



## The politics of place



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### Ask not what leadership of place can do for you

These days if you haven't heard the terms 'governance of place', 'place-shaping' or 'leadership of place', then you might not be involved in the recent discussions about local government. For those of us who are, it seems that this agenda and the ideas associated with leadership of place are accepted across the political spectrum.

In fact leadership of place is so much talked about, you might be forgiven for wondering how it got so ubiquitous, so relevant and so significant without someone calling for 'time out' to draw breath and look behind the words to find out what it can really do for local authorities, its leaders and the residents they serve. And – perhaps the more pertinent question – what is it that we in local government need to do to aspire to an agenda that gives us greater powers than ever to shape our own localities and achieve the best we can for our residents?

It's an ambitious jump – moving from commissioning and providing services, to acting as leaders of an entire locality, leading partnerships and co-ordinating action across a wide range of agencies and organisations. And good service delivery is a necessary pre-requisite to this – how else would a council command the moral authority to lead across place if it's not capable of emptying its bins properly? It's a leap that requires our local government leaders to step up to the challenge of aspiring to a better place through visionary leadership, while painting a picture of the future place that inspires and carries with it the residents' hopes and happiness.

Ironically, leadership of place is nothing new, it is actually a return to the historic role of local government. So, by championing place, local government is in fact coming home.

**By Stephen Taylor**

Chief executive  
Leadership centre

This publication – in its simplest form – is that 'time out', a precious respite to reassess why leadership of place is so important and why we need to raise our game if local government is really to come of age and stop relying on – or indeed – pointing the finger at, central government when it suits us.

In this publication we have sought the views of leading thinkers and practitioners in local government. The place shaping scene is set by Robert Hill, former No 10 adviser, who makes the argument about why place matters, and then Joe Simpson, the Leadership Centre's director of relationships and partnerships, provides a framework to demonstrate what things make places better. An insight into the Leadership Centre's work on the place making agenda with Manchester City Council is offered by our advisor Sue Goss, a principal at the Office of Public Management, who describes her work helping to develop leadership skills in a city acutely conscious of place.

To demonstrate how place shaping works in a live political setting, included are three case studies each representing the different main political traditions: Westminster City Council presented by the leader Sir Simon Milton, Milton Keynes Council presented by the leader Isobel McCall and Wakefield Council presented by John Fisher, director of the Local Futures Group.





# The rise and rise of leadership of place

Where we live has always been important, it helps to define who we are. The location of neighbourhood can make a huge difference to the quality of our lives. But the significance of place is growing and growing.

In part this is because of global trends. With companies and jobs coming and going, a rise in migration and the realisation our welfare is so related to world events, belonging to a place can provide a sense of security. A fixed point when so much else is changing.

We also know that the strength of our economy is in part related to having thriving and successful cities, towns and localities and places are more likely to thrive if they are skilled, creative and cohesive.

This agenda throws up all sorts of challenges – not least for government – as it wrestles to tackle the hard social issues of our time. It has seen the value of neighbourhood-renewal-style initiatives and has come to see that leadership of place has a major part to play in the early 21st century. Ministers increasingly recognise that many of today's high profile but complex social ills, such as anti-social behaviour, childhood obesity, drug abuse, and truancy can only be tackled across services, with all connected agencies working together with local people across the whole locality – so paving the way for local strategic partnerships.

The government has also started to shift its stance and move to a better balance between national and local priorities, following its previous high-profile focus on improving national standards in areas such as social care and education. This move reflects an acceptance that some issues are much more of a priority for some localities compared with others, or issues manifest themselves differently in different areas and thus require differing responses. What's more public agencies can hardly be expected to customise services for local neighbourhoods or individual consumers, as the government wants them to do, if they're also expected to focus on national objectives in a blanket fashion. Local Area Agreements have emerged as the government's solution for allowing national and local priorities to be combined.

The government is also keen to involve local people more in shaping services and having a say in running their locality. Ministers plan to change how councils are assessed and rated so that the system is as focussed on local people's perceptions and satisfaction as on meeting central government targets.

And while central government has been developing its thinking and policies, local government has also been changing.

Local authorities and their representatives have become more assertive over the past few years, having upped their game and improved their performance. They understand what central government wants from them and in return are asking for the freedom to deliver, to innovate, to join up – to do what it takes to meet local needs. Local government has become much more confident, recognising it is much better placed than ministers or officials in Whitehall to make decisions on local priorities and strategies.

One of the many ways local government has improved is the way in which it understands and maps the needs and aspirations of the different communities within its area. Many local authorities now have strategies that respond in detail to the specific and unique agendas of the places that make up their authority. As a result of using their planning powers, investing in the public infrastructure, improving the local environment, addressing public safety, supporting the skills and development of young people and adults who live in an area, local authorities up and down the country now increasingly see it as their role and mission to provide leadership of place.

**By Robert Hill, former No.10 adviser**







# The Lyons share

In May 2006 Sir Michael Lyons published his latest thinking on the future role and function of local government. His report reaffirmed the massive role of place shaping.

