

Planning for Change: Housing, Land and Sustainable Development

By Graeme Bell, Director, Town and Country Planning Association

Back to the future!

A lot can happen in 18 years. By 2016, according to official figures, 4.4 million more households than in 1991 will have needed to find a dwelling in which to live in England. What will the country look like with this new development? How will we have accommodated these houses? Will the countryside be concreted over? Will the towns be crammed?

Eighteen years ago, would we have predicted the changes that actually took place throughout the 1980s and 1990s? The transformation of the role of Government, the communications revolution, relay masts for mobile phones masquerading as plastic pine trees, the privatisation of water, gas and rail companies; the rise and rise of out-of-town shopping; the rapid increase in divorce—we're talking here about the year the Prince of Wales got engaged. Earth summits in Rio would only be imagined as termite heaps, from which David Attenborough emerges crumpled but unfazed. All these events and more have contributed to the built and natural landscapes that make up the United Kingdom in 1998. What will the landscape look like in 2016, or perhaps more importantly, what do we *want* it to look like, and *how* can we influence that?

My paper has five parts:

- first, some definitions and a reminder of the sustainable development concept that is central to Government policy for land use and movements and more besides;
- secondly, a brief explanation of the household projections, setting them in a regional context;
- thirdly, a focus on housing need estimates;
- fourthly, the land use implications of the household projections;
- fifthly, how do we want to live?

1. Definitions

Brownfield is now classed as “previously used land”. It may be derelict land—that is “former development land incapable of beneficial use without treatment”, but it could be allotments, or tennis courts, or gardens. It need not be in urban areas, indeed much of it may be in the countryside—say a disused airfield or a redundant hospital site. It could also include buildings as well as land. So, we may see empty office blocks and space above shops entering the equation. I imagine it could also include the site for the new Tesco store at Gerrards Cross. This is a flying freehold above the railway track, recently won on appeal.

Greenfield will be primarily agricultural land, therefore, it will be almost exclusively outside town or city limits. It may include school playing fields or public open space but what it need *not* be is Green Belt.

There has been much disinformation, some of it I think mischievously put about, that this debate is about either building on bomb sites, or busting the Green Belt. Wish it were as simple!

Sustainable development concerns the goal of creating societies that *develop* more sustainability. It is as valid today as when the Brundtland Report first appeared in 1987 urging us to: “meet the needs of the

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present without comprising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".¹ When this definition was given international prominence at and following the Rio conference, it was most closely associated with environmental issues. The economic and social agenda implicit in the concept and the process was largely ignored in the developed world. Certainly if we don't save the planet we're all sunk. But let us not forget the plight of the needy and the value of economic growth.

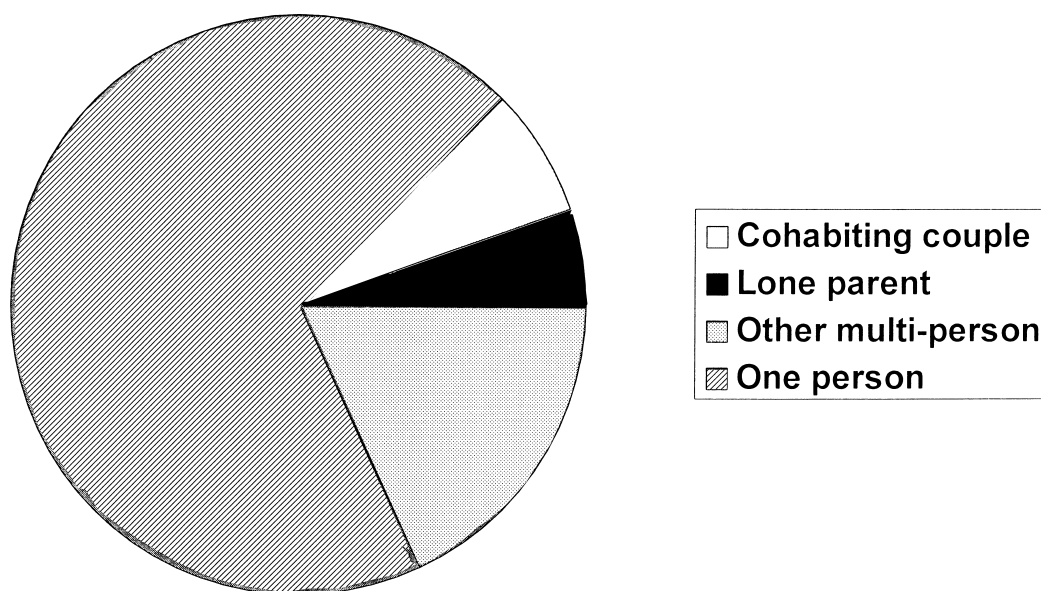
Many in the planning and development field are genuinely attempting to grapple with this concept in relation to meeting the land use challenges posed by the household growth projections. Inevitably this is pushing us all to have to consider what life will be like in the future—*how* shall we live and how do we *want* to live—as well as the well rehearsed arguments concerning *where* we will live.

