

‘The future’s changed’:
local impacts of housing, environment
and regeneration policy since 1997

A report from CASE’s Areas Study
by
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Abstract

The paper documents the local impacts of government efforts to improve housing standards and demand, enhance environmental quality and foster sustainable regeneration within low-income areas. Housing, the local environment and physical regeneration were core concerns for Labour as it entered office, and have remained high on the government's agenda throughout its two terms. Drawing on the experiences of 12 representative low-income areas in England and Wales, this paper examines how policies and initiatives implemented since 1997 have impacted on low-income areas' housing and physical environment.

Note on the authors

Caroline Paskell is a Research Officer at CASE. She works on CASE's Areas Study – a longitudinal study of 12 low-income areas in England and Wales. Anne Power is Co-Director of CASE. She manages the Areas Study.

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We accept full responsibility for any mistakes and also for the opinions expressed in this paper.

1. Introduction: housing, local environments and physical regeneration

We were elected in 1997 to make a real difference in health, in education, and on the economy. We have rightly focused on those priorities. But ever since we came to Office, we have also dedicated ourselves to the regeneration of our local communities and neighbourhoods. (Tony Blair, P.M., 24th April, 2001)¹

Historical context

Throughout history, as societies have become more productive, urban neighbourhoods have developed and polarised. The housing settlements where city dwellers have based their enterprise, exchange and innovation have formed the building blocks of urban society from the very dawn of urban civilisation. Over time cities expand outwards, but for many centuries, settlements remained densely clustered around an urban core, based on markets, crafts, religions, ceremonial and civic buildings. People therefore mingled within concentrated settlements across both specialised and shared activities. The traditional quarters of cities were rich in diversity, street life and interchange. The buzz of activity marked out city neighbourhoods. Cities developed ways of creating and sustaining order and security within seemingly informal, often crowded and chaotic conditions of endless change.

The character of urban neighbourhoods changed rapidly during the Industrial Revolution and the two centuries of unprecedented urban growth that followed it. They multiplied into even more dense, but also wider-spreading neighbourhoods as transport evolved. Industry took up many urban spaces and public intervention cleared the worst squalor, spawned by seemingly unmanageable growth. Roads, schools, hospitals, public baths and parks all helped the dispersal of housing settlements, leading to the *de facto* destruction of traditional urban neighbourhoods across wide areas. This created a greater separation of neighbourhood types: more or less costly, dense, serviced, connected, attractive. The traditional urban proximity was replaced by neighbourhood polarisation.

The sifting of urban residents into places that match their social and economic status is now a well entrenched pattern, made far more distinct by the advent of council housing, built by public authorities to replace slums, and targeted through most of its history at those workers in greatest need of better housing. It raises physical standards but it segregates low cost housing into enclaves built to take people *out* of traditional neighbourhoods into council renting. The dispersal of those who could afford to buy their homes into suburban owner-occupation was a parallel housing policy that had a similar effect in a contrasting direction – creating many new neighbourhoods of better-off, employed owners.

Governments have continued to drive this polarisation, through their explicit intention on the one hand to house more vulnerable people at the lowest possible cost in council estates and their attempts on the other, through greenfield developments, to ensure enough housing for all. Subsidising owner-occupation, whether by bearing infrastructure and long-term public service costs or providing planning

¹ *Improving your local environment* – www.number-10.gov.uk/output/page1588.asp

consents for new building in new areas, is the current method of ensuring adequate supply for those who can afford to buy new housing. Supporting housing associations, Councils and private landlords through running subsidies and housing benefits is the way government still ensures an affordable supply for those who cannot. Thus housing policy is driving ongoing division of urban neighbourhoods into places for the rich and places for the poor, despite attempts at more mixed housing.

This report looks at how these divisions and policies to address them have played out on the ground. The period that we are studying has been one of the longest periods of economic and job growth since at least the 1950s. But it comes after the vast industrial changes of the 1980s which affected regions differently. It takes a very long time for general national prosperity, such as we have seen under the Labour government, to reach areas where job losses were particularly high, and it does not happen automatically. Help needs to be ongoing and to operate in many incremental ways if complex urban conditions are to change and the poorest neighbourhoods are to pull out of the trough of decline that many of them fell into.

Current policy context

From early in its first term, Labour made clear its intention to tackle the particular problems faced by areas of high poverty. The government was concerned not only with areas' socio-economic conditions, but also with the quality of their physical environment – from the standards of housing to the upkeep of streets and parks. Over its two terms, Labour has introduced multiple initiatives and policies aimed at improving the quality of housing and local environments. A number are universal measures, but most focus on deprived areas. This paper considers how 12 low-income areas with poor environments and housing conditions – representative of high-poverty places across England and Wales – have fared from Labour's efforts at physical regeneration.

Our long-run study of 12 representative low-income urban areas captures this pattern of development and reveals how entrenched and distinctive, in design, location and activity, urban areas and housing patterns are. This shapes not just the way we run cities and towns, but also the way we socialise, work, exchange and learn. It also shapes how we feel about urban conditions and drives the repeated choice to move out of cities to escape urban neighbourhoods that have lost vitality, proximity and social coherence. Many urban neighbourhoods now offer relatively cheap housing but fail to foster cohesion.

Our work in low-income areas explores just how severe neighbourhoods' polarising trends are in terms of their physical form, ownership and social patterns. But the Study also uncovers how conditions can rapidly change and, in some cases, improve through interventions to reinstate features that make neighbourhoods more lively, integrated and prosperous. In its urban policy and neighbourhood renewal, the government set out to challenge and reverse problems of urban and neighbourhood decay. Box 1 summarises the main catalysts through which the government developed its policies on these problems.

Box 1. Labour's main urban and neighbourhood policy catalysts: 1997–2005

URBAN	NEIGHBOURHOODS
<p><u>1/. Urban Task Force (1998–99)</u> Appointed to identify how to tackle urban decline. Key recommendations include: designing and maintaining streets, spaces and buildings to support community; increasing building densities to moderate levels, sufficient to support a frequent bus service; prioritising public transport, walking and cycling; equalising incentives between regeneration and green field building, particularly reducing VAT on repair of existing buildings.</p>	<p><u>1a/. Social Exclusion Unit (1998)</u> Set up under the Prime Minister to address the extreme problems of marginalised groups (such as the homeless and school truants) and to tackle the problems of marginal areas. Developed the <i>National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal</i> (2000) through visits to declining areas and detailed consultation with residents and local staff, and negotiation across government, voluntary and community sectors on what needed to be done to equalise conditions between declining and mainstream neighbourhoods.</p>
<p><u>2/. Urban White Paper (2000)</u> Endorsed virtually all of the Urban Task Force's recommendations except VAT equalisation, but failed to give powers or resources to local authorities to accelerate urban regeneration, the restoration of urban parks, or the creation of adequate urban infrastructure.</p>	<p><u>2a/. Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (2001)</u> Set up within the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to implement the <i>Action Plan</i> of the <i>National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal</i> Manages <i>Neighbourhood Renewal Fund</i> (NRF) which tackles deprivation in England's 88 most deprived local authorities by funding efforts to reverse decline and create more attractive, viable communities. Manages <i>Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders</i> which are funded by the NRF to foster a partnership approach to improving neighbourhood conditions. Manages <i>Neighbourhood Wardens</i> pilots which are funded by the NRF, local authorities and housing associations to improve quality of life and people's sense of security in the area by tackling litter, graffiti, and vandalism, etc.</p>
<p><u>3/. Urban Policy Unit (2001)</u> The Urban Policy Unit was set up to create a framework for urban revival – following the Urban White Paper's recommendations. Has responsibility for improving urban design standards, creating play areas and green spaces and co-ordinating the 'cleaner, safer, greener agenda'. Promotes the 'Northern Way' as a strategy for redistributing growth from the over-pressurised South East, and so promoting recovery in Northern regions. At the <i>Urban Summit</i> in 2002, the government gathered around 2,000 regeneration experts, highlighting many urban recovery innovations.</p>	<p><u>3a/. Sustainable Communities Plan (2003)</u> The Government set out in this document how it intends to cope with: growth pressures and housing shortages in the South East; declining housing markets in the Midlands and North; general shortages of affordable housing; reform of planning; protection of the countryside; the need for sustainable communities that minimise resource use, environmental impact and social polarisation. In early 2005, the government will again convene 2,000 development and regeneration experts for the <i>Delivering Sustainable Communities Summit</i> – the aim is to discuss national, regional and local perspectives on how to create and sustain vibrant communities</p>

Three themes: social exclusion, liveability and sustainable communities

The policy catalysts outlined in Box 1 followed from three themes within the government's thinking – ideas that have motivated its commitment to tackling urban and neighbourhood problems. These are: social exclusion, liveability and sustainable communities. They are key to understanding the policies and initiatives which we review in this paper.

Social exclusion

Labour made clear in its bid for election in 1997 and from the start of its first term that addressing area-based deprivation would be a government priority. It stated that the aim was to address not only poverty itself (in particular, child poverty) but also broader problems of disadvantage – the complex set of problems referred to as ‘social exclusion’. This had become prominent in Labour’s ideology in the years preceding the 1997 election (Levitas, 1998) and within four months in office, Peter Mandelson announced that the Cabinet Office would set up a ‘social exclusion unit’ to develop cross-departmental policies for a problem that “is more than poverty and unemployment; it is being cut off from what the rest of us regard as normal life”². Social exclusion (as defined by this government) is something that affects not only individuals but also areas as a whole:

Social exclusion is a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown. (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001: 10)

The Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) was part of a wider effort to understand and address problems of specific places. This began with an overview of the problems faced by deprived neighbourhoods. In 1998 the SEU published an initial report *Bringing Britain Together: A National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal* (SEU, 1998). This document, setting out which issues the government needed to tackle, led to the commissioning of 18 Policy Action Teams (PATs)³, groups of experts, policy makers, professionals, front-line workers and residents who worked to identify specific aspects of deprivation and strategies for addressing them. Each considered issues that can affect low-income areas (such as access to financial services, school use and community self-help) but a number focused on local issues: neighbourhood management (PAT 4), housing management (PAT 5), neighbourhood wardens (PAT 6), and unpopular housing (PAT 7). The Teams provided detailed analysis and action points from which the government could develop a National Strategy aimed at narrowing the gap between low-income and other areas. After further consultation (SEU, 2000) the Strategy was published as an Action Plan for addressing multiple problems in “the hundreds of severely deprived neighbourhoods” (SEU, 2001: 5) in England and Wales. The emphasis on addressing social exclusion was retained, with the problem identified as places that had “seen their basic quality of life become increasingly detached from the rest of society” (*ibid.*: 7). The subsequent aim was that “within 10 to 20 years, no-one should be seriously disadvantaged by where they live” (*ibid.*: 8).

Better housing and physical environments were specific objectives within this broader goal (*ibid.*: 8), but the government’s efforts to improve housing and local environments are framed not only by this concern with social exclusion, but also by concern for areas’ quality of life or ‘liveability’.

² Speech given at the Fabian Society, 14th August 1997

³ www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk/publications.asp

Liveability

Concerns about litter, crime and low-grade environments are among the most common local concerns for residents across Britain (ODPM, 2003: 81-4). Such concerns are more extensive in low-income areas, but the wish for improvements is common across the country (Kearns and Parkes, 2003). The government refers to this issue – how quality of life is affected by local conditions – as ‘liveability’. It sees this as something that is key to the management and renewal of low-income areas, but the government also views it as relevant to other neighbourhoods – indeed to all neighbourhoods:

The quality of our public space affects the quality of all our lives ... everybody’s local environment should be cleaner, safer and greener. (ODPM, 2002: 5)

The government’s concept of liveability focuses on public space. This includes housing, as part of the built environment, but the emphasis has tended to be on open and green spaces (Urban Green Spaces Taskforce, 2002) and, more recently, on the ‘street scene’ (CABE, 2002). The government has represented the main challenge as ensuring that local areas in general are ‘cleaner, safer, greener’. The link to neighbourhood management and neighbourhood renewal priorities is clear. The ODPM has specific responsibility for meeting this challenge (ODPM, 2002) but works with other departments such as the Home Office, with local authorities and voluntary sector organisations in doing so⁴. This focus links to the third theme underpinning housing and local environment policy – that areas should not only be liveable now but viable in the future, i.e. that they should be ‘sustainable communities’.

Sustainable communities

Sustainability is promoted by the government on two levels. The original, over-arching objective is for ‘sustainable development’, for which the government set out four principles in 1999: steady economic growth; social progress to meet the needs of all; environmental protection and prudent use of natural resources. Progress on these has been measured through 15 headline indicators (DETR, 1999). The other, more specific objective is to ensure that neighbourhoods are sustainable, as set out in the *Sustainable Communities Plan* (ODPM, 2003). The concept of ‘sustainable communities’ develops on ideas from the Urban Task Force, which the government commissioned in 1999 “to identify the causes of urban decline in England and recommend practical solutions to bring people back into our cities, towns and urban neighbourhoods” (mission statement: Urban Task Force, 1999). Its introduction as a policy objective also reflects the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal in emphasising housing quality and local environmental standards. The Sustainable Communities Plan restated and reinforced the concepts of ‘decent housing’ and ‘decent places’ (first laid out in the National Strategy) and set clear targets for attaining these standards across all areas. It also aimed to establish how the simultaneous issues of housing shortage in the South-East and low housing demand in the Midlands and the North could be addressed – providing housing where needed, without undermining established communities in developing areas or areas of low demand.

⁴ See www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_urbanpolicy/documents/page/odpm_urbpol_042175.hcsp and also the cross-governmental and voluntary-sector liveability website www.cleanersafergreener.gov.uk/flash/index.html

These three concepts of *social exclusion*, *liveability* and *sustainable communities* interlink. The idea of 'sustainable communities' sets concern with local environments and housing (liveability issues) alongside concern at how neighbourhoods can resist demographic shifts that may 'tip the balance' towards local decline. In doing so, it also links to concern about social exclusion – prominent in Labour's thinking about the most disadvantaged local areas.

The significance of quality in housing and neighbourhood conditions

In this report, we explore what has been happening during Labour's two terms in office to core subjects of urban and neighbourhood policy: housing; the local environment; and physical regeneration. These aspects of local areas – and of immediate neighbourhoods in particular – are important for two reasons.

Firstly, research on people's concerns about their neighbourhood shows that its physical condition is a priority issue. National surveys and local studies both show the value that local people place on these physical standards – whether residents are homeowners or tenants, and whether they live in low-income or other areas (DTLR, 2001: 71-76). Such research also shows that people in low-income areas are particularly concerned about these issues, observing many more problems with the current state of their housing and neighbourhood than do those in other areas. This is evident in Burrows and Rhodes' 1998 study of 'the geography of misery', which showed that residents' dissatisfaction with their neighbourhood was associated not simply with 'the worst estates' but with a range of low-income places: large parts of London; deprived former industrial areas; areas with large minority ethnic populations; deprived inner-city areas with low amenity housing; as well as areas with high levels of Council housing. Similarly, the English House Condition Survey⁵ 2001 (ODPM, 2001) found that issues such as litter and rubbish in the streets, or the state of open spaces and gardens were seen as problems by around twice as many people in low-income areas as in other areas (60 percent in low-income areas saw litter as a problem and 30 percent saw open spaces as a problem, against 30 percent and 15 percent respectively in other areas).

