RSA

Action and Research Centre

Developing socially productive places

Learning from what works: lessons from British Land – RSA conference

July 2014

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About this paper

This paper reflects the insights generated from the RSA's conference on April 2nd 2014 – *Developing Socially Productive Places*.

This project has been kindly supported by British Land. British Land owns, manages, develop and finances a portfolio of retail, office and residential property across the UK

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Foreword

This paper explores the relationship between the physical and social aspects of community-building and place-making. It invites local authorities, developers, communities and businesses to deepen their understanding of what makes places good for people in the long term.

Content is drawn from a conference organised by the RSA with the support of British Land and held in April 2014. *Developing Socially Productive Places* brought together perspectives from over 100 professionals from a wide range of organisations. Drawing on examples of good practice, shared at the conference by expert speakers, we looked at approaches to policy making, engagement and metrics that might support a 'socially productive' built environment.

In essence, social productivity is the additional social value that can be created through better relationships between citizens, society, business and public services,[1] a concept created by the 2020 Public Services Commission and developed at the RSA. Socially productive places are neighbourhoods and districts where people are enabled individually and collectively to meet their own needs and achieve their aspirations for issues which matter to them. They require a system of physical assets – homes, streets, open spaces, shops, workplaces and community facilities – which function together in ways that respect and broaden the social and economic networks through which we live, work and play.

It can be helpful to see the system of physical assets provided by the development industry as the 'hardware' on which social and economic activity takes place, from household to multinational level. People, institutions, organisations and firms develop the 'software' applications: working arrangements and patterns of activity which ultimately produce social and economic value. For example, a theatre is useless without the groups and companies which perform.

With some notable exceptions, the property and development industry has struggled to quantify the value of the relationship and the nature of interaction between the 'hardware' and 'software' of socially productive places. Building assets for community use alongside development is often an afterthought; considered a social sweetener or an extractive tax on top of the economic basis for development. This is short-sighted. Long-term property value is driven by the long-term economic relevance of an asset. Remaining relevant in the long-term requires adaptability – the ability to support updated software.

Many have been trying for a long time to ensure that the development industry delivers the best possible impact and that

planning supports this. But experience shared at the conference highlighted the aspiration gap that remains. Fostering culture change is not easy; the capacity to develop and apply innovative solutions is stifled in a climate where public finances face unprecedented pressure and developers are emerging from years of market uncertainty.

Reflecting on the different context for change in the public and private sector, this paper challenges and supports the next generation of developers and local authorities to develop new ways of working with local communities and governments, outlining the value of insight into local networks.

Section 1 provides an on overview of how planning and development relates to the communities and places which host and support the process of change in the built environment. Section 2 draws on the keynote speech of former housing minister Mark Prisk MP at the conference, to outline key challenges for the coming decades.

Featuring examples from practice presented at the conference, Section 3 illustrates how progressive approaches can support socially and economically valuable outcomes at different stages of the development process – from engaging communities in planning to evaluating impact on well-being.

Section 4 draws conclusions from the evidence and outlines a long-term agenda for generating the experience necessary to develop socially productive places, and provides references to further resources. We conclude that progress will only be made if both public and private sectors, individuals and community groups, collaborate in new ways.

Finally, we suggest several opportunities to learn from existing and emerging practice, which will inform the RSA's programme of work on place, communities and public services.

This paper challenges and supports the next generation of developers and local authorities to develop new ways of working with local communities and governments, outlining the value of insight into local networks

A message from British Land, Chris Grigg

Our research into 30 years of development at Regent's Place – a large central London mixed use campus – was an opportunity to explore what is transferrable elsewhere. And the research did more than answer the question of whether a development created in partnership with the local community can create trickle-down benefits for that community. Crucially, it showed that these social benefits can also actually bring commercial benefits.

Our challenge is transferring what worked in Regent's Place to other cities and neighbourhoods. How can we all demonstrate to local communities that they will benefit from physical investment? How can we create organisations and community partnerships which work with us to direct the shape and uses of places? And are there other models of accountability and transparency to consider? We are also grappling with how we can improve the local economic benefits of our construction and property management activity; we want to explore better ways of supporting local jobs, production and skills.

We partnered with the RSA to learn how we can better invest our time and resources into local communities, creating places that benefit local people.

Planning, development and the power of communities

During a period when property values are rising in most parts of the UK and development activity is picking up, a key concern of local authorities and other accountable bodies is that economic growth must benefit residents while improving public finances.

One dimension of developing socially productive places involves supporting local people to engage with development as a means of addressing doorstep issues such as employment, transport and provision of health and education locally.

A socially productive place would build community capacity to benefit from and drive growth, and increase resilience to shocks and the ability to adapt together to new circumstances. As demonstrated through the RSA's Connected Communities' programme of action research, our social networks play an important role in determining our ability to create change and our influence over the decisions that affect us.[2]

The networks which link people together into communities operate at several scales, from local to global. New technologies provide new platforms for social and economic exchange at a global scale, connecting people and places at an unprecedented speed.

Global communication trends are affecting planning and development of the built environment

Peer-to-peer, collaborative networks – empowered by new communication technologies –increasingly enable us to access resources and social networks, providing new platforms online and offline for interaction. At the same time, many people are demanding 'real life' leisure experiences which are perceived as authentic and represent values alternative to dominant global corporate identities.

In some cases, the development and redevelopment of manmade environments is reflecting and driving social and economic change. For example, in the UK, retail development is changing in response to the growth in internet shopping. We are seeing developers add cultural facilities – theatres next to office blocks and cinemas and restaurants in retail parks – and brands such as Asda adopting a "community venturing" approach, forming partnerships with charities and public services. There is also growing and sustained interest in the imperative for buildings to reduce their contribution to climate change and their exposure to the risks climate change poses.

In other cases, planning and development has been slow to adapt. In a networked world, traditional models of ownership are being challenged and people are finding ways of utilising spare capacity in the built environment.