2. Household projections

The current 1992-based household projections were published in 1995.² They estimated that 4.4 million additional households would form between 1991 and 2016. Revised projections are expected from the Government some time this autumn. From the outset you should be aware that previous projections from Government have all proved to be *underestimates*.

Figure 1 outlines the demographic changes behind this increase. The outstanding change is an enormous rise in single person households, through a combination of people living longer, higher divorce rates and a big increase in the number of never-married people living alone. Of course, underlying the static nature of the figures is a more dynamic reality. Professor Alan Hooper has identified that household life cycles are becoming more fractured, with more people moving in and out of relationships, and spending periods of their life where they are living alone.³

Figure 1: Projected change in household type 1991–2016



Source: Department of the Environment, *Projections of Households in England to 2016* (London: HMSO, 1995).

¹ World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

² Department of the Environment, *Projections of Households in England to 2016* (London: HMSO, 1995).

³ A. Hooper *et al.*, *Home Alone: The Housing Preference of One Person Households* (Amersham: Housing Research Foundation, 1998).

Much of the conjecture surrounding the projections has been the extent to which they are a reliable base on which to then have the countryside carved up for new housing. Language and images just made for *Panorama* and Sunday broadsheets! What if the figures are wrong, and land is allocated for development that could otherwise have been conserved?

The latest information suggests that the number of new households forming is actually in line with the original household projection estimates published in 1992. The projections indicated that the number of overall households would rise to 20.17 million by 1997. The most recent survey of English housing records that in fact England had a total of 20.23 million recorded households in 1997.⁴ Commenting on the synergy of the figures, the chief housing statistician at the Department of the Environment, Housing and the Regions (DETR) expressed “incredulity” at such a close alignment of the projection with the actual figure.⁵

Nevertheless, the projections have been criticised as being too trend-based. It has been argued that the process of allocating housing is the same as the now abandoned “predict and provide” strategy that was one driving the road-building programme. The then Department of Transport bowed to pressure to abolish this method for determining future road needs because research showed this to be a self-fulfilling prophecy—provide the roads, and people will use them to capacity, therefore creating the need for more roads.

Research for the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) indicates that, while there is little to suggest this happens in relation to housing at the national level, there is evidence that there may be some degree of population expansion to meet the amount of housing available at a local level.⁶ Personally, I think housing *is* different to transport. One can usually provide alternatives to car travel that still mean someone can take a trip from A to B, but there are no alternatives to a dwelling—except no dwelling.

Nevertheless, earlier this year—about the time of the countryside march, the Government agreed to drop the “predict and provide” strategy in favour of “plan, monitor and manage”. You will notice I did not attempt a definition of this earlier! The Statement *Planning for the Communities of the Future* issued in February sets out a revised planning process, with more input from Regional Planning Conferences (see Figure 2).⁷

How will this work in practice? Present evidence suggests that regions will use the opportunity to revise projections downwards. SERPLAN and the South West have already taken this approach in draft regional strategies. Government assumptions regarding inter-regional migration; in the case of the south east international migration too, have been a bone of contention. The “going rate” seems to be a 20 per cent downscaling of the projections. Some say the revised figures have more to do with what is politically acceptable than a true reflection of demand.

