URBAN REGENERATION
in the UK

7 Regeneration Beyond the City Centre

OVERVIEW

Policy and academic focus has hitherto concentrated on the city centre. This chapter charts the extension of the urban regeneration agenda from central cities, to the suburbs and beyond.

- *The suburban question*: how suburbs have developed historically, the different types of suburbs and the challenges they pose.

- *Regenerating social housing suburbs*: focusing on those suburbs in greatest need of regeneration because of crumbling infrastructure and social deprivation.

- *New build suburbs*: how the private sector is responding to demands to build new suburbs that are environmentally and socially sustainable.

- *The great eco-towns disaster*: exploring the failed attempt to revive the post-war new town model with an environmentally friendly twist.

Introduction

The definition of what comprises a suburb can be somewhat fuzzy. In North America the word is often used to refer to those outer parts of a built-up area which are beyond the political administration of central city authorities. In the UK, 'suburb' has become a catch-all phrase referring in general terms to the outer city or that which is beyond the city core though normally within the same political territory (Whitehand and Carr, 2001). Thus defined, suburbs are home to around 86% of the UK's population and make for an exceedingly heterogeneous collection of urban environments and communities.

Where it tends to be regeneration of city centres that grabs the headlines, many suburban areas are also in need of revitalisation. Since the mid-2000s some attempt has been made to examine the specific regeneration challenges facing areas away from the city core. The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors and the Commission for the Built Environment, for example, jointly commissioned a report asking how suburbs can be sustained, acknowledging that suburbs function differently from urban centres (Johar and Maguire, 2007). A number of academic studies, such as the Adaptable Suburbs project based at UCL, have been investigating whether suburbs are ready for the challenges they will face during the twenty-first century. It is telling, however, that even the team behind the Adaptable Suburbs project admit suburbs are still poorly understood (Adaptable Suburbs, 2010).

The suburban question

Historically in the UK the idea of suburbia has had some rather negative connotations. Prior to the development of rapid transportation in the nineteenth century, people lived in suburbs because they were too poor to live in the town proper. With changes in transport technology, suburbs became the place where the well-to-do could escape from the noise and smell of the central city. As cities expanded so negative images began to be associated with them, suburbs becoming characterised as a sprawling cancer of bricks spreading out across the British landscape. Where trams and railways fuelled the growth of suburbs in the nineteenth century, in the 1920s and 1930s there was a new wave of expansion based around a developing road network built to service the motor car and omnibus. Indeed, the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE), an influential lobby group, was founded in the 1920s in direct response to this expansion. The spreading town was held in opposition to an image of an unspoiled rural idyll, an image which still affects a great deal of our understandings of the tension between town and country in the UK today. Suburban expansion triggered the widespread use of greenbelts, formalised in a government circular of 1955, to restrict further outward growth, although suburban development continued post-war, filling in the gaps between the edge of towns and their greenbelts. The greenbelts constitute one of the most

long-lived, popular and well understood aspects of the UK planning system, remaining sacrosanct even in the new National Planning Policy Framework (CLG, 2012e), which is otherwise orientated to serving a pro-growth agenda.

It must be emphasised, however, that both during the inter-war and post-war building booms, it was not just spacious houses for the middle classes that were being built, but also very large estates of council housing, which had a particular demographic profile and posed distinct challenges for urban regeneration today. The way that towns have developed historically means that the suburbs form an exceedingly heterogeneous group of different land uses, house types, demographic groups and environmental qualities. One of the most useful studies of suburbs and regeneration was produced for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Gwilliam et al., 1999) and attempted to give some critical form to this heterogeneity by producing a typology:

- historic inner suburb;
- planned suburb;
- social housing suburb;
- suburban town;
- public transport suburb; and
- car suburb.

This typology is far from perfect: both wealthy gentrified areas and poorly maintained districts housing large numbers of socially deprived people could fall under the category of 'historic inner suburb' and yet require very different degrees of regeneration intervention. The typology is useful, however, in breaking down the idea that suburbia is a monolithic category, with suburbs home solely to the white middle classes.

The short-lived In Suburbia Partnership led by Hampshire County Council was an innovative attempt to bring together the expertise of local authorities and the now defunct Civic Trust to produce guidance on more sustainable approaches to suburbia. While the Partnership might not have lasted, the materials it produced remain very useful and build on the typology from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report reflecting the diversity of the suburban experience. Examining the specific needs of suburban areas, the Partnership set out principles for ensuring sustainability and a high quality of life for residents:

- an appropriate and stable context;
- continuous improvements in environmental sustainability;
- good quality, affordable housing, with more choice in tenure and type of house for people of all ages and social groups;
- choice in mode of transport, so that walking, cycling and public transport become more viable;
- access to good quality local services and facilities;
- a community hub or heart;

- a diverse local economy with jobs for local people; and
- social inclusion and community safety. (In Suburbia Partnership, 2005: 5)

There is a clear stress here on transport infrastructure, in particular transport choices beyond the private car. Similarly, there is an emphasis on local employment to reduce the dependence on commuting outside the area. There are clear commonalities here with the North American idea of 'smart growth'. The context for development in the US is somewhat different, with uncontrolled outward sprawl of cities still a major problem and the principle of state intervention to better regulate development not as well established as in the UK (Krueger and Gibbs, 2008). Nonetheless, the smart growth emphasis on community, mixed uses, compact building design, walkability and public transport options are part of mainstream policy discourse in the UK. As the building industry starts to recover from the credit crunch, there is once again pressure to increase house-building on the edges of UK towns and cities, making the lessons of smart growth ever more important.