Airbnb was established in 2008 and has since grown to be the largest global network of short-term rental accommodation, with 500,000 private properties available to rent for business trips and holidays. Many authorities are seeking to incorporate this new business model within existing taxation and regulation frameworks developed for the hotel industry – without much success. Adopting the language of the "sharing economy", Airbnb calls itself a "community marketplace" – one in which many users of accommodation also provide accommodation to others. Other networks, such as SparePlace, started by RSA Fellow Dan Thompson, are applying this logic to commercial and creative spaces including shops and offices.

People rely on the built environment to provide the 'hardware' on which to live their lives

As well as housing, and other buildings in which to produce and consume, infrastructure networks connect places to one another and service them with utilities. Ensuring that people's needs are met requires developers, and local planning authorities, to protect the interests of the public, including neighbours to new development.

Ensuring that developments function well together with infrastructure as a system is the role of spatial planning. Ensuring that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts is a broader process of place-making. Successful place-making requires an understanding of how people, households and community networks respond to and use the opportunities afforded by the built environment.

Socially productive places can support well-being and prosperity for the people that live, work and play there through intelligent design. Well-designed buildings, streets, and neighbourhoods can promote the social interactions that enhance trust, cohesion and inclusion. Economically, good place design supports business connectivity and innovation. For the individual citizen, a well-designed, socially productive place can be the difference between disengaging with education and training, and connecting with the

networks and resources that enable lifelong learning. Equally, the conditions of the built environment can constrain opportunities if facilities are inadequate to meet demand or too prescriptive and inflexible to changing needs. LSE's work on "ordinary streets" has shown that adaptable low-cost premises for retail and commerce play a crucial role in community development and social mobility. This can be of value to diverse groups of people on the same high street simultaneously, and especially valuable for immigrant communities.

Planning should be thought of as a frontline service

Development is one of the most powerful drivers of local political engagement, and therefore the planning process represents a significant gateway to stronger community relations and dialogue on a range of issues.

Investing in planning can support other public sector objectives in housing, education and economic health, and pro-actively strengthen relationships between developers, incoming people, businesses and existing communities. Ultimately the success of a development should be judged by its impact on those who use it, and its ability to contribute to a broader set of social and economic outcomes.

As British Land's recent study into social and economic impact has shown,[3] the impact of development in one part of the country can support

hundreds of jobs at the other end of the country. Modern methods of construction will increasingly involve off-site pre-fabrication. The challenge for planning is that the costs and benefits of development are not shared equally among stakeholders, and often extend beyond the site of development. The complexity of the challenge comes from the need to involve different stakeholder groups at different scales in negotiating the inherent trade-offs over the long-term.

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Conference summary: challenges for the built environment

This section summarises the principle challenges for planning and development, as tabled at the *Developing Socially Productive Places* conference in Mark Prisk MP's keynote speech. Direct quotations are italicised.

Mark Prisk's full speech is available on YouTube at bit.ly/markpriskatthersa

1. Density

Development needs to be at higher density to be viable (financially) and sustainable (in environmental terms). But existing communities often fear crowding and congestion, poor quality high rise buildings, and loss of historic character. The challenge is to demonstrate that density will allow for better urban infrastructure – for example, more frequent buses or additional facilities at expanded local schools.

"We will need to show people that when we build to a greater density, it's desirable for … the wider community."

Policymakers need to do more to develop frameworks in which communities, developers and councils can sustain long term partnerships. Formalised, structured neighbourhood planning agreements are not always the only answer, nor are legal transactions such as Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payments. Planning needs to be seen as a process to achieve social and economic objectives *through* development, and more than simply a process of gathering contributions that pay for their objectives elsewhere.

A positive framework would help build trust, setting out roles and responsibilities, and sharing risks and rewards. In the US, Community Benefits Agreements are legally binding, community groups sign alongside developers.

A more transparent and democratic approach to allocating Section 106 payments would maximise benefits for communities, at the same time as reassuring developers that money was being used as intended and not as a proxy tax to plug holes in local government finance.

2. Flexibility

The planning system, and land use regulation, needs to allow buildings to change in how they are used over time, responding to changing needs, but ensuring an overall balance of supply. The challenge is to practice thoughtful and evidenced flexibility in the management of land use over time.

"Those of you who are investors or owners will reel from the idea of broad, mixed-use asset classes. However isn't it time to recognise how people's lives are changing, and not leave these assets increasingly vulnerable to becoming redundant?"

A silver lining during the economic downturn was the emergence of successful 'meanwhile' temporary uses such as 'pop-up' shops (see text box below), supported by initiatives such as the Coming Soon Club (in Wembley, London). Developing places involves initiatives big and small, temporary and long-lasting. Development does not always have to come from developers. In this era following the financial crisis, transition should be considered a structural feature of the way places will be built, with a new set of tools and approaches that deal with this uncertainty. Creativity, appropriation, and a rediscovery of the ability of citizens to shape their everyday spaces are highlighting the benefits of emergent and adaptive approaches. Support for such approaches is often missing in long-term masterplans.

3. Balance public and private interests

When community groups come together to create changes to the built environment, this should often be seen as a positive indicator of social productivity. Authorities should consider the merits of community ownership of assets, or any vehicles which secure long-term stewardship. Building and maintaining high-quality public realm is expensive, but privatising public space is not the answer. The challenge is how to deliver public good with private investment. We need to scale-up innovative investment and funding vehicles such as Tax Increment Financing and Business Improvement

Borneo Sporenburg, Amsterdam

Districts which balance public and private interests.

"So what does it mean for a space to be public? And how do we square private ownership and public access, in either new settlements, or urban renewal schemes?"

At its best public space stitches together private institutions to provide a sense of place which is greater than the sum of its parts. Providing small-scale open space in housing developments has been shown to encourage pro-social behaviours between neighbours. Given the ability, residents can appraise and propose successful open space solutions.[4] Inspiring urban design can be generated by setting a stimulating design code, as took place in Borneo Sporenburg in Amsterdam's docklands, which allowed for private housing with creativity and expression within a high density framework of public space.