However, John Prescott has just won a High Court hearing brought against him by West Sussex County Council concerning the number of houses they have to provide. West Sussex had allocated 12,800 dwellings fewer than the approved regional planning guidance (RPG 9) planned for.⁸ The Secretary of State issued a direction for the county to increase its allocation to the 58,700 figure in RPG 9. West Sussex sought a judicial review, arguing that, because the county had reached its own

⁴ DETR, *English House Condition Survey: 1996* (London: The Stationery Office, 1998).

⁵ *Planning*, July 10, 1998, p.1.

⁶ G. Bramley, *Circular Projections* (London: CPRE, 1995).

⁷ Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, *Planning for the Communities of the Future*, Cm. 3885 (London: The Stationery Office, 1998).

⁸ *Surveyor*, August 21, 1998.

Figure 2: “Plan, Monitor and Manage”: the revised DETR process for managing household growth

Stage 1

DETR produces the household projections in consultation with local authorities.

Stage 2

Regional Planning Conferences produce draft RPG in consultation with Government Offices for the Regions and other stakeholders.

Stage 3

Publication of RPG.

Stage 4

Production of Development Plans.

Stage 5

Monitoring by RPCs.

Stage 6

Publication of the next set of household projections.

Source: DETR, *Planning for the Communities of the Future* (London: The Stationery Office, 1998).

view on the number of houses that should be provided, including studies of the environmental capacity of West Sussex, Prescott could not lawfully issue a direction. However the ruling handed down indicates that the Secretary of State was entitled to make his own planning judgment on this question, and that unilateral action by one authority undermined the integrity of the whole system; essentially, that you cannot have planning in a vacuum, you need some top-down policy and leadership.

Although few councillors would admit it, it was convenient to be presented with the *fait accompli* of the old RPG figures. Councillors had someone to rail against, something for political point scoring. But who will grasp the nettle in the new regional process? Will the fledgling Regional Planning Conferences be able to deliver in time to make a difference? Will some of them have the technical capacity to produce a robust analysis of the position, that can withstand the rigour of the new Examination in Public (EIP) to which the new draft Guidance will be submitted? Will the marchers become ramblers—East Midlands one month, West Midlands the next?

Will they be met by the brown welly brigade? Those that quite rightly point out that some of the previously developed land in urban areas is often much richer in flora and fauna than fields of swaying wheat. Perhaps for those of you who remember Town and Country Planning Inks, it's more accurate to call them the "Brown Green 2" welly brigade!

For all the difficulties that there may be, I applaud the introduction of the EIP in the process. Better by far than a public inquiry which would be long, costly and generate more heat than light. Greater transparency must be right, but how long will housing get at the EIP? Perhaps one day of round tabling on general issues and then half a day per city or county on the detail may be thought reasonable. I speculate. Aside from the time taken, will representation be as inclusive as one would wish? This may be an examination in public, but will it be a representational slice of the public?

My concern is that those who are most in need of housing are in danger of being drowned out in the debate by those whose prime concern is countryside protection. We need to seek ways that will amplify concern over social equity, so that it can compete on level terms with the environment. Perhaps we need a housing march to complement the countryside march.

3. Housing need

So let me talk now about housing need. One of the major consequences of not providing enough dwellings to meet the projected increase in households is that house prices will rise. This in turn will force those on low incomes either into unsuitable housing, at its most extreme, out of housing altogether.

In its *Sustainable Development Strategy for the South East*, SERPLAN argues that 20–25 per cent of the projected new single person households will "either not wish to form separately or would not be able to acquire the necessary financial resources to gain access to a separate dwelling".⁹

In other words, SERPLAN are planning on a certain number of households not being able to live in a house of their own, even with Government subsidy.

The House of Commons Select Committee on the Environment, Transport and the Regions is unimpressed by such a stance. Its report on housing published in July argues that social housing targets *should* be provided in structure plans and regional planning guidance. Commenting on the report,

⁹ SERPLAN, *A Sustainable Strategy for the South East: Public Consultation* (London: SERPLAN, 1998).