He highlighted a number of factors that affect the way we live our lives today:

- A rapidly changing global economy
- Demographic and socio-economic change
- Growing expectations of the responsiveness and customisation of goods and services
- Environmental pressures and climate change
- The changing nature of political engagement

Sir Michael sees these changes as leading to greater diversity and difference within and between communities, and increasing expectations of government and public services. He argues for a system of local government for the 21st century that can manage increasing pressures on public expenditure, increase satisfaction and build more prosperous communities. We need to clarify the respective roles of central and local government, he says, based on a realistic assessment of who is best placed to do what. The aim should be to develop greater local choice over public services.

He also argues that local government should be given greater freedom to place shape – by that he means local government should have the responsibility for the well-being of an area and the people who live there, promoting their interests and their future. This agenda, Sir Michael says, challenges both central government and local government:

He argues for the following:

- Central government needs to clear the space for effective place shaping by setting fewer and better-focused targets and reducing supervision. It should also clarify the roles of central and local government, basing these on a realistic assessment of who is best placed to do what in order to allow greater local influence over public services
- Local government to further raise its game so that it can tackle the challenges of promoting effective local choice and energetic place shaping. This requires stronger leadership, closer engagement with local residents, effective partnership-working with other services and the business community, and a consistent commitment to efficiency and cost effectiveness

In its White Paper later this autumn the government will set out its plans for allowing local authorities to be better and stronger place shapers.

**By Robert Hill, former No.10 adviser**



# Ten principles of place

# 10

By **Robert Hill**, former No.10 adviser

Following discussions with elected members and chief executives, the Leadership Centre has developed **10 principles of place** which provide a framework for thinking about what place shaping means for local authorities.

**Places vary.** We need local government because of the difference in geography, population, economy and culture from one place to another. The sheer variety of place demands different responses and organisation.

**Places have some needs in common.** Despite this variety, people see access to some goods and services as being a universal right. Pertinent examples are the recent cases of women with breast cancer, who have expected to have the same access to the latest drugs irrespective of where they live. And, similarly, within local government, society expects, for example, that all councils will ensure that vulnerable children are identified and properly looked after. The Local Government Association and the government are currently discussing which services and issues should be classified as national priorities bound by nationally-agreed outcomes and which should be a matter for local discretion.

**Places have history.** The history of a place helps to provide a strong identity – people are bound together by a common past such as being part of a mining village, a major port, or the place associated with manufacturing a particular product. But places can also be trapped by their history – communities sometimes find it hard to move on and forge a new future as economic tides sweep away industries and jobs.

**Places in places matter.** A hospital, a school, a post office, a church, a bridge, a library or even a statue often define a place. They provide a focus for civic pride or a pivotal point where the community may meet together. In a suburb where one place may sprawl into another, a hospital may be more than just a medical centre but the physical expression of that place. Government – national and local – often makes decisions on services without realising that when they plan to change or close a facility they are also challenging people's sense of place and local identity.

**Places are multi-layered.** Both research and our own experience tell us we often belong (and are conscious of this) to more than one place. A resident may live in Canning Town but also see themselves as citizens of Newham. A person living in Taunton may well express pride in living in the town but also in hailing from Somerset. Many people will live in one place but work in another. Not surprisingly the place people associate with most is their immediate neighbourhood – a resident of Slough (a relatively small compact town) may live no more than a mile from the town centre which they regularly use, but when asked where they come from, might say Cippenham, a discrete neighbourhood within Slough.

**Places are personal.** Even within small well-defined and apparently homogenous neighbourhoods, needs vary enormously. Councils' own analyses as well as data from marketing companies shows that any one place will contain a wide variety of circumstances and needs. As Super Output Area work has shown, factors such as employment, ethnicity, educational achievement, family circumstances and income, all combine to make understanding of place a personal as well as communal exercise.

**Places can empower.** Places provide the basis for representation – wards, divisions and constituencies. Local politics is often based on competing visions for a place. Identification with or concern for place provides the catalyst for people volunteering or getting involved in the community. In many councils, the neighbourhood is now the focus for delivering services and ensuring that residents' views are sought and used to shape services. And place can provide the means to build cohesion and for integration between communities of different ethnic and cultural origins.

**Places can divide.** The empowerment that place brings can also be divisive as Ted Cattle reported following the disturbances in Bradford and Oldham. Place may end up reinforcing segregation between ethnic groups as different areas become home to different communities and end up as mono-cultural localities. Measures to empower communities, if not carefully designed, may just end up with the 'haves' consolidating their grip on services and resources. Nimbyism – the not in my backyard syndrome – can paralyse development and prevent places from moving forward.

**Places need vision and leadership.** Report after report has affirmed the importance of strong local leadership for building well governed places and creating social cohesion. Good leadership provides vision, unifies different communities, persuades agencies to work together, takes on tough issues, brokers agreements between different interests and represents the place to the wider world.