The smart growth model of local services combined with good connectivity fits closely with the 'suburban town' type identified by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report. As towns and cities have grown outward over time, smaller settlements on the edge of the urban area tend to be absorbed. London is sometimes described as a city of villages because of the way that historically distinct settlements have retained their identities since being swallowed up by the expanding conurbation (URBED, 2002). Places like Camden, Greenwich and Kew were all urban settlements in their own right before they became buried in London's middle suburbs. These areas have retained their own identities and retain much of their independent functions, acting as towns within towns, with shops, services and sources of employment as well as good public transport links. At the same time, because these areas are still on a relatively small scale, they can function as walkable settlements. In a sense, therefore, the holy grail of urban regeneration – the small scale, sustainable mixed development – is already partially in place. This is true not only of London; in all of the major cities it is easy to identify local sub-centres that have developed from historically distinct settlements. These areas provide good models on which suburban regeneration can build.

The idea that an urban area can contain multiple centres, each self-contained to a degree, is sometimes described as the polycentric or polynucleated city within contemporary planning discourse. The provision of local services is critical, however, because suburban areas lack the competition for service provision that, theoretically at least, helps maintain quality and price in central areas. The major challenge for the polycentric city of suburban towns is the threat posed to local services by large, out-of-town shopping centres which, at the same time, increase dependence on the private car. There has been a reaction in the UK against the planning policy of the late 1980s which encouraged out-of-town development, and the value of suburban centres has been recognised. Unfortunately, however, there is a tension here with the current direction of planning policy which places an emphasis on growth and a more market-driven approach to allocating development land. Indeed, even before

the Coalition government's pro-growth reforms, the *Barker Review of Land Use Planning* (Barker, 2006) was calling for the selective release of development land on the edge of existing areas to meet demands for growth. There are sound economic reasons for this and, indeed, there is some environmental justification to reduce commutes for people who otherwise choose to live beyond the greenbelt. The risk is that, without strong oversight, unfettered, market-driven development on the fringes of urban areas will prompt a return to car-dependent models which out-compete provision in local centres.

Suburbia does possess a particular set of associations in the English psyche. Where continental Europe, and, indeed, Scotland, are more comfortable with the notion of apartment-dwelling throughout the whole lifecourse, in England there is a sense that families with children should be based in a house with a garden. As a result, the suburban 'semi' remains a general aspiration. This has meant that although the city-living model has taken off since the late 1990s, it is as a distinct 'young' phase of the lifecourse, with city-centre residents twice as likely to be single as the national average and two-thirds of whom are aged 18–34 compared to the national average of a quarter (Nathan and Unsworth, 2006). This has been a factor encouraging the relatively rapid turnover of central city populations, as against the comparative stability of communities in many suburban areas.

Max Nathan and Rachel Unsworth (2006) have identified historic inner suburbs as representing a key opportunity to smooth the churn of city-centre residents moving out of the inner city as they get older and plan families. Indeed, churn was one of the problems that the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder initiative (2002–11) was attempting to resolve by creating attractive family housing in inner-urban areas which had become run-down. Particularly at the height of the boom, some developers were trying to apply the successful city-centre model to suburban areas, building high-density blocks of studio and one-bedroom flats. This raised questions about sustainability, given that inner suburbs are often slightly too far from the centre to truly give walkable access to central resources and therefore lose one of the key selling points of the city-centre experience. Similarly, the larger properties, typically Victorian terraces, that characterise the inner suburbs can act as much-needed comparatively inexpensive accommodation in the inner city for less affluent families. Demolition of such properties to be replaced with smaller flats or houses for wealthy incomers damages the potential for demographic mixing within these areas and this was a key critique of the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders. At the same time there are broader issues to consider, such as the quality of local schools, which is often a major determining factor for location among middle-class families. Regeneration which seeks to attract a proportion of wealthier residents to run-down areas therefore needs to take account of local social needs as well as market potential.

Developers can still make money selling apartments, even in the aftermath of the credit crunch, but the market for these in suburban areas is now highly limited. Further, trying to apply the city centre small apartment model to the suburbs is unlikely to tackle the broader social needs that regeneration seeks to address because of the UK's overwhelming cultural preference for raising children in houses rather

than flats. The question, then, is whether the UK can find models of suburban regeneration which tackle the divergent needs of these heterogeneous areas which face very different challenges from the city core.

Regenerating social housing suburbs

The stereotypical affluent, white, middle-class suburb is not a priority for regeneration activity. By and large these areas can look after themselves. But there are areas of considerable deprivation beyond the inner cities which require a more active approach. Social housing suburbs, as identified in the Joseph Rowntree Foundation typology, constitute a diverse group. Some of these areas are relatively stable, with a mix of tenure types, thriving local services, well maintained open spaces and excellent public transport connections. Others are sinks of poverty and desperation. Those estates built before or just after World War II generally comprise large three-bedroom houses, often now in private ownership after they were sold under the right-to-buy legislation of the early 1980s. Many of these estates are simply not a target for major regeneration projects, though it is worth noting that even here there can be problems. The Speke estate on the southern edge of Liverpool, for example, had the dubious honour of containing the most deprived area in England according to the 2007 index of multiple deprivation despite comprising large, well-built houses from the late 1940s.

Nonetheless, the estates built in the 1950s and 1960s are more likely to suffer problems, particularly given that these are even further out from central city services and employment and were often built with experimental techniques and unpopular building types such as the maisonette[1] and tower block (Jones, 2005). Because of their isolated location and the physical defects of the dwellings, many of these estates became difficult to let, meaning that only the poorest and most vulnerable accept the offer of accommodation in them. As a result, many larger city councils have been left with sink estates on their peripheries, although some of these are now run by housing associations following tenant votes to leave local authority control under the Large Scale Voluntary Transfer mechanism. Regardless of the built form or tenure patterns, however, a great many suburban social housing estates suffer acute social, economic and environmental problems and pose some of the greatest regeneration challenges in the UK.