Secondly, visible aspects of the areas can also serve as indicators of socio-economic conditions which are not so readily observed. This is particularly true of housing tenure, and is a consequence of various factors. In part it follows from poorer areas typically having very high proportions of social renting (which is targeted at low-income households) and low levels of reinvestment. It also follows from the prevalence of older terraced properties in areas where they were not cleared and replaced by Council estates – properties which need extensive ongoing maintenance. Furthermore, housing reflects status – people buy into an area that they can afford and, since cost is linked to neighbourhood and housing conditions, so low-grade environments and poor housing commonly reflect low income levels among residents (McGuire, 1981; ODPM, 2001: 50 and 71).

⁵ Previously a periodic survey, now running continuously since April 2002.

Aims and structure of the paper

The aim of this paper is to review what has happened to housing and environments within 12 low-income representative areas since the Study began, shortly after Labour came to power in 1997. Our focus is on the 12 neighbourhoods that we track within these areas, since the problems and the policy responses with which the paper is concerned are most salient at the most local level. In the paper, we set out to review whether multiple, locally-focused, mainly revenue-funded initiatives (such as neighbourhood wardens) have a positive impact on conditions; whether major regeneration initiatives (such as the New Deal for Communities) are required for solid change; or whether a combination of intensive intervention and ongoing support is necessary. From experience to date, we expect to find the answer closer to the third scenario. Without ongoing local efforts at supervision and constant care, unpopular areas will inevitably continually decay, particularly if there are high levels of renting. At the same time, without periodic major reinvestment and radical injections of capital to modernise conditions and attract a more mixed community, such areas will be too difficult to manage and sustain. In practise, over time the large-scale interventions are unlikely to work without ongoing management and maintenance as previous examples of regeneration show (Dunleavy, 1981; Power, 1997). This report provides a brief review of both our earlier findings and our 2003/4 visits and research. We will use it as a basis for tracking the areas' physical conditions through the remainder of the Study.

There are five parts to the paper, following this Introduction. Section 2 outlines the study's methods: first explaining how the 12 areas were selected as representative of low-income parts of England and Wales; secondly describing the research process, and explaining how this paper fits the broader project. Section 3 describes the areas' housing and local environments as they were in 1999, when the first round of interviews and visits were conducted. Section 4 describes the policies and area-based initiatives with which the Labour government has attempted to improve local environment and housing conditions across low-income areas and enhance housing demand within declining neighbourhoods. Section 5 describes the 12 areas' housing and local environments as we found them in the most recent round of research in 2003-4, documenting wherever possible the visible impact of the initiatives and policies. Section 6 presents conclusions on how Labour's efforts have affected low-income areas – considering specifically whether large or small-scale initiatives, or a combination of these, prove most successful in improving housing and neighbourhoods in low-income areas.

2. The research approach: Studying 12 low-income areas

The Areas Study is a longitudinal project tracking 12 low-income areas in England and Wales, now in its sixth year⁶. It is part of wide-ranging research into the dynamics of low-income areas conducted at the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion⁷. This work traces low-income areas' decline and renewal, and explores local families' experiences. The Areas Study (hereafter referred to as 'the Study') has tracked 12 representative low-income areas (11 in England, one in Wales) since 1998, documenting their changes in relation to the wider context and government policies (Lupton, 2003; Glennerster *et al*, 1998). This longitudinal Study covers 12 areas in order to combine breadth with sufficient focus for detailed analysis of local dynamics. Its findings are supplemented by those of the Families Study, which interviews 200 families annually (50 each from areas in Hackney, Newham, Sheffield and Leeds) to elucidate pressures and supports encountered by parents and children in low-income areas (Power and Willmot, 2004; Mumford and Power, 2003; Bowman, 2001; Mumford, 2001). In combination, these studies provide unique insights into how government and local efforts affect low-income areas.

This paper focuses on low-grade housing and environments that are often found in low-income areas in England and Wales. It describes which problems the 12 neighbourhoods had when the Study began, and documents how their housing and environments changed between 1999 and 2003. The paper reflects local workers' and residents' sense of how the areas changed and describes impacts that have been observed on the ground and from local statistics. Where changes affected physical and environmental conditions, we have recorded these visible changes. We offer both an account of the changes, and an analysis of the government's role in improving low-income areas' physical conditions. Specifically, we review whether smaller or larger initiatives, or a combination of these, are seen as having had most effect. In doing so, the paper compares findings from research conducted at the start of the study (1999) with data from the most recent round of visits and interviews (2003). The report draws on six main sources of information: perspectives of residents; perspectives of workers associated with the areas; the researcher's own observations; data gathered by statutory bodies ('administrative data'); government documents; and academic literature.

The areas and their neighbourhoods

Selection

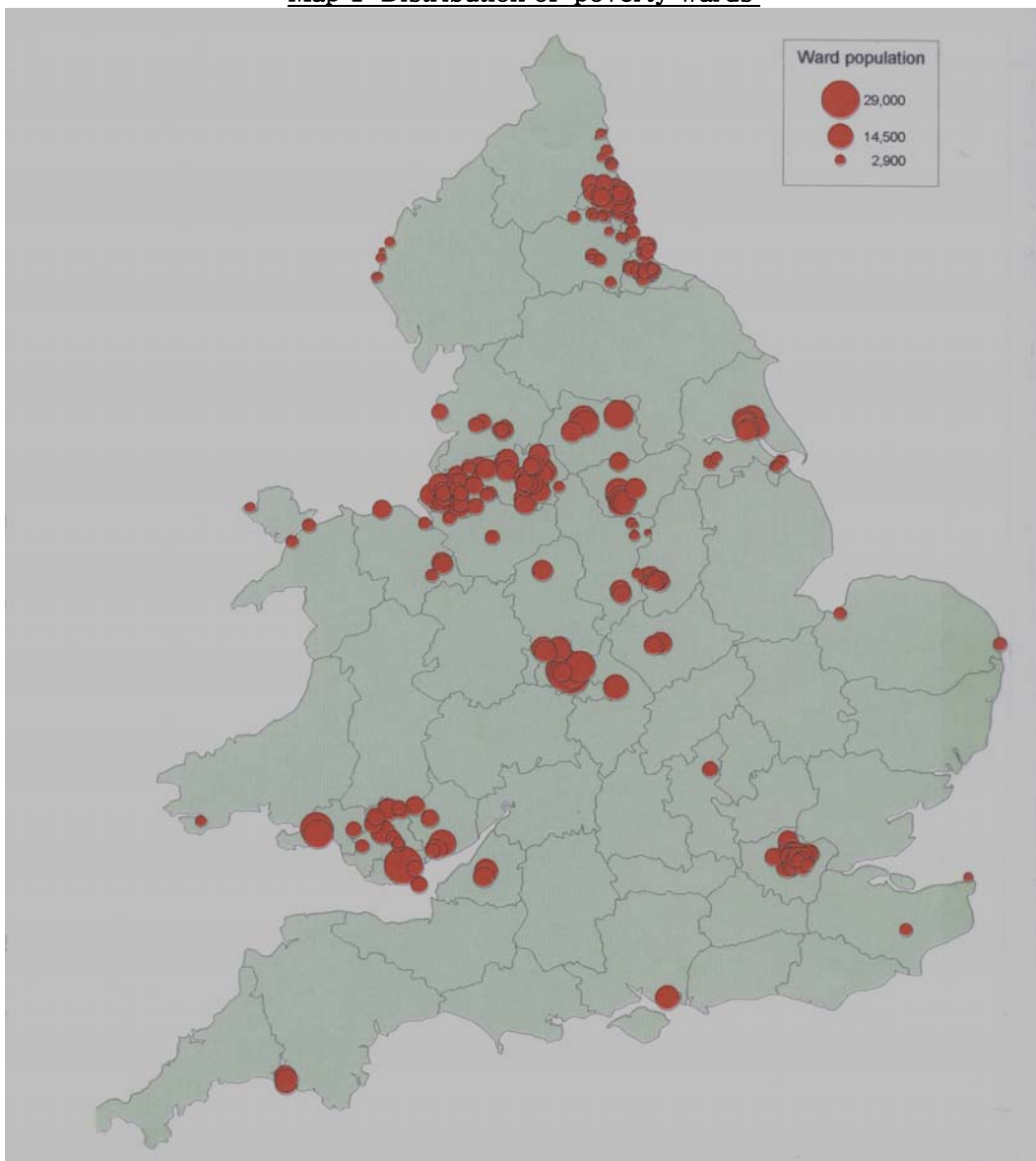
The Study's 12 areas were chosen as being representative of places across England and Wales with the highest concentrations of unemployment and multiple deprivation. They were selected in three steps (Glennerster *et al*, 1998). Step 1 was to identify 'poverty wards'. These were the 3% of wards in

⁶ It is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council

⁷ <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/case/>

England and Wales among both the 5% poorest (assessed using a ‘work poverty’⁸ measure, based on 1991 Census data) and the 5% most deprived (identified using the Breadline Britain Index⁹, Gordon and Pantazis, 1997). There were 284 of these poverty wards. A small minority (15%) were the only such wards in their local authority, but just under two-thirds (65%) were adjacent to other poverty wards, forming 51 ‘poverty clumps’. Most clumps were small towns or small parts of cities, but a number were very large ‘poverty clusters’ (cities or large districts). Map 1 shows their distribution. Step 2 was to determine which of these poverty wards the Study should focus on in looking for suitable areas. Twelve local authorities were chosen to reflect the spread of the clusters (Map 2) and cover different local authority and area types (Box 2). Most were in Northern and Midlands industrial regions but there were two in London, one in the South Wales coalfield and one on England’s south coast.

Map 1: Distribution of ‘poverty wards’

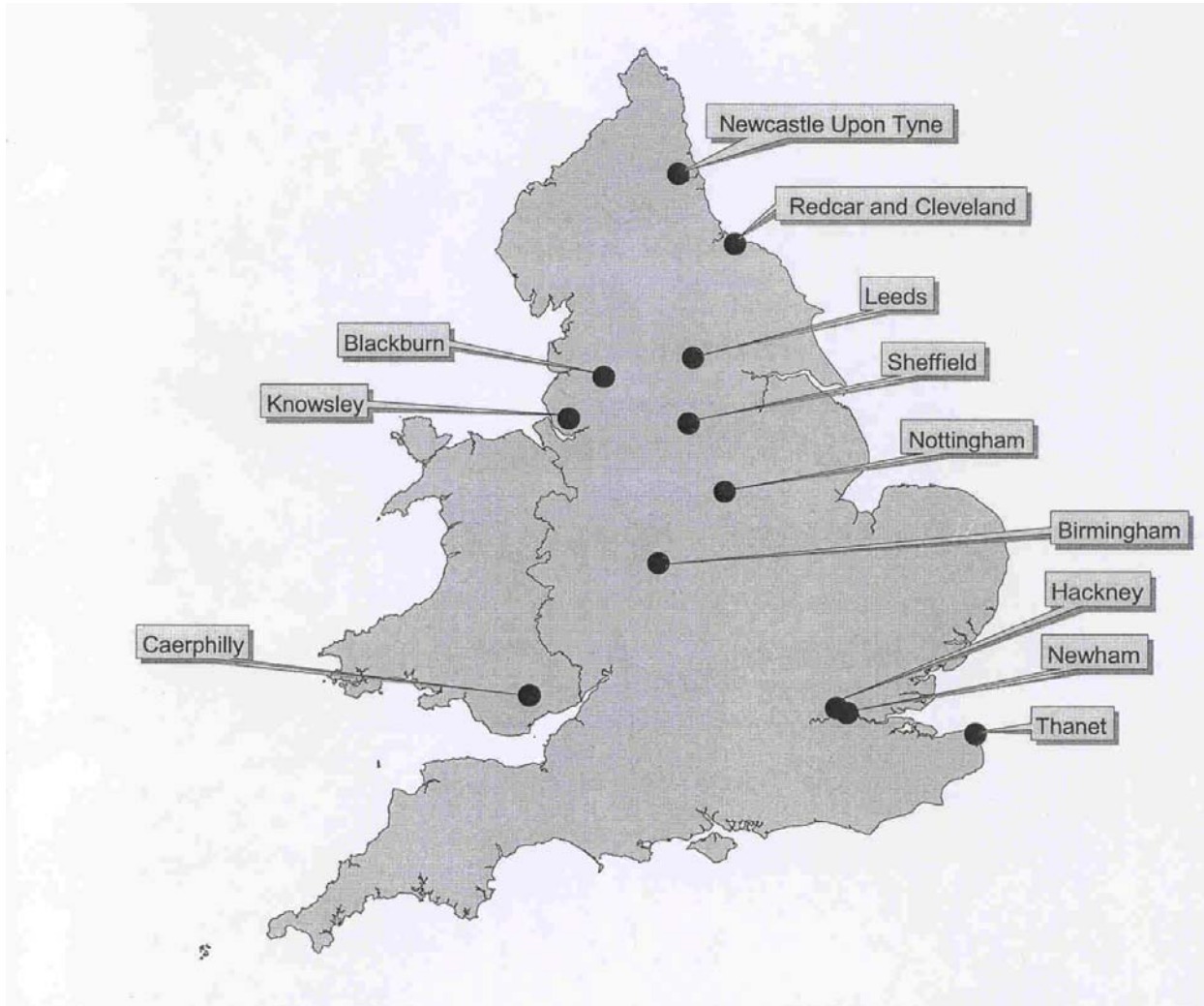


Source: Figure 3 (Glennerster *et al*, 1999: 18)

⁸ The proportion of people of working age neither studying nor in work or a government training scheme (1991 Census data)

⁹ The Breadline Britain Index was used in preference to the Index of Local Deprivation as the latter did not cover Wales

Map 2: Selected local authorities



Source: Map 2 (Lupton, 2001: 10)

Box 2: Selection of the local authorities by area type, region and local authority type¹⁰

Selected area types					
Inner London	Inner-City Characteristics	Coastal Industry	Coalfields	Manufacturing	Other
Selected regions					
London	North West East Midlands	North East Yorks/Humber	North East Wales	North West West Midlands	Yorks/Humber South East
Selected local authority types					
London Borough	Metropolitan District	Non-Metropolitan District	Unitary District	Unitary District	Welsh District
12 local authorities					
Hackney Newham	Knowsley Nottingham	Newcastle Sheffield	Redcar Caerphilly	Blackburn Birmingham	Leeds Thanet

Source: adapted from Figure 2 (Lupton, 2001: 11)

¹⁰ We selected the poverty areas to mirror the Office of National Statistics classification of areas and local authority types – local authorities were classified into 12 types, those listed in Figure 1 and others which not did not refer to deprived areas.

Step 3 was to choose areas and neighbourhoods within the local authorities. Each *area* contained around 20,000 residents. All were part of a ‘poverty ward’, but three were defined by regeneration schemes rather than electoral boundaries. The small *neighbourhoods* within each area varied in size, from 1,000 to 7,000 residents. All were distinctive places such as housing estates. The neighbourhoods were included in the research in order to allow for closer analysis of local dynamics.

Description

These places had key characteristics of low-income areas: the prevalence of work-poor households and broad deprivation that the ‘poverty ward’ analysis had identified; and also above-average rates of social renting and poor physical environments. The areas and neighbourhoods were also chosen for their diversity, in ethnic composition, housing structure, age and location. Physical factors such as their location (inner and outer-city, at the edge of cities or in towns) and their housing ‘heritage’ (when and by whom their housing was built) combine with socio-economic factors such as their demographic profile to create a very rich arena for studying area dynamics. Figure 1 gives a ‘pen picture’ of the 12 areas and their neighbourhoods.

