, the low density nature of the housing and the layout of communal green space in some neighbourhoods has led to concerns about personal safety and anti-social behaviour (Transport, Local Government and Regions Committee, 2002).

Lessons

The New Towns approach to urban design, which tended to be both autocratic and experimental, has undermined their performance and created some significantly problematic legacies for those communities and their local authorities. The responsibility for some of those problems lies with Government, as well as the development corporations, as spending constraints encouraged low density development and explicit directives to employ non-standard building techniques contributed to some of the major design and materials failures that have affected the New Towns, particularly the housing. Fundamentally some aspects of the urban design in New Towns frustrated the development of sustainable communities.

There are many parallels in current debates about housing and urban design and those that were taking place during the 50s, 60s and 70s. The key lessons from the New Towns are:

- The need to provide housing at higher densities;
- The drive for innovative design and minimising building and materials costs must be balanced against neighbourhood quality.
- The need to secure buy-in from the private sector to developing mixed communities.

Conclusions

Many of the issues that the Government, the NTDCs and local authorities grappled with in delivering New Towns are similar to those that will need to be addressed in the Growth Areas. Their successes and failures provide the following important lessons for the Growth Areas policy and its delivery.

Community

- A vision of who the housing in the Growth areas is for, and the types of new communities to be created, is needed.
- Comprehensive delivery plans with clear objectives about who is going to live in the Growth Areas are required. They should to set out the appropriate range of housing types, including social housing, which need to be delivered within mixed communities, as a guide to planning decisions;
- The provision of housing at higher densities, in high quality neighbourhoods, must not be compromised by the drive to reduce building costs.

Economy

- Strategies for developing mixed local economies in the Growth Areas to ensure that there are a range of jobs to meet the needs of mixed communities, should be a key priority for the Regional Development Agencies and local authorities;
- Learning and Skills Councils and Job Centre Plus must be given resources to improve skills and support access to jobs for newly arriving and existing lower income households in the growth areas.
- Mechanisms for financing up-front capital investment in infrastructure and sufficient capacity within mainstream funding for public services to expand alongside housing growth are needed;
- Sufficient capital funding to support the provision of social, cultural and community facilities will be crucial for the social and economic success of the Growth Areas.

Delivery

- Consideration should be given to making greater use of Urban Development Corporations or other special purpose vehicles with greater powers, resources and capacity to provide the strategic interventions necessary to create new sustainable communities;
- More focused and accountable leadership is required to co-ordinate the multiplicity of agencies responsible for the delivery of the Growth Areas;
- Responsibility and resources for social development needs to be allocated to agencies with the capacity to deliver support to new communities.
- Government must have capacity for monitoring delivery and comprehensive evaluations of each of the Growth Areas.

On many of these issues the Growth Areas are much better placed to succeed than the New Towns programme. In particular, with a Cabinet Committee established to oversee delivery in the Growth Areas the prospects for a joined up approach within Government are good. Delivery will also be much more accountable at the local level. However, community balance and development, employment and urban design are likely to prove as much a challenge to the Growth Areas as they did for the New Towns. The likelihood of successfully overcoming these challenges will be significantly improved if these lessons from previous policy are taken on board.

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