Clyde Gateway

Glasgow's East End, far from the regenerated city centre, hosts some of the most appalling social deprivation in the entire European Union. Estates such as Drumchapel, Easterhouse and Red Road became notorious for chronic unemployment, ill health, drug addiction, crime and poverty. Many of these areas received

central government funding in the 1980s and 1990s for large-scale demolition and refurbishment programmes, but problems persisted. In 2002, Glasgow City Council successfully transferred ownership of its housing stock to the Glasgow Housing Association (GHA) which operates through 62 local housing organisations. Stock transfer unlocked a number of funding routes, including private sector finance, and the degree of local control offers the possibility of better targeted regeneration activity involving the local community, which has representatives on the boards of the local housing organisations (Daly et al., 2005).

The Dalmarnock area of the city has its fair share of the social and economic problems that plague the east end. A successful bid to host the 2014 Commonwealth Games was the catalyst for a series of major infrastructure investments in this part of the city, levering in a large amount of funding from the Scottish Government. The controversial M74 extension (which opened in 2011) completed the city's motorway box. This was accompanied by a commitment to complete the East End Regeneration Route, a new arterial road, the aim being to better connect the East End to the rest of Glasgow. The demolition of a number of high-rise and other housing blocks owned by the GHA provided an opportunity to build a major new suburban settlement.

Regeneration activity in the area is being coordinated by the Clyde Gateway Urban Regeneration Company which was established in 2007. The Clyde Gateway site is a roughly triangular 866-hectare area straddling the River Clyde, close to the Celtic Park football stadium and about 4km from the city centre. The M74 extension passes through its southern edge meaning that the site sits across the border of Glasgow and South Lanarkshire councils. It is precisely this kind of organisational complexity, coordinating local and national government priorities, strategic infrastructure and operating with social housing providers and private developers that the urban regeneration company (URC) model was set up to tackle.

A phased series of developments is being undertaken, starting with accommodation for participants in the 2014 Commonwealth Games, which will subsequently be converted to residential use. RMJM architects designed the Athletes' Village, which received planning permission in 2010. The plans for the 32.5-hectare site were for 700 homes, including 400 rental properties built to the BRE EcoHomes 'Excellent' standard (Glasgow Architecture, 2010). The URC anticipates that a further 765 homes will eventually be added to this initial development. The ongoing Oatland development, which began in 2005, has also been wrapped into the URC's remit, with the intention being to produce 1,300 dwellings. Progress has been relatively slow, however, with only 370 homes built by mid-2011. Nonetheless, the scheme will be accompanied by a considerable improvement to the public realm, including a new riverside walk along the Clyde. In terms of economic regeneration, considerable work has been undertaken in acquiring former industrial sites and decontaminating them in anticipation of future business park development. Development of these is most advanced on the Clyde Gateway East, a 14.6-hectare site with planning permission for 40,000 square metres of business premises. This is a classic business park site

sitting at junction 2A of the M74, where infrastructure works began in 2010. Work has also started on other sites and there are plans for a 27-hectare arboretum on Cuningar Loop just across the river from the Athletes' Village.

The 2014 deadline has clearly galvanised action and, like Manchester's 2002 Commonwealth Games, a long-neglected area has received some focused activity. The hope with such developments is that with the public sector having started the process, private developers will be keen to take up further opportunities on the site. The advantage that Scotland has over England is the greater willingness among Scots to consider apartments as an acceptable housing type for families with children. This gives the designers looking at the Clyde Gateway area more freedom to use the kinds of apartment developments familiar from city-centre regenerations. It should be emphasised, however, that in Scotland, as in England, city-centre projects have still tended towards producing relatively small units for households without children so the model does not directly transfer to the suburbs.

Where city-centre developments can rely on proximity to central services, suburban projects need to think carefully about the kinds of facilities that are available in the local area. The Clyde Gateway redevelopment will need to consider whether shops, schools and other services in the local area are of sufficiently high quality to appeal to the middle-class families which it hopes to attract to buy the private housing. If these facilities are not up to standard, the development runs the risk of simply becoming a car-based commuter settlement, with all the resultant implications for sustainability. Indeed, critics of the M74 extension and the East End Regeneration Route argue that there is already too much focus on the private car in contemporary redevelopment schemes. Regardless, the Clyde Gateway project gives an interesting example of how a major event can be used to lever regeneration activity into an outer-urban area characterised by high levels of social housing and deprivation.

North Solihull

Solihull is a divided town. Most of Solihull is quite wealthy, its suburbs falling into the cliché of leafy, middle-class enclaves. The northern part of Solihull is, however, quite different. Following the reorganisation of local authority boundaries in the mid-1970s, Solihull was given control over a very large suburban housing estate which had been built by Birmingham City Council in the late 1960s. The estate was built very quickly – at the time the local authority proudly boasted that it was the size of a Mark I new town, but built in just five years. Unlike the new towns, however, the careful mix of shops, services, sources of employment and demographics was somewhat lacking. Although, quite innovatively for the time, a proportion of the houses were built for sale, the majority were for local authority tenants. The estate was served by a number of small shopping centres and retained a somewhat isolated feel, fenced in to the north and east by the new M6 motorway and to the south by Birmingham International Airport.

While parts of this vast estate have fared well, others have experienced the classic symptoms of areas with large concentrations of socially deprived residents housed in crumbling properties built with experimental techniques.