Figure 1: The 12 Representative Areas and Neighbourhoods¹¹

LA	Area	Neighbourhood
Hackney	West-City Mostly Council-built housing. Some pre-war housing. Business, leisure and market area. Ethnically mixed. Inner city.	The Grove Large 1950s Council-built estate of flats. Some pre-war private housing. Ethnically mixed, but higher proportion of white residents than the surrounding area.
Newham	East-Docks Mostly Council-built housing. Industrial sites, near business area. Ethnically mixed. Outer city.	Phoenix Rise Small 1960s Council-built estate; flats and maisonettes. Ethnically mixed.
Knowsley	Overtown 1950s–1960s Council-built estates. Some private housing. Almost exclusively white. Beyond city, built as overspill area.	Saints Walk Small 1940s Council-built estate of houses 1970s private housing at edges. Almost exclusively white.
Nottingham	Riverlands 1960s–1970s Council-built estates. Older private houses. Sizeable Asian and black population. Inner city.	Rosehill Small 1970s Council-built estate, mainly of flats, with an integrated shopping precinct. Significant ethnic minority population.
Newcastle	Shipview Interwar Council-built estates with more affluent older private housing. Predominantly white. Outer city.	Sunnybank Small 1950s Council-built estate of houses Predominantly white.

¹¹ False names are used for areas and neighbourhoods to protect their identity.

LA	Area	Neighbourhood
Sheffield	The Valley Small 1970s Council-built estates. Mostly pre-war private housing. Ethnically mixed. Inner city.	East Rise Council-built flats and private-built houses Ethnically mixed.
Blackburn	High Moor Mostly 1970s Council-built housing. Some private terraces. Mostly white, plus Asian population Outer town.	Bridgefields 1970's Council-built estate of houses Predominantly white.
Birmingham	Middle Row 1950s-1960s Council-built estates Mostly private terraces. Ethnic mix, large Asian minority. Inner city.	Broadways Mixed tenure area of Victorian terraces. Asian majority.
Caerphilly	Fairfields 1970s Council-built estates. Older private housing. Almost exclusively white. Valley towns.	Valley Top Small 1970s Council-built estate of houses Older private housing surrounding estate. Almost exclusively white.
Redcar	Southside Three 1900s-1960s residential areas built to serve industrial plants Mixed tenure Almost exclusively white. Beyond the city.	Borough View Small 1950s Council-built estate of houses Small 1990s RSL development of houses Mostly 1900s terraces Almost exclusively white.
Leeds	Kirkside East 1930s-1940s Council-built estates. Some older private housing at edge. Almost exclusively white. Outer city.	Southmead Distinct part of 1930s Council-built estate. Almost exclusively white.
Thanet	Beachville Mostly 1900s private houses. Small council-built estate. Predominantly white, plus refugees. Seaside town.	Sandyton Former hotel area, many adapted to HMOs. Plus small council estate at edge of area. Predominantly white, plus refugees.

Source: adapted from Figure 4 (Lupton, 2001: 12)

Studying the areas and neighbourhoods

We track these places using both data collected in the field by the researcher and 'administrative data' collected by statutory agencies (e.g. housing allocation figures, local employment statistics). The fieldwork entails interviewing residents, workers and others involved with the areas, as well as noting observations and information on local conditions, facilities, and activity. This helps us to develop our understanding of how these places operate. Each area and neighbourhood has been visited every year, with extended fieldwork conducted in 1999, 2001 and 2003. The 1999 and 2001 rounds of fieldwork entailed interviews with over 300 people (20-35 in each area), plus observations and 'administrative data', through which the researcher tracked the 12 areas' change on issues as diverse as regeneration, education, health, housing, crime, employment and private investment. A full account of this first part of the Study is given in *Poverty Street* by Ruth Lupton (2003).

In 2003 the Study moved into its third round of extended fieldwork, and into a new phase of research. The first two rounds created overviews of conditions, patterns and change by addressing many different issues. The Study is continuing this broader project of tracking how the areas fare overall, but its third round focused on the physical domain, concentrating on the issues of housing, local environment and physical regeneration. Interviews were conducted with housing staff, community workers and regeneration staff as well as residents; the 2001 Census provided much statistical information, which was supplemented by data sources such as local authorities' regeneration strategies, and housing statistics¹².

We compare housing, environment and regeneration data from 1999 with the 2003 fieldwork and data. Comparing how the representative low-income areas were in the early years of Labour's administration with their conditions in 2003 provides insights into how the government's efforts around neighbourhood renewal have impacted on low-income areas.

¹² For example, the Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix submitted by each local authority in England to the ODPM, see: www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_housing/documents/page/odpm_house_023787.hcsp

3. The areas in 1999

We begin by describing the areas' housing and environments in 1999, and documenting the physical regeneration efforts that had been made prior to Labour's first term (see also Lupton, 2001, 2003). When the first round of extended research was conducted, Labour had been in government for eighteen months. In that time it had developed a range of initiatives aimed at enhancing local environments and housing quality. However, few of these had been put in place by the 1999 visits, and those that had were too new to show significant impacts. Therefore – although staff and residents were broadly optimistic that neighbourhood and housing standards would improve under Labour's efforts – the 1999 findings mostly reflect the areas as they were before Labour's initiatives and policies were implemented locally. As such, they provide a baseline against which to track the impacts of these efforts on low-income areas.

Three characteristics: housing, local environment and physical regeneration

Even at the start of the Study, the style and quality of the 12 areas' housing, the character of their built environments and quality of their natural environments were more heterogeneous than might be assumed of low-income areas with much Council-built housing. This diversity partly follows from their differing ages and locations.

Housing

Most areas have housing of different ages, but typically one period dominates, especially within the neighbourhoods on which this report focuses. The dominant housing types are: pre-World War I private stock (Birmingham, Sheffield, Thanet); inter-war Council estates (Newcastle, Leeds, Redcar); 1950s and 1960s Council estates (Knowsley, Hackney, Newham); and 1970s Council estates (Nottingham, Blackburn, Caerphilly). The 12 areas can also be grouped by distance from an urban core: five are inner-city (Hackney, Newham, Nottingham, Sheffield and Birmingham); four are outer-city (Newcastle and Leeds) or just beyond a city or large town (Redcar and Knowsley); and three are in or at the edge of smaller towns (Blackburn, Caerphilly and Thanet). Thus they can be categorised into three sets based on distance from an urban core and the age of their housing. These are: inner-city areas with a mixture of 1950s-1970s Council housing and older private stock; outer-city and city-edge areas with large estates predominantly of inter-war Council housing; and areas in or close to smaller towns with a mixture of 1960s-1970s Council housing and older terraces. Table 1 shows these.

Table 1: Age and Type of Housing by Distance from Urban Core

Area		Distance from Urban Core (miles)	Age of Housing	Type of Housing
Inner-city	West-City (Hackney)	2.5	1950s/1960s	flats
	East-Docks (Newham)	6.5	1950s/1960s	flats and houses
	Riverlands (Nottingham)	< 1	1970s Pre-WW1	flats and houses terraced houses
	The Valley (Sheffield)	1.5	1970s Pre-WW1	flats and houses terraced houses
	Middle Row (Birmingham)	1.5	1950s/1960s Pre-WW1	flats and houses terraced houses
Outer-city or city-edge	Overtown (Knowsley)	5.5	Inter-war	houses
	Shipview (Newcastle)	2.5	Inter-war	houses
	Kirkside East (Leeds)	4.0	Inter-war	houses
	Southside (Redcar)	2.5	Inter-war Pre-WW1	houses terraced houses
Towns	High Moor (Blackburn)	N/A	1950s/1960s/1970s Pre-WW1	flats and houses terraced houses
	Fairfields (Caerphilly)	N/A	1970s Pre-WW1	flats and houses terraced houses
	Beachville (Thanet)	N/A	1960s/1970s Pre-WW1 Victorian/Edwardian	flats terraced houses houses

Source: adapted from Table 1.2 (Lupton, 2003: 26)

Note: London's inner-city areas extend further out from the core of the city because it is so large.

Tenure

The 1991 Census showed that in most areas housing was predominantly socially-rented, dominated by local authority ownership with home-ownership relatively rare. However, there were some contrasts. Areas in or at the edge of cities tended to have higher proportions of social renters than areas in or at the edge of smaller towns. Even within areas there were differing tenure profiles: the neighbourhoods typically had higher proportions of social housing than the areas, reflecting higher poverty levels in the neighbourhoods. By 1999 the picture had shifted. Housing managers, regeneration workers and estate agents confirmed that in most areas local authority ownership had been reduced through the Right To Buy, demolition for regeneration schemes and stock transfer to Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). RSL stock had been boosted both by stock transfer and new build, mostly on clearance sites in regeneration schemes or on spare Council land. Home-ownership rates had increased through the Right To Buy and private building, which some Councils had actively encouraged. Table 2 shows social rental, private rental and owner-occupation rates in 1991 and 2001 for the Study areas. Tenure rates within the neighbourhoods also saw an increase in private rental and ownership, but the changes were less dramatic as the neighbourhoods continued to be dominated by social renting.

Table 2: Tenure of Area by Location (1991 and 2001)

Area		Dominant housing types	% social rented		% private rented		% owner occupied	
			'91	'01	'91	'01	'91	'01
Inner-city	West-City (Hackney)	1950s/1960s flats	74	61	8	12	17	24
	East-Docks (Newham)	1950s/1960s houses and flats	68	51	7	13	25	32
	Riverlands (Nottingham)	1970s flats and houses Pre-WW1 terraced houses	52	61	15	11	33	24
	The Valley (Sheffield)	1970s flats and houses Pre-WW1 terraced houses	52	42	7	11	40	44
	Middle Row (Birmingham)	1950s/1960s flats and houses Pre-WW1 terraced houses	55	34	8	14	35	46
Outer-city or city-edge	Overtown (Knowsley)	Inter-war houses	57	52	4	5	37	38
	Shipview (Newcastle)	Inter-war houses	61	55	5	5	33	38
	Kirkside East (Leeds)	Inter-war houses	70	60	1	4	28	33
	Southside (Redcar)	Inter-war houses Pre-WW1 terraced houses	45	41	3	5	51	52
Towns	High Moor (Blackburn)	1970s flats and houses Pre-WW1 terraced houses	53	36	9	6	38	53
	Fairfields (Caerphilly)	1970s flats and houses Pre-WW1 terraced houses	38	31	8	5	54	62
	Beachville (Thanet)	1960s/1970s flats Pre-WW1 terraced houses Victorian/Edwardian houses	18	17	24	20	58	58

Source: adapted from Table 1.2 (Lupton, 2003: 26) using 1991 Census and 2001 Census

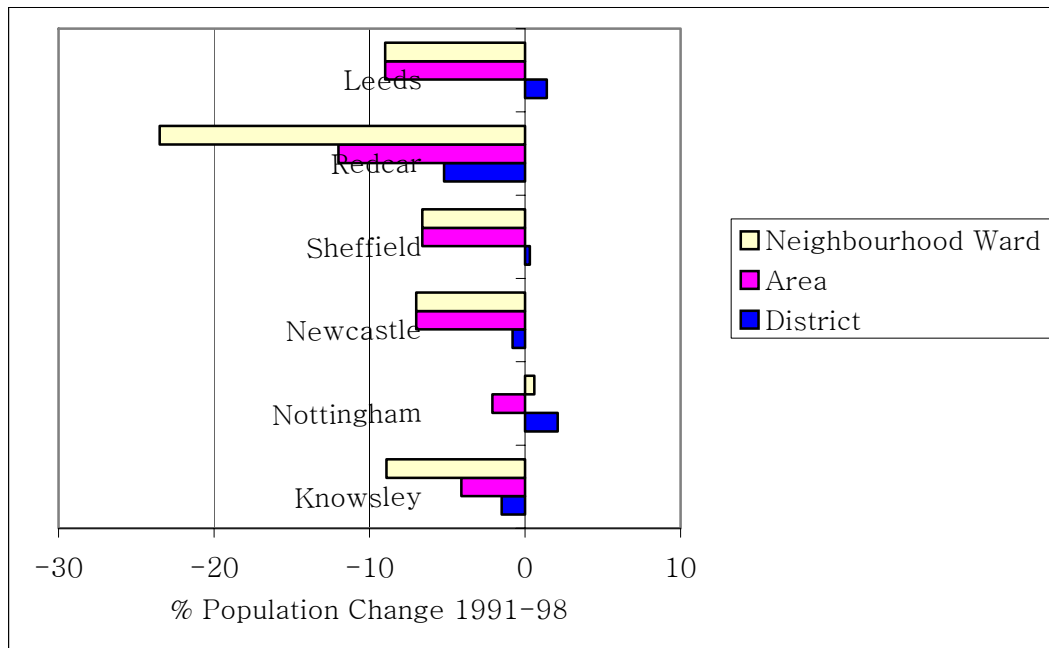
Note 1: alterations to ward boundaries may have amplified tenure changes in some areas

Note 2: percentages do not sum to 100 as Table does not include other forms of tenure

Demand

At the same time, overall demand for housing was falling in many of the areas outside the South East. Many had been experiencing low demand for decades, but a number saw demand fall even lower in the 1990s, across both the social and private sectors, driven by overall population loss. Six of our areas lost between 2% and 12% of their population from 1991 to 1998, and some of their neighbourhoods had even greater losses. Council housing was particularly badly affected, but the private sector and RSL housing in these areas were also experiencing declines in demand. Often new building drew people out of older homes, creating an increase in empty property. Figure 2 shows the changes in these six areas.

Figure 2: Population losses 1991–1998



Source: Figure 3.5 (Lupton, 2003: 86) using ONS mid-year population estimates and Oxford University population estimates for wards in England, mid 1998

Table 3 summarises how the Housing Managers in these areas of population loss saw the local housing demand when they were interviewed in 1999.

Table 3: Demand for Housing in Population-Loss Areas

Area	Housing manager’s description of demand	Level of empty properties
Overtown (Knowsley)	Low – no waiting list	7% of area higher in neighbourhood
Riverlands (Nottingham)	Low – no waiting list <i>“if there was a level playing field, no one would choose Rosehill at all”</i>	2% of area higher in neighbourhood
Shipview (Newcastle)	No waiting list <i>“Nil”</i>	10% of area higher in neighbourhood
The Valley (Sheffield)	Low – no waiting list	25% of flats few houses
Southside (Redcar and Cleveland)	Low – small waiting list for one estate <i>“hand on heart I can’t say there’s a demand”</i>	31% of terraces (of which 10% in clearance area) 3% of Council estate
Kirkside East (Leeds)	No waiting list <i>“low to non-existent”</i>	7% of area higher in neighbourhood

Source: Table 3.6 (Lupton, 2003: 87) based on interviews with Housing Managers, 1999

Not all areas lost population. Table 4 shows the prevalence of empty property in each neighbourhood in 1999. Two-thirds had a problem with empty properties, either throughout the neighbourhood or in particular streets or housing types, but the areas in London and Birmingham had no significant problem with empty property. In Hackney particularly there was significant competition for space.

Table 4: Levels of Empty Property in the Neighbourhoods (1999)

Neighbourhood	None or isolated empty property	Pockets of empty property affecting certain streets or property types: <10% overall but worse in parts	Many empty houses and flats: 10%-40% overall
The Grove (Hackney)	✓		
Phoenix Rise (Newham)	✓		
Saints Walk (Knowsley)		✓ isolated streets	
Rosehill (Nottingham)		✓ one block of flats/maisonettes	
Sunnybank (Newcastle)			✓
East Rise (Sheffield)		✓ flats/maisonettes	
Bridgefields (Blackburn)			✓
Broadways (Birmingham)	✓		
Valley Top (Caerphilly)		✓ scattered, mainly flats/maisonettes	
Borough View (Redcar)			✓
Southmead (Leeds)			✓
Sandyton (Thanet)	Housing is mainly HMOs ¹³ or hostels – but some scattered empty stock		
TOTAL	3	4	4

Source: Table 13 (Lupton, 2001: 46) Interviews with Housing Managers, 1999

Population estimates in 1998 showed that the London areas had gained population over the late 1990s, despite significant population loss in the 1970s and 1980s, and the Thanet area had also experienced a net gain. Nor was this only a South-East phenomenon: the Birmingham area's population increased by 8.8% from 1991 to the late 1990s, due to natural increase in the Asian population and some continuing immigration from abroad. Table 5 shows the changes in these areas for 1971–1991 and 1991–1998.