Committee Joint Chair Gwyneth Dunwoody M.P. reinforced that “the Government must have a strategy to ensure that there will be homes for these poorer households.”¹⁰

This is an enormous challenge. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) has estimated that if all the repressed demand for social housing was included in the household projections, the figure of 4.4 would be more like 5.5 million.¹¹ Shelter argue that in order to reduce unmet social housing need by three-quarters by 2006, as well as meeting newly arising housing need, almost 1.5 million social rented homes will be required between 1997 and 2006.¹² This is an annual average requirement to the year 2006 of 158,000 dwellings. Current estimates are that only 30,000 social housing homes are being provided each year, a shortfall of four in five against the projected need figures. If one takes the JRF scale of need and then compares this with the SERPLAN proposed level of provision, one is faced with a yawning gap.

The extent to which the planning system can help meet the housing needs of those who cannot afford market housing is a contentious issue, and one that is unlikely to be resolved easily. Most local planning authorities are seeking to secure from developers the 20 per cent social housing that Circular 6/98 allows them. Indeed, in the buoyant cities and on a rising market, sometimes more is sought and generously given. In some cases commuted sum payments are being taken by councils against future social housing provision. Delivering affordable homes on very large sites with sufficient critical mass to absorb costs is said to be easier, but the key issue is for realistic council requirements to be set out in local plans and development briefs well in advance and for them to be fixed.

As a process, it works, just about. If countrywide, up to date, approved district local plans and UDPs were in place, it could work better. But it is still a ramshackle platform on which to build social housing provision. The TCPA believes that in the absence of a nationally administered betterment levy on the uplift in market value created by development planning, there is no escaping the need for more public funding in this sector. Furthermore, we believe that serious under-provision will only lead to social and economic problems, with costs falling back on the community and the economy. What is needed is some “joined up thinking”.

4. Land use implications of the household projections

So, where will all the houses go? And the schools and jobs and shops and parks and pubs and cinemas and everything else that is essential for good mixed development?

The CPRE claims that 700 square miles of English countryside and woodland will be taken for housing by 2016. The spectre of another 27 Milton Keynes has been raised. Interestingly, it is always an area the size of Devon that will be concreted over. Poor old Northumberland or Essex, both very attractive counties and of comparable size, presumably do not make the grade.

Of course, land will be built on; even the House Builders Federation (HBF) admit to this. They point to official house building rates that show that only 9.5 square miles—an area a third of the size of the Isle of Wight, is built upon each year, spread across the whole of the 50,000 square miles of England. Furthermore, the HBF reveal that the Government projections are only a continuation of house building rates over the past decade and are far below those of the 1960s and 1970s.¹³ They suggest we are now fixated with numbers, rather than addressing where the houses will go.

¹⁰ House of Commons Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee, *Housing: Report and Proceedings of the Committee* (London: The Stationery Office, 1998).

¹¹ Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *Memorandum of Evidence to the House of Commons Environment Transport and Regional Affairs Committee* (York: JRF, 1998).

