



# DESIGN FOR SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

A framework for creating thriving  
new communities

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Foreword by Sir Peter Hall





# ABOUT FUTURE COMMUNITIES

Future Communities is a partnership programme established by the Young Foundation to explore practical ways in which new housing settlements can succeed as communities where people want to live and work.

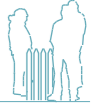






Our starting point is that although there is widespread understanding of the physical and environmental challenges involved in creating new settlements, there is still much to be learnt from the UK, and internationally, about what makes some communities succeed and others fail. Lessons from communities that have become high profile failures should tell us that understanding the social dimensions of new settlements is crucial for their long-term success and sustainability. The social and financial costs of failure are high.

In this paper we argue that building new communities that can flourish and become socially successful and sustainable is as important as designing places that are physically, economically and environmentally sustainable. Social sustainability is an issue of public value as well as the wellbeing, quality of life and satisfaction of future residents. It demands a new approach to

planning, design and development that we call social design, which needs to be integrated into policy and professional practice across all the disciplines involved in the creation of new communities – much like the way standards of environmental sustainability have become widely adopted in recent years.

This paper sets out how to plan, design and develop successful and socially sustainable new communities. The ideas and examples are drawn from a large scale review of evidence about what makes communities flourish, with practical examples and approaches from new settlements around the world. It was commissioned by the Homes and Communities Agency as part of Future Communities. This work will be published on [www.futurecommunities.net](http://www.futurecommunities.net) as an online toolkit during 2011.

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# FOREWORD BY SIR PETER HALL



## Sir Peter Hall

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Foundation

When the Young Foundation started on the work that has led to this publication, no one could have ever imagined just how topical it would become.

The August riots in London and other British cities, which manifested a collapse of social sustainability and social order on a scale never before witnessed in this country, have naturally provoked a huge wave of public debate, a form of national hand-wringing, on what has happened and why. Our carefully-nurtured self-image as a nation, an image of good-natured tolerance which absorbed and eroded differences in class and race and culture, lies all but shattered. Nowhere is this more true in London, whose citizens and civic leaders observed disturbances in other places – in northern cities, in Paris – and comfortably said “it could never happen here”.

But it could, and it has. So the topic of this new study, which might have seemed peripheral and academic, has become central and urgent. Its authors were naturally

concerned first with the creation of successful new communities – new suburbs, new towns – where previously no community existed. But the challenge is equally great, or greater, in the creation of successful new communities within the existing urban fabric. Here, as the riots so starkly show, we have failed. New estates have been injected into older housing areas without adequate thought as to how the two would integrate. Housing policies, doubtless with the best of intentions, have produced concentrations of people with multiple forms of deprivation and multiple resulting problems. At the same time, the surrounding communities have often themselves been transformed in the opposite direction, through gentrification. The predictable result, in the worst cases, has been the obverse of social cohesion: a form of deep social resentment of one community against the rest, and indeed the wider world. This is why the lessons and the recommendations of this report are bound to have a salience that its authors can never have imagined.

Sir Peter Hall, August 2011.

# 1 WHERE ARE THE PEOPLE?

“*The architecture was award winning - but the lifestyle? There's more going on at local cemeteries.*”

Spiegel Online, describing City Nord, Hamburg (2010)



Creating cities, towns and communities that are economically, environmentally and socially sustainable, and which meet the challenges of population growth, migration and climate change will be one of the biggest tasks of this century.

The development of new settlements is underway on an unprecedented scale. In Europe, 32 new towns are being created across 11 countries. In China, new cities are springing up from Kunming to Shanghai in response to mass migration to urban areas. Some estimates suggest 100 new cities, each with a population of one million, will be developed in China in the next three years.<sup>1</sup> Pujiang New Town in Shanghai aims to house 500,000 new residents in its 100 square kilometre **One City, Nine Towns project**, as part of the World Expo 2010 resettlement programme. It has aspirations to be the 'ideal city'.<sup>2</sup> **Incheon Development Area** outside Seoul will house 200,000 people by

2020; while in Delhi four new satellite cities, including Patparganj and Gurgaon, are being created to deal with overcrowding and to cater for India's growing middle classes.

The number of households in England is projected to increase by nearly 5.8 million between 2008 and 2033.<sup>3</sup> There is already a backlog of more than half a million households needing rented social housing who are currently homeless, or living in overcrowded or otherwise unsuitable housing.

Four new eco-towns have been proposed and a number of strategic growth areas identified to increase housing supply to 240,000 homes a year by 2016<sup>4</sup>. Although the economic downturn and a change of government have raised questions about the future for these new communities, there will be a continuing need to build more homes in the UK for those who cannot find adequate housing without some form of subsidy.

**The UN forecasts that today's urban population of 3.2 billion will rise to nearly 5 billion by 2030, when three out of five people will live in cities.**<sup>5</sup>



Asia alone has 16 megacities with a population of more than 10 million, including Mumbai, Karachi, Dhaka and Jakarta. Such large scale population growth creates particular challenges for cities trying to create sustainable communities and cope with overcrowding, pressure on housing and transport systems, climate change and ageing societies. UN surveys indicate that one billion people, one-sixth of the world's population, now live in shanty towns and, by 2030 over two billion people in the world will be living in slums, with the associated problems of poor sanitation, and access to healthcare and education.

Pressure to provide decent and affordable private and social housing in communities that are economically, environmentally and socially sustainable will present huge challenges to governments. This is not a new problem; there is much to be learnt from past experience of creating new towns and communities.

There is widespread understanding of the physical and environmental challenges involved in creating new settlements. Much is known about how architecture shapes social behaviour and people's sense of place; how high quality, well maintained public spaces influence perceptions of personal safety; the role local green spaces play in wellbeing; and how to design out crime. However, experience shows that high aspirations for new settlements often end in disappointment and failure. This is partly because building flourishing, cohesive, inclusive communities is genuinely challenging; but it is also because putting into practice what is known is difficult.

There is clear evidence from European new towns about what new communities need in order to flourish. Social infrastructure like schools, shops, neighbourhood parks,

community groups and local transport, must be provided at an early stage in the life of new communities. Much is known from both new and existing communities about how local identity and social networks influence people's feelings of attachment and belonging to places. There is growing evidence of the effect of local social networks on community wellbeing and resilience; and there is widespread understanding of how to foster volunteering, neighbourliness, activism and local democratic engagement.



However, much of this knowledge and practical experience is contained in professional silos: architecture, planning, studies of the public realm, public policy research, housing management, community development and local government. Different ideals, language, professional approaches and commercial drivers make it challenging to transfer research and good practice to the many public and private sector stakeholders involved in the creation of new communities.

There are other challenges with putting this thinking into practice. Every community is different so understanding what settlements

need and aspire to is difficult to predict and equally hard to measure. Social sustainability cannot be prescribed in the same way as standards for environmental sustainability; it requires planners, local agencies and developers to consider and respond to local needs and circumstances.

Recent work by The Oxford Institute for Sustainable Development (OISD) recognises that:

*“...at a practical level the tools, instruments and metrics to foster sustainable urban development currently available are biased toward environmental and economic sustainability.”*<sup>6</sup>

OISD calls for further research exploring how to construct and measure social sustainability, along with work to integrate this thinking into socially responsible investment policies for future developments.<sup>7</sup>

In the UK at least, new communities are often driven by private sector developers who depend on selling homes to provide the capital for schools, parks, community shops and other facilities. Arguments between developers and local government planners about who should fund and provide amenities are well rehearsed. In spite of contractual agreements and planning levies to fund local amenities, many new communities must wait for a number of years before local authorities and developers meet commitments to provide shops, schools and community spaces. Planning levies are part of the UK government's Localism Bill agenda. Changes have been proposed to the current

system of Section 106 Planning Obligation Contributions, which are negotiated locally, and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), of which only a portion is transferred directly to the neighbourhood. At the time of writing, the future of both Section 106 and CIL are uncertain.<sup>8</sup>

We argue that thinking about the long-term success and sustainability of social life in new communities is as important as physical, economic and environmental sustainability. We need a better understanding of how to create socially successful communities and how to use planning, development and stewardship functions to achieve this goal. Evidence about social success and sustainability needs to be integrated into policy and professional practice across all the disciplines involved in the creation of new communities – architecture, planning, economic development, property investment, social policy, development, construction, housing management – much like how standards of environmental sustainability have become widely acknowledged in recent years.

In this report we identify the local services and support that are essential for creating flourishing and socially sustainable new communities, like community workers, temporary community spaces and opportunities for residents to get involved in shaping the place they live in. In spite of a growing body of evidence and practical experience in development and regeneration, there are still very few new communities designed with social success in mind from the beginning. We argue that planning for social success and sustainability can prevent or at least mitigate, the likelihood of future social problems, and in many cases, represents a fraction of the overall costs of development and long term management.





Boy planting, Staffordshire, UK

## 2 THE CASE FOR SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

*“It is difficult to design a space that will not attract people. What is remarkable is how often this has been accomplished.”*

The Social Life of Public Spaces, William H. Whyte (1980)



Given the scale at which new settlements are being planned and developed globally, there is a need to build both a practical understanding and professional commitment to creating new cities and communities that are socially, as well as economically and environmentally, sustainable.

Past experience shows that the long-term social needs of new communities are often overlooked in the drive to deliver housing on a large scale. In part this is due to the financial models that fund the development of new communities, where government and public agencies lead on planning, but investment is provided by private-sector developers. Commonly, private housing is prioritised over local facilities in order to provide revenue to fund community infrastructure and affordable housing. Often new residents move into a building site

with few, if any, shops, schools, buses or community centres to support local social life. Sometimes this persists for several years while the new community grows to a size that can support local infrastructure.

Global housing need combined with economic pressures, and the multiple difficulties of brokering and managing relationships between public and private partners, will only increase the pressure to provide homes rather than build communities.

However, managing the long-term costs and consequences of decline and failure in new settlements is an issue of public value and political accountability. The financial costs of failure are high, but the social costs are higher.