Table 5: Population gains 1971–1998

Area	Change ¹ 1971–1991 (%)	Change ² 1991–1998 (%)	Birth/Death Ratio 1998
West-City (Hackney)	-35	+ 3.4	1.47
East-Docks (Newham)	-10	+ 6	2.10
Middle Row (Birmingham)	+ 2	+ 8.8	3.24
Beachville (Thanet)		+ 3.3	0.83
England and Wales	+ 4	+ 3	1.15

Source: Table 3.8 (Lupton, 2003: 91) – Based on 1971 and 1991 Census data. ONS mid-year estimates. University of Oxford ward level population estimates calculated for use with IMD.

Notes: ¹ 1971–1991 change calculated using Census data (population present on Census night). Blanks indicate areas where boundary changes make comparison impossible for this period.

² 1991–1998 data calculated using mid-year population estimates. 1998 data were taken directly from estimates produced for use with IMD. These are not directly comparable with Census data. However, there are no mid-year estimates at ward level for 1991. These were calculated by attributing 1991 Census ward population shares to 1991 mid-year estimates for districts.

¹³ HMOs = Housing In Multiple Occupation, i.e. home to more than one household.

Quality

Although housing demand varied across the 12 areas in 1999, housing quality was uniformly low. Each area had physical problems with housing stock, although the nature and extent of problems varied between Council-built and privately-built housing, and between different styles of Council estate. The inter-war estates needed modernisation but did not have the extensive problems that much of the newer Council housing did, with insulation and heating systems failing and structural elements deteriorating and requiring major investment. Privately-built housing experienced problems with damp, poor insulation, and general obsolescence. In addition, the areas with a sizeable private sector (Redcar, Caerphilly, Thanet, Blackburn and Sheffield) had other significant problems with roofing and wiring in particular. These homes were usually owned or rented by people who could not afford the necessary maintenance, so private stock in these areas was typically in poor or very poor condition. Areas with substantial numbers of middle or higher-income private renters and owners (Hackney, Newcastle and to a lesser degree Nottingham) had significantly better quality private stock, but the overall housing quality was still low as most homes were in the social sector and displayed problems with maintenance, low demand and structural soundness respectively. These housing quality issues are outlined alongside the wider problems of area design and usage in Table 6 on the following page.

Physical environment

Built environment

Housing-specific problems were often reinforced by flaws with the built environment as a whole. The materials used in the construction of housing and other buildings around the areas had often worn poorly, contributing to the impression of a low-grade environment and making general maintenance both more necessary and less effective. These flaws had been compounded by poor quality repair and misuse. There were also problems with the layout of the areas, with insufficient parking space in some areas¹⁴ and little green space in others. Those open areas that did exist were often poorly supervised and so were prone to vandalism and graffiti, which both undermined the physical environment and contributed to a sense of disorder and fear of crime. The lack of supervision was a particular problem in newer estates that had been designed to separate pedestrians and traffic. Where the design was poor, it could lead to enclosed spaces being unsupervised and consequentially becoming underused. The problems with the design and layout of the areas are outlined in Table 6 (on the following page), along with the housing quality issues discussed above.

¹⁴ The 1991 Census showed that about 50% of the households in these areas owned cars. This was less than the national average but significantly more than had been allowed for in the original design and layout of the estates.

Table 6: Problems with housing stock and area layout by housing type (1999)

Housing type	Areas	Housing stock problems	Area layout problems
Pre-WW1 Private	Riverlands (Nottingham) The Valley (Sheffield) High Moor (Blackburn) Middle Row (B'ham) Fairfields (Caerphilly) Southside (Redcar) Beachville (Thanet)	Generally soundly built, but possibly in need of modernisation; poor maintenance has meant that many do now have significant problems	Some narrow streets, with parking limitations. Decay of pavements and roads, walls and fences, kerbs and green spaces in most areas. Some areas have problematic alleys
Inter-war Council	Overtown (Knowsley) Shipview (Newcastle) Kirkside East (Leeds) Southside (Redcar)	Generally soundly built but need modernisation of kitchens, bathrooms, doors and windows, and central heating	No major design problems. Narrow streets so parking problems. Ageing of roads, pavements, kerbs, walls, fences and green spaces
1950s - 1960s Council	West-City (Hackney) East-Docks (Newham) Middle Row (B'ham)	Structural problems; some modernisation needed	Poorly designed and poorly maintained communal areas some poorly designed blocks
1970s Council	Riverlands (Nottingham) The Valley (Sheffield) High Moor (Blackburn) Fairfields (Caerphilly) Beachville (Thanet)	Various, including poor insulation and heating systems, and damaged and worn timber frames	Estate design problems. Alleys and passages unsafe. Communal space excessive and uncared for. Surveillance impaired by separation of pedestrians and traffic

Source: Adapted from Table 8 (Lupton, 2001: 33) based on visits and interviews with housing managers, 1999

Natural environment

Problems with the built environment also affected the quality of local green areas. Poor informal surveillance is known to reduce people's recreational use of open spaces (Gehl, 1996; Hillier and Hanson, 1984; Jacobs, 1972) and so, where design or demolition had undermined local supervision, green spaces had become neglected, often used more as rubbish dumps than for recreation. This was a particular problem in the newer Council estates, such as Riverlands (Nottingham), and in areas of older housing where voids and vandalism had prompted demolition, as in Borough View (Redcar). In some areas, such as East-Docks (Newham) and The Valley (Sheffield), problematic estate design and low-grade building materials brought additional problems. In Newham, the lack of green spaces meant that those which did exist were over-used and run-down as a result. In the Sheffield neighbourhood, the design of two blocks of flats, and the materials used in their construction, contributed to the low-grade environment surrounding them. Table 7 shows how neighbourhood conditions in the areas were affected by lack of care and general neglect of the environment.

Table 7: Problems with Local Environment in the 12 neighbourhoods (1999)

Neighbourhoods	Derelict / boarded up houses or shops	Dumped household items/rubbish	Noticeable litter	Poorly maintained common areas (e.g. kerbs, fences)	Noticeable graffiti	Noticeable vandalism	TOTAL
The Grove (Hackney)							0
Phoenix Rise (Newham)	✓						1
Saints Walk (Knowsley)	✓						1
Rosehill (Nottingham)	✓	✓					2
Sunnybank (Newcastle)	✓						1
East Rise (Sheffield)	✓						1
Bridgefields (Blackburn)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
Broadways (Birmingham)		✓	✓				2
Valley Top (Caerphilly)	✓	✓		✓			3
Borough View (Redcar)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
Southmead (Leeds)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
Sandyton (Thanet)	✓						1
TOTAL	10	6	4	4	3	3	30

Source: Table 9 (Lupton, 2001: 35) based on observation and interviews with residents and staff in 1999

One approach to improving the local environment is to ensure that there are clear communication channels to people who are in a position to act on the problems. In 1999, there were two main channels of communication about local ‘neighbourhood management’ issues: One Stop Shops; and Area Forums or Area Committees. A third form was the appointment of a neighbourhood manager – a local worker with whom ‘the buck stops’ over maintenance of the local area (Power, 2004: 1). However, in 1999 this was rarely used as there was no specific funding for it. Table 8 sets out which of these initiatives each area had in 1999. Most had one initiative (usually an Area Forum or Area Committee) but the Leeds and Nottingham areas both had three initiatives, whereas the areas in Blackburn, Caerphilly and Thanet had none. Only one area (Nottingham) had a neighbourhood manager when we first visited.

Improving communication about problems is not, however, sufficient to ensure that they are addressed. Without their own budgets and staff, such efforts to address neighbourhood management problems are still dependent on Council decisions and efforts. Four of the six Area Committees (in Leeds, Sheffield, Nottingham, and Newcastle) had employed full-time co-ordinators to follow issues raised at committee. This reinforced committees’ efforts but their influence was still limited by the resources which the Council put into addressing the local problems. Some initiatives were improving or maintaining local environmental standards, but others appeared to have made little impact. The two areas with the most comprehensive neighbourhood management had contrasting environmental standards: the researcher

recorded the Nottingham area as having two major environmental problems (derelict housing and dumped rubbish), while the area in Leeds was recorded as having six (among the most of any area).

Table 8: Area Management Initiatives (1999)

Area	One Stop Shop	Area Forum	Area Committee (& co-ordinator)	Neighbourhood Manager	Total
West-City (Hackney)			✓		1
East-Docks (Newham)		✓			1
Overtown (Knowsley)	✓				1
Riverlands (Nottingham)		✓	✓ (✓)	✓	3
Shipview (Newcastle)			✓ (✓)		1
The Valley (Sheffield)		✓	✓ (✓)		2
High Moor (Blackburn)					0
Middle Row (Birmingham)			✓		1
Fairfields (Caerphilly)					0
Southside (Redcar and C)		✓			1
Kirkside East (Leeds)	✓	✓	✓ (✓)		3
Beachville (Thanet)					0
TOTAL	2	5	6 (4)	1	14

Source: Adapted from Table 17 (Lupton, 2001: 62) based on 1999 visits

Regeneration

In addition to these neighbourhood management initiatives, there were a number of ongoing or recent area-focused regeneration programmes¹⁵. Since the late 1960s, the UK government and the European Union have made efforts to address disadvantage through area-based initiatives and funds. These have had one or more objectives: physical improvements; socio-economic improvements; and community empowerment. The most common aim has been to make physical improvements, but since the 1990s more emphasis has been placed on socio-economic factors such as health, education, employment or community safety, and there has also been increased interest in engaging residents in improving areas. The broadest efforts have aimed to deliver on all fronts: physical, socio-economic and community.

From 1968 to 1997 England had eight major programmes: the Community Development Projects; Inner City Task Forces; the Urban Programme; Priority Estates Project; Urban Development Corporations; Estate Action; City Challenge; and the Single Regeneration Budget. Wales had six: Welsh Priority Estates Project; Welsh Capital Challenge; Local Authorities Rural Scheme; Programme for the Valleys; Urban Programme (later Strategic Development Scheme / Community Strategies) and Urban Investment Grant. The European Union had five: Objectives 1, 2 and 3; and two Community Initiatives (Leader and Urban). Table 9 summarises the programmes and indicates which of the Study's local authorities and areas received funding. Study areas did not always share in funds received by their local authority, but all 12 had received funding from at least one regeneration scheme prior to Labour's first term in office.

¹⁵ Individual schemes within each programme ended at different times. Many schemes were absorbed into new programmes.

Table 9: Summary of major regeneration programmes, 1969–1997

	Programme	Dates	Description	Local authorities (★) Study areas (☆)										TOTALS			
				Hackney	Newham	Knowsley	Nottingham	Newcastle	Sheffield	Blackburn	Birmingham	Caerphilly	Redcar		Leeds	Thanet	
EU	Objective 1	1994–1999	to encourage development in less prosperous regions			★							★				20
	Objective 2	1994–1999	to revitalise regions facing structural difficulties		★ ☆			★	★			★	★ ☆				52
	Urban	1994–1999	to facilitate sustainable urban development in failing areas	★	★ ☆	★	★		★			★	★		★		81
England	Community Development Projects	1969–1977	to research low-income areas & catalyse local development		★ ☆			★									21
	Urban Programme	1978–1993	to deal with problems of inner city deprivation	★	★ ☆	★	★ ☆	★	★	★	★			★ ☆	★		103
	Urban Development Corporations	1980–1993	to develop areas' economic, social, and physical resources		★			★	★		★			★	★		61
	Priority Estates Project	1979–ongoing	to improve low-demand estates through estate-based housing management	★ ☆	★	★		★	★		★				★		71
	Estate Action	1985–1993	multi-faceted programme for comprehensive physical and social estate regeneration	★ ☆	★	★ ☆	★	★ ☆	★	★	★			★	★	★	113
	Inner City Task Forces	1986–1993	small teams concentrating on the economic regeneration of designated inner city areas	★			★					★					30
	City Challenge	1991–1998	local authority led partnership to regenerate failing areas	★ ☆	★		★ ☆	★			★	★					62
	Single Regeneration Budget	1994–ongoing	unified funding for socio-economic regeneration of deprived areas	★	★ ☆	★ ☆	★ ☆	★	★	★	★	☆		★ ☆	★ ☆	★ ☆	119
	Wales	Priority Estates Project	1983–1989	to improve low-demand estates through estate-based housing management										★ ☆			
Strategic Development Scheme		1994–2000	fund for economic, social and environmental improvements to disadvantaged communities										★ ☆				11
Capital Challenge		1997–1999	fund to support and extend education and employment										★				10
Local Authority Rural Scheme		1994–2002	fund for rural environmental and physical development														00
Programme for the Valleys		1988–1999	fund for regenerating housing and economy in the Valleys										★ ☆				11
Local Regeneration Fund		1999–ongoing	fund for social, economic and physical regeneration of local urban and rural areas														00
People in Communities		1998–ongoing	partnership to tackle social disadvantage in some of the most deprived communities											★ ☆			11
Urban Investment Grant		1989–1996	funding to stimulate private sector investment to rundown sites in deprived urban areas														00
TOTALS																	
Local authorities (★)				7	9	6	6	8	7	4	9	8	4	6	2		76
Study areas (☆)				3	5	2	3	1	2	1	1	5	2	1	1		27

Source: adapted from Table 6.1 (Lupton, 2003: 124) based on interviews and regeneration programme reports

Note: funding is indicated by ★ for local authorities, and ☆ for Study areas

The Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) was among the only programmes still running in 1999. Nine of the English Study areas had SRB funding for specific projects but only five had comprehensive area-based SRB programmes. Table 10 outlines what these provided – a mixture of physical improvements, socio-economic development and community provision. All five engaged in some way with business, employment or training; four funded community groups and facilities; and all were involved in efforts to improve the physical environment, most through housing renewal (only one through demolition) and some through improvements to roads, parks and environmental maintenance in general.

Table 10: Comprehensive area-based SRB programmes, 1999

Area	SRB (£m)	Main elements
East-Docks (Newham)	21.5	Redeveloped industrial estates, and attract new employers Set up Business Support, and develop training /employer links. Funded limited housing renewal
Overtown (Knowsley)	26	Improved quality and use of industrial estate. Provided training schemes and community education facilities. Funded community health workers, community groups and schemes Enhanced physical environment of estates Made limited improvements to housing stock
Shipview (Newcastle)	25	Redeveloped main shopping street Funded training, Workfinder and community education facilities Funded community groups and schemes (eg family support worker) Improved local environment and facilities (pool, library, play area)
Middle Row (Birmingham)	23	Supported community-based training and employment initiatives Provided business support and improve the trading environment Improved community facilities, local roads and environment Funded housing renewal scheme, including designing out crime Tailored initiatives to needs of ethnic minorities
Southside (Redcar)	18	Set up training, employment advice, and employer incentives Improved industrial estate and fund inward investment grants Re-developed main shopping street, and improve housing stock and layout (including demolition and private sector renewal) Improved community facilities; set up community forum, detached youth work, environmental warden, CCTV and additional policing

Source: adapted from Table 6.2 (Lupton, 2003: 126) based on interviews and reports, 1999

4. Government action: policies and area-based initiatives

Having described how the areas were at the outset of the study, the paper now outlines how Labour has tried to improve housing and local environments since coming into government in 1997. We started by outlining the concepts behind Labour's policy development in this arena: social exclusion; liveability; and sustainable communities. The sheer number of policies and initiatives introduced by Labour led to a burgeoning of new projects across highly deprived local authorities, and especially within the poorest neighbourhoods. Table 11 summarises these and shows in which areas they were running in late 2003. Those which have been implemented since (for example, Newcastle's ALMO) are not discussed here.

