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

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Tensions & Prospects for Sustainable Housing Growth

A case study on the MKSM spatial plan for sustainable development

Presentation to University of Westminster
November 20th 2012

Dr Bob Colenutt & Dr Martin Field
Northampton Institute for Urban Affairs

What this case study considers :

- 1. A spatial strategy focused on 'growth'
- 2. Growth focused on 'sustainable development'
- 3. Themes and questions

[Interim findings from ESRC-funded study - "Tensions and future prospects for sustainable housing growth : a case study of Northamptonshire and Milton Keynes", University of Northampton & Open University, 2012 -13]

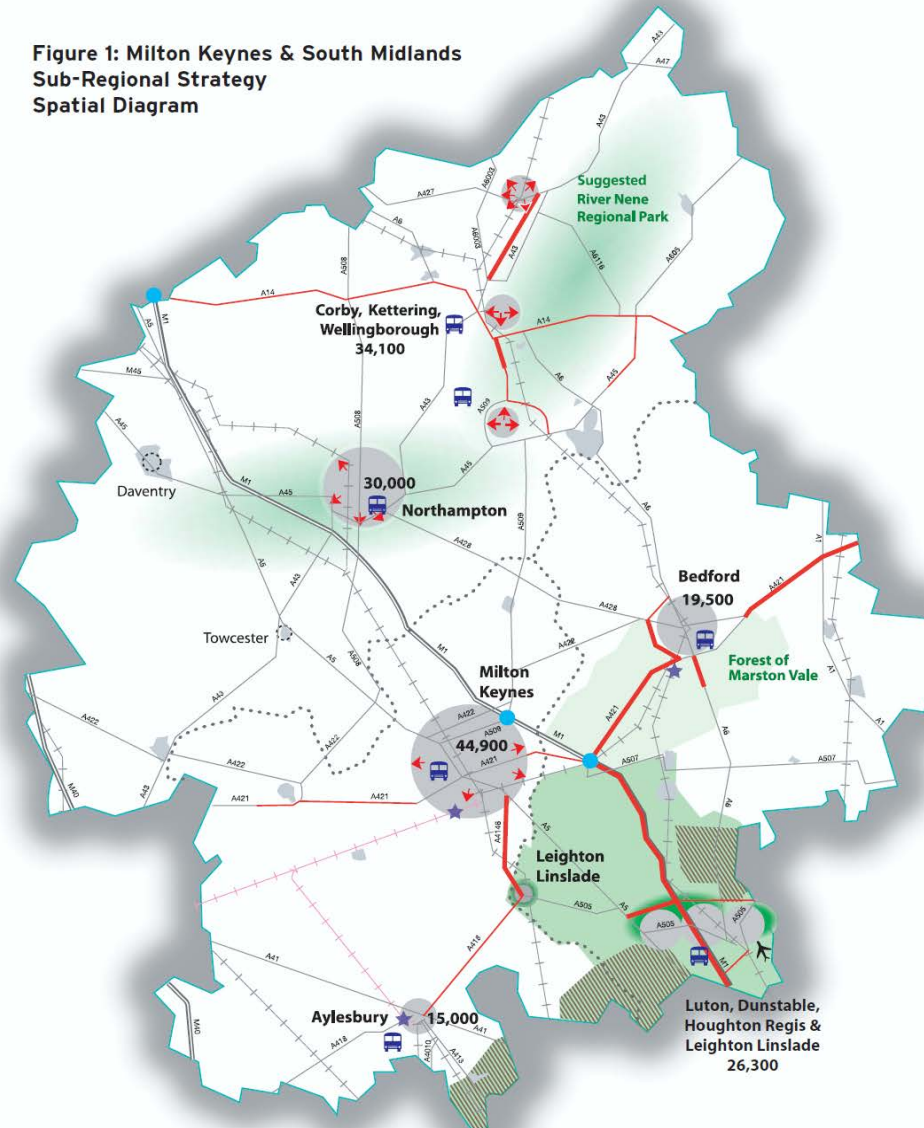
1. A spatial strategy focused on 'growth'

- SCP primary objective to raise housing delivery and quality
- Government makes ambitious “step change” assumptions
- MKSM to deliver sub-regional context
- Local authorities to deliver Core Strategies
- Private sector to deliver housing in the Growth Areas
- LDVs to facilitate local initiatives

Response of stakeholders to growth plans

- Government became increasingly anxious about delivery and amended regional focus and strategies
- MKSM 'identity' adopted at PR level, but biggest influences occurred at very local levels, not sub-regional scale
- Major towns had ambitions for growth & regeneration; more criticism of target impacts from urban edges and rural settings.
- MKSM not a major event for house-builders : plans were a spur to more land assembly and submission of further schemes
- No clear evidence that lack of land or consents held up growth
- MK partnerships already embedded; NNDC supported and enabled first JPU; Friction over WNDC role and interventions.