In order to tackle the problems of this area, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council has established the North Solihull Partnership. A 15-year regeneration project is being undertaken, covering an area containing more than 15,000 households. The local authority has taken the lead on this, bringing in Bellway Homes, Inpartnership Ltd and the Whitefriars Housing Group as part of a public–private partnership to under-take the redevelopment. The stated aims of the project are quite interesting:

- More than 8,000 (4,000 net) new homes.
- A tenure mix of 60% private, 30% social and 10% shared ownership.
- Ten new, state-of-the-art primary schools.
- Five vibrant new village centres.
- New health-care facilities.
- New leisure facilities.
- Employment and training opportunities.
- A positive change to almost 40,000 people's lives.
- Mixed-use developments.
- Local environment and transport improvements.
- Massive employment opportunities. (North Solihull Partnership, 2011)

While there is clearly a move to undertake a major programme of changes to the built environment, the fact that improving people's lives is listed as a core aim is an unusual (and welcome) emphasis in the rhetoric surrounding a project like this. Large-scale demolition of tower blocks – originally the site had 34 of these – and small town houses has already taken place, with a substantial number of new homes being built.

The proposed tenure mix involves a significant change to the character of the area. At the 2001 census, the Chelmsley Wood portion of the site was over 50% socially rented. The stated aim to reduce this to 30% is in line with a great deal of housing policy not just in the UK but across Europe which seeks to dilute concentrations of poverty by attracting wealthier incomers to buy new private housing. The Dutch, for example, have been pursuing a policy of housing 'redifferentiation' on large socially rented estates since 1990 to try to reduce segregation by income (Priemus, 1998).

North Solihull was built on a greenfield site and so did not absorb older settle-ments which might have been used to form a suburban town type community hub. The development was originally broken down into a series of sub-settlements, nominally with their own identity, but these were quite large and not particularly distinctive. The solution adopted by the North Solihull Partnership is to create a series of 'village centres' in the area. This is a profound shift away from seeing north Solihull as a series of monolithic housing estates and instead trying to repackage and rebuild the area into distinctive settlements. Given the physical isolation of the site, both from Birmingham and Solihull centres, this notion of villages has a great deal

of appeal and draws somewhat upon the smart growth model of polycentric cities. The new village centres will create walkable, mixed-use communities with greater accessibility to services and some forms of local employment. This is clearly in tune with planning discourses of mixed-use, sustainable developments and is something quite clearly different from the central-city model of small apartment development.

In terms of how this project is being carried out, the North Solihull Partnership has engaged in an extensive and sophisticated programme of involving the local community in decision-making. A series of public consultations were undertaken in each of the villages with the overall masterplans for each area subsequently revised in accordance with some of the recommendations by local residents. By drawing on local knowledges, some homes that might otherwise have ended up on the demolition list were retained because they are actually popular with people living there. While this kind of process will inevitably have winners and losers, Solihull did not feel pressure to deliver 'early wins' by demolishing and rebuilding areas without effective local consultation. Instead a longer-term partnership was established, taking seriously the idea of the community as a stakeholder in this process and trying to improve lives rather than simply cleaning up the area to attract wealthier incomers.

Key points

i) Social housing suburbs are key targets for regeneration beyond the city core with many such areas suffering from the indicators of social deprivation.

ii) While apartments are more culturally accepted as family housing in Scotland than in England, simply applying the metrocentric model of small flats will not produce demographically mixed communities.

iii) Locally available shops and services are crucial to attracting wealthier residents to regenerated areas and reducing car dependence.

iv) The introduction of village-style community hubs is one mechanism for providing identity and coherence in the redevelopment of very large social housing estates, reproducing the suburban town model.

New build suburbs

Regenerating social housing suburbs means dealing with a complex set of legacies, particularly in dealing with an often deprived existing resident population coping with an obsolete built environment. Building a new suburb on a greenfield or previously non-residential brownfield site brings a different set of challenges. Such sites can be tremendously attractive to developers, but careful thought needs to be given

to transport infrastructure and the availability of local services. The first two case studies described here, indicate some of the problems that can be generated by car-dependent, wealthy suburban developments, while the third suggests ways of overcoming these disadvantages.

Port Marine

Portishead is situated on the Bristol Channel about 13km west of Bristol and 30km from Bath. The town's two power stations fell into disuse during the 1980s, with neighbouring docks and factories similarly declining, producing a large waterside brownfield site for redevelopment. Being within 5km of the M5 motorway, Portishead is strategically well located within the economically dynamic south west region, making these brownfield sites a prime redevelopment opportunity. Outline planning permission was granted in 1997 and the former dock district has been branded Port Marine, with the lead taken by Crest Nicholson, a major UK developer which has focused its core business on regeneration activity (Figure 7.1).

In 1992, 13,000 people lived in Portishead, but Port Marine was intended to increase this to 30,000 with the development contributing some 4,000 new homes, although the pace of development was slowed by the 2008 property crash. One can

Figure 7.1   Though a large-scale development, Port Marine has created a very attractive and varied new waterfront for Portishead. This brownfield development is anchored by a Waitrose supermarket, giving some indication of the wealthier social demographic being targeted.

consider this new development to be a suburb of Portishead; it is perhaps more significant, however, to think of it in terms of its relationship to Bristol. It can thus be thought of as an ex-urb – a settlement outside the boundaries of a major town but highly dependent upon it, especially for sources of employment. This kind of arrangement is more common in North America than in the UK, with many small settlements looking out toward a larger city. Port Marine is well placed for this and has primarily been marketed at people wanting access to Bristol and the strategic motorway network in the region.