Table 11: Key housing, local environment and physical regeneration policies, 1997–2003

	Programme	Start	Description	Local authorities (★) Study areas (☆)											TOTAL	
				Hackney	Newham	Knowsley	Nottingham	Newcastle	Sheffield	Blackburn	Birmingham	Caerphilly	Redcar	Leeds		Thanet
England	New Deal for Communities	1998	10-year programme for 39 low-income areas = £50 million funding each	★ ☆	★	★ ☆	★	★	★ ☆		★					7 3
	Neighbourhood Renewal Fund	2001	Funding to improve standards in 88 most deprived authorities	★ ☆	★ ☆	★ ☆	★ ☆	★ ☆	★ ☆	★ ☆	★ ☆		★ ☆	★ ☆		10 10
	Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders	2000	Area-focused approach to tackling housing and environmental issues								★					1 0
	Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders	2002	Programme to sustain private housing market in 9 pathfinder areas					★	★ ☆	★ ☆	★					4 2
	Arm's Length Management Organisations	2002	Housing management organisations set up to serve Council housing											★ ☆		1 1
	Housing Private Finance Initiative	1998	Initiative for private investors to build and lease to public sector		★ ☆											1 1
Wales	Communities First ¹⁶	2001	10-year-plus strategy to tackle area-based poverty and deprivation									★ ☆			1 1	
Both	Choice-Based Lettings	2001	Initiative to broaden the range of Council tenants by ending points system		★ ☆			★ ☆	★ ☆	★ ☆		★ ☆		★ ☆		6 6
	Neighbourhood Wardens	2000	Uniformed workers who patrol areas to address local 'liveability' issues	★ ☆	★ ☆	★	★	★	★ ☆		★	★	★ ☆	★ ☆	★	11 6
	Decent Homes / Welsh Housing Quality Standard	2000 / 2001	Housing standard for social and vulnerable private households	★ ☆	★ ☆	★ ☆	★ ☆	★ ☆	★ ☆	★ ☆	★ ☆	★ ☆	★ ☆	★ ☆	★ ☆	12 12
TOTALS				4	6	4	4	6	6	5	5	4	3	5	2	54
				4	5	3	2	3	6	4	3	3	3	5	1	42

Source: Interviews and regeneration programme reports, 1999–2003

Note: funding is indicated by ★ for local authorities, and ☆ for Study areas

¹⁶ This programme subsumed two earlier regeneration programmes into its 'Community Purposes' funding. These were: 'People in Communities' (launched in 1998) and 'The Sustainable Communities Programme' (established in 1999).

Regeneration

By establishing the Social Exclusion Unit and National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, the Labour government quickly identified local regeneration as crucial to improving Britain. The original report for the National Strategy *Bringing Britain Together* (SEU, 1998) set out new initiatives to address multiple problems faced by low-income areas, and restructured the Single Regeneration Budget to fund these. The creation of the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit¹⁷ (NRU) in April 2001 reaffirmed this focus on the needs of low-income areas. It also brought in additional funding and new initiatives, and served as a central resource for workers and residents involved in regenerating low-income areas. After devolution in 1999, the Welsh Assembly government introduced specific strategies for local regeneration in Wales. This section discusses the most important regeneration initiatives introduced since 1997: New Deal for Communities; the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund; and Communities First.

New Deal for Communities

New Deal for Communities (NDC) was one of five major area-based initiatives introduced in Labour's first term. The other four (Sure Start and the Employment, Education and Health Action Zones) focused on socio-economic issues. The Action Zones aimed at encouraging new ways of working, creating stronger partnerships and improving services in severely disadvantaged areas. Sure Start was designed to strengthen partnership-working around young children's needs, and to bring additional resources for pre-school children and their parents in low-income areas, to "ensure that all children are ready to learn when they arrive at school" (SEU, 1998: para 4.10). Unlike the Zones and Sure Start, New Deal for Communities (NDC) focused on areas as a whole. It was designed as a catalyst for the intensive physical and social regeneration of specific low-income areas, premised on having residents involved in the design and conduct of the regeneration, 'putting residents in the driving seat'. There are 39 NDC areas, each with around 4,500 homes. These areas are given £50m over ten years; how this is spent differs from area to area, following needs identified by residents and the NDC Board.

Communities First

The Welsh Assembly Government has shown similar concern with regenerating low-income areas. Its area-targeted initiatives began with 'People in Communities' (from 1998) and 'Sustainable Communities Programme' (from 1999). In 2001 these were subsumed into *Communities First*. This programme is similar to NDC in being a long-term scheme premised on community involvement and "an integrated approach to addressing poverty and the factors that cause or contribute to it" (National Assembly for Wales, 2001a: 3), but it differs in being a channel for diverse extant funding rather than a source of new funding. Eligible areas¹⁸ create Communities First Partnerships to conduct needs analysis and devise a three-year action plan for sustainable regeneration on six factors: business and jobs; education and training; environment; health and wellbeing; community activities; and community safety.

¹⁷ Set up within the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, to implement the National Strategy Action Plan for Neighbourhood Renewal, supported by regional teams in the nine government offices.

¹⁸ Areas within the 100 most deprived electoral divisions (identified by the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000)

Neighbourhood Renewal Fund

In 2001, the government launched a new source of funding for neighbourhood renewal in England. This Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) was specific to the 88 most deprived local authorities (as assessed by the Indices of Deprivation, DETR, 2000). The aim was to improve outcomes in the most deprived areas by enabling local authorities to improve mainstream services and to support voluntary-sector projects in these areas. Each of the 88 local authorities distributes its NRF budget in conjunction with its Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) – LSPs were set up in each local authority as part of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, but in NRF areas they receive additional funding¹⁹. The NRF provided £200 million in 2001/02, £300 million in 2002/03 and £400 million in 2003/04.

Local environment

The NDC and Communities First programmes and the NRF were designed to meet local priorities – whether housing, local environment, or socio-economic issues. In developing the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, however, it became clear to the government that environmental conditions and housing issues were nation-wide priorities which required broader responses than such area-specific initiatives could provide. The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit took on responsibility for two initiatives focused on addressing local environmental conditions across the country: neighbourhood management; and neighbourhood wardens.

Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders

Power (2004: 3) has described neighbourhood management as “the local organisation, delivery and co-ordination of core civic and community services within a small, recognisable, built-up area of under 5000 homes”. Such mechanisms were in existence before Labour came to power but they were given increased recognition and support under the Labour government. In 1999, neighbourhood management was identified by the government as a key strategy for addressing social exclusion and promoting local regeneration. In 2000, the government published a report on the nature and potential of neighbourhood management (SEU, 2000) and launched 20 long-term neighbourhood management pathfinders in areas of high deprivation, with an additional 15 pathfinders announced in December 2003. In addition to these 35 pathfinders, there are estimated to be 150 areas that have developed and funded neighbourhood management structures independently of central government. Since 2001, the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU) has promoted neighbourhood management as “one of the best ways to deliver effective neighbourhood renewal”²⁰. It has created a Neighbourhood Management Team (now combined with the Neighbourhood Warden Team) both to co-ordinate the pathfinders and to offer information and support to pathfinder areas and the many other places that use neighbourhood management.

¹⁹ The LSPs were founded to identify priority neighbourhoods, develop a plan and targets, and develop community networks

²⁰ NRU website: www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/nmwt/nmanagement.asp

Neighbourhood Wardens

The government has adopted a similar strategy of broad support plus specific initiatives in developing the role of wardens within the management and renewal of disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The idea of wardens – people providing a semi-formal presence in public places – is not new, nor did it originate in central government (warden schemes have been developed by local authorities in many areas since the early 1980s), but this government's approach marks a significant development, with central funding and advice from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister²¹. There have been three rounds of ODPM funding for warden schemes across England and Wales: neighbourhood wardens in 2000 (with a focus on environmental issues), street wardens in 2001 (focused on city and town centres) and street crime wardens in 2002 (as part of the Street Crime Initiative). The ODPM has allocated £91 million for these schemes, funding each for three-and-a-half years. The Welsh Assembly Government has also funded neighbourhood warden schemes (The National Assembly for Wales, 2001b: 117): £300,000 for schemes in five local authorities between 1999 and 2003²². There are at least 500 warden schemes in operation across England and Wales, including 245 schemes funded by the ODPM (68 of which have been granted ongoing local authority funding), five local authority-wide schemes funded by the Welsh Assembly Government, and schemes funded by local authorities and regeneration or crime reduction programmes. Each of these 'neighbourhood' or 'community' warden schemes, whether funded by ODPM, the Welsh Assembly Government, local authorities or area-focused programmes, have fundamentally similar functions of monitoring and addressing local environmental issues and anti-social behaviour. However, their geographical focus can vary – some operate in town and city centres, whilst others (the majority) serve predominantly residential areas.

Housing

The government's aims for housing are concerned primarily with meeting demand and improving quality (DETR/DSS, 2000) and with ensuring sustainability (ODPM, 2003a). In addition to the Neighbourhood Renewal and Sustainable Communities agendas, it has set a target of bringing all Council housing up to an improved basic standard by 2010 – the Decent Homes Standard. The government has used extant strategies (stock transfer and Private Finance Initiative) and new approaches (Arms Length Management Organisations and Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders) to address the quality, demand and sustainability issues. It has also made efforts to stem the loss of social housing through changes to Right To Buy in some high-demand areas, and to broaden people's access to social housing across the country through Choice-Based Lettings. Much the same efforts and strategies have been made by the Welsh Assembly Government, although some of the details differ. For example, the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (broadly similar to the Decent Homes Standard) is to be met by 2012 rather than 2010.

²¹ The Neighbourhood Warden Team (within the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit) See www.neighbourhood.gov.uk

²² See also the National Assembly website www.wales.gov.uk/subicsu/content/funding/neighbour-wardens-e.htm

The government has developed a number of strategies aimed at managing regional problems of housing demand and need, including creating new or promoting existing ‘growth areas’ for house-building and sustainable development²³ (e.g. the *Northern Way* strategy: ODPM, 2004). More locally, it has used two methods to ensure that housing demand is enhanced where low, and can be met where it is high.

CBL – Choice-based lettings

Choice-based letting schemes extend eligibility for social housing beyond the traditional points system. They also allow social housing tenants to apply for specific properties, rather than being allocated one. The principle is that the majority of social lettings should no longer be restricted by a points system but should be open to all who are interested in taking them. Furthermore, the lettings should be advertised openly, rather than only in housing offices. In most cases a minority of lettings are still allocated on a points system in order to provide for those in greatest need, for example the homeless. The choice-based lettings strategy was developed in the Netherlands²⁴ in the late 1980s. From 1998–2000 three schemes were developed and implemented in the UK by two housing associations and a local authority (Brown, Hunt and Richardson, 2003). In 2001, the government sponsored 27 CBL pilots in England. Since 2001, it has been promoting choice-based lettings as a way of both increasing demand for social housing and diversifying local populations – key to creating sustainable communities. Local authority housing data supplied to the ODPM are now required to note whether CBL is used, the proportion of lettings to which it applies if so, and the plan for introducing it if not. The clear emphasis is on choice-based lettings being implemented more widely and extended where they already operate.

RTB – Right To Buy changes

In 1999, the government made changes to the Right to Buy discount within areas of particularly high demand for social housing. The maximum discount of £50,000 was replaced with regional maximums of £22–38,000. In 2003, the maximum discount was reduced further for London and the South-East, to £16,000 in areas with greatest housing pressure (measured by house prices and homelessness figures).

Decent Homes Standard / Welsh Housing Quality Standard

On the matter of housing quality, both the British and Welsh Assembly governments have continued or introduced a range of strategies for improving the condition of social housing stock. Fundamental to all of these is the requirement that all social housing should reach a minimum standard by 2010 (England) or 2012 (Wales). The English standard is for housing to be warm, weatherproof and to have reasonably modern facilities. The Welsh standard is for housing to be well maintained and managed, warm, safe and secure, have modern facilities, set in attractive and safe environments, and to suit the household. In England, extra funding will be made available for work to meet this standard if local authorities either transfer their stock, set up intermediate management organisations or redevelop using private finance.

²³ See ODPM document *Overview of the Growth Areas*, online at www.odpm.gov.uk

²⁴ It is also known as the ‘Delft model’ after the city in which the idea originated

Stock transfer

Transferring social housing from local authority ownership to registered social landlords (RSLs) was an option before Labour came to power. Initially, large-scale voluntary transfers were predominantly of rural housing which had a positive market value. Subsequently, transfer was used to separate service delivery from housing strategy, and to address funding gaps by removing housing expenditures from local authority budgets and drawing down central government funds for housing improvements (many of which were dependent on housing being transferred to RSLs). Labour retained stock transfer for these reasons but also made transfer one way to access additional funds to meet the Decent Homes standard.

Housing Private Finance Initiative

A second option is for local authorities to engage the private sector in regenerating stock. The Private Finance Initiative (PFI) was introduced by the Conservative government in 1992, but Labour retained it as a way of improving public sector delivery, and expanded it to incorporate housing renewal:

ODPM expects housing PFI to become an increasingly important element in helping it to achieve its objective of ensuring everyone has the opportunity of a decent home by 2010. It was identified ... as one of the investment options that authorities could use to improve their Council housing along with stock transfer and ALMOS. (ODPM, 2003a: 2)

ALMOs – Arms Length Management Organisations

The third, and entirely new option, is the creation of a local Arms-Length Management Organisation to manage the stock on behalf of the local authority. The ALMO option was introduced by the government in 2001, in response to the increasing difficulties that many local authorities were having in managing stock without significant financial losses, and specifically to provide for the Decent Homes Standard. Councils which meet stringent financial targets can access additional government funding for setting up ALMOs and upgrading stock through these, although Councils can set them up independently if they can finance it. ALMOs do not have to be approved by tenants, but most local authorities do ballot their tenants as part of the development process.

Housing Market Renewal

In 2003, the government launched Housing Market Renewal (HMR) pathfinders to catalyse the housing market in nine low-demand sub-regional areas²⁵. The aim was to spark *and* sustain housing demand in areas that had seen substantial population declines or significant homogenisation of tenure. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, which took the lead on this, was very much concerned with developing sustainable communities and so the idea was to provide funding for strategic developments that would generate interest in the areas over the long term.

²⁵ Newcastle and Gateshead; Hull and East Riding of Yorkshire; South Yorkshire (Sheffield, Doncaster, Barnsley, Rotherham); Birmingham and Sandwell; North Staffordshire (Stoke, east Newcastle-under-Lyme and east Biddulph); Manchester and Salford; Merseyside (Liverpool, Sefton and Wirral); Oldham and Rochdale; East Lancashire (Burnley, Blackburn, Hyndburn, Pendle, Rossendale)

5. Tracing the changes: local impacts and problems

Section 4 has outlined the major initiatives that Labour introduced around housing, local environment and physical regeneration since coming to power in 1997, many of which have also been introduced by the Welsh Assembly Government. The remainder of the paper considers what our 12 low-income neighbourhoods tell us about the impact that these have had within the UK's disadvantaged areas.