**Figure 1: Milton Keynes & South Midlands
Sub-Regional Strategy
Spatial Diagram**



Housing trajectory for Milton Keynes Borough - AMR 2004/05

Figure 23b – Housing Trajectories

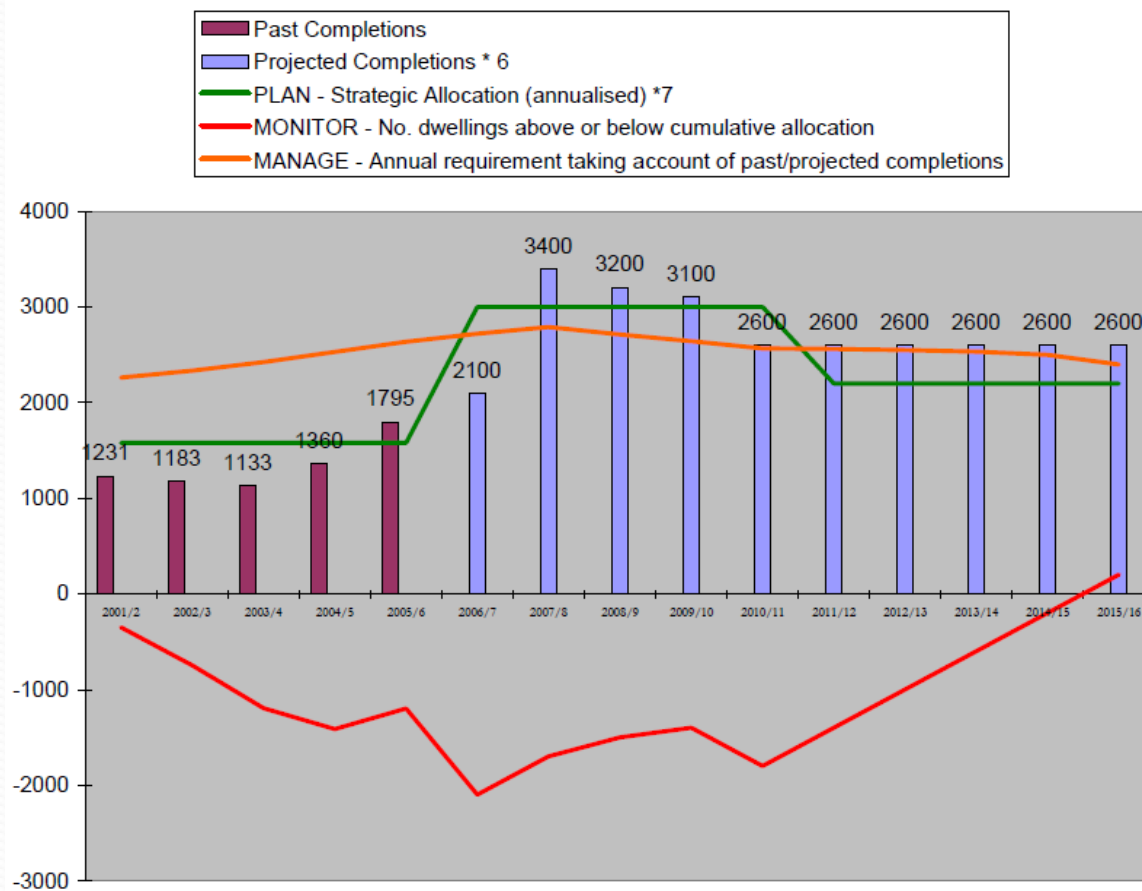
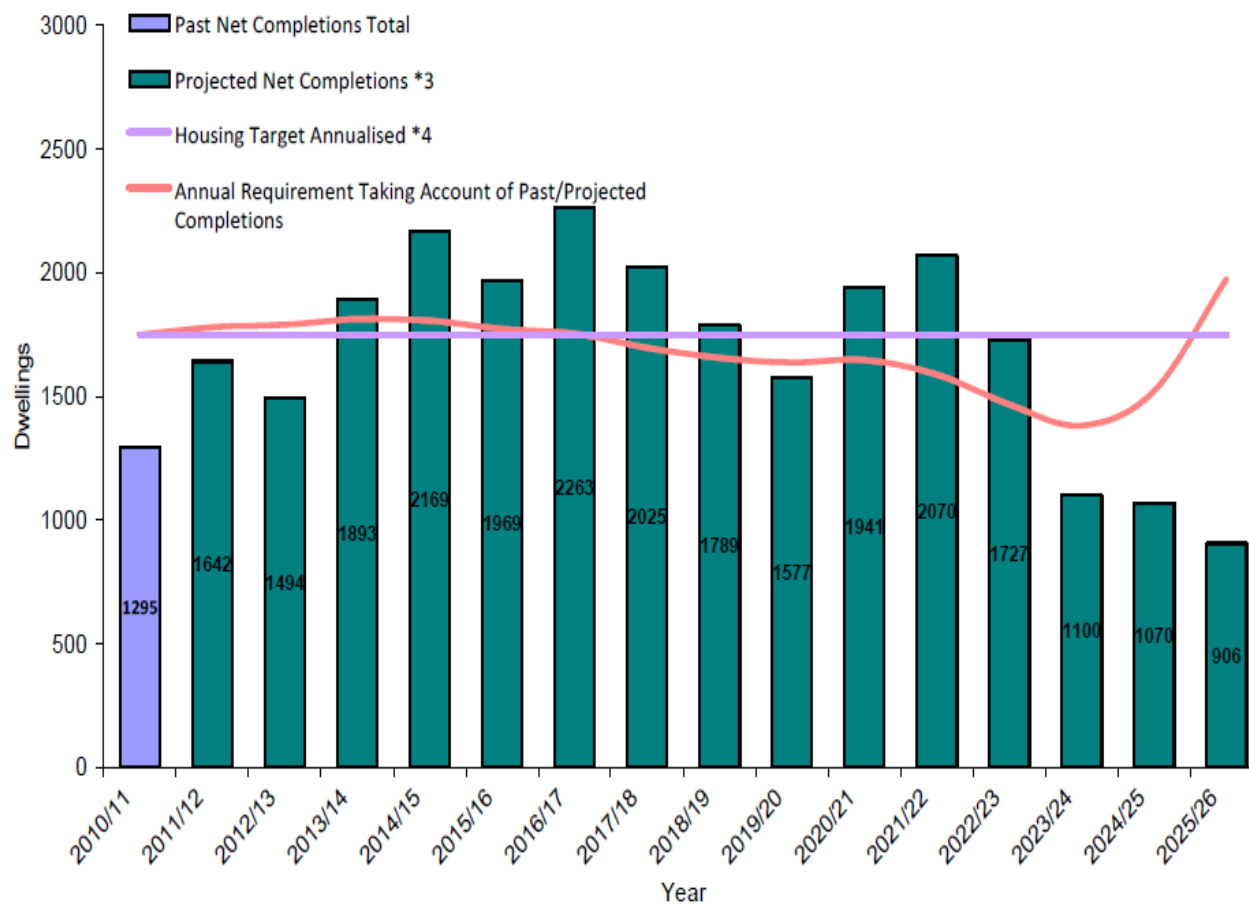
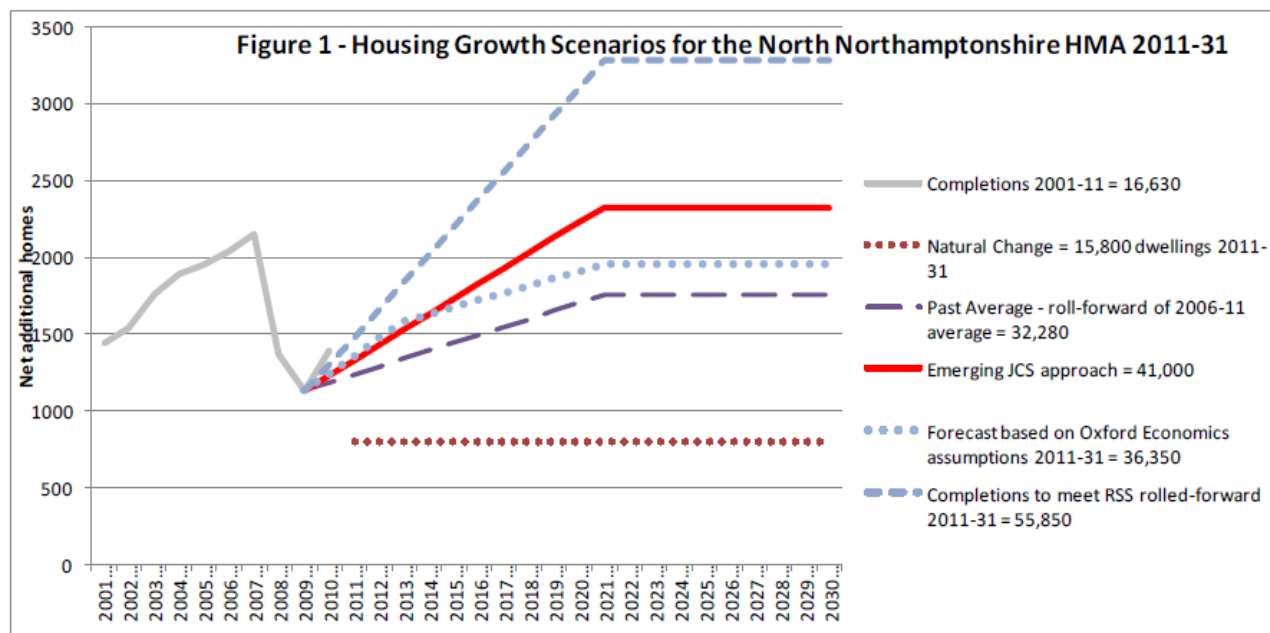