Accessible public realm is an important feature of socially productivity places – places designed to support social and economic connectivity. This is particularly important for vulnerable groups such as new immigrants and less mobile older people. Public facilities such as parks and playgrounds are where neighbours form relationships. Informal associations to supervise, support and campaign for the maintenance of such facilities provide an important basis for expressing ownership of space.

Urbanists have noted the public behaviours which provide whimsical indicators of places supporting social life: the destinations people choose for first dates, places where children play safely but unsupervised. Large and enduring institutions and infrastructure facilities also play a key role. Developers could learn more from locations like the school gate as an informal social space, and many local authorities appreciate the importance of welcoming arrival gateways to a place; the first impressions created for visitors at bus and train interchanges.

Further devolution of powers means local neighbourhood planning groups are taking on new responsibilities. They need capacity and foresight to

build communities sustainably over time alongside private interests, at a scale ample to meet the demands of future generations. Both planning and development are in and of themselves processes which forge strong community identity, and can bring people together, forging social capital.

"The final challenge is how can we empower people to create lasting communities? It's that social side, less tangible but just as important, which acts as the glue that binds a community together. Now all too often this is the exception not the rule. We need to change this, developers, community leaders and politicians alike."

Boundary Estate, Shoreditch, London
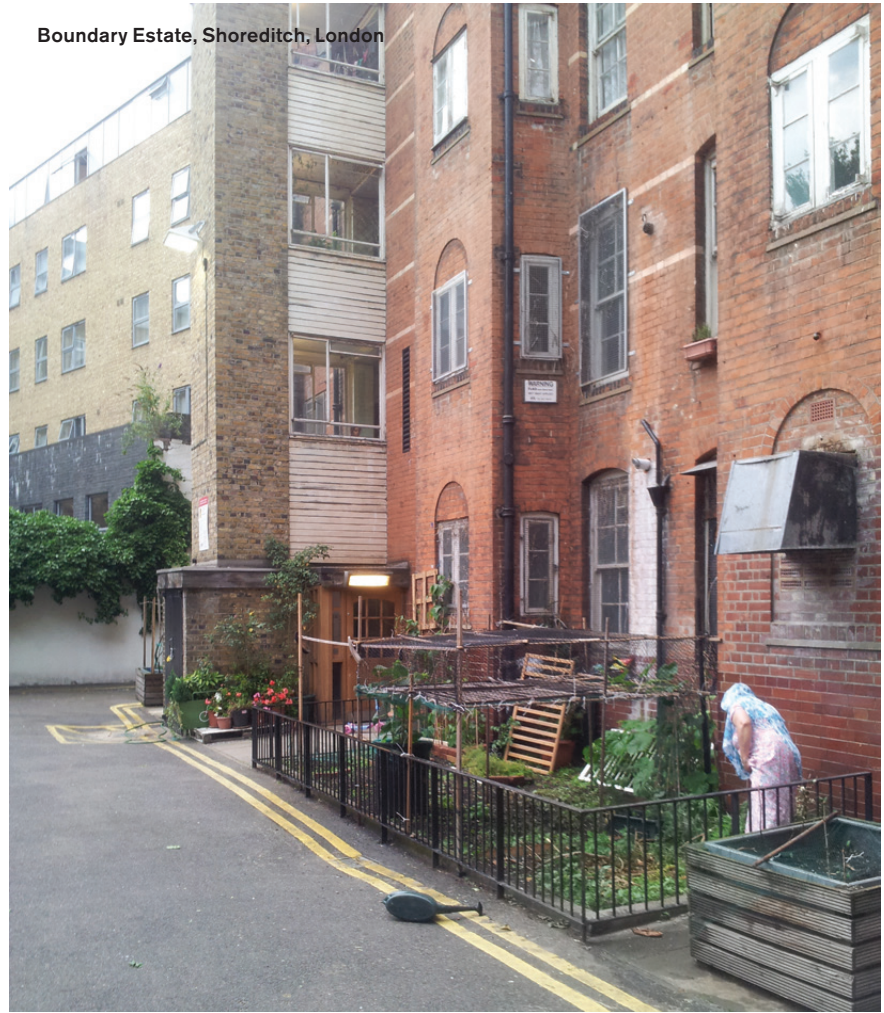
Pop-up and meanwhile uses allow for temporary experiments to see what works. These often include commercial uses, and can catalyse new local business networks as they feature lower barriers to entry, that encourage local people to take ownership and initiative. Great value can come from small urban spaces in which groups can engage and inform one another, and take collective action. For example, public consultations by local authorities may take place on pavement space near to a busy pedestrian crossing. Small plots of green space can be adopted and managed by residents associations to provide pocket parks, gardens, and sanctuary.

Conference summary: learning from experience

Engaging people in planning

Birmingham's Big City Plan

Waheed Nazir is Director of Planning and Regeneration at Birmingham City Council. His full presentation is available at bit.ly/RSAsummary31

Local authorities and neighbourhoods draft and approve planning documents which outline the policies governing development, and developers then seek permission for schemes to match the aspirations of these plans. Lessons from Birmingham City Council show that in preparing masterplans and development proposals, if you treat communities with respect, openness and transparency, much more is achieved. Productive dialogue in the face of opposition requires trust that planners are not in the pockets of developers but are concerned with delivering sustainable growth.

Most objections to Green Belt release are valid concerns about bringing forward infrastructure investment in time for proposed housing growth. Plans must clarify funding timescales and responsibilities, and use creative investment vehicles (such as Enterprise Zone investment in Paradise Circus).

People want to shape the plan, not write the plan. Conventional neighbourhood planning requires intensive resourcing which is often not sustainable. Most communities are much more interested in the immediate challenges they face than longer-term or broader growth pressures. Understandably, their focus is on fine-grain issues – improving lighting and referencing the authentic local heritage of existing communities. A focus on a high quality environment – clear routes where people felt safe – was therefore important for public support and business footfall.

Most planning documents are a struggle to read. Birmingham decided to simplify and clarify the message. The plan was about expanding strength of the city centre into wider areas, using the distinct character of individual areas such as the Jewellery Quarter. Getting the support of local politicians means explaining things by reference to the long-term outcomes, not in land-use planning terms.