There are many analyses of efforts to improve housing and the local environment in low-income areas, but most focus on single initiatives or policies and may say little about the inter-play between efforts. The paper contrasts with such analysis by considering diverse efforts across 12 neighbourhoods. This section details what the Study shows about the local impacts of Labour's housing, environmental and physical regeneration efforts. Many of the policies and initiatives applied to numerous Study areas. Rather than discussing all of them, we focus on two or three of the most informative examples of each policy or programme (Table 12 indicates which these are). Our analysis is concerned specifically with the neighbourhoods within our Study areas. We focus on this most local level because this is where the housing and environmental problems (and the impacts of efforts to remedy them) are most salient.

Table 12: Study neighbourhoods used as examples of post-1997 policies and initiatives

Policy / Initiative		Neighbourhoods											
		Hackney	Newham	Knowsley	Nottingham	Newcastle	Sheffield	Blackburn	Birmingham	Caerphilly	Redcar	Leeds	Thanet
Housing	Right To Buy restrictions	✓	✓										
	Choice Based Letting		✓			✓		✓					
	Decent Homes / Housing Quality Standard				✓				✓		✓	✓	
	Stock transfer			✓				✓		✓			
	Housing Private Finance Initiative		✓										
	Arms Length Management Organisations											✓	
	Housing Market Renewal						✓	✓					
Environment	Neighbourhood management			✓		✓			✓	✓			
	Neighbourhood wardens	✓						✓				✓	
Regeneration	Neighbourhood Renewal Fund		✓										
	New Deal for Communities	✓		✓			✓						
	Communities First								✓				
TOTALS		3	4	3	1	2	2	3	1	3	2	2	2

Housing

Before discussing the impacts of the individual housing strategies, we give an overview of the housing situation in each of the 12 neighbourhoods. Tables 13–15 show how each was in 2003 in terms of: lettings (Table 13); stock condition (Table 14); management and renewal efforts (Table 15). Table 13 shows that most neighbourhoods were seeing increased demand; only one faced collapsing demand. This is significant given the low demand and high turnover rates that most had been experiencing in 1999. Table 13 also shows that a number of the neighbourhoods were using choice-based lettings. The discussion will consider what influence choice-based letting had on local demand.

Table 13: Lettings issues and choice-based lettings in the 12 neighbourhoods, 2003

	Issues	Choice-based lettings		
		Status in 2003	Start date	% lettings
Hackney	over-demand competition for properties	Planned	(late 2004)	–
Newham	low-demand; homogeneity of tenure relocation for imminent regeneration	Started	2002 Sept (Pilot 2001)	~100
Knowsley	low but rising demand: empty properties but turnover is slowing and demand is up	Idea	–	–
Nottingham	few demand issues, but estate is to be emptied for major regeneration	Idea	–	–
Newcastle	settled, no significant lettings issues; CBL appears to be raising demand	Started	2003 Dec (Pilot 2003)	~100 (50)
Sheffield	some problems with empty homes but better since demolitions	Started	2003 Late (Pilot 2001)	~100
Blackburn	some empty homes but more demand since selective demolition and CBL	Started	2002 June (Pilot 2001)	~100
Birmingham	over-demand and overcrowding in both social and private housing	Idea	–	–
Caerphilly	empty properties but demand is stabilising; have local lettings plan	Planned	2004 Late	–
Redcar	low and falling demand; better in the newer properties but still problematic	Idea	–	–
Leeds	majority of empty properties now demolished, and demand is improving	Started	2003 Feb	~100
Thanet	very high turnover of single people but no problem with demand as such	Idea	–	–

Table 14 shows stock condition in 2003, and the changes that were being made in each neighbourhood. Small-scale demolition and upgrading of remaining properties were common (seven neighbourhoods), while large-scale new development was rare. Only two areas were undergoing extended change: Newham, with its housing Private Finance Initiative (which had residents moving out in late 2003 to allow for demolition and redevelopment) and Nottingham, with comprehensive regeneration of the neighbourhood estate (residents had been moved out by the time we visited in 2003). However, another six areas had development plans. The Decent Homes and Welsh Quality Housing Standards both require significant changes to much of the stock in our 12 neighbourhoods, but there had already been improvements in many of the Council and RSL estates by late 2003.

Table 14: Stock condition in the 12 neighbourhoods (2003)

	Issues	Demolition	Development
Hackney	low-grade buildings, repairs backlog, upgrades to security but not to fabric	rumours but no plans for mass demolition	new private housing mostly along canal
Newham	low-grade buildings; but small-scale upgrades to some buildings	PFI regeneration will bring mass demolition	comprehensive new building planned
Knowsley	worst housing has been demolished; upgrades to surroundings & interiors	demolition of 400 units; more planned for 2004	NDC planning mass redevelopment
Nottingham	regenerating neighbourhood estate; most other housing of good quality	estate to be demolished; none elsewhere	redeveloping estate over next 5 years
Newcastle	low-grade housing now demolished; no major issues with remainder	15 houses demolished; no plans for more	possibly building on demolition site
Sheffield	many private homes very low-grade; upgrading through NDC+ HMR	2 blocks demolished; more demolition planned	private building and masterplan for area
Blackburn	no major issues; recent upgrades or demolition have dealt with worst	5 houses demolished; no plans for more	Housing Market Renewal imminent
Birmingham	low-grade buildings; but upgrades by council, plus loans for private homes	end of minor demolition; no plans for more	not enough land for development
Caerphilly	low-grade buildings; but worst are being demolished or upgraded	5 houses and 6 flats are being demolished	individual private houses only
Redcar	low-grade buildings; empty housing often vandalised before demolition	extensive demolition in neighbourhood and area	no development planned
Leeds	low-grade buildings; but dealing with this through demolition or upgrades	10 flats demolished; no imminent plans for more	possibly building on demolition site
Thanet	low-grade buildings, but major issue is size (too small) rather than quality	none	redevelopment of private properties

Table 15 shows the priority concerns for housing managers in each neighbourhood. It also shows areas which had undergone stock transfer, had PFI or an Arms Length Management Organisation. Those that were considering options are indicated in the table by 'OPTION', those with definite plans by 'PLAN'.

Table 15: Housing management in the 12 neighbourhoods (2003)

	Issues	Transfer	PFI	ALMO
Hackney	meeting Decent Homes Standard is a major challenge; repairs backlog too	Partial (2002)		
Newham	imminent redevelopment is major concern, plus ongoing lettings issues		2000-12	
Knowsley	anti-social behaviour, crime, drugs are major issues; plus NDC-liaison	Complete (2002)		
Nottingham	usual stock/lettings issues in area; relocation of residents from estate	Partial (2004)		
Newcastle	usual stock/lettings issues; attention to anti-social behaviour in particular			PLAN (2004)
Sheffield	stock quality; overcrowding; under-demand; anti-social behaviour	OPTION		OPTION
Blackburn	no major stock or lettings issues but some anti-social behaviour concerns	Complete (2002)		
Birmingham	Decent Homes Standard; backlog of repairs; significant over-crowding	OPTION	OPTION	OPTION
Caerphilly	Decent Homes Standard; anti-social behaviour, drugs, crime; low demand			
Redcar	damage to empty property; demand falling; responsible for gypsy camp	Complete (2002)		
Leeds	usual stock/lettings issues; concern to address anti-social behaviour			2003
Thanet	reducing turnover; addressing anti-social behaviour; stock condition	Partial (1994)		

Right To Buy changes – Hackney and Newham

Housing workers in both the Hackney and Newham areas explained that there had been a sharp rise in Right To Buy applications before the discount was reduced in 2003. Applications had remained low for some months afterwards, but picked up over 2004 as people adjusted to the change. However, many tenants who were interviewed through the Families Study commented that they could no longer hope to buy their homes. Thus it appears that the discount reduction did affect individual households, but this impact did not significantly undermine Right To Buy rates across the neighbourhood and wider area.

Choice-Based Letting (CBL) – Blackburn, Newcastle and Newham

Choice-based letting allows for allocation of tenancies on a ‘first-come, first-served’ basis. Schemes vary in the proportion of lettings made on this basis (most still allocate a fraction of lettings on points to provide for households in greatest need), but almost 100% of the social housing stock in Blackburn, Newcastle and Newham were being allocated through CBL by late 2003. Blackburn and Newham both ran ODPM-backed CBL pilots from 2001, and then expanded to cover all lettings by 2002. Newcastle ran its own pilot scheme covering 50% of lettings in 2003, expanding to cover 100% by Autumn 2003. The Blackburn neighbourhood – Bridgefields – experienced a significant decline in vacant properties between 2002 and 2003, with 100-plus ‘voids’ in 2002, down to 35 in mid-2003 and 17 in late-2003:

I show colleagues that the voids in my area are the lowest they’ve ever been, I pin them up in the office – I’m the only one who does that! (local housing officer)

In part, this was aided by selective demolition of long-term voids, improving the look of the estate and concentrating residents in the more popular central streets. But choice-based letting was also a factor: senior Housing Directorate staff and local housing workers alike credited it with having affected levels of empty properties in the neighbourhood. Tenants who moved within the neighbourhood proved more stable in the new home that they had selected, and housing demand from people outside the estate had also increased. Housing staff explained that Bridgefields had been boosted by choice-based letting attracting new residents who would not have considered it before. Prospective tenancies were vetted through panel interviews with the residents association, and this seems to have provided an additional support in converting interest into committed tenancies. Introducing choice-based letting has enhanced both Bridgefields’ image and accessibility, and appears to be particularly successful in combination with demolition and resident involvement:

In the last year there have been more people looking at moving into the area – people coming to the panel interview over the last year say they’re here because they’ve heard that it’s improved (local housing worker)

The Newcastle neighbourhood (Sunnybank) had also experienced notable increases in demand, and greater population stability, since the introduction of choice-based letting. When the Study began, Sunnybank was singled out for specific attention because it had high rates of drug-crime and attendant anti-social behaviour and there were concerns that it might tip into serious decline, but in late 2003 housing officers described their work as the ‘standard tasks’ of housing management rather than the

'crisis management' they had experienced in 1999. There were various reasons for the improvements, including bringing CCTV into the estate (which prompted a number of residents involved in crime to move out) and running police checks on potential tenants for drug or anti-social behaviour offences – but housing staff said that the introduction of choice-based letting had been a major factor in the increased demand and reduced turnover in the neighbourhood. This was particularly encouraging given that choice-based letting was introduced on a partial basis until December 2003, with only 50% (rather than almost all) of council stock allocated through it. It also demonstrates how measures such as choice-based letting can be enhanced by local factors – in this case, the CCTV and liaison between police and housing officers over potential tenants.

East-Docks in Newham is now undergoing extensive regeneration. This requires blocking applications to move into the area but, prior to this, choice-based lettings had been having a marked positive impact on vacancy rates, independently of any additional CCTV or resident vetting scheme such as Blackburn and Newcastle had.

There used to be quite high voids in East-Docks, but since we introduced Choice-Based Lettings in September 2002 they've reduced a lot. CBL has meant that people who'd been on waiting lists for a long time were the priority. And now we're seeing that people are moving a lot less. (local housing worker)

In summary, these three neighbourhoods had benefited from Choice-Based Lettings attracting residents to places that – in the case of the Blackburn and Newcastle neighbourhoods – were also being improved by small-scale demolition, minor upgrades to housing stock and, in Sunnybank, innovative action over anti-social behaviour. By marketing available and often reasonable quality housing, and by promoting the idea (new within Council housing) that people can actively choose a home, social landlords in very low demand areas have uncovered new demand and created the potential for real ownership of the neighbourhood's conditions and reputation.

Decent Homes / Welsh Housing Quality Standard – Nottingham, Caerphilly, Leeds and Thanet

The requirement to bring all social housing up to a decent standard by 2010 or 2012 had reinforced the significance of repairs, maintenance and upgrade programmes. In a number of neighbourhoods, it had also reinforced the case for selective (in Caerphilly and Leeds) or extended demolition. In Nottingham, the neighbourhood estate was being cleared prior to major demolition and transfer of land and property rights to a social landlord. Nottingham's demolition was motivated not only by the poor condition of much of its stock, but also by the unsuitability of many units. The prevalent bedsits within the estate were unpopular and not deemed appropriate for modern households. The senior housing staff in Thanet identified the priority problem as being unsuitability, rather than low-grade stock:

The £12m allocated to the most unfit areas doesn't help us here; we're not in that category because the buildings aren't bad, it's rather that they're not fit for purpose

Transfer – Knowsley, Redcar, Blackburn

Transferring housing stock from local authority ownership to Registered Social Landlords is not a new practice; all of our areas had seen some housing sales or disposal of land before 1997. But since the study began, three of the neighbourhoods had undergone complete stock transfer: Blackburn in 2001, Redcar and Knowsley in 2002. Their differing experiences show how significant the wider context can be for the relative success of housing and regeneration efforts.

All three had large-scale demolition in response to declining housing demand and damage to empty housing. Each subsequently upgraded much of their remaining property and worked to improve the surrounding environment. However, whilst turnover fell and demand for housing improved in both Overview (Knowsley) and Bridgefields (Blackburn), demand continued to decline in Southside (Redcar). Local staff and senior Council officers in Blackburn saw choice-based letting as contributing to Bridgefields' increased demand and lower turnover rates. In Knowsley, which did not have extensive choice-based letting, the housing management style was conspicuously holistic, engaging extensively with other agencies (especially police and environmental maintenance) and seconding staff full-time to the NDC. This co-operation may partly explain how the new transfer association made such significant improvements in such a short time, but this then raises questions over why a similarly holistic strategy in Southside (Redcar) – the Estate Management Board – had such trouble in stemming out-migration. Both the North-West and North-East regions saw considerable population decline throughout the 1990s, but the population decline in Southside may have been increased by very localised migration. A number of residents and staff asserted that Southside was losing residents (and potential residents) to an adjacent neighbourhood which they saw as receiving more development support from Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council. Our Knowsley neighbourhood was greatly aided in retaining residents by the fact that it had an NDC and extra resources for community support, environmental upgrading and other works.

These examples suggest that transferring stock can help to improve housing quality and demand, where other factors combine to support the neighbourhood as a whole, but if Councils cannot see sufficient overall demand to protect all areas it becomes more a process of “managing the decline”. Transfer unleashes extra money, and the potential for new investment and management styles and greater concern for the local population on whom success depends. But it will only transform a declining area if new households can be attracted into it on the back of improvements. This happened in two of the three transfer neighbourhoods – in Knowsley and Blackburn.

Private Finance Initiative (PFI) – Newham

East-Docks in Newham is in the early stages of extensive housing redevelopment and regeneration under a Private Finance Initiative scheme. This PFI is intended to bring the housing up to the Decent Homes standard, and also to attract and retain new residents. East-Docks' current population is

predominantly in social housing, and one of the Council's major aspirations for the PFI scheme is that it should create a more diverse mix of tenures (and income). Another priority is to create a more sustainable community, with a smaller but more stable population²⁶. A third key issue is to regenerate East-Docks' public areas, which are low-grade and perceived as threatening by many residents:

It's not as dense as a lot of people think and it's greener too – but residents don't like the local environmental standards of dumped cars, litter, vandalism, etc. And community safety is a major concern – it's always a key issue at local meetings. ... East-Docks is not actually so bad for crime levels, but people don't feel safe, the underpass is not pleasant and there are youth hanging about (senior housing worker)

To achieve these ambitions, the 12-year, £28million PFI scheme will entirely re-develop large tracts of housing, taking East-Docks from being 80% social housing to 60% private with all social housing owned by RSLs. These are the plans, but the PFI contract was only signed in November 2004 and there was little to show for them in this round of research. However, 200 Council tenants are due to be moved by December 2004, and so the scheme could soon be showing some preliminary impacts on the area.