Without the right social infrastructure new communities can quickly spiral into decline. High profile failures include the banlieues of Paris, Chicago’s **Cabrini-Green**, **Broadwater Farm** in north London and **Park Hill** in Sheffield – which is currently being redeveloped at a cost of £146 million.<sup>9</sup> Some developments, like the





2. Heygate Estate, London, UK

**Pruitt-Igoe** housing project in St. Louis, USA and **Fountainwell Place** in Glasgow, have been demolished and replaced. Others are regenerated and turned around through intensive effort and at high public cost, like **Castle Vale** in Birmingham, and **Robin Hood Gardens** and **Holly Street**<sup>10</sup> in London. The **Heygate Estate** in London's Elephant and Castle, home to over 3,000 people and knocked down in May 2011, cost approximately £8.5 million to demolish and £35 million to rehouse the residents.<sup>11</sup> These figures do not reflect the social cost to the community<sup>12</sup> of two decades of living with crime, anti-social behaviour, poor housing and a reputation for being one of the capital's worst estates.

The Heygate – and many other large council housing estates from the 60s and 70s – have attracted widespread criticism for their 'brutalist' architecture. Despite its initial popularity with new residents – the

housing was seen as spacious and modern – the architecture was blamed for isolating residents, creating 'dead' spaces for anti-social behaviour to flourish, being inflexible and unable to adapt to modern liveability requirements, and costly to maintain.<sup>13</sup> However, the decision to demolish the Heygate has also come under fire. Critics question the logic of destroying affordable housing stock at a time of rising housing need, and have highlighted issues with poor management and neglect over two decades that allowed the housing and public spaces to decline.<sup>14</sup> Arguably, the Heygate is symbolic of changing attitudes and policy towards mass social housing, urban neighbourhoods and home ownership.

Other developments fail in their aspiration to create mixed communities with a balance of private and social housing. London's Docklands, which was redeveloped during the 1980s and 90s as a new financial and

residential centre, has been widely criticised for focusing on luxury flats to house financial sector workers, rather than creating mixed communities with affordable housing for low-income families living in the East End. The result is long term tensions between existing communities and new residents, and problems with anti-social behaviour and local cohesion.

Before the current boom in creating new communities, the **English New Towns** was one of the world's most sustained new-town development programmes; creating 32 settlements between 1946 and 1970 and housing over three million people. Experience from the English New Towns has shown that ignoring the social dimensions of new places and the aspirations and opinions of residents can lead to long term problems.

The review of evidence and experience from new settlements around the world highlights the fragility of new communities and the length of time it takes for new places to become established:

**Some evidence suggests that it takes up to 15 years before local social networks develop fully.**<sup>15</sup>

Research in China reports that social interaction in neighbourhoods is hindered for long periods of time after urban redevelopments.<sup>16</sup> It identified the need for good quality social infrastructure and local services, support for community development, opportunities for residents to get involved in local decision making, and shared social spaces and activities in new communities.<sup>17</sup> Equally important are the less visible types of support that create

opportunities to meet other residents, build local networks and shared social experiences. Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation exploring the success and sustainability of mixed communities from the perspective of residents identifies nine priorities for new communities. These are: good quality housing; good schools; safe, clean and friendly neighbourhoods; community outreach workers; pre-school child care; well integrated social housing; careful inter-agency planning; neighbourhood staff; and supervision of open spaces and parks.<sup>18</sup>

Without these social supports new settlements struggle to become cohesive, living communities with a sense of place, belonging and identity.



3. Futurecommunities.net

Evidence shows that communities without adequate local facilities, services and community support suffer from a wide range of social problems. Lessons from English new communities identify higher than average rates of isolation and mental health problems, often caused by poor transport connections that isolate people from friends, family and local jobs. Other problems are inflexible housing stock that makes it hard to attract and retain residents, and a lack of opportunities for residents to influence



planning and development decisions, resulting in inflexible and inadequate local facilities – all of which have social, as well as financial costs.



4. Home security, Aylesbury Vale, UK

Declining communities often have issues with housing tenure and management; for example, in the UK a growth in buy-to-let properties in many areas has made it difficult for public agencies and housing providers to manage challenging areas. There is little to prevent those families that can relocate from doing so, leaving behind residents who have no choice but to stay. In the most extreme situations, declining communities become housing of last resort for the most vulnerable, with associated problems of anti-social behaviour, poor health and educational outcomes and crime.

Communities need to attract and retain residents from a range of backgrounds, ages and tenures if they are to succeed as places where people want to live in the long term. The initial motivation for moving to a new community is often better quality housing, more space at the same cost, and employment prospects. However, as experience and research from the UK has shown, early problems with social infrastructure and resulting problems with

isolation and dissatisfied residents mean new communities can quickly gain a new community a poor reputation.

The CABE National Housing Audit 2007 found a connection between social infrastructure, services, and residents' satisfaction with their neighbourhood. The study found that although residents were overwhelmingly satisfied with their homes, they were much less satisfied with their neighbourhoods, describing problems with a lack of public open spaces, street layouts that felt unsafe for children to walk or cycle in, and lack of character in the neighbourhoods. Dissatisfaction was greater among residents who had lived in a development longer: 18 per cent of people resident for over a year were dissatisfied, compared to 10 per cent who were resident for less than a year.<sup>19</sup>

Research indicates that the identity and reputation of a neighbourhood are established in the early stages of its development and history; and once established are very resistant to change.<sup>20</sup> Community identity is often defined according to housing type, style or tenure, social class and status, historic male employment or inward migration patterns. Even though places evolve and change over time, early perceptions of a community can be extremely powerful and exert significant influence on how current and future residents feel about moving to a neighbourhood. **Bradley Stoke**, a new community on the outskirts of Bristol built in the 1980s, was renamed "Sadly Broke" by local media to describe the number of home owners in negative equity. 20 years on the "Sadly Broke" nickname is still in use.<sup>21</sup>

Already there is evidence that the current generation of new cities and towns are running into problems. **Chenggong**, in Kunming, Southern China, and **Ordos** and

**Qingshuihe** in Inner Mongolia, are examples of China's "ghost towns", entirely new communities designed to attract investment and develop the local economy, which now stand empty and unfinished. These cities are located outside existing urban centres, typically 20 to 30 kilometres away, and are designed around key industries like mining, institutions like government offices, or universities that are relocated from other cities to attract new residents.

Construction came to halt in Qingshuihe in 2007 after two years of development. Empty houses, offices and hotels now stand next to the old town, which is described as "in dire need of welfare reforms and infrastructure improvement".<sup>22</sup>

**Chenggong is said to contain 100,000 new apartments, brand new local government buildings, new university campuses and a new light rail system; but no residents.**

Distance from existing urban centres is thought to be a factor in the failure of the Chinese new towns to attract residents. An article about Ordos and Qingshuihe describes the problem:

*"expecting entire communities to uproot themselves from their social, historical and cultural context from one moment to the next is not only unrealistic, it's unsustainable."*<sup>23</sup>

This was also the experience of Egypt's new desert cities programme. A lack of amenities and social infrastructure, combined with

distance from Cairo, made it very difficult to attract new residents.<sup>24</sup>

In all these examples, professionals from different perspectives believed they had found the answer to building at scale, creating housing and communities that would benefit their residents for years to come. Yet these mistakes are still being repeated in spite of a growing body of research and practical experience that could be used to design new communities that work socially as well as economically and environmentally.



5. Empty skyscrapers, Chenggong, Kunming, China

Local authorities, government agencies and housing associations need to work with planners and developers to ensure that planning for new communities is well integrated into wider social, economic and environmental policy and socially responsible investment strategies; or risk creating future communities that will fail.



# 3 WHAT DOES SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY MEAN?

*“The great challenge of 21st century urban design is mastering ecological and social design.”*

Geoff Mulgan, NESTA



Social sustainability is largely neglected in mainstream sustainability debates. Priority has been given to economic and environmental sustainability in particular in the context of planning, housing and communities, where policy and investment has focused on renewable resources, low carbon communities and encouraging pro-environmental behaviour in households. As a result, there are few practical resources that directly address the question of how to create places that are socially sustainable, as well as physical infrastructure that is environmentally sustainable.

In 2003 the UK government commissioned a review to clarify what the term community sustainability meant and to identify the necessary skills to create sustainable communities. The Egan Review, published in 2004, identified seven factors: governance; social and cultural; housing and the built environment; economy; environmental; services and transport, and connectivity.<sup>25</sup>





## OISD defines social sustainability as:

*“Concerning how individuals, communities and societies live with each other and set out to achieve the objectives of development models which they have chosen for themselves, also taking into account the physical boundaries of their places and planet earth as a whole. At a more operational level, social sustainability stems from actions in key thematic areas, encompassing the social realm of individuals and societies, which ranges from capacity building and skills development to environmental and spatial inequalities. In this sense, social sustainability blends traditional social policy areas and principles, such as equity and health, with emerging issues concerning participation, needs, social capital, the economy, the environment, and more recently, with the notions of happiness, wellbeing and quality of life.”<sup>26</sup>*

## The Young Foundation argues that social sustainability should be seen as:

*“A process for creating sustainable, successful places that promote wellbeing, by understanding what people need from the places they live and work. Social sustainability combines design of the physical realm with design of the social world – infrastructure to support social and cultural life, social amenities, systems for citizen engagement and space for people and places to evolve.”*

Social and cultural factors are identified as an essential element because of the contribution they make to building vibrant and inclusive communities. Six areas are identified as important supports for social and cultural life: a sense of community identity and belonging; tolerance, respect and engagement with people from different cultures, background and beliefs; friendly, co-operative and helpful behaviour in neighbourhoods; opportunities for cultural, leisure, community, sport and other activities; low levels of crime and anti-social behaviour with visible, effective and community-friendly policing; and opportunities for all people to be socially included and have similar life opportunities.