The Big City Plan is about setting clear principles and focusing on deliverable projects. The development community wants to see clarity of vision.

Articulating what the city wants to achieve is more important than the planning status of a masterplan. Birmingham site- and neighbourhood-specific plans are now falling into place guided by the principles of the Big City Plan. Bringing education and housing within the planning department provides real integration to match development with social infrastructure.

Co-producing development with long-term stewardship

Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust at Derwenthorpe

Nigel Ingram is Director of Development at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation & Housing Trust. His full presentation is available at bit.ly/RSAsummary32

Experience from Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust's (JRHT) Derwenthorpe development demonstrates how the social, financial and environmental impacts of new development relate to one another. Derwenthorpe reflects principles reaching as far back as New Earswick, started in 1902. New Earswick aimed to foster social cohesion for workers in York, not only through new affordable housing, but through new governing bodies with a focus on creating a sense of community. Derwenthorpe – an urban extension at the edge of York for 540 homes – drew on this heritage in its ambition to provide affordable housing and create

a sense of place through quality design at high environmental standards.

The trade-offs generated debate before spades hit the ground. Land identified for housing in the late 1980s and first proposed by JRHT in 1998, faced local objections based on perceived loss of amenity, flooding, traffic increases and connecting 'different' neighbourhoods. The objections culminated in three formal examinations – a six-week planning inquiry, a Village green inquiry, and a two-year European infraction investigation – before consent was gained to start on site. Local

feedback from early consultation had favoured designs which separated the new housing from existing housing.

Delays to planning proved to have a silver lining. Early evidence gathering and engagement strongly indicated that new residents would require certainty about the energy performance of their homes in the context of ambitious sustainability objectives. Derwenthorpe's energy generation was ultimately designed to provide all homes with heating and hot water through a community heating system. Confident in the green efficiency of its

build and able to realise economies of scale as a purchaser, JRHT has taken responsibility for providing energy to residents at a competitive price, at a time when energy prices are an increasing concern and a source of insecurity for those on low incomes. The energy hub also serves an additional purpose as a meeting place for residents, local schools and community groups. This space, built early in the phasing of development, reinforces the links between their social, financial and environmental aspects of behaviour changes and forging new neighbourhood identity.

Focussing economic benefits locally

Pooled recruitment at King's Cross

Ed Watson is Assistant Director of Regeneration and Planning at London Borough of Camden. His full presentation is available at bit.ly/RSAsummary33

Development of the built environment can support economic and social opportunities. Building on several decades of good practice, conference delegates suggested that this needs coordination beyond the scale of development sites in order to maximise impact. The King's Cross development demonstrates how Camden Council, lead developers and their supply chains have put systems in place to ensure ambitious targets are met for ensuring that the value of investment in construction reaches the firms and workers located near to (potentially negative) construction impacts.

The Construction Skills Centre is a key part of the commitment to deliver local benefits. It offers advice and information on finding work

in the construction industry around King's Cross. The Centre links residents of Camden and Islington who are looking to start or further a career in construction to training and apprenticeship opportunities, including a variety of courses offered free to unemployed local residents. These range from general pre-employment preparation to employer-led seminars on industry-specific skills.

Following on from this, KX Recruit was established to help local residents find work in the area and help King's Cross-based employers fill vacancies. The level of local recruitment KX Recruit aims to achieve is between 15–30% local residents; since opening in 2004 1,200 people have secured jobs in the industry.

Investing in community relationships

British Land at Regent's Place

Thirty years of experience from Regent's Place demonstrates how the West Euston Partnership brought together British Land, the local authority and a united local community voice. The Partnership effectively identified and implemented social and physical investments which contributed to the transformation of the wider neighbourhood beyond the redevelopment of 13 acre estate.

Despite the lack of a formal planning framework for the site, The West Euston Partnership married up investment in social 'software' – existing community organisations, work enabling programmes and resident's networks with the creation of physical 'infrastructure': new theatres, walking routes, retail and office buildings and community spaces. A racially motivated murder catalysed community cohesion in this instance, but experience from elsewhere shows motivations for community engagement can be supported by special events, or threats to cherished assets such as heritage assets or public services. Public interest reinforces councillor interest.

In a recent study on 30 years' investment at Regent's Place, nef consulting research found that the area around the estate saw a substantial reduction in levels of deprivation in recent years – in the top 1% of the greatest improvement across London. And from 2004 to 2010, the area achieved the top 5% of all London areas for improvements to employment. This social change was supported by the Partnership between the council, ward councillors, the police, University College London, the NHS, community organisations and other local stakeholders with the common aim of making the area a better place to live and work.

Regent's Place signifies a holistic approach to development, highlighting the wider impacts on community well-being from investment in social, in additional to physical, infrastructure.

"The most unusual aspect of the community engagement here was the proactive and collaborative engagement of all sectors of the community with British Land, through the West Euston Partnership Planning Working Group, as part of the planning process. This informed British Land's response in what community and leisure facilities were provided on and off site."

Frances Wheat, Head of Development Management, Camden Council

"At Regent's Place, the West Euston Partnership brought the community together and so we were able to build relationships and break down barriers to engagement in a community that was not the type of middle-class group that normally engages in planning. This meant that we came to understand the issues they faced, and so were better able to work with them on how those issues might be addressed."

Nigel Webb, Head of Development, British Land

Learning points
Forming a lasting and effective local partnership

- Successful community investment takes time and effort by developers, including long-term consistent representation, engagement by senior executives and dedicated staff.
- Local political support is essential; site-specific planning frameworks are not.
- The results for developers can be profitable, as quality of public realm drives rents, and local consent for density allows greater floorspace yield from a site.

Generating returns for public investment

Leeds City Council's plans for South Bank

Tom Bridges is Chief Economic Development Officer at Leeds City Council. His full presentation is available at bit.ly/RSAsummary35

Leeds City Council is applying new approaches which open up its South Bank neighbourhood. These are designed to ensure that public finances can realise a return on investment in high quality public realm, infrastructure and community facilities – something that can be a struggle within current accounting frameworks.