So far, the evidence on how the PFI plans have affected the neighbourhood is mixed. The Family Study, with which this Study is associated, indicates that the process has confused and worried residents – but MORI's 2003 research showed a majority of residents in broad support of the plans, although those who bought their Council homes are reluctant to move in the near future (MORI, 2003: 24–28). However, a number of the workers that we interviewed voiced concerns over the programme, especially of it being 'social engineering' which could clash with the interests of established residents. One worker said to us that "the plans are ok if you think that yupification is ok". Furthermore, discussions in the local media, and between Council staff and the authors, indicate that developing the scheme has proved expensive and complex to the Council. For these reasons, it is unlikely to be replicated in many other low-income areas; it will be interesting to assess whether this proves true, and to follow how the scheme develops and impacts on East-Docks over the remaining years of the Study.

Arms-Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) – Leeds

In February 2003 the management of 12,500 homes in and around the Kirkside East area was taken on by an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) – one of six set up by Leeds City Council to cover 76,000 council homes in Leeds. When I visited in late 2003, the ALMO had been operating for just under a year and had not yet had a visible impact on the housing stock. There were high levels of activity around housing but these were driven by the Council, specifically by its Community Investment Team²⁷, rather than the local ALMO. For example, small-scale demolition of flats along the shopping

²⁶ There is varied evidence on rates of population turnover in East-Docks. MORI found that 10% of residents surveyed had lived in the area for less than two years, which MORI states is only half the level that they find in most regeneration areas that they have surveyed (MORI, 2003: 8-9). However, turnover among Council tenants is higher than the Borough average, according to the Housing Manager.

²⁷ The Community Investment Team is a statutory initiative based in Kirkside East (our Leeds area) that serves as a catalyst not only for community development but also for physical and socio-economic improvements to the area

street and of 'problem' properties in the neighbourhood (single houses and a notorious pub) was initiated and managed by the Community Investment Team. The workers that I interviewed did not view the ALMO as having brought significant changes to the neighbourhood as yet, either to housing demand or quality. However, those who worked directly on housing issues had a sense of optimism about the ALMO. They believed that it would be valuable both in sustaining the improvements that were already being made by other agencies, and in building on them, bringing greater flexibility and an enhanced capacity for customer service than the Council had when operating with tenants directly.

ALMOs are not a panacea, since even with a high performance which attracts more government investment, the resources are too limited to transform an unpopular and difficult area. But they do change the shape of housing management and they do offer the potential for more radical changes should the residents and local staff want. A few may become community-based housing associations or community trusts. Others may simply strengthen local management of the neighbourhood.

Housing Market Renewal (HMR) – Blackburn and Sheffield

Bridgefields, the Study neighbourhood in Blackburn, falls into the regional Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder – but in late 2003 the programme had only just reached it, having been phased out over surrounding areas first. The neighbourhood had seen significant improvements to housing – both in terms of housing demand and, less strikingly, in terms of quality – but these were attributed to other factors. As discussed above in the section on Choice-Based Letting, the Blackburn neighbourhood had benefited significantly both from an increase in eligibility for local housing through CBL, and selective demolition. Whilst we did not observe the impacts of HMR in 2003, these two factors can be expected to provide a good basis for HMR, and so we will expect to see the positive trajectory sustained and possibly extended when we visit in 2005.

In Sheffield, HMR funding had been available since 2002 and was being used to upgrade the facades of private houses. This was serving to sustain and enhance physical improvements that had been made to private housing in the previous decade using European funding. These HMR-funded changes were very popular with residents who benefited directly, although the Families Study found that people in streets which were not included in the facelift were frustrated by the specificity of the scheme. Having HMR funds was also seen as providing a significant boost to the capacity of the local New Deal for Community. The NDC spent much of its own budget on housing, demolishing a notoriously problematic block of flats and planning redevelopment of another small pocket of the area, but having HMR in the area meant that the NDC's efforts were not spread too thin across the area, and reinforced its impacts. The local housing manager observed that addressing housing quality still left significant questions over the appropriateness of the housing stock – especially given the need of larger housing for many Asian families – but noted that HMR was helping to address the immediate issues of disrepair.

By late 2003, HMR had not been in operation long enough in our Blackburn neighbourhood to ascertain its impact, but in Sheffield HMR appeared to be having significant positive impacts – not so much on housing demand *per se* as on the quality of housing for current residents, sustaining previous funding gains and extending the impact of the NDC’s efforts to improve housing in the area. Housing Market Renewal can only work if it taps into every possible innovative strategy and strand of thinking on how practically to reverse decline. The idea of HMR may catch on as it becomes increasingly unpopular to spread new houses further around the edges of existing, often declining areas. It has the potential to transform older areas, using all the multiple strategies on offer.

Local environment

When the neighbourhoods were visited in 1999, Ruth Lupton recorded that all but one (The Grove, in Hackney) had some problem with their physical condition (Lupton, 2001: 34-37) and a quarter had very poor local environments (the neighbourhoods in Blackburn, Leeds and Redcar). When we visited in late 2003, problems with the natural or built environment were still visible in most of the neighbourhoods. But it was also clear that action over these problems had become both more common and more focused on the problems which cause greatest concern to residents: fly-tipping; litter; and vandalism. Table 16 gives an overview of the environmental conditions in each neighbourhood, outlining the quality of their natural and built environments and the strategies in place to improve the local environment.

Table 16: Local environmental quality and action in the 12 neighbourhoods (2003)

	Natural environment	Built environment	Action
Hackney	some rubbish and litter	not much vandalism or graffiti	neighbourhood wardens since May 2003
Newham	very low-grade: fly-tipping; limited green/play areas	some vandalism & graffiti	environmental wardens since Autumn 2003
Knowsley	maintaining quality of areas which have been improved	some vandalism & graffiti	RSL and NDC are making significant renewal efforts
Nottingham	very little litter or rubbish	estate has vandalism and graffiti but area did not	demolition management; standard housing management
Newcastle	gardens are problematic but common areas are not	no graffiti or vandalism, even on the youth club	standard housing management with a neighbourhood focus
Sheffield	litter on street; rubbish and over-growth in gardens	poor upkeep of private property; minor vandalism	NDC & HRM facade upgrades; NDC environmental wardens
Blackburn	bland but no litter or rubbish	no apparent problems with vandalism or graffiti	caretaker but no wardens
Birmingham	rats and rubbish; residents pave or cut back greenery	poor upkeep of private property; minor vandalism	neighbourhood wardens since 2003, but not very prominent
Caerphilly	rubbish, litter and bland open areas, often vandalised	extensive vandalism of empty homes; graffiti	demolition of worst property; designing new public features
Redcar	Millennium Park & sculpture but open areas are damaged	very severe vandalism of empty homes; some arson	standard housing management with a neighbourhood focus
Leeds	open areas damaged by joy riding and heavily littered	little vandalism in general but bad in some areas	Community Investment Team and ALMO leading efforts
Thanet	litter and some vandalism of open areas and planting	extensive vandalism and graffiti on estate	2 wardens since 1980s, on site regularly but cover wider area

Source: Visits and interviews, 2003

Neighbourhood management – Caerphilly, Newcastle, Knowsley and Redcar

Neighbourhood management is promoted by the government as a strong support for local quality of life, whether the broader strategy for an area is aimed at regeneration or managed decline. Our Study areas show that neighbourhood management can indeed bolster housing and environmental quality, but they also demonstrate that even such intensive and focused efforts can sometimes do little to enhance local areas. None of our neighbourhoods had ODPM-sponsored Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders, but a number were employing neighbourhood management strategies. We discuss four in order to outline the different outcomes that similar approaches were having.

In the Study neighbourhood in Knowsley, neighbourhood management strategies brought distinct gains; having a dedicated neighbourhood budget enabled housing managers to address problems of poor maintenance and vandalism where they were worst. Likewise, Sunnybank, the neighbourhood in Newcastle, had benefited from having intensive housing management at the most local level – the estate had a dedicated housing office, despite having less than 1000 homes (4000 residents). In addition, the local housing management strategies extended beyond housing alone. There was a sense among the housing staff that the wider terrain of the neighbourhood (public spaces as well as the housing) was within their remit of activity, and indeed that they had responsibility for it. In responding to these wider responsibilities, the housing officers worked directly with the estate's youth project manager (and saw the project as providing for youth, rather than as akin to policing), brought in CCTV to address drug-dealing, and developed a strategy for dealing promptly with abandoned or burnt-out cars.

However, similarly focused management in Redcar had been unable to comprehensively boost the area. Individual homes were improved, but the neighbourhood had experienced significant declines in the quality of the local environment, with considerable ongoing damage to empty homes and public property. Valley Top, near Caerphilly, had similar population trends to the Redcar neighbourhood, but here the holistic neighbourhood management approach brought in from early 2003 by the new Housing Manager appeared to have brought improvements rather than simply 'holding the line' against further decline. The manager's clear sense that the 'buck stops' with him prompted his close involvement in addressing issues beyond the standard housing remit. Despite the difficult context of very low housing demand, with anti-social behaviour and drug-use prevalent, his form of neighbourhood management has led to: problematic public spaces being redesigned, with local business funding; the design of problematic housing being restructured to impede anti-social behaviour and drug-dealing; spaces left by demolition being used to extend people's gardens and so increase their attachment to the area and quality of life; and funds being used subsidise housing for first-time buyers. This case suggests that addressing more than housing can bring significant gains even where problems are diverse and severe.

Neighbourhood wardens – Hackney, Birmingham and Thanet

The neighbourhood wardens in Hackney and Birmingham were both new schemes, introduced in 2002, funded by the NDC (Hackney) or ODPM (Birmingham) and managed by housing organisations. The two schemes had similar remits – to deal with local quality of life problems – but their style of operation and profiles differed significantly.

In Hackney, local people saw the wardens as making a major contribution to tackling problems of litter, vandalism and graffiti which undermined the parks and other open areas. The wardens were supported in tackling street crime and anti-social behaviour by greatly increased numbers of local police officers (supplemented by Police Community Support Officers) but their broader appeal and success appeared to lie in the fact that they were doing particularly extensive work. The team of 8 wardens was larger than many schemes but it was their extended work hours (10am-11pm five days a week) and the variety of ways in which they operated that had gained them a high profile and positive image among residents. As with all neighbourhood wardens, they looked out for and dealt with environmental problems, but also provided additional services which other schemes did not – such as organising football teams for young people, and escorting elderly people home after local meetings.

The Birmingham wardens, by contrast, appeared to have a very limited range of activity, consequently they had a lower public profile and less notable impacts. Indeed residents were quite dismissive of the scheme, pointing out that the wardens' bikes in the community centre had not been used since being delivered months before. Local workers had similarly limited ideas as to what the wardens were doing.

The neighbourhood estate in Thanet has been served by wardens since the late 1980s. They operate in broadly the same way that the new neighbourhood wardens do – observing and addressing graffiti, vandalism, littering, fly-tipping and other instances of local environmental neglect or damage. The two wardens serve council housing across the wider area, and so cannot offer the intensive supervision that 'neighbourhood' wardens can. However, their work does play a significant part in the maintenance of local standards. When I was shown around the estate by one warden, it was evident that he not only knew the properties well, but was also familiar with most tenants (despite the rapid turnover) and could therefore anticipate issues as well as responding problems. This was helpful for the estate wardens, as they could go beyond 'fire-fighting' to take preventative measures. It was also helpful for the police and other services, who could draw on this knowledge by liaising with the estate wardens.

These three examples suggests that the particular way in which the neighbourhood warden remit is fulfilled makes more of an impression on residents than simply whether neighbourhood wardens are present or not. By extending their remit to include direct, supportive liaison with residents it appears that schemes can enhance their impacts and raise the profile of the wardens and their work in general.

Regeneration

The impacts of the three physical regeneration schemes – the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, the New Deal for Communities and the Communities First programme – are discussed below. Table 17 shows in which neighbourhoods NDCs or Communities First were operating, and in which neighbourhoods NRF was spent on environmental improvements.

Table 17: Physical regeneration initiatives in the 12 neighbourhoods (2003)

Initiative	Hackney	Newham	Knowsley	Nottingham	Newcastle	Sheffield	Blackburn	Birmingham	Caerphilly	Redcar	Leeds	Thanet	TOTAL
New Deal for Communities	✓		✓			✓							3
Neighbourhood Renewal Fund		✓		✓				✓					3
Communities First									✓				1

Neighbourhood Renewal Fund – Newham

The Neighbourhood Renewal Fund was allocated to the 88 most deprived local authorities²⁸ in England. All but one of our English areas are in local authorities that receive this funding. The fund brings over £1 million per annum to each eligible local authority (significantly more for more populous authorities) but the Study areas themselves may not receive it. Furthermore, those areas which do receive it might spend it on tackling issues other than local environmental problems. One area in which much of the NRF was spent on improving the local environment was East-Docks in Newham.

Newham Council has used much of its Neighbourhood Renewal Fund to tackle environmental anti-social behaviour – especially fly-tipping and dumped cars. These are routinely identified as priority concerns among residents across the Borough, but Council staff note that East-Docks does suffer more prevalent and serious environmental problems:

Local environmental issues are a real problem in East-Docks, and people are *very* concerned. The fly-tipping is a particular issue – it’s happening at a criminal level, with large-scale dumping by companies. They’re able to do it because there’s so much brownfield land in the area. (senior Council worker)

Within Newham, the NRF (approximately £20million p.a. for the Borough) has mostly been directed at supporting community groups, but a large amount has been reserved for tackling environmental anti-social behaviour. Rather than neighbourhood wardens, Newham has piloted environmental wardens to address problems of fly-tipping, environmental damage and littering as well as crime and disorder across the Borough. In late 2003, Newham had seven ‘Respect’ wardens. The team operates by targeting a particular area (roughly the size of a ward) and bringing in relevant agencies to work with it in ‘blitzing’ environmental problems. Their work is reinforced by NRF-funded schemes to tackle fear

²⁸ As measured by the Indices of Deprivation 2000 and the Index of Local Deprivation 1998

of crime, such as alley-gating which reduces opportunity for burglary by locking alley-ways between houses or gardens. The wardens have not started operating in East-Docks yet, but their impacts in other parts of Newham seem to have been significant, with particular success in targeting abandoned cars. Local workers had a positive view of the wardens' ability to tackle environmental problems, and were confident that they would have significant impacts in East-Docks.

New Deal for Communities – Hackney, Sheffield and Knowsley

The NDCs in Hackney, Sheffield and Knowsley were funded from the same date but had developed at different rates. The Hackney NDC was the quickest to be established, the Sheffield NDC took longer and the Knowsley NDC took until mid 2002 to appoint its Chief Executive and Board. Local impressions of the organisations, however, inverted this order with the Knowsley NDC and Sheffield NDCs held in best regard and Hackney NDC perceived as having done less than was expected over its three years.

The broad impression of Hackney's NDC from interviewees from housing, regeneration and voluntary-sector services was that it had been funding workers rather than works. There was also a common view that politics between the NDC and other regeneration projects had led the NDC to start new projects rather than work with extant organisations and sustain established projects. The NDC funded the neighbourhood wardens but interviewees involved with housing and other services appeared unaware of this, and stated that they had observed minimal impacts from the NDC. The impacts that they had noted – a new local bus service, new door-entry systems on tower blocks, and improvements to some parks – make significant contributions to local quality of life, but the general impression among local staff was that more had been expected of such a substantial organisation.