Figure 1 - Revised Housing Trajectory as published in the AMR 2010/11



North Northants revised JCS

16. Figure 1 below shows that although this emerging aspirational Target is below the 55,800 implied by rolling forward previous Regional Plan targets, it still very ambitious having regard to forecast housing market recovery. The latter is based on Oxford Economics' assumption of 10% year on year recovery to 2014 and 3% thereafter to 2020, from which point a plateau is assumed in line with NHPAU forecasts (see Annex 3 for further detail).



Northampton housing trajectory AMR Report 04-05

Figure 4: Housing Trajectory

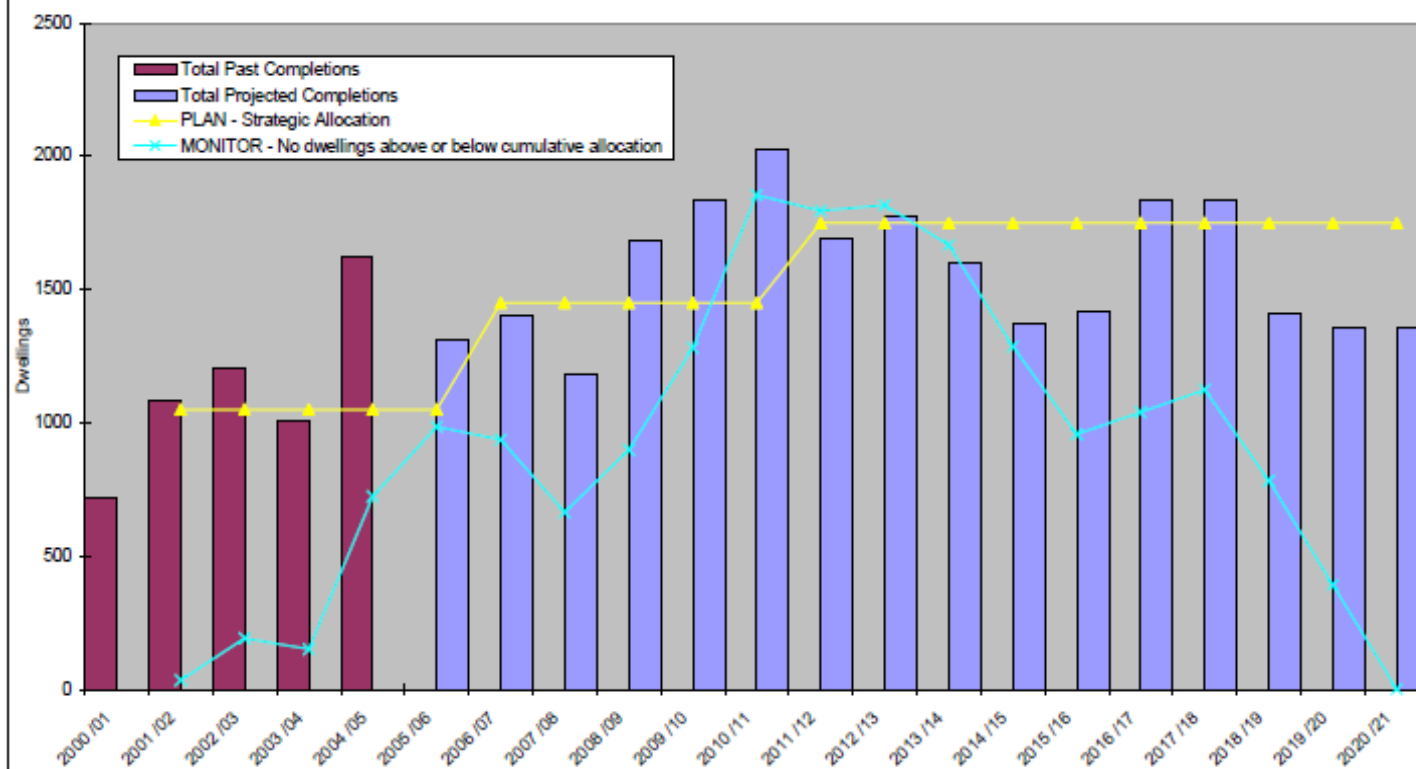
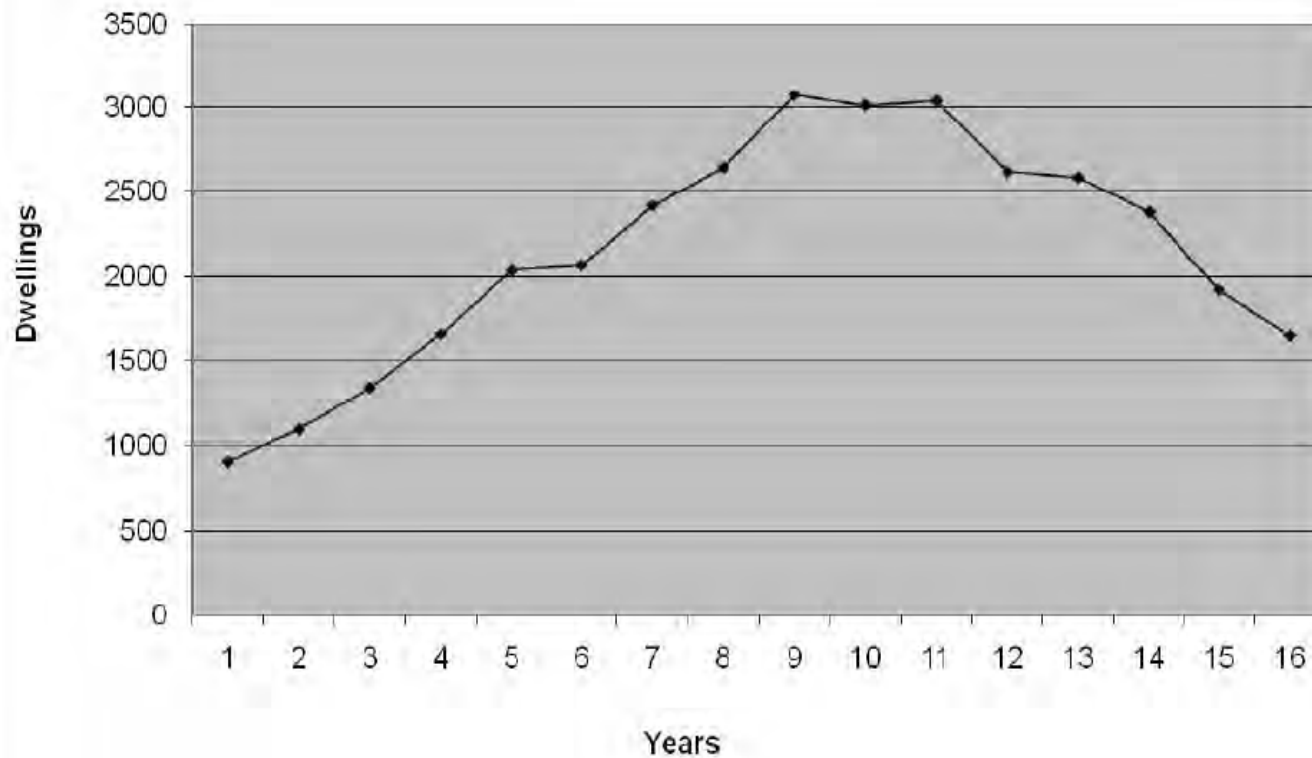