As the heart of a large city-region which spans West Yorkshire, Leeds has seen significant redevelopment in its historic centre in recent decades, including new retail premises and residential accommodation. The city centre is itself an engine for increasing the number and quality of jobs, and quality of place is key to attracting knowledge-intensive industries.

While there is a deficit of quality green space in Leeds City Centre, the South Bank is home to significant brownfield industrial land and the planned High Speed Rail station. The Council has created a plan to develop a new City Centre Park, conceived as a destination in its own right, a catalyst for regeneration and place-making on the South Bank, and a means to enhance connectivity. The design will ensure that it is an accessible, safe and secure space that will improve pedestrian and cycling connections to surrounding communities, linking the north and south banks of the River Aire. A wealth of opportunities for public art and cultural attractions will also be generated from the green infrastructure, including a civic event space.
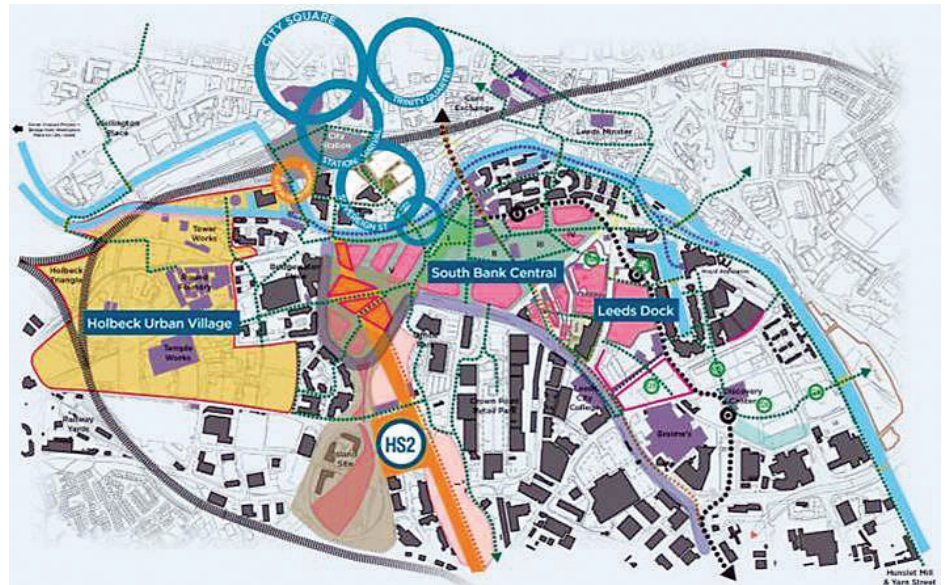
This expansion of green space is designed to attract new commercial and residential development. In economic terms, the Council recognises this must generate additional development rather than displace it from elsewhere. The challenge is to create financial vehicles which support the viability of public realm investment by capturing the value it brings to nearby sites. Conventional accounting models (such as the Treasury's Green Book) don't adequately appraise schemes which have less direct and longer-term economic benefits. Such schemes are – by definition – transformational rather than incremental, and more sophisticated appraisal techniques are needed. Leeds is considering using Tax Increment Financing, which it has secured permission from central government to pilot.

Learning points
Getting maximum value from city centres

- Knowledge-intensive industries are particularly attracted to co-locating in city centres, and particularly sensitive to quality of urban realm and provision for recreation and entertainment.
- Public investment in space such as parks can bring certainty to a neighbourhood seeking private investment, and a platform for civic and cultural events. Maximising the benefits of major new transport infrastructure investment requires long-term planning well in advance.
- Current accounting and appraisal models struggle to accommodate the wider economic benefits of transformational public investments; new innovative investment vehicles are needed to return value created in future development phases.

Read more about Tax Increment Financing from Core Cities: bit.ly/abouttaxincrementfinancing

Managing growth at scale

The Cambridge sub-region

Cambridge was referred to during a breakout seminar conference, which considered how to leverage economic growth across city-regions. Full minutes are available at bit.ly/DevelopingPlacesStrandC

Pushing out the Green Belt has enabled the growth of Cambridge as a dynamic centre of regional economic activity, fulfilling the potential of the University of Cambridge and its graduates to attract high-value knowledge industries. A clear sub-regional vision and co-operative working have enabled significant housing and economic growth over the last two decades. This has involved the creation of award-winning new neighbourhoods, densification of brownfield land, and new connections to nearby towns.

Since the 1980s, Cambridge has appreciated that as well as providing fuel for the city centre's social and cultural offer, the University represents its competitive advantage in attracting industry at a national and global scale. Cambridge has unique historical development conditions. It escaped WW2 bombing, and post-WW2 rebuilding, features many listed buildings, land at risk of flooding, and extensive land owned by the University. The City Council, alongside neighbouring South Cambridgeshire district councils and Cambridgeshire County Council, has been among the most pro-active UK authorities in planning for growth.

An international comparative study concluded that Cambridge represents "an example of how current policies might better be integrated to provide an environment for a more positive approach to large-scale continued land supply and development".[5] The County-level Structure Plan was driven by an ambition for growth and quietly moved the limit of the green belt to release large sites for housing and expand centres for economic activity such as NW Cambridge around the University campus and the Cambridge Biomedical Campus around Addenbrooke's Hospital. Astra Zeneca is planning to develop a new major new research facility near Addenbrooke's, on a former Green Belt site.

In the 1990s, planning strategy sought "selective dispersal of jobs away from Cambridge".

Cambourne was the first relatively large new settlement planned and built west of the city. Its attractiveness and affordability have meant demand for social infrastructure from young families (such as school and nursery places) has exceeded expectations. However, employment has not followed, creating additional demands on transport links. Development of stand-alone new settlements are often more infrastructure-intensive (and hence expensive) and remote employment sites are less conducive to agglomeration effects – the productivity benefits of firms locating near many others another.