One of the challenges of making a case for building socially sustainable communities is the difficulty of identifying suitable measures of success. OISD's work identifies the difficulties in measuring the 'softer' aspects of social sustainability, such as wellbeing and a sense of community; and calls for government bodies to develop new approaches to gathering data. OISD has developed a set of social

sustainability indicators for measuring the social dimensions of urban regeneration. It describes these metrics as distinct from traditional social indicators that provide a static analysis of statistical social data, with a key difference being analysis of the priorities identified and agreed by local stakeholders, and the processes and solutions that are implemented; rather than the statistical outcomes. OISD's indicators include: how connected residents feel to each other, or the sense of place in the community; the provision of and access to services; green design features; proximity to businesses and employment; cultural activities; and community involvement.<sup>27</sup>

Another obstacle, in the UK at least, is the financial models used to fund new communities. As discussed earlier in this paper, many new housing and regeneration programmes are financed by private sector developers or public-private partnerships that rely on the sale of private and social housing to provide infrastructure and amenities. This creates disincentives to invest in social amenities as work by the Joseph Rowntree



7. Ecological reserve, Buenos Aires, Argentina



Foundation identifies:

*“When regeneration is property-led, contracting regimes impose their own logic on investment and hiring, and commitment to local benefit is lost. Key informants noted a common requirement to spend public funds quickly (called ‘front-ending’) to achieve early visual results to boost investor confidence and lever in private funds. This can push the development process too fast to link it to the requisite employment*

*strategy, and the community participation, skills assessment, training and adult basic education which needs to go with it.”<sup>28</sup>*

Innovative, socially responsible new business models are needed to incentivise developers to take a long-term interest and financial stake in new communities. Evidence suggests that the most successful developments in Europe generally involve a partnership between commercial providers and local government with the private sector taking a long-term stake in the development through service charges or rental income.<sup>29</sup> Research from the Chartered Institute of Housing suggests that in the UK, the highest quality and most successful schemes tend to be led by non-commercial owners and developers.<sup>30</sup>

*“...One of the key determinants of high quality European residential developments was the leading role played by the local authority in setting the project on the right course and in making sure quality was maintained to the end... getting all the public stakeholders to work together seemed much easier...often the project had been started by one or more visionary leaders, but even more important, the local authority had some financial capacity and the skills to manage and direct the project itself. The private sector was invariably involved but within a framework that was strongly controlled and directed towards the vision that had been set...many of the builders and investors were relatively local.”*

*Beyond Eco-towns, applying the lessons from Europe, URBED, PRP Architects & Design for Homes (2008)*



8. Outdoor Chess, Western China



# 4 DESIGNING IN SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

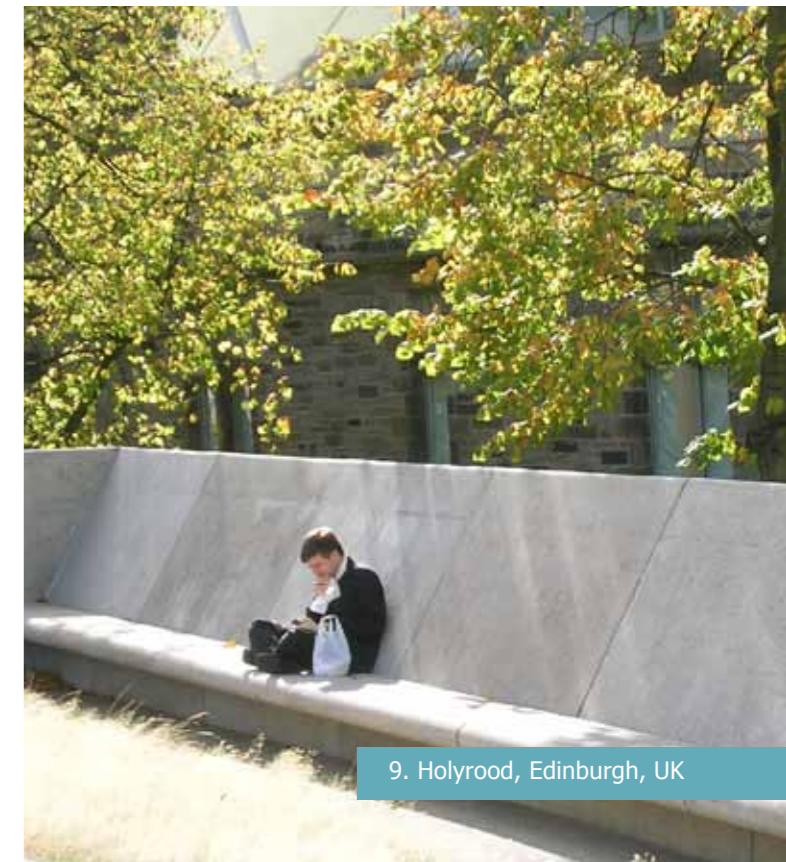
*A framework for practical action*



Drawing on a review of international experience the Young Foundation has developed a framework containing four elements that are essential to build new communities that will be successful and sustainable in the long term. These are: amenities and social infrastructure; social and cultural life; voice and influence; and space to grow.

While all four elements are needed in every new community (alongside good housing, high quality public buildings and spaces, local economic opportunities and design that supports pro-environmental behaviour) social success and sustainability cannot be prescribed in the same way that the standards for green building or environmental sustainability can. A more flexible approach

is needed that leaves room to reflect local circumstances and the diverse nature of every community and its individual residents.



9. Holyrood, Edinburgh, UK

Integrating this framework into public policy and professional practice would enable local government, other public agencies, and





private sector investors in new communities to understand the social needs (and potential problems) of future residents; allowing public agencies to work with master planners, architects and developers to design in and finance social supports and services that are both enabling and empowering.

In the following pages we explore the role that each dimension plays in supporting new communities to become socially sustainable; and the practical services, support and interventions that can be “designed in” to new communities.

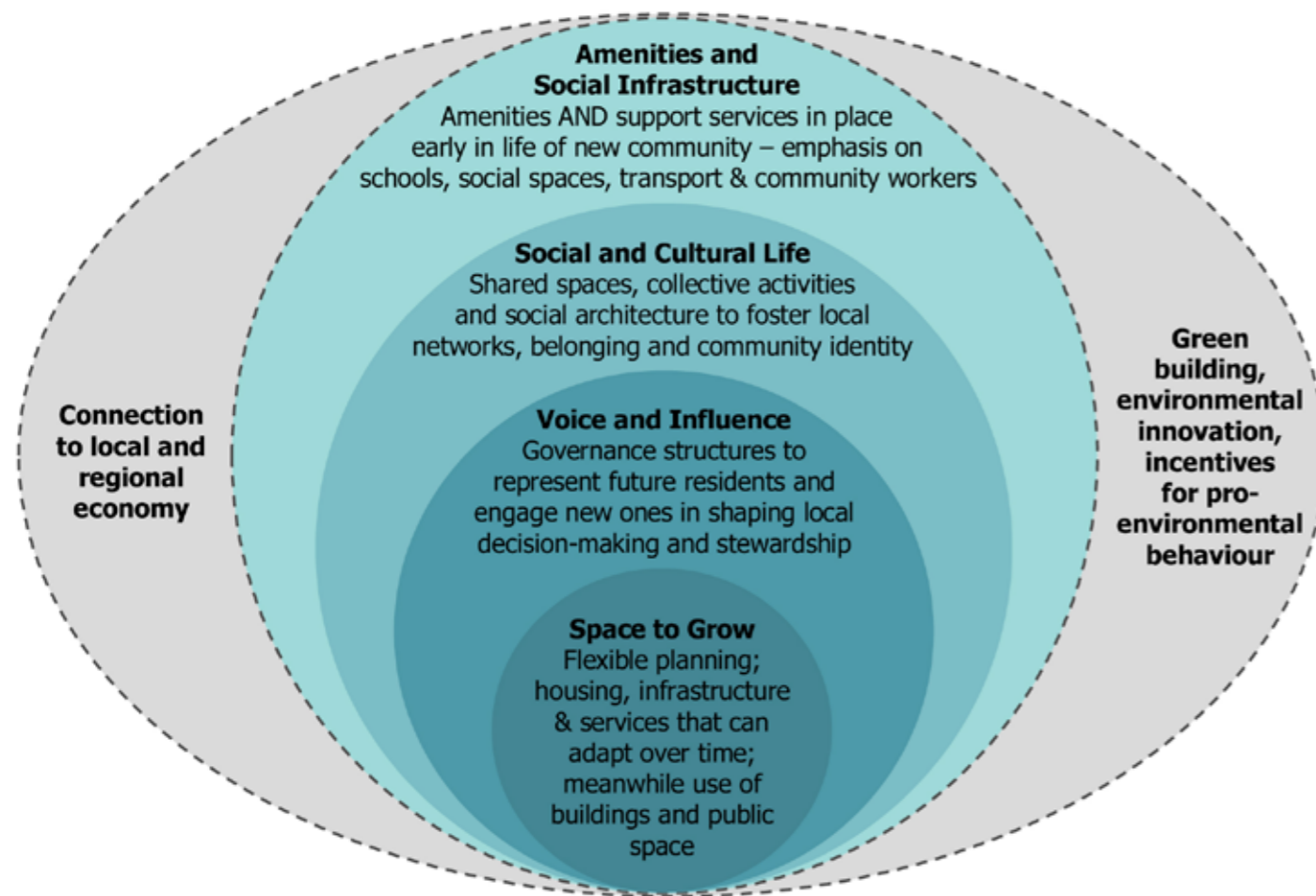
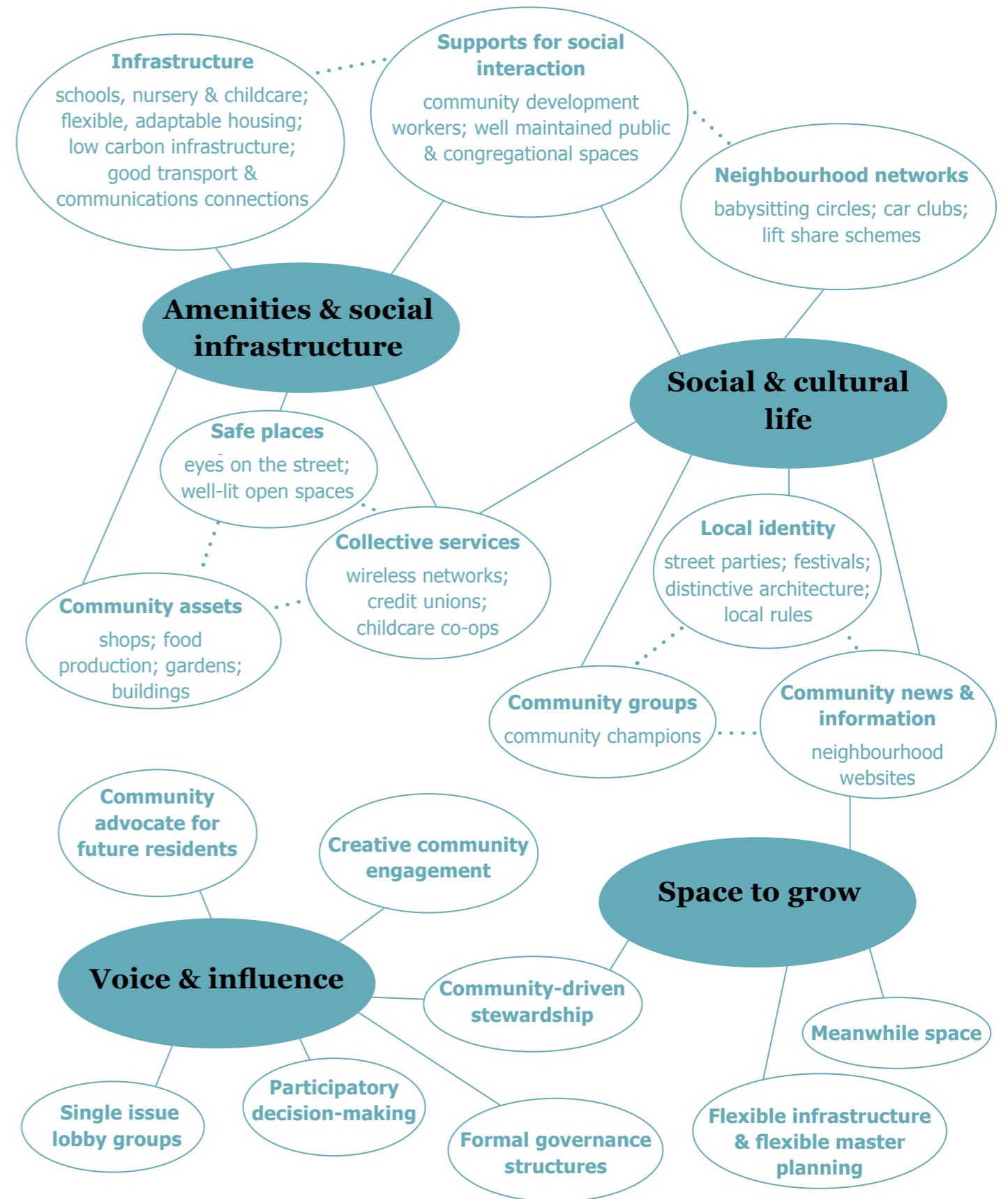