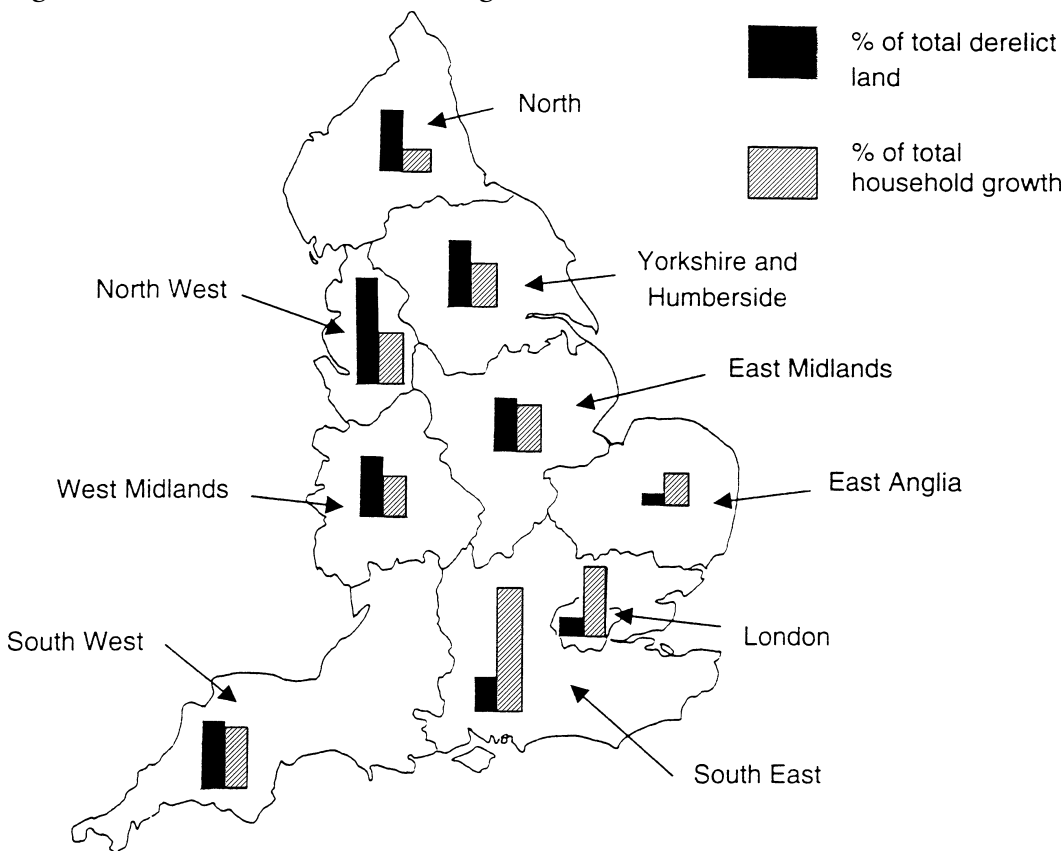
¹² Shelter, *Behind Closed Doors* (London, Shelter, 1998).

¹³ Source: House Builder's Federation.

The Government has indicated that we should be working towards a national target of 60 per cent of new housing built on brownfield land. The previous Government's Roundtable on Sustainable Development suggested that a 75 per cent figure be adopted,¹⁴ while the TCPA's own regional investigation into the subject suggested that, without substantial policy changes, the reality could be more like 30–40 per cent. In any case, a national target is of little use on the ground. In our 1996 report *The People: Where Will They Go?*, we called for regional and local targets to be introduced and the Government has now agreed to produce targets for regions.¹⁵

The repopulating of towns and cities will not take place without a considerable effort to change current patterns. One of the key factors is the demand for housing versus the supply of readily available brownfield sites—housing demand and brownfield supply are seldom found in the same place (see Figure 3). For example, much of the available brownfield land is in the area north of the Severn/Wash line, whereas much of the housing shortfall is to the south. Even within regions, there is an imbalance, for example, land is available in Manchester and Liverpool, but the upscale, solid demand is in Cheshire, Cumbria and rural parts of Lancashire.

Figure 3: Mismatch between household growth and derelict land



Source: Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, *A Brown and Pleasant Land? Accommodating Household Growth in England on Brownfield Sites* (London: POST, 1998).

¹⁴ U.K. Round Table on Sustainable Development, *Housing and Urban Capacity* (London: Department of the Environment, 1997).

¹⁵ M. Breheny and P. Hall, *The People: Where Will They Go? National Report of the TCPA Regional Inquiry into Housing Need and Provision in England* (London: TCPA, 1996).

Furthermore, should we not be looking at transport infrastructure, and new patterns of working, as much as we do land availability? Canary Wharf should surely have taught us a lesson in that respect.

The issue of housing *quality* is also as important as where you actually put them. In some places this is critical. In parts of the north west 10 per cent of the housing stock is considered to be unfit, with up to a third of houses falling into this category in Blackburn, and one in four dwellings in Burnley and Bolton. The same is true in many other areas north of the Severn/Wash line. It is not just the Victorian and Edwardian stock that is nearing the end of its life, it is the badly planned, jerry-built council estates of the 1960s. In these areas, the replacement of the existing stock is a much more critical issue than the projections.