In the centre of a large town or city, the classic dockland conversion comprises large numbers of small apartments for relatively wealthy couples without children. But Port Marine is, functionally, a suburb and Crest Nicholson have avoided relying solely on the metrocentric small apartment model, providing a mix of three- to five-bedroom houses alongside the more familiar apartment blocks. There is a clear recognition that this development is targeting a suburban market, attempting to attract an older demographic of professional families with children as well as the standard waterside apartment market.

The development is not unproblematic, particularly because it is, in effect, largely serving Bristol rather than Portishead. One risk with a development of this kind is that where larger local authorities have more experience in squeezing concessions from developers – for example on affordable housing, or contributions to community facilities – smaller authorities may find they have less bargaining power. Similarly, with a new residential population that tends to look beyond the town, the development may not contribute as much to the economic and social well-being of the host town as its size might suggest. There have been some rumblings of discontent, even among the newcomers who moved to Port Marine, that promised social facilities and public realm improvements have not yet materialised. The town also now has major traffic problems, particularly on the key A369 which links the town into Bristol, but there is no prospect of reopening the old rail link that once served Portishead (Anon., 2007).

Nonetheless, Portishead is interesting because it indicates that developers see the possibilities offered by towns which, in and of themselves, would struggle to attract a large residential population. Even following its dramatic expansion, Portishead is still a small town, in pleasant rural surroundings with, as a result of the redevelopment, an attractive waterfront. Its strategic location is critical, however, because developers like Crest Nicholson would not look at, for example, an isolated village on the west coast of Scotland, as a major development opportunity. With the new National Planning Policy Framework in England placing an emphasis on growth and a more liberal approach to releasing greenfield sites for development, these kind of ex-urban suburbs may look like increasingly attractive prospects around major transportation corridors. While Port Marine itself is far from being a bad example of regeneration activity, when considering its impact on the regional transport infrastructure, it is clear that if there is to be an increase in these kinds of developments, more thought will have to be given at government level to strategic transport improvements.

Waterfront Edinburgh

Waterfront Edinburgh reiterates the problems of not clearly considering transport issues before development takes place. The site is itself within the political boundaries of Edinburgh, but at some distance from the city core. Historically Edinburgh was not located on the waterfront and it was neighbouring Leith that was the main port of the Firth of Forth. Leith was absorbed into Edinburgh as the city grew during the inter-war period, but the area retains a detached feel, with the capital turning its back on the waterfront. The decline of the port has produced opportunities for a whole series of brownfield developments along the waterfront, west from Leith docks. In 1999 a masterplan was drawn up by Llewelyn-Davies Architects for the area around Granton Harbour. This masterplan was subsequently adopted by Edinburgh City Council in 2001 as the development framework for 'Waterfront Edinburgh'. Although this area is only 4km from central Edinburgh, it has a distinct identity while poor transport connections make it somewhat isolated.

The Waterfront Edinburgh masterplan had a number of key objectives:

- to deliver a comprehensive and viable regeneration plan to reinforce Edinburgh's role as a major international city;
- to produce a high-density live/work environment to produce a 'buzz' in the area; and
- to socially and physically integrate the development with neighbouring communities and contribute to their regeneration. (Edinburgh City Council, 2007)

Clearly, although the development is seen as part of the wider regeneration of Edinburgh, there is an emphasis on the area having distinctive character and function, rather than simply being another one of Edinburgh's suburbs. North Edinburgh is a rather deprived area with a great deal of social housing. Unlike the plans for a mix of socially rented and private accommodation in the Clyde Gateway redevelopment, the development around Granton Harbour has been very much driven by the private sector. Granton now sits in stark juxtaposition against the surrounding social housing and it is unclear how proximity to the Waterfront Edinburgh area will help regenerate neighbouring estates.

The emphasis on high-density living/working to create a 'buzz' is also interesting. There are clear parallels to the metrocentric model of development, attracting busy young professionals without children to live in this area, but here without the major sources of professional employment that locate in the central city. While some of the new residents will doubtless work in the new business parks built as part of the development, it is clear that many of the people who move to the area will still be dependent on the city centre for employment.

The masterplan covers 57 hectares, which is a large site, but the somewhat deprived demographic of the surrounding areas suggests that it may be difficult to generate the kind of critical mass to give the waterfront district real independence from the central city. Although a new link road was built to the site, the jewel in the

crown of its planning was that Granton was intended to be connected to the city's new tram network. But the tale of the Edinburgh tram system is a depressing one. Conceived at the height of the boom, the Scottish National Party was committed to scrapping the scheme in its 2007 manifesto, but, forming a minority administration at Holyrood, found itself allowing the project to continue. Critically, the scoping of the scheme proved woefully optimistic, particularly failing to anticipate the scale of costs involved in moving buried infrastructure, such as gas and water mains. In a complex, historic city centre like Edinburgh, this was always going to be a major task. A subsequent legal dispute with the main construction contractor over the hold-ups moving the infrastructure led to the scheme being delayed even further.

In the first edition of this book, we noted that the link west along the waterfront from Leith to the Granton site would likely be dropped if the scheme got into financial difficulties. This proved to be the case. Even more dramatically, however, the main section from the city centre to Leith has since also been unceremoniously cancelled. This meant that the city did not need anything like the number of trams that it had ordered, meaning that the completed vehicles were left sitting in a Spanish warehouse while Edinburgh tried to find some other city to take them off their hands at a knockdown price. Thus a tram scheme that should have been completed by the time we started writing the second edition has now been halved in length and is predicted to come in at just over £1bn – twice the original estimate for the whole scheme (BBC, 2011).