Illustration of Design for Social Sustainability Framework, Young Foundation, 2011

# Building blocks for social sustainability





# 4.1 AMENITIES & SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

*New communities need services and support, not just buildings*



*“If we are to have any chance of creating vibrant new communities that offer residents quality of life and that open up new opportunities – communities that are well balanced, integrated, sustainable and well connected – then we have to think about building for the wider needs of the whole community, not just focus on building homes.”*

A good place for children? Attracting and retaining families in inner urban mixed income communities, Emily Silverman, Ruth Lupton & Alex Fenton, Chartered Institute of Housing/Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2005)

Experience from around the world has shown that new communities need local services like schools, shops and public transport, at an early stage. Equally important though are the less visible types of support that make people feel at home in an area and create opportunities to meet other residents; like community and cultural activities that create a sense of shared history, and community workers who can help residents to meet their neighbours and enable residents to set up their own local projects.

This type of social infrastructure needs to be in place early in the life of a new community – preferably before new residents move in. Central to the **English New Towns** concept was the idea of ‘walking distance communities’ where each neighbourhood would contain a school, shops, post office, chemist, church, pub, community centre and sports facilities. A review of transferrable lessons from the New Towns<sup>31</sup> to provide practical lessons for England’s new growth areas concluded that,



*“where these facilities were already in place when people began to arrive, the community came together and networks were formed more easily.”*

This work finds that a lack of social infrastructure to support new residents when they arrive slows the process of building a community and can create long-term problems for the wellbeing and opportunities of new arrivals.



10. Bus stop, Staffordshire, UK

Support that at the outset can seem relatively insignificant can have far-reaching consequences, such as the availability of direct bus routes to connect people to local facilities and jobs; or micro-grants to support toddler groups, residents associations, sports teams, allotment clubs, and community workers to bring together residents from different backgrounds. These factors shape how inclusive, safe and tolerant new communities feel for residents and have a direct impact on local issues and services –

like policing or support for young people and families – and how housing markets and the local economy perform.

There is a strong connection between the quality of social infrastructure in new communities and the wellbeing of new residents. In the early stages of the English New Towns the quality of housing and the feeling of being a pioneer helped some residents to deal with these difficulties. However, early enthusiasm soon gave way to frustration and in the longer term, had more serious consequences for the health and wellbeing of residents, as this quote suggests:

*“They have a strong feeling of being involved in something new and exciting and of ‘belonging’... They survive the mud and lack of facilities because they feel adventurous. They may have to put up with travelling shops or shops in converted houses, but when the enthusiasm wears off, the time taken to get a substantial shopping centre built and operating or to provide places of entertainment, causes disgruntlement. They get tired of having no buses,*

*no chemist, no doctor’s surgery and no competing supermarket next door. They find there is more to happy living than a good job and a nice house with a view.”*<sup>32</sup>

The term “new town blues” was coined to describe the isolation that many people in the New Towns, particularly young mothers, felt at being separated from friends and family and having few opportunities to meet other people living locally. This has also been the experience of people living in other new communities around the UK. Problems with “new town blues” have emerged early in the development of **Cambourne**, Cambridgeshire, a new settlement with planning consent for 3,300 dwellings on 1,000 acres. Approximately half of the new homes have been completed and a further 700 are planned. Although some community and commercial facilities have been provided, including a supermarket, a range of smaller shops and a community centre, a rise in mental health issues in the community caused so much concern among GPs and other local professions that the Primary Care Trust (PCT) commissioned work to investigate the problem. The Cambridgeshire PCT report found that,

*“...planning for the hard infrastructure alone would never build a community and that it would*

*only be done by a matrix of formal and informal opportunities or supported activities. There was a strong imperative for designing facilitated activities to meet the needs of future citizens and their households if they were to take part in, and join together with, other households to build a strong and cohesive community or indeed different communities.”*<sup>33</sup>

The report also argues for the involvement of existing communities in the planning of new housing settlements.

*“Although often marginalised in the administrative structure of the new towns, the community development staff played a key role in settling in newcomers and providing a link between them and the development process as a whole, and in establishing new communities. Having community development staff in place at the outset ‘pays off handsomely’.”*

New Towns: The British Experience, Hazel Evans (ed) (1972), as quoted in: Learning From The Past, Marina Scott, Neil Stott and Colin Wiles, Keystone Development Trust (2009)



Work by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation identifies community outreach workers as important to residents in new communities. The need for this type of social or community development was recognised early in the history of the English New Towns. Many New Towns recruited teams of social liaison or community development officers, based in local houses, to meet and greet new residents, provide local information, and involve residents in decision making as new communities grew.

Neighbourhood-based workers, whether they are volunteers, part of a parish council or neighbourhood management team can create opportunities and spaces for people to interact with neighbours through local events, street parties, public meetings, consultation and community planning work. These approaches are proven to be effective at engaging residents and helping to support strong social networks and working to break down barriers and reduce tensions between different social, faith or ethnic groups.

Schools, nurseries and play areas have a particularly important role in new communities. As well as attracting families to settle in new places, schools and nurseries create opportunities for people from different backgrounds to meet other parents and build relationships. Early provision of good quality schools and nurseries will encourage more affluent families to use community services and not seek out school places in neighbouring areas, which can create long-term issues with the reputation of local schools. Schools can also provide a hub for community services or community groups,

either in the short-term while other facilities are being developed; or long-term by co-locating children's centres, community health workers or youth workers in the buildings.