Government has responded to this in its Comprehensive Spending Review which announced an increase in spending of £1.5 billion for the renovation of existing stock over the next three years. However, the Chartered Institute of Housing believes we need £3 billion a *year* for the next decade to sufficiently address the backlog of repairs.¹⁶

Urban housing capacity

The TCPA has recently completed a major study examining the role for our towns and cities to accommodate more new housing development.¹⁷ The findings of the project were launched at a major conference in the spring chaired by Lord Rogers, head of the Government's new Urban Task Force.

The project focused on six themes:

- the costs of reclaiming urban sites;
- legal and liability issues preventing urban housing development;
- improving institutional arrangements for optimising housing capacity;
- design solutions for increasing urban capacity;
- monitoring, measuring and target setting for urban housing capacity;
- urban capacity: setting an urban regeneration context.

We commissioned a discussion paper for each of these topics and organised six seminars where each of the papers was debated by an expert group from a wide range of backgrounds.

One important aim of the project was to report on the *links* between these topics, and to suggest a cohesive and integrated strategy for providing more homes in urban areas.

What were the findings?

- Funding for urban housing development

Perhaps the clearest message from the project, and the one that will be most painful to Government, is that large-scale resources will be required to revive the cities to the degree required. It is obvious, for example, that the reclamation of some brownfield sites will require considerable subsidies—direct, or in the form of tax breaks—if they are to be brought into the market. Our evidence shows that the market in London and the major regional cities can sustain profitable brownfield and building conversion programmes indeed, some very interesting and exciting projects are now completing and are underway. Parts of Leeds, Manchester, Newcastle and Liverpool are now vibrant and prosperous. But where the housing market is weaker, land needs to be very cheap if the deal is to stack up.

¹⁶ Chartered Institute of Housing, *How Much Housing Investment Do We Need?* (Coventry: CIH, 1995).

¹⁷ M. Breheny and A. Ross, *Urban Housing Capacity: What Can Be Done?* (London: TCPA, 1998).

The research commissioned as part of the project on housebuilder attitudes to building on derelict (and in particular contaminated) land, revealed that there is still a lot of work to be done to convince developers of the merits of building on these sites. This has serious implications if increasing the amount of urban housing is to rely on more heavily polluted sites. Many of the easier sites, the single ownership sites, the playing fields and the former railway goods yards have already been done. Measures that will enhance the confidence of the building industry generally about developing on badly contaminated land should be considered further by Government and in this they could do worse than learn from the experience of house builders such as Bellway who completed 70 per cent of their units last year on previously used land.

- Linking household growth with regeneration—the benefits of development

A clear message from the project was that planners and others will need to make connections. The housing issue has focused too narrowly on the prospects for physical change. This is, of course, crucial—but it is only part of the picture. The renaissance of our towns and cities—and hence the prospects of attracting large numbers of people to remain in or return to them—will rest on policies to improve education, crime, social welfare and “image”. The situation in the west end of Newcastle, where millions have been spent to refurbish homes that people refuse to rent, is salutary. The Cabinet enforcer Jack Cunningham needs to demonstrate some “joined up action”, and many local authorities are pioneering new processes in this context under the joint Government/local government Regeneration Pathfinder Project. The aim is to highlight best practice in collaboration between the range of agencies and departments, so that everyone works on both their own and through other people’s programmes. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

This is where we part company with the Jeremiahs, for the TCPA sees the *benefits* of sustainable development. Potentially, the house building and the house replacement programme could be a major regenerator in its own right, creating long-term craft jobs for tradesmen and many others. How else can we secure improvements, if not through well planned development? This can be as important in the rural areas on a small scale, as it can in the towns and cities.

- Jobs and housing

In order to get more people back into city centres, it will be necessary to keep jobs in the cities. Over decades, job losses have been focused in the cities, while gains have occurred in suburban and rural areas. Certain sectors—financial services, comparison shopping, and entertainment—have remained faithful to the cities, but virtually everything else can now go elsewhere.