This somewhat depressing tale means that developments at Granton and plans for a new ocean liner terminal and associated development at Leith Docks will remain heavily dependent on the private car, putting additional pressure onto the already heavily congested road network heading into central Edinburgh. The architecture at Granton is dominated by uninspired off-the-shelf small apartments although a handful of developments, such as Granton Studios, have attracted praise from the Architecture Scotland Annual (Urban Realm, 2008). Indeed, there has been some quite innovative urban planning undertaken at Granton. Part of the site comprised the seventeenth-century Caroline Park which had disappeared under subsequent developments and there has been some attempt to recreate this. Similarly, some of the street layouts have sought to create interesting aesthetic effects with the underlying topography.

Ultimately a major part of this project's appeal is its waterfront status, but the fact that Edinburgh was not traditionally a port has meant that the waterfront is some way outside the centre, in contrast to the situation in neighbouring Glasgow where the Clyde runs through the city. Thus despite the beautiful views across the Firth of Forth, the developments are cut off from the city by a ring of deprived suburban social housing and a lack of adequate transport. For the time being, Edinburgh's waterfront remains a large, car-based, socially segregated settlement located next to a business park. The development therefore appears to miss some of the key aims of contemporary regeneration – integration, mixed use and sustainability.

Lightmoor

The irony of this final case study is that though it is built on a greenfield site it is probably closer to the ideals of sustainability and mixed development than the brownfield projects described above. Lightmoor is being built just beyond the urban fringe of Telford, a 1960s/1970s new town built to take the overspill of people and businesses from the overcrowded West Midlands. Where Waterfront Edinburgh was built as a middle-class outpost, Lightmoor is a partnership between private sector developers and Bournville Village Trust, a major housing association in the region. The project also had significant input from English Partnerships (now the Homes and Communities Agency) because the site was part of the land bank it inherited from the old Commission for New Towns. When the project started, prior to the deep cuts to public spending after 2010, English Partnerships were able to commit significant resources to it. Combined with the social mission of Bournville Village Trust, this has produced quite a unique settlement. Building work began in summer 2005 on the 72-hectare greenfield site, with a project cost of £31m. Certain historic features on the site, including hedgerows, lanes and parts of a canal, have been integrated into the design in an attempt to give the new development some character. Planning permission was granted for 800 homes, of which at least 25% will be affordable, provided and managed by Bournville Village Trust. Permission was also granted for a primary school, community centre and small amount of local retail suitable for a 'village'. The guidelines underpinning the development include:

- A well-defined compact village surrounded by landscape.
- A strong distinction between the recreational open spaces encircling the village and the protected rural wildlife site.
- A mixed-use centre arranged around the High Street and a village green, located so that foot access is promoted.
- Higher residential densities clustered around the village centre, with areas of lowest density at the edges of the village where transformations between urban and rural character are made.
- The character of the existing lanes is retained and they are integrated into the movement network as recreational routes for pedestrians and cyclists. (Lightmoor, 2007)

Essentially what is being produced is a planned village with walkable local services and a mixed demographic, which ties in very closely with both the new urbanist and smart growth agendas. Private developers were brought in to actually build the properties in each of the different phases of the development, sticking closely to the overall masterplan. Thus the advantages of both private capital and public sector coordination were brought to bear on the project. The development is something of a modern Bournville in that it is a planned settlement, beyond the urban fringe,

with a strong sense of social mission. Technologically the development is quite advanced and even before the government set targets for low carbon domestic buildings in 2006 the decision was taken that all houses in the development should meet EcoHomes 'excellent' standard. The buildings are also designed to be flexible, so that houses can be altered and extended as future needs arise, ensuring that the buildings have a longer lifespan. Other environmentally friendly features, such as sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) for surface water runoff have also been integrated into the design of the development.

Bournville Village Trust has a very good 'brand' in terms of social mission and for being able to deliver high-quality developments. This reputation is important when putting together a project of this kind, which would otherwise seem comparatively high risk to private developers because it is so innovative. The Trust also has a long-standing commitment to use innovative environmental technologies, having experimented in orientating houses to let in maximum sunlight as early as the 1920s. This reduces the costs of heating houses and has become a central principle used by contemporary sustainability gurus ZedFactory, who used solar orientation for their BedZED development (see Chapter 5 and Figure 5.11). Lightmoor does, however, somewhat have the feel of a demonstration project, rather like Poundbury discussed in Chapter 6. Indeed, even the design of the new development has some parallels with Poundbury (see Figure 6.1), with high-density building cover, attempts to subordinate the car and a postmodern pastiche of historic building styles (Figure 7.2). One indication of the project's somewhat pioneering character is that 'Croppings', one of the later development phases, was selected by the government as one of six test sites for a new housing financing strategy. The Homes and Communities Agency is allowing development company Keepmoat to build – and sell – houses on the site before actually paying for the land (Estates Gazette, 2011). This kind of approach is attractive to developers as they no longer need to raise a great deal of capital up front, therefore securing faster progress on schemes like this, particularly in an era where developers are finding it harder to secure loans to cover the cost of projects.

Lightmoor responds to its location on the urban fringe, producing a modern version of the rural village. Unlike Edinburgh Waterfront, Lightmoor cannot be accused of trying to apply the metrocentric model to a location at some distance from the central city and does seem much more in tune with contemporary policy on questions of social integration and environmental sustainability. Despite the presence of some local services in the village centre, the development is essentially a commuter settlement for people working in Telford and so significant questions remain about its reliance on the private car by virtue of location on the urban fringe. At least in this case, however, the generously proportioned road network in the area – a legacy of its new town origins – has sufficient capacity to cope with the increase in traffic that the development will generate.

Figure 7.2   Lightmoor, just outside Telford, has been designed with a similar density of housing and narrow winding streets as at Poundbury, though without the same degree of *faux*-historic buildings.