*“...most mixing across social groups takes place between children. It is these contacts – in nurseries, playgroups, schools and in public spaces – that provide opportunities for adults to meet and form relationships. Children provide a common ground and shared interest between people in different tenures.”*

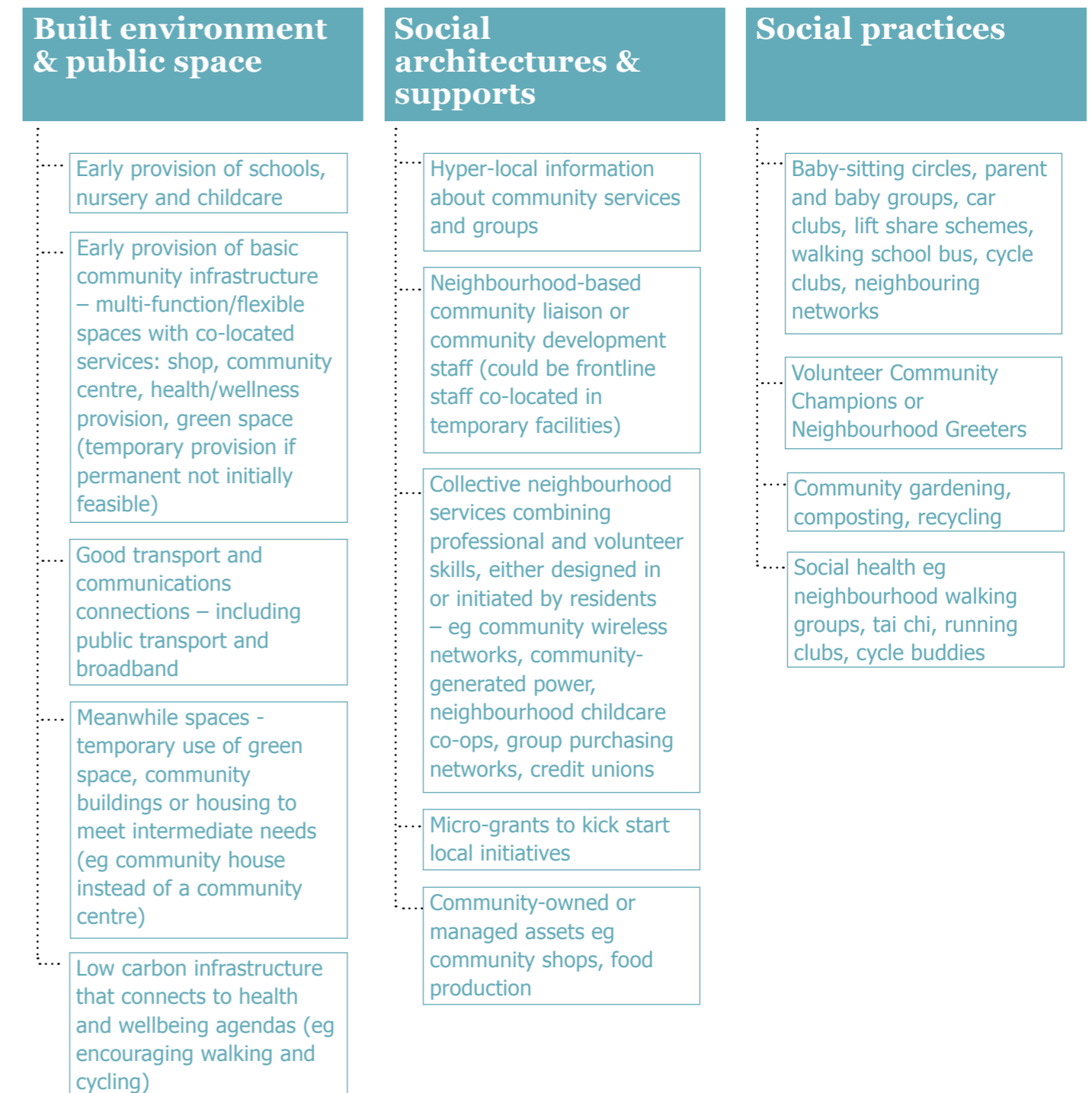
*A good place for children? Attracting and retaining families in inner urban mixed income communities, Emily Silverman, Ruth Lupton & Alex Fenton, Chartered Institute of Housing/JRF (2005)*

This is reinforced by experience in the English New Towns:

*“the provision of education facilities was key in the development of New Towns and the creation of communities, as so many of the newcomers were families with young children, who had been uprooted from their previous schools, friends and social networks. The Development Corporations had to work hard to provide enough schools and teachers ... In the cases*

*where this was not possible, it hindered the integration of communities.”*<sup>34</sup>

## Building Blocks: Amenities & social infrastructure







Man watering plants, Staffordshire, UK

## 4.2 SOCIAL & CULTURAL LIFE

*New communities need shared spaces, shared rituals & support to build social networks*



*“Policy needs to acknowledge the importance of social networks and social cohesion, and of feelings of security and safety. In this study, people expressed attachment to the communities in which they lived and to their networks of families and friends, rather than to the physical places. The qualitative research found that social and family networks and their feelings of safety were what helped to retain people in deprived areas. Policies that aid the development of social networks or of feelings of security are likely to aid attachment.”*

*The influence of neighbourhood deprivation on people's attachment to places, Mark Livingston, Nick Bailey & Ade Kearns (2008)*

Good relationships between residents, and a range of local activities – formal and informal – are key to thriving communities. However, research has also found that just small changes in a community like closing a village shop or a community centre can have far reaching consequences. New communities are particularly fragile.

People live complex lives and relate both to communities that are defined by where they live, and ‘communities of interest’, based on interest, religion, or shared identity. No one can be forced to be ‘good neighbours’ or to become friends, but there is strong evidence that the strength of local social networks is related to a number of outcomes from health to crime. Social capital – the quality





11. Regents Canal, London, UK

of relationships between residents that give a community the capability to be supportive and empowered and a rich cultural life – is important to help people put down roots, feel secure and ‘at home’ and develop a sense of belonging.

The identity of a place is rooted in history, in local celebrations, the stories people tell about the area, and in regular local events. These build up over time. When new large-scale housing developments are built the sense of place cannot be defined by its shared history. New residents will not know others and, in the early stages, there will be few social connections. Many new developments are planned as ‘mixed communities’, housing people from a range of circumstances and backgrounds. Often inner city neighbourhoods thrive on this sort of diversity – but it is something that has usually evolved over many years and generations.

**Michael Young identified three essential factors for a sense of community to exist based on a study of New Earswick, a new community developed in 1904 by Joseph Rowntree.<sup>35</sup> These are:**

- length of residence: “many people have lived there long enough to put down roots. They have not had to change their friends or their grocer and milkman every few years or so”

- a place with a character of its own: “New Earswick is distinguishable from its surroundings. The way the trees are planted, the way the houses are built, give it an individual character”; it is a “place you can belong to because it is different”
- people who share a common history: Young related how no less than six people told him how long ago ‘old Sam Davis the chemist’ started the first bus service: “Their faces lighted up as they recalled the ‘yellow Peril’ as they called it... This shared tradition, the shared knowledge of old experiences, or old stories of experiences handed down, is one of the intangible things which make people feel they belong somewhere”

There is an important role for agencies in providing support, especially in the early years, to work with local people to generate the social and cultural infrastructure that is essential to foster a sense of identity and belonging. Experience shows if this does not happen, there is a danger that residents will feel alienated from their new homes, mental health problems increase, people do not invest for the long term and move away when they have the chance.

Strong local networks give people many benefits: from a sense of belonging and attachment to a neighbourhood,

to local news and information, informal childcare, neighbours swapping keys, to recommendations about local jobs. Michael Woolcock, a senior Social Scientist at the World Bank and a lecturer in Public Policy at Harvard University remarked:

*“the well connected are more likely to be hired, housed, healthy and happy.”<sup>36</sup>*

Harvard Professor Robert Putnam has written extensively about the atomisation of American society, and the decline of group activities. *Bowling Alone*, published in 2000, argued that joining and participating in one ‘group’ cuts in half your odds of dying next year, with a group being defined as an sort of collective activity shared with others. The positive effects of high social capital, which Putnam defined as ‘networks, norms and trust that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives’, can include low crime rates, less grime, better educational achievement, and better health.<sup>37</sup>

The importance of building social networks between groups – related to what is sometimes called ‘bridging social capital’ is particularly relevant where new housing settlements bring together people from different backgrounds – age, ethnicity, religion, lifestyle, culture, or social class.<sup>38</sup> The problems that occur in areas where there is low social capital are well documented:

from high crime and anti-social behaviour, to poor quality public realm and resident dissatisfaction.

There are various practical ways of building social capital into new communities. Community development workers or neighbourhood-based staff have an important role to play in new communities by creating spaces for people to interact with neighbours through local events, street parties, public meetings, consultation or community planning work. This type of role can cost as little as £10,000 a year to fund a part-time worker, up to £50,000 or more to support a full neighbourhood management team.

### Community development support can help:

- people settle into their new homes/environment
- build networks with other newcomers and with the existing community
- organise the rituals that begin to give the place a distinctive character and encourage belonging
- broker differences between residents, and between residents and service providers
- help to ‘champion’ the new community, enable residents to ‘find their own voice’, build recognition and accelerate positive identity

*A good place for children? Attracting and retaining families in inner urban mixed income communities, Emily Silverman, Ruth Lupton & Alex Fenton, Chartered Institute of Housing/JRF (2005)*

Another approach that is proving to be highly effective in the UK is time banking: local exchanges where people can earn credits by engaging in community and public service activities which they can then ‘bank’ and put



towards 'buying' other activities. One example is **Spice**, a new community credit system that began as an institute within the University of Wales, Newport in 2003.

Spice uses a people-to-agency timebanking model, rather than the traditional people-to-people approach. A Spice timebank is hosted in a community organisation, like a housing association or community centre, and local people earn time credits by taking part in community activities. The credits are then traded for local services. This approach has been used in a community in Bridgend, Wales where the timebank has been hosted by Blaengarw Workmen's Club. Credits earned can be used in the community café, internet services, language and ICT classes, live music events and for bus travel. After an initial two year pilot with 120 people, the system is now embedded in all aspects of village life and has revitalised the former mining town.

The Young Foundation has carried out extensive research to understand what makes people feel they belong. Central to this work is the premise that individuals can instinctively sense acceptance from groups such as family, colleagues, the neighbourhood, and society, through

informal 'feedback circuits' which can either reinforce a sense of belonging or make individuals feel excluded.