But what will the land use demands be for jobs in city centres? Given current pressures it is possible that urban sites zoned for employment use may be regarded as potential housing sites. Critics point out that many councils make unrealistic over-provision for employment land. The truth is that the *amount* is often less important than other factors such as location and condition. Already we are seeing a slow down in office to housing conversions in London, not least because of a hardening in the office market.

Some local authorities are trying to back both horses by turning towns inside out. By planning for employment growth in business parks on the periphery while seeking to promote more housing and retain jobs in town centres, they believe they can win both ways. It remains to be seen how far measures to crack down on car commuting and the pricing of office car parking, effect such strategies. The increase in home working is also a trend to be monitored.

- Promoting urban living

Even though four out of five people live in urban areas, the merits of urban living need to be promoted

to a largely sceptical population. (There is always a competition running in the *Daily Mail* to win your dream home—a country cottage!) One way of doing this is to develop exemplar projects. Exemplars do exist, but need to be publicised much more. It must be demonstrated that high quality developments can be created for all income groups, everything from affordable flats over the shop, to Manhattan loft conversions for the chattering classes. High quality soft landscaping can be used to soften blank walls, railings and the less friendly aspects of very private living. Not everyone wants to live seven days a week in a 24-hour city.

The balance between intensification and retaining quality of life is a delicate one. Very imaginative design ideas have come forward as part of the urban compaction debate and more works need to be done, for example, on reducing noise that can be troublesome in high density urban living. The paradox is that we may be content to live closer together, but only if we have more personal space in which to retreat.

- New thinking and innovation

There was a feeling among delegates to the TCPA seminars that efforts to increase the capacity of cities and towns to accommodate more housing will be hindered by conventional thinking. A call was made to suspend all previous prejudices and contemplate solutions that may currently be ruled out by conventions or regulations. Although developers continue to winkle out plots that council planners could not see, notions of appropriate residential densities, layouts, height restrictions, parking standards, etc., do act as a major constraint on what can be done. All of these need to be challenged.

However, I am constantly reminded by what Eric Lyons, designer of the SPAN developments said in the 1960s. “The British will go to any expense to get something on the cheap!” Quality does come at a reasonable price if you look at the right set of figures. We all know that, because it is how we organise our own financial affairs.

A practice that needs to be abandoned is the neglect of revenue budgets relative to capital budgets. All too often, large sums of money are spent on flagship schemes, only for those same schemes to look shabby a few years later. Capital and revenue needs to go hand in hand.

Town and country

A view that was repeated consistently through the TCPA seminars was that the debate is not about city or country, brown or green: town and country are interdependent. Cities and towns must play their part in accommodating growth, but they cannot be expected to take it all.

So what are the implications for the countryside? If 40 per cent of the total demand is to be met on greenfield this represents nearly 2 million units to be built on grass and fields. Will those that live in the countryside take the view that in their area, *all* new development should be accommodated in their neighbouring town or city? The fact that people in rural areas live longer, and get divorced, just as those who live in the towns, and need small developments of affordable houses, is somehow lost on the last person into the countryside, busily pulling up the drawbridge.

I foresee great difficulties ahead as local authorities struggle to deliver the required development in some regions. Under section 54A, the plan is designed to lead; but the process is hardly able to cope with the routine, let alone the dynamic. This will not be helped, incidentally, if shire counties go over to elections, in halves, every other year as recommended in the DETR consultation on modernising local government.¹⁸ It will make it less easy for councillors to take the difficult but necessary decisions which

¹⁸ DETR, *Modernising Local Government: Local Democracy and Community Leadership* (London: The Stationery Office, 1998).

communities sometimes need. The worst case scenario is that we will end up with planning by appeal; housing estates on the outskirts of towns, largely unrelated to public transport links, jobs, schools and services.

5. How do we want to live?

Most people in the next century will be living in circumstances largely comparable to those of today. Given a choice, I imagine they would value living in well-built, distinctively designed, easily maintained, energy efficient homes. Busy lifestyles for couples, single parents and the young at heart will put a premium on housing with ease of access to school, work, leisure, health care and other community facilities. The electronic age will not signal an end to personal travel; journey patterns are likely to become more complex and intensive.