Key points

i) New suburban developments on the edge of existing towns and cities remain highly dependent on the urban core for employment and services.

ii) Where public transport infrastructure is not of a sufficiently high standard, new suburban developments can put serious pressure on already heavily loaded road networks.

iii) Without giving careful thought to the provision of affordable housing, these kinds of developments can end up being somewhat monocultural and contributing little to the regeneration of neighbouring areas.

iv) Attempts to produce a specific response to a suburban site, such as the village model at Lightmoor, appear to be more closely allied to policy discourses on mixed use and sustainability.

The great eco-towns disaster

In 2007 Gordon Brown, at the briefly optimistic start of his short-lived premiership, announced proposals to build a series of eco-towns across England. This looked a little like a return to the new towns policy of the post-war years that delivered settlements like Harlow and Telford, but the decision to describe these settlements as eco-towns was significant. The 'eco' tag not only made this old strategy seem new and progressive, but it also served as an attempt to defuse criticism from the environmental lobby that this new programme of building would lead to the destruction of the countryside. A significant difference from the original new town policy, however, came with the commitment to using brownfield sites wherever possible. Many of the proposed sites that emerged in the subsequent bidding process were former military bases deemed surplus to requirements – unsurprising, given that military sites are nearly the only large-scale 'brown' land use outside of existing urban areas.

The preference for brownfield sites, although giving a boost to the 'eco' credentials of these development proposals, meant that the eco-towns were not strategically located in terms of transport infrastructure and sources of employment. Military land, by its nature, tends to be located in somewhat isolated areas. The lack of a strategic approach to location meant the eco-towns were quite different from the original new towns, which were predicated on upgraded transport links and relocation of industries. The risk of the chosen approach was that while paying lip service to environmental needs through re-use of previously developed land, microgeneration and highly insulated housing, the eco-towns could be accused of being merely car-based commuter settlements.

Nonetheless, of 57 bids submitted in 2008, eventually 12 sites were shortlisted with a proposal that the size of each be doubled to 20,000 homes (Figure 7.3). In many ways this was a sensible response to the shortage of houses in England. Unfortunately the intention was for the eco-towns to be built by the private sector and, following the credit crunch of 2008, private developers were unwilling to commit to schemes of this scale, particularly on sites where there was no clear market nor any commitment to invest in strategic infrastructure or employment relocation. At the same time, local opposition to the schemes grew and became vociferous, with only the Whitehill–Bordon and Rackheath proposals facing anything less than hostility at a local level (Morad and Plummer, 2010).

The eco-towns remained a central element in late period New Labour planning policy, with an eco-towns supplement to Planning Policy Statement 1 issued in July 2009 (CLG, 2009). This document, as with all the planning policy statements, was scrapped as part of the Coalition government's simplification of planning guidance into the single English National Planning Policy Framework in 2012. As originally conceived, the eco-towns project is now effectively dead. Even the label 'eco-town' is now being downplayed, with the focus instead being on eco-friendly developments added to existing towns, rather than full-blown new settlements.
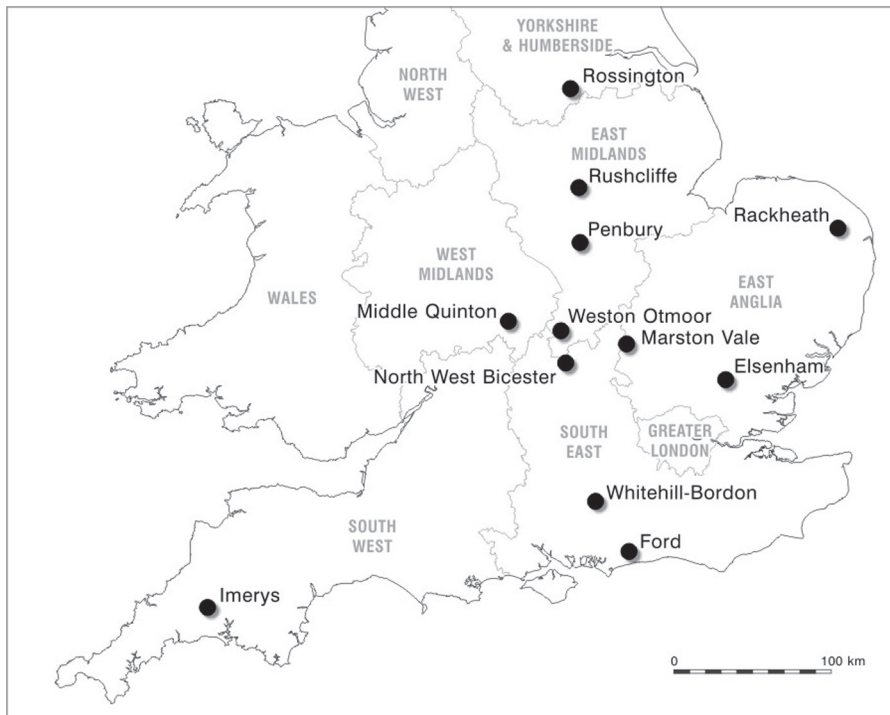
Figure 7.3 Sites initially selected for eco-towns. This controversial scheme generated rather more heat than light, sparking local protests and failing to deliver any major expansion in house-building. Drawn by Graham Bowden.

