

The challenge of national regeneration

Richard McCarthy, Director-General of Programmes, Policy and Innovation at Communities and Local Government, gives *SiteLines* readers some insight into the possible policy directions for the delivery of Sustainable Communities



The creation of Communities and Local Government (CLG) in May 2006 gave fresh impetus to delivery of Sustainable Communities.

According to McCarthy, one of the key prerequisites for success is an economically viable community. "Without a strong economy, the community will not stay strong and prosperous and may struggle to be cohesive. People will leave."

But economic growth is not enough, he continued: "We also have to think how we can best plan and shape places and encourage environmental sustainability."

Strong leadership is another important factor for McCarthy: "There must be clear opportunities for community engagement at a variety of levels. We must deliver a social and economic policy that builds on and precipitates mix rather than encourages exclusion."

McCarthy outlined some of the current CLG initiatives: "Local authorities that have concentrations of deprivation in their communities receive the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. Un-ringfenced, this has the value of being applied in the way that local authorities and their Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) think fit."

In some places local expenditure is supported by heavier, direct intervention through programmes such as Housing Market Renewal, New Deal for Communities and, in the future, the activities of Communities England, which will combine the functions of English Partnerships, the

investment functions from the Housing Corporation and key delivery functions from CLG.

McCarthy added: "We also have targeted particular places to support their need for growth, places like the Thames Gateway where a mixture of regeneration and growth will be delivered to benefit the existing community as well as those who chose to move and work there."

And now there is an even stronger drive to create mixed communities of different incomes and types of housing, particularly in areas of concentrated disadvantage.

McCarthy explained: "New social housing is already required to be provided as part of new developments but there are issues about concentrations in existing localities that require careful attention and thought. Nevertheless, there have been and will continue to be successful mixed tenure regeneration programmes. For example, the work that we are supporting in Kidbrooke in Greenwich and Hattersley in Manchester is all about facilitating real regeneration and change."

McCarthy said the need to build more affordable homes goes hand in hand with the responsibility of both local authorities and developers to incorporate measures to raise the design quality and environmental performance of new homes.

With homes being responsible for 27% of CO₂ emissions, McCarthy firmly believes we must act now to ensure that we take the necessary steps to tackle climate change.

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"We have introduced Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 3 for housing and have consulted on a PPS for climate change, which is designed to help local authorities get it right, without being disproportionate in their approach. In the Housing Green paper, ministers pledged to create three million new homes by 2020, with an extra 70,000 social homes being built every year by 2010/1.

"The private sector must also do their part. We are keen for developers to respond by continuing to increase the rate of new-build, whilst taking into account the 10-year commitment we have made to introduce zero carbon homes. We are confident that the new Code for Sustainable Homes and our 10-year target for 2016 will encourage developers to achieve much higher standards of performance in terms of their buildings and places.

"There is a tricky balance to strike with local authorities being more proactive in some places and less prescriptive in others. Some local authorities are working to get ahead of our 10-year trajectory and pushing for quite high levels of performance. However, one of the reasons for the 10-year trajectory is to give a chance for the building sector to adapt rather than walk away.

"We need to get the right balance between enthusiasm and initiative; locally and nationally we must develop a sense of certainty of where we are going over that 10-year period whilst keeping milestones within it; adapting the approach to make it happen."



If key aspects of major infrastructure are in place this should facilitate future housing development and sustainable communities

Of course, central to this agenda is planning. The 60 years since the Town and Country Planning Act have seen unprecedented change. The recent reviews by Kate Barker of land-use planning, and Sir Rod Eddington of transport infrastructure, have highlighted both the successes and the shortcomings of the existing planning system.

McCarthy said the new Planning White Paper will make the planning system work better. "We need to move faster in terms of the speed and certainty of decision making. We need to make sure there is a more mature relationship between applicants and planning authorities. This is what the Planning Performance Agreement arrangements we are introducing are meant to achieve.

"Local planning authorities must now concentrate on their place-making role and put their Local Delivery Plans in place. They need to focus more on outcome and less on the process. Getting the place-making role right is essential. But also when individuals and developers apply for planning permission they must have some sense of certainty of how quickly they will get a response.

"On the other aspects of the Planning White Paper – major infrastructure projects – it is important we improve the planning process. Getting the roads, power stations and other key aspects of major infrastructure in place facilitates future housing development and sustainable communities, an indirect

relationship rather than a direct relationship. Key pieces of infrastructure must be delivered, so that both economic growth and physical development can then take place."

One important focus of the creation of Sustainable Communities is the empowerment of the community itself, in particular, the role of community engagement in the development and regeneration process.

McCarthy said: "We should be prepared to take some risks and shift some assets locally to local groups. Where this has happened, communities have found it empowering. The assets facilitate a sense of real ownership and the potential for a new income flow into the community.

"In line with this remit of empowering local communities, with the ever-increasing threat from terrorism and extremism on our streets and in our communities, CLG now also has responsibility for tackling social exclusion and extremism, and creating social cohesion.

"We are keen to ensure that the investment we make in places to facilitate growth must be done in a way that encourages and enables greater levels of cohesion and not exacerbate tensions.

"Our work on housing, planning and regeneration is central to this. When we invest, we must be careful that it is not undertaken in a way that will alienate local communities, but brings benefits to everyone who lives

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there or who moves in."

McCarthy also hinted that future policies may give local authorities the powers to raise supplementary business rates in order to generate some additional resource locally to help facilitate greater levels of investment.

He concluded: "CLG looks forward to making further progress in building Sustainable Communities, and meeting the challenge of national regeneration. Successful progress depends not on quick fixes, but on having the strength to take the long-term course and see it through."

Sustainable Communities Summit 2007

The Sustainable Communities Summit 2007 – The Challenge of National Regeneration: Securing our Future will be held at Church House Conference Centre Westminster, London, on October 25 2007.

This premier Conference and Exhibition provides an unique opportunity to debate, analyse and share knowledge and best practice across the public, private and third sectors – those key stakeholders involved in creating Sustainable Communities.

This landmark event will examine the key issues of the day, and showcase the progress being achieved across the country.

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