The list of 'feedback circuits' is intended to be extensive, but not infinite. There are likely to be other factors involved in determining feelings of belonging. But it provides a starting point for making sense of feelings of belonging of any particular individual or group in a place, and explains why some long-standing residents feel that they no longer belong, or conversely why in some places newcomers feel at home. This work suggests that in many traditional working-class communities the majority of these 10

### 10 key feedback circuits have been identified by the Young Foundation:<sup>39</sup>

1. informal but strong ties of family and friendship
2. weak ties of association that bind people together in churches, clubs and voluntary bodies where they find connection and common purpose
3. messages from the economy, positive ones if it offers entry level jobs as well as opportunities for advancement, negative ones if it overtly discriminates, or simply has no place for a significant part of the population
4. messages from power and politics – a political system in which key roles are filled by people who look like you and share your values will encourage feelings of belonging
5. messages from culture in its widest sense that reinforce a sense of belonging or of alienation
6. messages about physical safety – levels of violent crime and anti-social behaviour strongly influence feelings of belonging
7. physical environment
8. everyday public services – schools, hospitals, frontline government offices
9. homes – where there are homes for people like you, your friends and family
10. law and its enforcement – if people help to shape and believe in the law, they are more likely to obey it

feedback circuits, with the partial exception of the first, is sending negative belonging messages to significant groups of citizens. They are not recognized by the economy, political power, or visible culture, and they feel unsafe. By contrast, in many highly

diverse but more affluent communities, the feedback systems send positive messages about everything from the economic value of newcomers to appreciation of their cultures.<sup>40</sup>

## Building Blocks: Social & cultural life

### Built environment & public space

People-friendly layouts eg car free areas, speed reductions, eyes on the street, well-lit areas

Distinctive architecture/landscaping to reinforce/create sense of local identity

Public and congregational spaces eg open spaces, parks, wide pavements, benches

Third spaces (eg cafes, pubs, shops), playgrounds and playspaces

Connections to neighbouring communities to avoid isolation eg pathways and shared public spaces

Flexible working spaces to encourage home-working, local enterprise (eg spaces in a community centre or café)

### Social architectures & supports

Timebanking – promoting mutual exchange and development of social capital though peer-to-peer timebanking or people-to-agency timebanking

Community projects to encourage inter-generational/inter-group mixing

Neighbourhood Charter, Community Design Statement

Local rules and norms eg Home Zones, car free streets, neighbourhood agreements, local taxes or fundraising

Informal local currencies eg Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS)

### Social practices

Neighbourhood-based groups eg Neighbourhood Watch, Residents/Tenants Associations, Pledgebank

Inter-generational, cross-cultural events and activities eg Under One Sun, The Big Lunch

Local celebrations – eg festivals, street parties, fetes, family days, artists in residence

Local oral history projects like East Midlands Oral History

Local events – eg litter picking, planting, fundraising

Neighbouring activities eg household network, loanables



## 4.3 VOICE & INFLUENCE

*“Foremost, residents need to have a say in shaping their surroundings ...”<sup>41</sup>*



Involving local communities in decisions that affect their lives throughout the stages of new developments is vital if public investment is to be effective. If communities are not involved in designing and planning housing and wider facilities and infrastructure, short-term cost savings may lead to long-term cost burdens if what is provided proves to be inappropriate, and under-used.

Gerda Speller spent six years studying the relocation of **Arkwright Town**, a 100 year-old mining village in Derbyshire, England. All the villagers were moved into new housing a short distance away in the mid 1990s due to methane gas emissions from a nearby coal mine. Speller identified a number of conditions that must be met for people to form an attachment to a new neighbourhood.

Foremost, is the need for residents to have a say in the shaping of their surroundings. Speller says:

*“Often you will find with developments like this that they are completely finished before people move in. So they lack the chance to make their new environment their own.”*

Speller’s work identified the small things that can have a profound influence on how people respond to new environments. She describes how residents of Arkwright moved to their new homes but the lack of greenery in the neighbourhood meant there were no birds. “People were absolutely distressed,” she says.

*“It took about six months for shrubs and trees to provide enough cover for the birds to frequent the new town.”*



Public space near City Hall, London, UK



*The planners of the town had tried to think of everything and it was fascinating that this lack of external stimulation turned out to be so very important.”<sup>42</sup>*

Engaging with a community at the early stages of development can be challenging, especially when future residents are yet to arrive.

However, in every development there will always be a community with a stake in the new development – either as potential residents, or as a neighbouring area or as the wider local community – who can be consulted. For example, a large development will have a profound impact on nearby towns or villages, or the surrounding rural area, by displacing people, bringing in new residents, and possibly increasing the strain on transport and services. Overlooking the opinions of neighbouring communities can lead to local resistance, planning objections, delays and hostility to new residents when they move in.

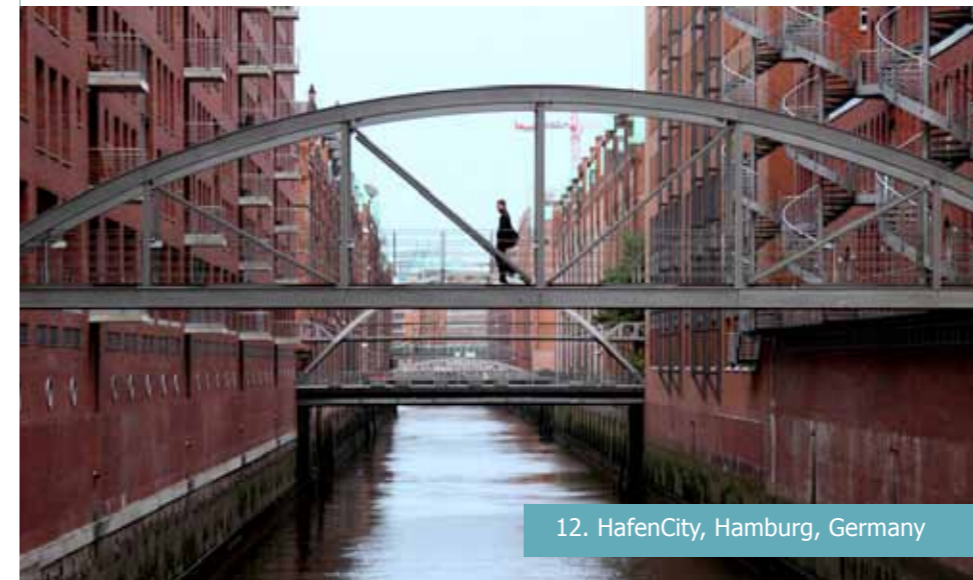
The developers of **HafenCity**, a new residential and commercial quarter in Hamburg, are taking an interesting approach to engaging residents. When completed HafenCity will be home to 12,000 residents and between 45,000 and 50,000 workers commuting to the quarter during working hours. Now, however, there are just 1,550 residents and 6,000 workers. HafenCity has employed sociologist Marcus Menzl, to act as an advocate and “go-between” for the residents and developers. Interviewed in SPIEGEL, Menzl says:

*“We are doing something very ambitious here. Yes, we are building buildings. But we are also producing social and cultural environments for the next century. After all, a city is not only a commercial product, but also a public good... You can't have a totally structured place and then just expect people to fit in. But nor will it work if everything is totally open to interpretation... The goal is to find a balance between structures and freedoms and opportunities.”*

HafenCity provides a good example of how residents' needs are likely to evolve as the community develops. In 2008, there were 600 inhabitants including 40 children, a high number given the lack of a kindergarten and playground at that early stage. A playground was a high priority for parents. Developers agreed to build a temporary one that could be moved once construction had advanced. The parents also suggested an indoor recreation area for use during bad weather, which HafenCity agreed to on the condition that residents took over responsibility for it. HafenCity financed half of it and the parents financed the other half.<sup>43</sup>

Early research in HafenCity has shown new residents to identify strongly with their new surroundings. Marcus Menzl claims:

*“That sort of emotional connection usually only comes with time. But they [residents] seem to have identified with HafenCity very quickly and they want to support the philosophy. You cannot build a neighborly feeling ... but I think that architecture can help certain processes and hinder others.”<sup>44</sup>*



12. HafenCity, Hamburg, Germany

Another example of the consequences of social sustainability methodologies can be drawn from a case study in Mumbai, India. Qualitative research carried out in 2009 on the sustainability and transformational impact of the relocation of pavement dwellers showed that a community-led relocation process in which pavement dwellers were re-housed through a highly participatory process (i.e. having a say in the selection of the relocation site, the design of the built environment, and structures created for community governance) has been demonstrably more successful than traditional

state-led relocation processes that lack participation and consideration of how the newly relocated communities might settle together and thrive.<sup>45</sup>

A growing body of research supports the assertion that community and neighbourhood empowerment – giving residents the opportunity to take part in collective activities that influence the areas they live in – contribute to the wellbeing of residents and communities.

A report from the Local Wellbeing Project – a partnership between Local Government Improvement and Development, the Young

Foundation, the London School of Economics and three local authorities (Manchester, South Tyneside and Hertfordshire) – argued that: wellbeing is higher in areas where residents can influence decisions affecting their neighbourhood; wellbeing is higher among people who have regular contact with their neighbours, and that wellbeing is higher in areas where residents have the confidence to exercise control over local circumstances. This study found three key benefits of empowerment

that directly contribute to wellbeing: that it creates opportunities for residents to influence decisions, facilitates contact between neighbours, and builds residents' confidence to control local circumstances.<sup>46</sup>

As communities become established and social networks develop, both formal and informal groups will form. Informal groups will include local activists coming together, often to form campaign groups based on particular life experiences or interests (especially toddlers groups and faith



groups). There are numerous ways that resident involvement can become formalised, by developing community groups into community organisations, or by setting up new institutional governance arrangements, like formally constituted residents associations, neighbourhood councils or Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs). Alternative approaches that are proving to be effective in the UK include community contracts (negotiated between local services providers and residents) and neighbourhood management. All are essential to feed into thriving community governance over time. Sustaining residents' voice and influence in the long term means putting robust engagement and governance arrangements in place that are sensitive to local needs, and thinking about how these will be funded into the future. Evidence from the Development Trusts Association (now Locality) and other community empowerment models shows that a strong community organisation can be very effective in influencing local services, encouraging community initiatives and giving people a voice in dealing with the whole range of issues that impact on a community's everyday existence.

The **Barking Riverside Regeneration** scheme in Barking and Dagenham, East London, is establishing a Community Development Trust (CDT) to represent the interests of existing and new residents in the regeneration area. Barking Riverside will be a large mixed community, housing up to 26,000 people over the next two decades and will include new schools, health and community facilities and commercial space. The development borders well-established

communities and industrial businesses in an area with a long history of deprivation and disadvantage. Dealing with anxieties about incoming residents and the demands they will place on local public services is a priority for the local authority and Barking Riverside Limited (BRL), a partnership between the Homes and Communities Agency and a private developer. In the early stages of the development, the local authority and BRL will represent local interests. As existing residents are engaged and new residents arrive, management of the CDT will be transferred to the community, with the local authority always maintaining a representation on the board.