The case of the Middle Quinton proposals gives an illustration of the muddled thinking that underpinned and eventually killed the eco-town concept. The conceptual diagrams produced showed a vibrant, leafy small town with a rail link, town centre and business district. Much was made of the shortage of affordable housing in the region, particularly in nearby Stratford-upon-Avon. One third of the 6,000 planned homes were to be affordable and the whole project was to be built on a brownfield site, formerly a Ministry of Defence Engineers' depot (Shelter, n.d. ~2008). Unfortunately the rail line is freight only and there were no firm plans in place to upgrade it into a passenger service and to make the link into Stratford. Neither was it clear what kinds of employment were going to be attracted to the site. While there is a definite shortage of affordable housing in the region, placing 2,000 affordable homes at some distance from sources of employment would not necessarily address *local* housing need in, say, Stratford. The likelihood was, therefore, that residents would have to commute by car to jobs at some distance away. This in itself was a significant problem because the site is around 20 miles away from the nearest motorway and served only by minor roads, guaranteeing high levels of congestion.

As a planning concept, the eco-towns project was sound, but the implementation was appallingly botched. Without very high levels of financial commitment from the state and strategic investments in transport infrastructure, they were never going to work. The ideological commitment to using brownfield land made success even less likely as there was not the freedom to locate on sites that made sense in terms of links to existing infrastructure and sources of employment. Indeed, the one scheme which seems likely to be built in something like the originally planned form is, in effect, an extension to Bicester, a town with good road and rail links, sources of employment and solid growth prospects that are attractive to private sector developers. And this, if it does go ahead, will be on greenfield land.

Key points

i) The eco-towns strategy revived the model of new towns but without providing the capital for much needed strategic infrastructure.

ii) Brownfield sites and green housing technologies cannot, of themselves, make a development eco-friendly.

Conclusion

There is no such thing as a typical suburb; those areas beyond the urban core pose a variety of regeneration challenges. Much of the policy rhetoric that has developed around walkability, local services and compact urban form points towards something which already exists in many cities, polycentric development, where historic centres have been absorbed into the wider city yet retain their identity as independent settlements. Such polycentric development can be created through careful planning, which is one of the things that schemes like north Solihull are attempting to achieve through the creation of semi-independent village centres. This is very much in line with North American ideas of smart growth.

Large social housing suburbs like north Solihull pose some of the greatest challenges for suburban regeneration. The main approach that has developed since the 1990s has been to change the tenure mix in these types of suburbs, reducing the proportion of socially rented properties. The hope is that by diluting concentrations of poverty, new services and new employment opportunities will be attracted to the area, although such an approach opens itself to the charge of simply representing state-sponsored gentrification.

Distance from the jobs and services of the city core is the key disadvantage of suburban location for deprived communities, making local opportunities and good transport infrastructure an absolute priority. The Clyde Gateway combines good

existing rail infrastructure with a major strategic upgrade of the city's road network and new business park development. Conversely, developments along the waterfront at Edinburgh have been stymied by the failure of the tram scheme and protracted wrangling over the future of Leith docks as a location for new sources of employment. This is in stark contrast to developments elsewhere in Europe, for example Amsterdam's IJburg, where creating a new tram line was a crucial element in developing the site.

The re-use of brownfield land became a totem of regeneration during the New Labour period. Brownfield is not, however, a guarantee of environmental friendliness and, as the eco-towns debacle demonstrates, can actually be a hindrance to strategically locating developments in order to secure other environmental gains. Well-planned greenfield developments such as Lightmoor can have the edge over poorly thought out brownfield projects. But the key phrase is 'well planned'. The new National Planning Policy Framework places an emphasis on growth and a presumption of development where it is deemed 'sustainable'. The danger with such an approach is that it leaves areas vulnerable to poorly planned, poorly integrated additions to existing settlements reliant upon car-based travel.

What is clear, however, is that in the UK the suburbs are still seen as a key location for families with children. While the model of small apartment development worked spectacularly well in city centres, particularly during the boom years, it caters to a very specific, young demographic. Attempts to apply this metrocentric model to suburban developments hold some real risks. The suburban experience is one which is qualitatively different from that in the central city and it is clear that to apply city-centre models in outer-urban areas will not be sustainable either in terms of mixed communities or in attempting to reduce car dependence. The relatively small amount of research and policy that responds specifically to the challenge of regeneration beyond the city core indicates that these issues have not yet been carefully thought out. The suburbs, home to most of the UK population, remain a regeneration puzzle.

Further reading

Suburban redevelopment is a fascinating topic which has not really had the specific attention that it deserves. The article by Vaughan et al. is an excellent summary of the state of the art in research into suburbs more generally; their origins, function and future. Nathan and Unsworth's article is a good introduction to the tension implicit in attempting to apply city-centre models of regeneration to suburban areas, although their work focuses specifically on the inner suburbs. The report by the Civic Trust gives some indication of how the challenges of suburban regeneration might be tackled. The *Built Environment* special issue explores some of the ideas underpinning compact city development and what this means in terms of suburban development.

Built Environment Special Issue (2010) 'Revisiting the compact city', *Built Environment*, 36(1).

Civic Trust (2002) *In Suburbia* http://web.archive.org/web/20060515203401/ http://www.hants.gov.uk/urbanliving/new_html/suburbia_html/assets/suburbia_ brochure.pdf [accessed 23 August 2011].

Nathan, M. and Unsworth, R. (2006) 'Beyond city living: remaking the inner suburbs', *Built Environment*, 32(3): 235–249.

Vaughan, L., Griffiths, S., Haklay, M. and Jones, C.E. (2009) 'Do the suburbs exist? Discovering complexity and specificity in suburban built form', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 34(4): 475–488.

Note

1   In the context of post-war council housing the maisonette was a distinctive type where two-storey flats were stacked one on top of another. These flats were specifically designed for families. Four- and six-storey blocks of this type were built without lifts, making them a nightmare for the elderly or those with small children.