Designated a growth area by central government, Cambridge secured loans and equity shares to build a guided busway to Huntingdon, releasing growth capacity outside the city. Cambridge also successfully lobbied for Department for Transport upgrades to the A14 trunk road and its rail station. Further new settlements are being built at Alconbury and Northstowe and are planned at Waterbeach and Bourn. Approval and delivery of this form of development requires significant coordination and capacity among local government and agencies, and investing political capital to overcome objections to rural development.

Increased density development within the city limits makes better use of existing assets and is preferable in sustainability terms, for instance reducing the need to travel by private car. Redevelopment projects, especially near the rail station, have been pursued vigorously. Accordia, for example, has won multiple awards. Large-scale retail redevelopment in the city centre has also consolidated Cambridge's role as a regional centre. However, pressure on travel routes into the city and housing market affordability have not diminished.

Cambridgeshire now has a co-dependence between growth in city-based employment and housing growth in surrounding communities. Economic productivity has required housing growth. Cambridge and the sub-region

have delivered impressive growth by UK standards. Capitalising on the role of the University, there are wider lessons for other UK city-regions, currently being explored by the City Growth Commission, hosted at the RSA.

"Per capita, the UK has the best higher-education sector in the world. It's inconceivable that second-tier cities will succeed without these institutions linking into their local economy: both in research and exploits of graduates. Economic development outside London should focus on graduate retention. One policy idea is to give students a financial incentive, based on their loans, to stay and work where they study."
Jonathan Portes, Director of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research

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Learning points **Securing social infrastructure**

- Creating momentum for large-scale and sustained business and population growth through planning and housing development requires commitment, vision and determination across decades which span election cycles and policy changes.
- New settlements require significant infrastructure co-ordination for regional transport provision and local social infrastructure, and will tend to rely on continued city-centre employment growth, creating transport pressures. Commuting patterns and housing affordability are signals of whether economic growth is being comfortably accommodated.
- Universities will increasingly serve as drivers of economic activity as the economy restructures towards knowledge-intensive industries. Local areas should consider graduate retention strategies as a part of economic development, and work with universities themselves as development partners.

Adding it all up

Measuring and evaluating socially productive places

Tim Dixon is Professor at the School of Construction Management and Engineering, University of Reading. His full presentation is available at bit.ly/RSAsummary37

How will we know when we've achieved social productivity in a place? While economic and, increasingly, environmental performance can be quantified, many developers, authorities and communities have neglected to develop measures of the social aspect of sustainable places, and use this feedback.[6] This can be done through tweaking existing monitoring regimes, experimenting with alternative indicators, and using emerging sophisticated tools.

Social productivity is supported by the quality of services institutions provide, and the mutual behaviours people exhibit: both school performance and the presence of litter are just two examples of useful indicators. Housing delivery is already monitored closely by Local Authorities, but could be extended to cover measures such as length of tenancy, affordability to local residents, or crowding and space standard.

The health of local businesses and their contribution to local life is poorly understood; existing measures draw on sources such as VAT registrations or shop vacancy rates. The East End Trades Guild – as a new organisation supporting traders around Brick Lane and Spitalfields in London – surveyed a sample of its membership to discover how many customers businesses knew by name, number of years of continuous operation, and the proportion of workers and suppliers who were located in the area.

Ground-breaking work is taking place to understand how collective well-being and quality of life is impacted by development: the infrastructure to support social and cultural life, opportunities for people to get involved, and scope for the place and the community to evolve.

New measurement techniques pioneered by Social Life with University of Reading[7] draw on nationally-collected well-being indicators to understand and benchmark social networks and connections among residents of new developments, allowing an assessment of performance and feedback on "what works" in the development planning and design phase.

The initiative, supported by Berkeley Homes and tested on large housing developments within their portfolio, involves direct survey work with residents covering 45 questions, compiled into 13 indicators under three broad areas: amenities and infrastructure (reflecting the design and service provision of the development), social and cultural life (reflecting how the development works), and voice and influence (the potential to shape the future).

A key driver of the project was the desire to create a standardised toolkit. Results are benchmarked against national averages for neighbourhoods which have similar profiles to the housing development in terms of socio-economic and demographic data.[8] There are, however, challenges in controlling for all relevant variable factors: for example, new residents in a new development may have a different pattern of social and cultural engagement than a mix of existing and new residents in an established area. Communities reproduce themselves over time, often without external help

or physical development. This is in part a function of turnover or population in a given location. In many London boroughs, over 15% of adult residents are refreshed annually by those arriving from elsewhere in the UK and from across the world.

There is huge value in demonstrating that the experiences of residents using a development can be captured. This information can feed through to designers, planners, developers and investors, and occupants of developments themselves, incentivising continuous improvement based on the observed outcomes. Such measures need to be embedded in public policy and corporate policy to have influence. Berkeley has committed to carry out a social sustainability assessment on every site of more than 100 homes, before submitting a planning application.

It is clear that high-quality design has measurable impacts on the performance of the built environment in terms of social productivity. One peer-reviewed study showed that the impact of classroom design accounts for 25% of observed differences in learning progression.[9] Land-use planning across a wider scale can also have well-being impacts. For example, behavioural psychology evidence in relation to housing choices shows that people over-estimate the positive impact that outside space will have on their well-being, and under-estimate the negative impact of extended commuting times.

In all cases, measuring social productivity is useful when results can guide investment, planning, design and other decisions to improve performance.

Learning points

- Judge the social productivity of places through independent evaluation which quantifies and qualifies the experience of the "end users" – residents and occupiers – in relation to the "hardware" at their disposal.
- Significant progress has been made in developing measures for health, well-being, economic sustainability, civic participation, and other outcomes that successful development supports.
- Be sensitive to the mobility of populations, and their participation in alternative types of community networks including virtual networks and identity networks which span local geographies and extend globally.
- Data should be publicly accessible and understandable in order to drive decision-making by individuals, authorities and developers.