Sheffield NDC by contrast appeared to link into, rather than exist alongside, extant organisations. It had engaged them in planning significant changes to housing and the local environment, and interviewees spoke of the NDC as being a strong catalyst for significant physical redevelopment and improvements as well as for enhancing local social infrastructure through community empowerment and development. Despite starting some time after Hackney's NDC, there was clear evidence of progress and significant changes to housing were starting to show in late 2003, with the demolition of two blocks of flats that had long been under-used. The NDC benefited significantly by having Housing Market Renewal funding running alongside – as both the staff at Sheffield NDC and other NDCs commented. But it was not only on housing which the NDC was delivering. The NDC had already funded additional police, who had reduced rates of vandalism and graffiti as well as the more serious drug crime on which they focused. Additional declines in the levels of vandalism and graffiti and improvements in terms of litter clearance were expected once a team of NDC-funded environmental wardens started work in December 2003. There were reports of friction over funding of different community projects, but these were being tackled by encouraging the development of projects that were issue-based rather than identity-based (i.e. premised on ethnic groups) such as child-care provision which cuts across all local groups.

Knowsley NDC had been significantly delayed in starting – owing to complications with the Council and Government Office for the Region – but once properly established it had spent heavily in order to bring early wins and meet initial targets. Its main focus was on housing regeneration and it had developed a very ambitious programme of housing change. While frustrated by a lack of housing-specific funding (such as HMR), the NDC team was optimistic about being able to deliver this extensive programme. By late 2003 it had made considerable impacts on housing and the local environment, having demolished 400 houses and substantially improved green areas across two estates. It had also established a close working relationship with the local RSL – with two RSL staff seconded to it full-time for two years – and the Chief Executive appeared well integrated across the area, with both resident organisations and statutory agencies operating in the area. Many interviewees (including housing staff) responded to questions on local statistics and trends by suggesting that we ask him, asserting that he was particularly well-informed about the area, not only about his own project. These interviewees also had evident confidence in the ability of the NDC team to bring about considerable improvements to housing

In summary, judged by their performance and profile among people involved in regeneration or housing, two of the three NDCs were already making significant contributions to housing and local environments. Knowsley's NDC had the most ambitious plans but was widely deemed capable of delivering. Sheffield's NDC had already cleared some of the worst housing in the area, and had the benefit of being a Housing Market Renewal pathfinder area, reinforcing its own housing work. Overall, these NDCs had galvanised effort and action on the ground. In spite of local problems, many of which were ongoing and deep-set, the areas were showing real change and improvement. In Hackney, the NDC investment had brought some visible improvements to the facades and security of housing, but the wider impact was unclear. Furthermore, it was not engaging as closely with a broad range of local organisations as the Knowsley and Sheffield NDCs were – this was limiting the impact of those efforts that were being made. Whether the NDCs can reverse the entrenched pattern of social deprivation and physical decline that has marked their areas for so long is a question that remains to be answered. Our expectation is that they will only succeed in this regard if significant private investment is attracted in – as is well-established in West-City in Hackney, is beginning to happen in the Sheffield area, and is intended for the Knowsley area.

Communities First – Caerphilly

Communities First focuses on engaging residents in directing extant funding, and so it is more about the process than specific impacts on environment or housing. However, there were a number of notable physical changes and additions that had come about directly as a consequence of Communities First. Most visibly, children's play areas and places for young people to gather without being moved on, and also improved community gardens. Communities First had not long been in operation in the area and so these changes were significant for the time-scale. It will be interesting to see what this systematic community engagement provides over the remainder of the study, and to compare its impacts with those of New Deal for Communities, which is also ostensibly founded on community participation.

Overview of changes

Most of our neighbourhoods' physical conditions had undergone a broad improvement since they were first studied in 1999. Our Introduction highlighted the wider context of economic growth and stability, conditions which will overall have helped to enhance and sustain local improvements. This section offers a brief review of the contribution that specific initiatives and policies made to the broad upwards trajectory of our neighbourhoods' local environmental and housing conditions

Regeneration

New Deal for Communities, being better funded and planned on a larger scale than Communities First, had had more extensive impacts than the latter. However, it had not been as quick to deliver these as had been hoped in any of the three areas. The complexity of such a large programme, compounded by its explicit commitment to being steered by the community, had meant that both the NDCs in Sheffield and Knowsley began slowly and were only just making significant impacts in the second half of 2003. These impacts were, however, widely recognised as being significant – whereas the contributions that Hackney's NDC had made were deemed to be far less than a large-scale regeneration scheme should have made to the area, and the programme itself was seen as unduly distant from its local community. The Communities First programme was closely engaged with the Study neighbourhood, as it was with the various settlements across the Study area, but had made only limited contributions by late 2003, the most notable being upgrading small public gardens and play parks.

Housing

The introduction of the Decent Homes Standard and the Welsh Quality Housing Standard has focused local authority funding on upgrading and repairing properties. However, in 2003 most local authorities covering our neighbourhoods were still developing their responses to the offer of further funding based on the three options (stock transfer, PFI, and ALMO) and so extended improvements had not yet been implemented. Transfer had been highly successful in our Knowsley area but less so in Redcar. The impacts of other initiatives and policies were generally judged too early to call. The Leeds ALMO was not reported as having had significant impacts to date, although there was a sense of confidence in its ability to deliver improvements over the medium term. The Newham PFI scheme was still being planned in late 2003. The East Lancashire HMR had yet to reach our Blackburn area. However, there were a number of neighbourhoods within which earlier programmes of upgrading had brought significant improvements, most commonly to the exterior through new windows, roofs and garden walls or fencing, and in some cases to the interior, with new kitchens and bathrooms. The most consistently positive housing changes, as reported by local workers, followed introduction of choice-based lettings. In the cases where choice-based lettings had been most successful (Newcastle and Blackburn) there were supporting factors (introduction of police checks and CCTV, and minor demolition respectively), but the indication was that choice-based lettings had been the key factor in improving local demand.

Local environment

It is difficult to determine which of the initiatives and policies had the greatest impact on neighbourhood conditions. However, comparing how neighbourhood conditions were assessed in 1999 with how they were assessed in 2003 (Table 18 below) shows that, in combination, these innovations had brought broad improvement to two-thirds of the neighbourhoods. Even allowing for differences in perception between the two researchers who conducted the 1999 and 2003 fieldwork, the significant declines in the number of problems in some places, and the overall decline across all places suggests that there has indeed been a quantifiable improvement in neighbourhood conditions. These improvements are even more stark when one considers that the derelict housing in half of the areas was in the process of being demolished or upgraded in 2003, and so was already being dealt with.

Table 18: Problems with Neighbourhood Conditions (2003 and 1999)

Neighbourhoods	Derelict / boarded up houses or shops		Dumped household items/rubbish		Extensive litter		Poorly maintained common areas, kerbs, verges & fences		Extensive graffiti		Extensive vandalism		TOTALS	
	'99	'03	'99	'03	'99	'03	'99	'03	'99	'03	'99	'03	'99	'03
The Grove (Hackney)													0	0
Phoenix Rise (Newham)	✓	✓*						✓					1	2
Saints Walk (Knowsley)	✓	✓											1	1
Rosehill (Nottingham)	✓	✓*	✓										2	1
Sunnybank (Newcastle)	✓												1	0
East Rise (Sheffield)	✓	✓*				✓		✓					1	3
Bridgefields (Blackburn)	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		6	0
Broadways (Birmingham)			✓	✓	✓	✓				✓			2	3
Valley Top (Caerphilly)	✓	✓	✓				✓						3	1
Borough View (Redcar)	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	6	4
Southmead (Leeds)	✓	✓*	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		6	1
Sandyton (Thanet)	✓	✓				✓				✓			1	3
TOTALS (1999 / 2003)	10	8	6	1	4	4	4	3	3	2	3	1	30	19

Source: Observation and interviews with residents and front-line staff in 1999 and 2003

Note: * indicates derelict housing that was being demolished or upgraded in 2003

6. Conclusions

Decline or renewal?

Our visits to these areas, and our interviews and discussions with those who live or work in them, give detailed insights that build on what administrative data can show about how initiatives are impacting. The main finding from this latest research is that strategies in combination make more difference to areas than even the largest single strategy. Multiple small schemes seem central to local renewal, bringing visible changes and fostering a greater sense of confidence about the area's future.

Housing statistics show that there has been, as yet, little substantial change to the physical character of the housing stock in most areas, beyond demolition of the worst housing. The new strategies for improving housing standards – from the Decent Homes Standard, to ALMOs, and to HMR – are typically at too early a stage to show much impact. Long-standing approaches – Right to Buy and stock transfer – continue to show efficacy in enhancing housing quality, but on their own do not stem problems with housing demand. Choice-based lettings appear to be successful in facilitating the uptake of available housing – but success appears to be contingent on other strategies for enhancing tenants' commitment to an area (such as the involvement of residents in a local selection panel in the Blackburn area) or systems for countering anti-social behaviour (such as a CCTV scheme in our Newcastle area, which housing officers said had prompted tenants who engaged in anti-social behaviour to move away).

Residents become more committed to an area where they find not only reasonable quality housing, but also a good local environment. Frequent repairs, well-maintained streets and parks, local supervision generate a sense of security and confidence that creates real value in older neighbourhoods. These strengths are fostered by local strategies such as neighbourhood management and neighbourhood wardens. Our visits to the areas showed that a combination of locally-targeted strategies were the most powerful in bringing short term benefits. Even where local environments and housing were of low quality (as in the Caerphilly area) local management efforts or the visible presence of wardens served to bring an identifiable sense of optimism about that area's future. This, we think, was the major change in these 12 areas, the sense that, whilst much is still wanting in the quality of housing and environment, it is generally the case that – in the words of one local worker – “the future has changed”.

Thus Labour's major contribution to the housing, local environment and physical regeneration of low-income areas is to have set in train strategies which, in combination, are bringing confidence about the future condition of these disadvantaged areas. These strategies are about how revenue resources are deployed, how conditions and improvements are maintained and how residents can find someone local whose job it is to solve local problems. Our close tracking of 12 representative low-income areas over the period of Labour's intervention shows a drop by over one-third in the number of problems we

originally identified as blighting the neighbourhoods (see Table 18 above). Such a scale of change is both visible and significant to the prospects of these places. This research suggests that the strategies need to be maintained over the long-term so that residents' and workers' increased confidence in the area is borne out. The success of neighbourhood management, for example, in those neighbourhoods that have it suggests that the government and local authorities would do well to mainstream it, rather than leave local projects vulnerable, having to seek continuation funding.

The bigger picture

Cities have made a comeback. Their centres are competing strongly with out-of-town shopping centres. Loft and warehouse apartments are revaluing our industrial heritage and drawing better-off people back into the urban core. New trams and bus lanes, pedestrianised squares and streets, are now fighting for space with the ubiquitous urban polluter, the car. People are beginning to enjoy city living again after decades of decline.

But the hinterland of cities and older industrial towns are often still losing population and jobs. Many older industrial towns' and cities' traditional working-class neighbourhoods were decimated as demolition and estate building failed to create "a new Jerusalem". And many urban neighbourhoods are still hit by loss of industry, and the contamination and environmental damage of our 200-year pursuit of consumer wealth. The housing and environmental problems of these areas have rolled on until today as Council estates have decayed and terraced housing that survived large clearance programmes was partially modernised but quickly became outmoded again. This means that the physical appearance of the 12 deprived areas in this report continues to signal separate conditions and special problems.

Meanwhile, the legacy of closed businesses, polluted rivers and canals, declining shops and a continuing loss of low-skill, manual jobs has led to steady depopulation of these deprived areas over a generation and loss of viability for many of the remaining centres of activity – including shopping parades, local schools and local service jobs such as caretakers, park keepers and cleaners.

In the mid-1990s a strong job recovery nation-wide, including in previously declining cities, helped the recovery of some of our areas. However, job growth was much slower in poorer areas and much of it was taken up by women moving into part-time jobs. In East London, for example, joblessness and economic inactivity barely changed among men in manual occupations, in spite of being part of the strongest growing and richest region in the country. Two of our 12 high poverty areas are in East London and affected by deep poverty. This pattern, repeated in all 12 areas, still makes them lag far behind the average, in spite of improvements in employment rates.

The combination of increasingly outmoded housing, poor environments and the continuing low status of the population in high poverty areas, has made regeneration efforts complicated, costly, and sometimes half-hearted. But we can see changes happening. Most of these neighbourhoods are gaining in value as land shortages push some new growth into existing areas. Visibly at least four of the 12 areas are in better physical shape with other improvements under way; four are in a major transition in that direction; but the remaining four are in areas of such steep decline that as yet all attempts at regeneration seem marked out to fail. One of the worst areas openly talks of 'managing decline' as the area disintegrates through lack of people.

The biggest challenge of neighbourhood renewal and urban revitalisation is to live up to the promise of sustainable communities – places where people will want to live for the long-term. Above all this involves attracting enough people into these areas (a doubling of current densities, since household size has halved in the last fifty years) to make them hum with activity. People will only come if the physical signals are positive: clean, orderly, green environments; well-maintained, attractive houses; visible supervision of open spaces and communal areas; viable local services and regular transport links. These conditions all require enough people of different kinds and different ages to create a mixed community, and enough activity and care to attract and retain a mix of people.

For this renewal to happen, we face the classic chicken-and-egg situation. People will only choose traditional, low-value areas if they can see opportunity, promise and rising values. This will only come about if people see investment coming in and properties being maintained. The appearance of an area determines the first reaction of potential incomers, it also drives the choices of existing residents in work. Low value deters all but the most unusual investors – government, local Councils, regeneration agencies, housing associations are the typical non-market actors. So will new efforts by government and its partners to bring about neighbourhood renewal simply reinforce the old patterns, determining access to poorer areas only by the poor? Or will regeneration this time lead to the kind of mixed and active community that makes places work? Holding on to long-standing residents, attracting in newcomers who can contribute to the community, and appealing strongly enough to families with an earner are all necessary for an area to become the place of choice for local service workers and young professionals such as teachers, on whom the sustainability of these areas depend.

If the repeated physical decline of poor areas reflects the economic and social troubles the areas experience, then physical upgrading should be linked with social and organisational interventions that together may attract back the people in work with reasonable incomes who do not currently consider declining urban areas suitable for building their future. People would want to move in, values would rise, more homes would be filled and paid for, incomes in the area would support shops and other vital services, repair and care would happen as a matter of course – if the housing and environmental conditions of neighbourhoods were maintained to a decent standard. For as a country we are short of

space and the urban areas where 90% of the population live are short of attractive, well-maintained and diverse neighbourhoods. If neighbourhoods have better environments, and if they are marketed as assets rather than liabilities then in most cases they will improve in line with this better image.

Residents on low incomes do not have to be displaced, if we avoid demolition, which is the ultimate consequence of decline and decay. But their neighbourhoods will work better – far better – if they share their surplus space with other households with a little more income. Their environments will be more cared for if there is more money coming in to help pay for services. Their housing will be more attractive if the house next door is occupied and repaired. Services will reopen if an area is more populous. Interestingly, one of our London areas shows signs of such a virtuous circle in full swing. This new form of ‘low-level gentrification’ to fill the spaces created by low-demand and population exodus should help reintegrate previously isolated communities.

So our overall conclusion is that while many measures are pushing the most disadvantaged and declining areas in the direction of recovery, regeneration will truly take hold when people with higher incomes, needing affordable homes, choose these areas. This is dependent on physical regeneration of these areas, sustained by ongoing, intensive management, supervision and environmental maintenance. If we are to protect the environment and make neighbourhood recovery a reality for all, then we need to re-populate depleted and depopulating urban areas. Housing and environmental improvements in our 12 areas epitomise this struggle to create sustainable communities in places where people already live, where there is the capacity to grow, strengthen and stabilise existing communities; this is better than allowing their continuing decline as people move to greener pastures.

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