Table 4: Housing Requirement by Area 2010-2026 (Note: Figures may not sum due to rounding. Source: ORS Housing Market Model)

Housing Type Housing Requirement 2010-2026	Daventry²	Northampton Related Development Area	South Northants³
Market housing	3800	15700	3600
Intermediate affordable housing	0	0	1300
Social rented housing	1700	7500	900
Total Housing Requirement	5400	23200	5800
Market housing	69.2%	67.6%	61.9%
Intermediate affordable housing	0.0%	0.0%	21.8%
Social rented housing	30.8%	32.4%	16.2%

West Northamptonshire



Has the strategy been successful for achieving 'growth'?

- Pre-2008 slippage seen as unrealistic trajectories, slow pace of infrastructure, slow delivery of large sites (SUEs)
- Post-2008 slippage seen as impact on build rates from recession lowering demand and availability of finances
- Inflexible policies are blamed for leaving consents undeliverable through lack of 'viability'
- LDVs & public sector effectiveness to help infrastructure-led development has been mixed – some HCA funds but limited
- Private sector capacity and willingness to delivery comprehensive development never assessed strategically
- Core Strategies have been revised downwards by up to 25%

2. Growth focused on ‘sustainable development’

- Strong policy and appraisal direction from EC Directives and 2004 Planning Act
- Adopted by local authorities and government to make growth more “palatable” and to improve practical qualities
- Spirit of optimism embodied in Egan Wheel principles for construction and development industries
- House-builders luke-warm to sceptical, seeing ‘sustainability’ measures as good PR but potential extra cost
- Community groups saw SD as opportunities to deliver more community facilities and local services

Response of stakeholders to 'sustainable development'

- Under pressure to deliver, a general sense that central Government gave *quantity* more importance than *quality*
- Large SD frameworks, but little sense of any priorities within these, if delivery might not achieve all within local schemes
- MK 'Tariff' the only strategic approach in place (yet does not cover all costs) – is development of a higher quality there?
- Substantial 'SD monitoring' undertaken by LAs, but difficult to see a purpose without a role to challenge poor performance

Has the strategy been successful for 'sustainable development'?

- Increasing reliance on s106 resources has been precarious and could never fund total of SD targets
- Role of 'affordable housing' very ambiguous in scheme economics and to perspectives on 'mixed communities'
- Reduction of delivery from holistic approach to focus on environmental (green) and physical (construction) issues
- Delivery of wider social (community facilities) or economic aspects (job supply, etc) has met with limited success
- Has the notion of 'sustainability' become subservient to 'economic viability' that they are now used synonymously?

3. Themes and Questions (a)

- Was Growth “imposed” as claimed, or was it an expression of local ambitions and aspirations? And/or was it an expression of what the housing market wanted with plans like MKSM giving shape to developer demands?
- What did the MKSM approach achieve? Did it stimulate more housing growth (was there a step change.....?) And what would have happened without it?
- Were growth figures over-ambitious? Were they evidence based on the assumption of continued growth of London and the South East, or “politically driven”?

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Themes and Questions (b)

- Despite the outpouring of reports and policies on sustainability, was the approach largely superficial or naive ? Was the pre-eminence of housing numbers rather than quality always going to rise to the top of the Government agenda?
- How might the sustainability/quality agenda be achieved if sufficient funding is not forthcoming from the transactions of landowners and developers? Can the gap between best practice and what is 'normal' housing development be bridged?
- Is there a reduction in democratic accountability in the development process as the presentation of 'viability' becomes ever more important than policy? Is there an unavoidable loss of central and local policy ambition control housing growth and quality in a market economy that is undergoing times of stress?

Indicative references

- Regional Spatial Strategy for the East Midlands (RSS8)
- Regional Planning Guidance for the East (RPG6)
- Regional Planning Guidance for the South-East (RPG9)
- Sustainable Communities : building for the future, ODPM, 2003
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- The Egan Review of skills : is it still relevant five years on? Jayne Cross, HCA Academy, 2009
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<http://housingforum.org.uk/sites/default/files/4.%20ESRC%20presentation.pdf>