There are 13 criteria in the Berkeley Homes social sustainability toolkit
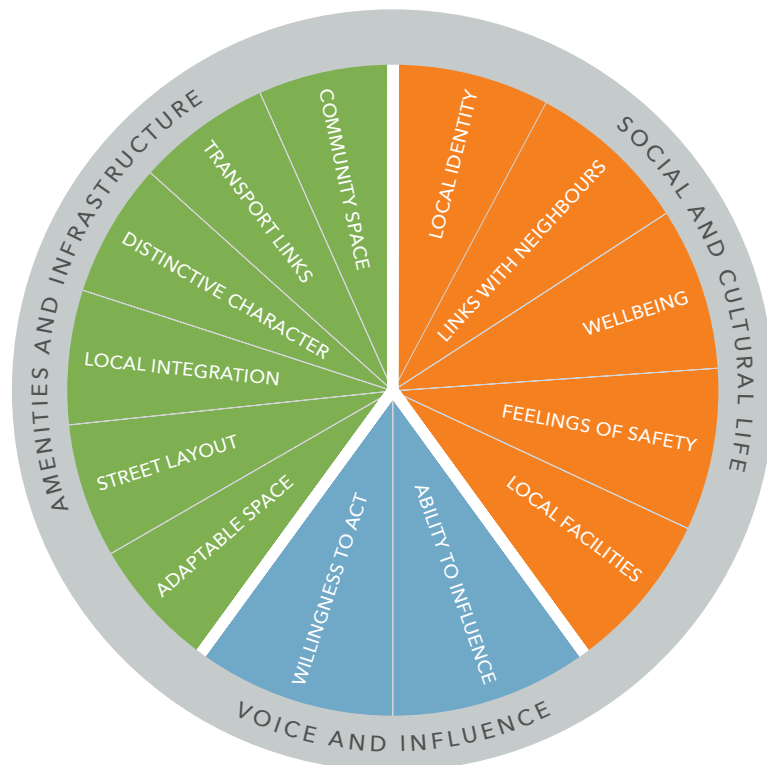
Developing socially productive places

It has been 36 years since Parliament voted to pass the Inner Areas Bill, which saw significant central government resources go into urban regeneration, led by urban development. In the 1980s, urban development corporations created conditions for private sector redevelopment in several the inner-city areas. 1990s urban regeneration companies broadened the focus to include skills and training, focusing on areas of deprivation. Urban regeneration became a big industry in itself, and with the planning reforms and, later, the Urban Task Force recommendations, came a further focus on inner-city redevelopment. Attempts were made for whole-place approaches through Single Regeneration Budgets and later New Deals for Communities.

What has been consistently neglected is an understanding of the dynamic and mobile nature of people and the networks they form. Often when poor people in poor places achieve more, they move out. And when deprived places experience investment and improved facilities and amenities, they often price out or alienate existing residents. **A social productivity approach seeks to understand the potential of places and people through the value of the relationships held in networks – which span scales from local to global.**

From the evidence collated for the conference we have seen that whether engaging Birmingham's residential communities in neighbourhood plans or developing recruitment programmes for major urban regeneration projects such as Kings Cross, the appropriate geographical scale at which to engage and coordinate is a crucial consideration, taking into account that impacts often spill across administrative boundaries.

Appreciating the timescales involved in building community networks is also crucial to successful planning and development. New developments – such as York's urban extension at Derwenthorpe – can take a generation to plan and deliver, with incoming residents inevitably navigating different networks to existing residents. This impacts on our ability to measure and evaluate social sustainability, but Regent's Place provides evidence that new development can deliver community benefit for existing neighbours.

We've also seen that **networks are crucial to the business community, and to the economic vitality of a place.** In Leeds and in Cambridge, authorities are seeking to make the most of agglomeration effects – the powerful productivity benefits which occur from firms locating near one another. As the economy transitions further to service-sector knowledge industries, city centres

and universities will be increasingly important in attracting jobs. In turn, housing demand is driven by proximity to jobs and the wider qualities of place – including the social amenities and the strength of community networks.

Place-making can come from different places

The policy rhetoric of valuing a sense of place,[10] existing assets and local distinctiveness does not often reconcile with the culture of development which values scale, simplicity, and aspires to national and globally recognisable values in branding and design.[11] The financial crisis of 2008 led to a stalling of many development projects across the UK and highlighted the fragility of relying on corporate financing to change the physical assets in a place.

From a tumultuous period of recent economic history, new approaches to community planning are beginning to emerge, often led or catalysed by community groups, and based on a clear expression of values and outcomes. **A plurality of approaches is needed.** Some of these, such as Incredible Edible, which started in Todmorden in Yorkshire but is now operating in hundreds of communities nationwide, deliberately bypass bureaucratic processes which rely on a narrow account of how value is created and maintained. The project seeks to turn hundreds of small plots of land into spaces to grow food, encouraging ownership and responsibility over the environment and food supply.

Community-led development can achieve density, flexibility and adaptability over time. Hackney Co-operative Developments coordinated long-term public and private sector investment that created new business premises with award-winning public realm. Co-operatives, public private-partnerships, and other forms of asset sharing, have been shown to balance private and public interests. Most importantly, the act of development itself is an opportunity for public engagement and building social capital.

The RSA is interested in developing the concept of "smart communities" – adding a more human dimension to the excitement over technology-driven "smart cities". Through a partnership with crowdfunding platform Kickstarter, the RSA has supported several projects which strengthen social relations at a neighbourhood scale. These include Talk to Me, a project to address isolation and encourage strangers to engage in conversation; and New Urban Voices, which support young people in Dundee and Angus to set-up and run exhibitions showcasing their ideas for change in their local communities. This involves collaborating with experienced designers, artists, and council workers, to design and influence development in their local areas through the design or re-design of the physical environment around them, and the way people interact with it.

The examples highlighted suggest that **all types of developers will require a wide range of new competencies.** Community-led development approaches can be nimble, while large corporate developers can bring significant value, leveraging money, resources and expertise beyond that available locally, and having the ability to operate at speed and scale. Common lessons are emerging that are important in realising the aim of socially productive places.