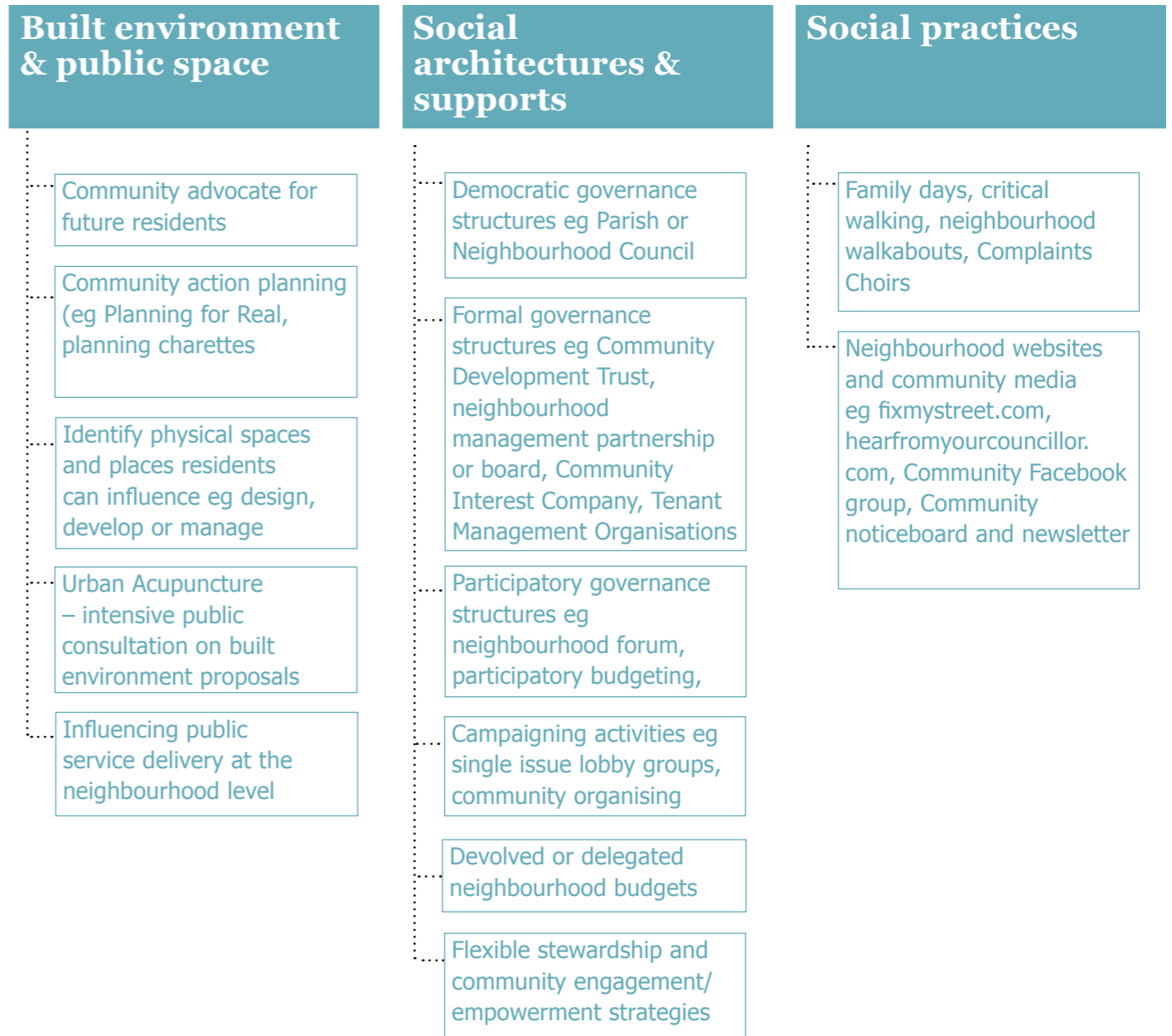


There is increasing interest in community investment in the UK, a different approach to issuing shares that enables community agencies to expand. This could include selling shares to service users or more conventional share offers. In the first half of the last decade there were, on average, four new community share schemes each year. But in the second half of the decade, the number of community share schemes started to increase, culminating in a sevenfold increase in 2009, when 28 enterprises launched community share offers. In addition to this, at least another 50 community groups

are known to be exploring the option of community investment. From farming, football and pubs, to community retail stores and renewable energy, community investment is proving to be an excellent way of financing enterprises that serve a community purpose. Examples of community share projects include **Ashington Minors**, an established childcare nursery in a former mining town

in north-east England, which plans to engage the local community and strengthen its business model through a community share offer; and **Cybermoor**, a community organisation in rural Cumbria which provides wireless broadband access to the local community. Cybermoor is planning to raise an additional £100,000 in capital to provide the next generation with internet access.<sup>47</sup>

## Building Blocks: Voice & influence







Palais Royal, Paris, France

## 4.4 SPACE TO GROW

### *Flexible use of land and buildings is essential*



If a new community is to be successful and sustainable, the place – the physical space, the housing stock and amenities, the social infrastructure – needs to be able to adapt over time to new needs and new possibilities. As Saskia Sassen points out, “*in that incompleteness...lies the possibility of making.*”<sup>48</sup>

As has been argued elsewhere in this paper, new developments need to be well planned to ensure that basic amenities and a robust social infrastructure are in place from the time that residents begin to move into their new homes. However, many of the aspects of social life that make communities flourish cannot be planned in advance – community projects, governance arrangements and other local institutions need to evolve, building on local relationships, recognition of common interests, a sense of mutuality and trust

between residents and other stakeholders that again needs time to develop.

In order to allow new communities to flourish, planning authorities should avoid a rigid ‘master-planning’ approach that seeks to create a blueprint for the future. Rather, master plans need to allow for a degree of ambiguity, uncertainty and openness to change, recognising that a new community will develop best if it is allowed to be dynamic and to evolve in ways that the planners cannot entirely predict. In designing places for the future, planners should make sure that communities and their residents have the space to grow, in particular, to develop a distinctive character, to shape the place so that it better meets local needs, and have scope to change as populations age and shift and new patterns of work and social life emerge.

Lessons from the English New Towns Review identified that community master planning worked most effectively when it provided for local choice. Successful aspects were identified as providing,



*“infrastructure that was flexible, so that communities could develop it in a way that suited them in the future. Enabling participation in planning of the later phases.”*

Less successful aspects were being overly prescriptive in terms of social infrastructure, by providing facilities that weren't easily adaptable. The different local circumstances and approaches of the English New Towns meant varying degrees of success in providing social infrastructure and support. The review suggests that social infrastructure and amenities in the New Towns were often inappropriate, unimaginative or poorly designed, in spite of the New Town Development Corporations recognising at an early stage that providing housing and employment alone could not create 'living communities'. Too great an emphasis was placed on design and physical issues in the planning process at the expense of community and social needs, which resulted in facilities that were inflexible and hard to adapt.

In practical terms this kind of flexibility should include creative use of buildings and land, such as adaptable housing stock and if possible, opportunities for community groups to manage or build their own homes. Research identifies the importance of flexible and adaptable housing to provide space for families to grow without having to move away from a community where they have become established.<sup>49</sup> In the US and UK there is growing interest in community land trusts as

a vehicle for transferring land and buildings to communities to provide assets and capital to fund the development of local housing.



14. Brixton Green, London, UK

The majority of UK land trusts are small, rural projects. However, a small number of urban community land trusts are being developed, the most advanced being **London Citizens Community Land Trust**, focusing on the London 2012 Olympic site, and Brixton Green.<sup>50</sup> There are various short and long term benefits to asset ownership for communities including: wealth creation being retained and recycled in the community and generating new projects and further benefits; a 'multiplier effect' bringing wider range of benefits boosting business viability, restoring land values and attracting new investment; promoting community cohesion through bringing people from different backgrounds; building bridging and bonding social capital. However, there are significant challenges associated with establishing a community land trust. A review of UK urban land trusts<sup>51</sup> found many organisations struggled to cope in the early stages of development, specifically with business planning and bureaucracy. Public sector support, political

will and community interest, strong business planning, and a social enterprise dimension to the business model, were identified as crucial conditions for success.

Residents in new communities can find themselves surrounded by semi-dereliction and building sites for many years while developments are completed. Intermediate or 'meanwhile use' of land and buildings can provide much-needed temporary space for community activities and interaction. Community gardens and orchards, grow-bag allotments in empty plots of land, empty buildings temporarily housing social enterprises, community projects or drop-in clinics for local public services, are among the growing number of temporary projects developing in the UK and US.

**Milton Keynes**, one of the English New Towns, provides a temporary community house and £10,000 in funding in its new housing developments. This approach is intended to provide a space for new residents and community groups from the very early stages of a new development, in order to help combat isolation and small amounts of funding to support community activities. **London's Olympic Legacy Company** is also developing a similar approach as described in this article, *A Sporting Chance for London*:

*“...the Olympic Legacy Company has started proposing temporary uses for the empty sites such as market gardens, allotments*

*and... arts festivals. Paul Finch, the chairman of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, champions the idea of temporary tree nurseries—a source of employment and an environmental benefit.”*



15. New Housing at Coin Street, London, UK

More innovatively he suggests allowing people to self build on the site, rather than waiting for developers, which would allow neighbourhood characters to develop spontaneously. This would be done by encouraging developers to work in the same entrepreneurial way as individuals and small businesses.