Some people will value tranquillity, others will value vibrant neighbourhoods, most will value the former with easy access to the latter. People will value attractive coast and countryside—on their doorstep if they can get it. Varied ecology and well maintained green space will be especially valued by those living in towns and cities.

And how will we improve those towns and cities in which over four in five of us will live? How will we ensure that substantial new development is a beneficial force for change, that it really is sustainable development? Development that reinforces in each town the sense of plan and local distinctiveness; that tackles the regeneration and the necessary (and often long overdue) maintenance of bus stations, schools and public spaces?

Sustainable solutions to town and country planning

Answer? Good town and country planning, and other things besides, although I will only focus on planning here. There will be no single pattern. The TCPA's view is that there needs to be a portfolio of solutions and a sequential approach:

1. maximise the potential for mixed use development in town and city centres, while still respecting the need for green space, allotments, playing fields and conservation of urban ecology;
2. maximise the potential for sensitive infill and rounding off in suburban and fringe areas;
3. maximise the potential for reuse of brownfield land in rural areas, but be very careful that these developments are truly sustainable developments and not just isolated housing estates. Good public transport links and development briefs are needed;
4. examine the opportunity for sustainable development delivered through new settlements and expanded towns.

Let me elaborate on this last point. It means planning for developments of sufficient size or a cluster of them, that have the necessary critical mass to support a range of activities. It means concentrating development along public transport routes and interchanges—the “string of pearls”. It means development that helps to reduce the need for car travel and increasing the scope for healthy, safe and sociable walking and cycling. I see the new regional structures—the Chambers and the Regional Development Agencies, as crucial in delivering this. However, involvement and ownership by councils, the private sector and community groups is crucial too. It must be both top down and bottom up.

I am not saying that new settlements are the only solution; but I am convinced that south of the Severn/Wash line, they must be part of the solution.

However, possibly more important is the concept of Expanded Towns. Some will recall the Expanded Towns programme of the 1950s and 1960s, designed to accept London's overspill: Swindon, Andover, Wellingborough, Basingstoke and many more. I believe we need a new Expanded Towns programme for the millennium. Not this time to accept overspill, for we know better now that we need to keep jobs and homes in towns and cities. Rather to plan for the long-term indigenous growth of the cities and towns themselves. These plans need to have a longer time horizon than current development plans and set out the context for them. The schemes would be steered and owned by a consortium of stakeholders, led by the local authority which could exercise compulsory purchase orders where necessary and including other community representatives. My guess is they will be a lot easier to deliver than new settlements (could anything be harder?), particularly if the political machinery for dealing with border disputes along local authority boundaries can be finessed.

The so-called new settlement at Stevenage, Garden City 21, with a first phase of 3,600 dwellings, is just such an Expanded Town scheme. Building on the infrastructure that already exists and replacing the Green Belt lost, with a net increase of 11,000 acres of land further west.

Conclusion

The household projections have provoked an important debate about what we want our cities, towns and countryside to be like, and where new housing can best be located to bring this about. But the projections could also be a catalyst for an overdue debate about the ways in which planning and development can better satisfy housing need, while achieving critical environmental aims. The planning system must do both: how else can we claim that a society with a plan-led system is more equitable than one without?

I started by saying how difficult it is to predict the future. I finish, by quoting from the Golden Jubilee edition of the *TCPA Journal*, published in 1949. Four articles caught my attention:

- "The flight from the cities";
- "Small children in small flats";
- "Good agricultural land"; and
- "Town cramming".

It also contains a letter written by the Chairman of the Edgware Ratepayers Association in London under the title, "Nibbling the Green Belt". I quote an extract:

"It is with sorrow rather than surprise that we see a deputation from the Hendon Borough Council is to wait on the Minister of Town and Country Planning to ask him to allow the Council to wrench acres and acres of open land from the Green Belt and develop them for housing. The Association feels it must oppose such a means of solving the housing problem, a problem that will not be settled by piecemeal efforts. Every Council is pleading for permission, using as their excuse the time-honoured plea, 'It's only a little one'."¹⁹

History will show whether we grasped the opportunity presented by the housing challenge. Let history show that we were not found wanting.

¹⁹ *Town and Country Planning* (1949) summer edition.