First, **developers need to get smarter at engaging with local communities.** Relationships should be direct, start as soon as possible and then be sustained beyond the completion of the initial buildings. Developers can get to know the needs and aspirations of their local communities, at a time when planning teams are stretched increasingly thinly in most areas. Allocating time and resource is a significant investment, requiring consistency. A range of channels and learning approaches are needed for engagement to go beyond listening, to informing decision-making on how the built environment affects a place.

Second, **communities can benefit from consolidating their strength in diversity into one voice** – and hence consolidate their power to communicate effectively. This is not to ignore important differences, but where different groups collaborate, consensus can be reached on how a development should be shaped for the maximum local economic and social benefit. A good example of this is the West Euston Partnership which articulated the needs of the diverse community around Regent's Place to Camden Council and British Land.

Applying these approaches is not an overnight job. Managing the forces and harnessing the potential of development through planning requires resources, capacity and coordination. Local authorities have a crucial role in using planning and development to reinforce wider social and economic objectives.

Leaders should consider the following:

- Planning as a frontline service, which doesn't exist in isolation from other public sector roles which influence how a place functions.
- Investing in planning can bring value to other public sector objectives, and pro-actively strengthen relationships between developers and incoming people and businesses and existing communities.
- Developing socially productive places means supporting local people to engage with development as a means of addressing issues such as local employment, transport and provision of health and education.
- Socially productive places build community capacity to benefit from growth, increase resilience to shocks and support people's ability to adapt together to new circumstances.

This paper provides support for the case that planning can provide a worthwhile long-term investment. By developers, communities and councils working towards a common goal of creating socially productive places, common oppositions can be overcome. Partnerships forged in the development process can create long-term adaptability – both in the built environment, and in the social networks which create and sustain local economies.

Going forward

The RSA – building on existing partnerships with British Land and others – will explore how greater local autonomy and better regional connectivity within cities and city regions can enable more citizens and businesses to thrive economically and socially. We will support place-based public service reform which makes the most of the full range of assets in a place, particularly the creative potential of local people.

Further resources

Developing Socially Productive Places

Conference presentations

Linking local growth with local politics
by Daniel Goodwin FRSA, former Chief Executive of St. Albans City & District Council.

Developing through social enterprise
by Kate Swade, Development Manager at Shared Assets.

The RSA

Shopping for Shared Value considers how retailers can adopt a 'community venturing' approach, enhancing relationships within their local community.

Citizen Power draws on three years of work in Peterborough improve attachment and develop networks between people, build local participation and cultivate public service innovation.

Power Lines uses New Cross in South East London as a case study, and looks at networks of power and influence, and in particular those who are isolated in the community.

Community Footprint argues that businesses should act as 'community hubs', helping promote social interaction amongst their customers and developing local action plans to create happier, more resilient communities.

Heritage Exchange is a project supported by Heritage Lottery Fund and the RSA, and explores how the heritage sector can develop a stronger role in place making.

British Land

Regents Place at 30 provides a reflection of the development process at a large central London office development, highlighting the involvement of, and impact on, surrounding communities.

Our Economic Contribution presents statistics on the scale of economic impact from British Land activities.

Building Business, Creating Growth highlights the economic impact which links development to suppliers across the UK.

Thought leadership from *Developing Socially Productive Places* participants

Value of Planning presents an analysis of the various policy instruments for planners to shape, regulate and stimulate the behaviour of 'market actors' (Royal Town Planning Institute, June 2014).

Fostering Growth presents ideas for strengthening the economic benefits of planning (Royal Town Planning Institute, June 2014).

Tools to engage and measure impact

Spare Place and **Somewhere To** each provide a platform to identify under-used spaces open to pop-up and temporary uses.

Social sustainability toolkit from Berkeley Homes facilitates measuring community outcomes (see section 3.7).

Commonplace is a crowdsourced insight tool for local authorities, property developers and residents. It aims to ensure that communications strategies are appropriate, targeted and effective by listening and responding to the needs of the community at a street-by-street. Working from a smartphone and tablet platform, Commonplace is in use by local authorities, housing associations, property developers and neighbourhood plans and has been shown to increase consultation engagement, reach and diversity at low cost.

Seeplan is a project of Bengler in Norway. It looks at how information design and data visualization can improve access to city planning process. The Oslo Planning Authority opened up 10 years of case history and a series of tools were developed which emphasise different aspects of the information. These include 3D illustrations, network maps, interactive timelines and augmented reality applications.

Endnotes

1. *Business, Society and Public Services: A Social Productivity Framework,* the RSA (2012)

2. *Power Lines,* the RSA (2011)

3. *Our Economic Contribution,* British Land (2013)

4. J. Anderson, *Well-being & Neighbourhood Outdoor Space Provision,* PhD thesis (Cambridge University: Department of Architecture), forthcoming

5. *International Review of Land Supply and Planning Systems,* Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2013)

6. A. Colantonio, A. and T. Dixon, *Urban regeneration and social sustainability: best practice from European cities.* Real estate issues. Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester, pp317. (2010)

7. N. Bacon, D. Cochrane, S. Woodcraft and J. Brown: *Creating Strong Communities: How to Measure the Social Sustainability of New Housing Developments.* The Berkeley Group (2012)

8. T. Dixon and S. Woodcraft, *Creating strong communities – measuring social sustainability in new housing development.* Town and Country Planning, Nov. pp. 473–480 (2013)

9. Barrett et al., *A holistic, multi-level analysis identifying the impact of classroom design on pupils' learning, Building and Environment* 59 (2013)

10. For example, in the Lyons Review of Local Government (2007)

11. P. Jones and J. Evans, *Rescue Geography: Place Making, Affect and Regeneration,* Urban Studies 49 (2012)

The RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) believes that everyone should have the freedom and power to turn their ideas into reality – something we call the Power to Create. Through our research and 27,000-strong Fellowship, we seek to realise a society where creative power is distributed, where concentrations of power are confronted, and where creative values are nurtured. The RSA Action and Research Centre combines practical experimentation with rigorous research to achieve these goals.

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