Other more creative approaches include Space Makers Agency's work in Brixton, London, which is a good example of how 'meanwhile spaces' can catalyse local action. **Space Makers Agency** worked with Lambeth Council in October 2009 and landlords London and Associated Properties



to bring a number of empty properties into temporary and potentially longer-term use on a three-month rent-free basis. With financial support from the owners, and considerable unpaid work, the project has strengthened with relationships between the owners, local authority, other stakeholders and third sector group **Friends of Brixton Market** to discuss community involvement in the market's future. Making the market a centre of cultural and social activity is strengthening the local economy through increased footfall, with an initial wave of temporary projects occupying formerly empty space ranging from galleries to street theatre. Four previously empty units have been occupied by tenants since the start of the project, with a further rise in the number of applications for units and the projection that five of the tenants taking a three-month rent-free trial will make the transition to becoming long-term tenants.

Flexible use of land and buildings presents great potential in new communities, where local relationships, needs and ideas are taking shape. Too often, the default response is to provide a community centre for a new settlement, without considering the needs of the residents or how a centre will be managed over time. More creative approaches to exploring with residents what they need and want, and also challenging assumptions about what might be possible, can result in more exciting, relevant and sustainable alternatives. A good example is **The Octagon**, the result of five years of community-led consultation and planning driven by the **Goodwin Trust** in Hull. In 2006 it was commended in the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors Community Benefit Award. The centre provides primary health care, a 60-place nursery and council customer



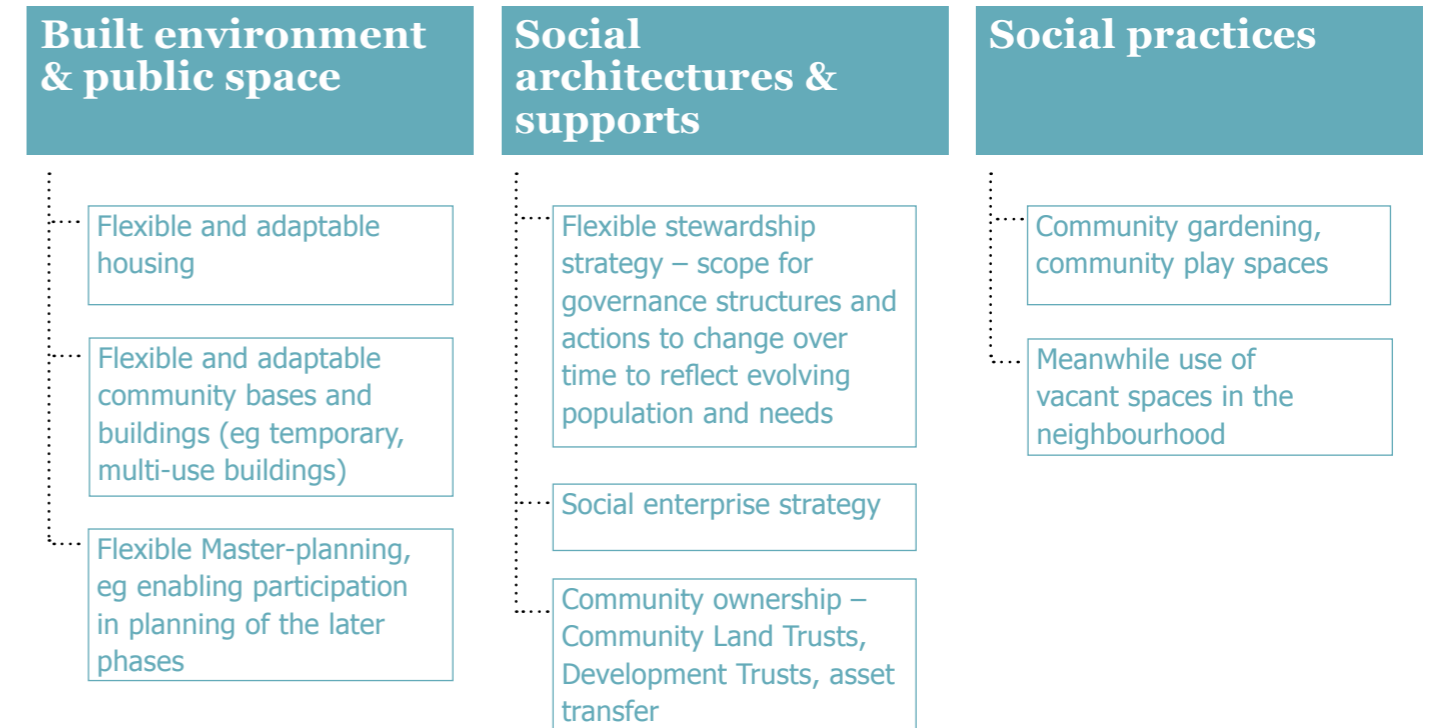
16. EC1 Street Party, London, UK

services, in addition to office accommodation and conference facilities. The £5 million project has become a source of local pride, and it has acted as a catalyst for further regeneration in the area including Hull's first community gymnasium, The Octagon Fitness Centre.

A major challenge for English new towns and communities is an ageing population and the demands this creates for specialist housing, health and social care services, and support to overcome problems of isolation. Moreover elderly residents are often living on fixed or low incomes, limiting their ability to contribute to local services. One example of how authorities in Sweden are responding is the **SeniorForum**,<sup>52</sup> a cooperative housing association set up in five municipalities, which all elderly residents are entitled to join. Three main models have been developed: Bonus (for larger communities of up to 200 members); Habitat (for small communities of between 50 and 100 members); and Focus, which provides for those who need full-time nursing care. The cost of construction is shared between Swedish Credit Agencies, who pay for the construction phase and 70 per cent of the final financing. Members pay the other 25 per cent by depositing between €25,000 (approx. £21,500) and

€40,000 (approx. £34,500) when they live in the complex. The sums are returned when they leave the cooperative. All members pay a monthly fee to cover organised social activities. This fee includes the cost of one employee, who organises the various activities. The scheme was short-listed for the 2010 World Habitat Awards.

## Building Blocks: Space to grow





# 5 CONCLUSION

*“You can’t have a totally structured place and then just expect people to fit in...”*

Marcus Menzl, sociologist, HafenCity



Creating cities and communities that work socially, economically and environmentally and can be sustainable in the long term will be one of the main challenges of this century.

Much is already known about how governments, planners, architects and developers can work together to achieve this. However, the challenge is to integrate this thinking into professional practice as well as public policy.

To do this, a coherent body of evidence and practical experience is needed to strengthen the case for social sustainability in the design of new communities; as are innovative partners willing to try different approaches to planning and funding new settlements.

Further research is needed to define what social sustainability means for new communities, along with work on how to measure the effectiveness of different

approaches for different types of community. For example, there are many more studies of the failures and successes of social housing estates developed in the 1960s and 70s, than of the many new communities of private and mixed housing that have been developed from the 1980s onwards. We need to know more about the local experience of people living in new communities to understand how these places shape the aspirations and opportunities of individuals.

More work is also needed to identify and analyse the costs and benefits of applying this framework for social sustainability; to understand the long-term financial costs to developers and public agencies of making this initial investment; the likely problems that will occur if investments are not made in supporting social life to flourish in communities; and to find innovative and sustainable ways to maintain this type of social infrastructure when it is in place, such as involving local social enterprises.

Evidence about the cost of developing and maintaining social infrastructure is difficult to find. Milton Keynes, an English New Town





developed in 1967, appears to be one of the only places to have developed an investment model that clearly defines and costs the provision of social infrastructure. A cost of £700 per new dwelling is budgeted for providing social and community infrastructure – defined as:

‘activities, resources and support that strengthen the skills, abilities and confidence of people and community groups to take effective action and leading roles in the development of their communities.’<sup>53</sup>

**Masdar City** on the outskirts of Abu Dhabi, has until recently been held up as an example of best practice in environmental sustainability and green building. Designed as a zero-waste, car-free and carbon-neutral city for 50,000 people, it was intended to promote innovation in energy efficiency, resource recycling, biodiversity and sustainable transport. However, even this experiment has failed to consider the social needs of people trying to live in a model environmental city.

Our aim is for social sustainability to be the aspiration for the next generation of new cities and communities in the UK and around the world; with governments, planners, developers and architects committing to learn from the many lessons of the past: cities and communities need to work as places for people.

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# IMAGES

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*Outside the National Theatre, London, UK, by Damian Thompson*

## Section images:

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- Section 5. *West Village, New York City, USA, by Lucia Caistor-Arendar*

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- 3. [www.futurecommunities.net](http://www.futurecommunities.net)
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# ABOUT FUTURE COMMUNITIES

Future Communities is a partnership between the Young Foundation, the Homes and Communities Agency, Local Government Improvement and Development, and a group of local partners including Birmingham City Council, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, Aylesbury Vale District Council and Peabody Trust. International projects are also underway with the City of Malmö (Sweden) and in Adelaide (Australia).

[www.futurecommunities.net](http://www.futurecommunities.net)  
[www.futurecommunitiesneveragain.wordpress.com](http://www.futurecommunitiesneveragain.wordpress.com)

July 2011

This paper was written by Saffron Woodcraft with Tricia Hackett and Lucia Caistor-Arendar. We are grateful to Holly Brereton, Douglas Cochrane and Nicola Bacon for their significant contributions to the content of the paper.

Design by: Lucia Caistor-Arendar

# ABOUT THE YOUNG FOUNDATION

The Young Foundation brings together insight, innovation and entrepreneurship to meet social needs. We have a 55 year track record of success with ventures such as the Open University, Which?, the School for Social Entrepreneurs and Healthline (the precursor to NHS Direct). We work across the UK and internationally - carrying out research, influencing policy, creating new organisations and supporting others to do the same, often with imaginative uses of new technology. We now have over 60 staff, working on over 40 ventures at any one time, with staff in New York and Paris as well as London and Birmingham in the UK.

[www.youngfoundation.org](http://www.youngfoundation.org)



This paper sets out how to plan, design and develop successful and socially sustainable new communities. The ideas and examples are drawn from a large scale review of evidence about what makes communities flourish, with practical examples and approaches from new settlements around the world. It was commissioned by the Homes and Communities Agency as part of Future Communities.

*“The recommendations of this report are bound to have a salience that its authors can never have imagined.”*

Sir Peter Hall