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Conference or Workshop Item

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Creators: Field, M., Colenutt, B. and Cochrane, A.

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ESRC Project : “Tensions and Prospects for Sustainable Housing Growth”

Advisory Group meeting 31.3.12

Presentation by Allan Cochrane, Bob Colenutt and Martin Field

Issues to present to Advisory Group

- Rationale of ESRC work Jan-Mar 2012
- Historic context to policies
- Identification of collaborative frameworks
- Indicative delivery mechanisms in study area
- Aspects of local planning policies
- Aspects of local housing policies
- Measurements of 'sustainability'
- Future for 'sustainable housing growth?'

ESRC work focus Jan-Mar 2012

- Focus on first period of study from @ 2003/4 to transitional period of 2010-onwards
- Data and policies digested
- Core issues emerging of interpretations to 'growth' and 'sustainability'
- Preparations for first interviews

Context of policies in Northamptonshire 2003-2010

- Ambitious growth plans with routes to 'growth' via formal partnerships
- Regional Assemblies & Development Agencies
- "Growth agenda" largely resourced from housing boom
- Community empowerment
- "Weak" partnerships for the growth areas
- New Joint Strategic roles cancelled 2010
- Desire to secure more from private sources
- Local communities not a significant partner in growth agenda

Identification of collaborative frameworks to 2010

- Key role of DCLG Growth Areas unit and NCC political/strategic role
- Regional and sub-regional strategies v important
- MKSM Board established
- Joint Planning Units and Joint Core strategies
- Local Strategic Partnerships
- Growth agenda 'planning'-led not 'housing-sector' led, though housing numbers key measure of success
- RDAs not decision making authorities; but could CPO
- Weak MKSM Governance
- First JPU and completed core strategy in country
- LSPs lacked teeth

Indicative delivery mechanisms in study area to 2010

- SDVs (WNDC, NNDC, MKP)
- Reliance on housing market and 'planning gain' outcomes
- Limited 'growth' funds – Growth Area fund; Transport Infrast. Fund
- English Partners/HCA roles (+ design codes like Upton)
- Different powers to individual bodies; minimal funding
- Reliance on disparate negotiation skills in LA
- House builders resistant to prescriptive policies and conditions (cf objections to Core Strategies)
- Quite a lot of land in EP ownership. HCA imagined Northampton will outstrip Derby in size

Aspects of local planning policies

- Emphasis on translating MKSM into 'core strategies' (LDFs)
- Huge LA officer time to create frameworks, while property booming
- Start of 'Sustainability Appraisals' (SA)
- Growing 'wish list' of intentions / inclusions for 'sustainable development'
- Conflicts between setting up policies and development pressures
- Plans finalised while market collapsed
- SAs - a framework for assessing 'sustainability' of *plans*, less about mechanisms and outcomes

Aspects of local housing policies

- Regional housing target driven
- First Housing Market Area assessments
- Regional / sub-regional demands for affordable housing %
- SUEs to deliver 50% of new units
- Separation of RSL management partners from development role
- Growing unease over targets and new-build 'quality'
- All policies supported a mix of property/tenures
- Slippage in programme delivery in all tenures pre Crash; long lead times on SUEs and infrastructure
- Increasing pressure to Review policies and programme
- RSLs supported by LAs county-wide and HCA, but suffered in recession

Measurements of ‘sustainability’

- Different interpretations by scales : macro to local
- Strategic view – aim for a balance of jobs, housing and “growth towns”
- Local view - Sustainability appraisals within plans
- Patchy emphasis on design to improve / support local dynamics
- Lack of clear policy on “Sustainable Urban Extensions”
- Long lists within core strategies lack community dimension
- promotion of ‘sustainable places’ came very late

How did it look in 2010 before change of Government

- Progress made in coordination, plan making, and planning obligations
- Development began on some key sites, and infrastructure
- Housing crash 2008 brought development to a halt
- HCA interventions important at the margin
- Increasing need to review policies and programme
- Delivery mechanisms not up to the ambition
- Growing criticism from politicians and some community groups about lack of capital and revenue infrastructure
- Change in local political control from 2006 hastened pressure to review
- Evident programme slippage on housing and jobs
- Yet Las/JPU's still maintaining the ambition?