**Places need powers to change things.** Places must be able to respond to the needs of their residents: to be able to change things either by their own actions or by working in partnership with others. Authorities should do more to develop and exercise their power to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area. And as government increases the tasks and roles assigned to local authorities, so it should ensure that freedoms, funding and powers are proportionate to the responsibilities assigned to a place.



# Rising to the challenge – the 10 pre-requisite skills

# 10

By Joe Simpson, Leadership Centre

To follow are some **key attributes** we believe are vital for local leaders if you are to aspire to the challenges of place shaping.

**Steering not rowing** . Since the publication of *Reinventing government* over a decade ago, there has been increasing recognition of the need for public leaders to focus more on steering rather than rowing. If we look at the range of areas we have identified for attention by local government it would simply be impossible for local government to directly run all those services and also maintain the ability to be proactive and strategic.

**Commissioning and co-commissioning**. It is not sufficient to have the vision, councils need to be better at commissioning – in other words they have to be able to clearly articulate the outcomes they are seeking. Moreover much of this commissioning will need to be done in consultation with other partners. These commissioning skills (quite different from pure procurement ones) are strategic and need to be developed at the most senior level.

**Influence not command and control**. As the democratically-elected body, the authority has significant moral influence and authority. Yet that does not translate into direct control. Local authorities cannot force private businesses to invest in their town (as opposed to elsewhere, perhaps even another country).

**Convening (and being convened)**. Authorities have a critical role in convening others – in other words creating common agendas where all partners can see the benefit in the collaboration. This requires the ability to see, identify and communicate the longer-term desired outcome. But this also requires developing the flexibility to understand other agendas and problem-solving techniques that buy stakeholders into shared solutions rather than separate ones.

**Thinking and acting long term**. Authorities have to be the champion of the longer-term vision. Clarity of purpose and vision, and the stability (and predictability) that should flow from that, is critical to creating the climate of confidence that will secure the participation of others.

**Coping with complexity**. Partnership-working is messy and complex. In this world of place shaping there will be very many partners, working in many different partnerships and working to very different timescales. Authorities have to develop the maturity and the confidence to operate in this more complex world.

**Listening and engaging**. If this agenda is to succeed it is not enough for there to be great plans, local people must have a sense of ownership and stakeholders must believe they have a real opportunity to influence and design outcomes. In other words listening and engaging skills are critical. We have seen

the consequences of top down major development; the lesson to learn is not that there has been any inappropriateness in terms of master planning, but more that the problem lies in only engaging the 'expert'.

Engagement is not just about ownership, it involves people doing things. A devolutionary agenda only has meaning if there are active citizens prepared and supported to engage. Within this world the sort of performance indicator needed (instead of the inadequate top down ones) would evaluate the level of increased citizen engagement in making their place better.

**Community mediation**. Any change involves difficult decisions. A unique role of the politician is to help people understand issues, and help find solutions that can get buy-in from local residents – who in turn might not have got what they wanted but can at least understand why certain decisions were made. More generally the greater the scale of change, the more important the need for the mediation to provide the 'glue' to help places hold together.

**Vision (and storytelling)**. Shaping places means changing places, sometimes physically, sometimes more ephemerally, but it therefore involves being able to picture (or more often part-picture) those changes. It's the quality of the vision that determines the success or otherwise of the enterprise. We know that the change we have seen in many of our great cities in the last decade or so is the direct result of local leaders with the clarity of vision to see a different future for their place.

Such visions need articulating – the role therefore of storytelling becomes a key political attribute – for the story has to have the power to bind together citizens and stakeholders in the pursuit of a common goal. It thus is not purely one person's story (or even one authority's story). This organic role of storytelling naturally evolves as time goes on and people's lives are affected by it.

**Strategic and community leadership**. Vision alone is not sufficient. What matters is the ability to mobilise others to make things happen. The attributes referred to above all culminate in the strategic leadership skills required to create and sustain the coalitions required to make leadership of place possible.

But this has to happen at both the wider strategic level, but also at the very local neighbourhood level. The language of frontline councillors is now well established. But we should not see that role as exclusively one for non-executive councillors. All councillors need to be able to champion the neighbourhoods in the ward they represent.



# Building capital

By Joe Simpson, Leadership Centre

## Constructing a place

### Building Capital

There are two tenets that are key to the argument put forward by Sir Michael Lyons. The first is the centrality of place shaping and the second, a pivotal connection with local economic prosperity. (However, despite this, we still recognise the need for public intervention in areas such as quality care for people with disabilities that don't translate directly into some pure economic assessment.) Here we try to articulate exactly what these two principles might mean, and what implications these have for the mind-set and skill-set of leaders working in a 21st century local authority. A quick and dirty headline that explains this might well read *Moving from local government to local governance* – where leadership of place becomes the primary task.

The American academic and author Professor Mark Moore has argued that just as the core business of a private company is the creation of more private value, so for a public body, the focus should be the creation of more public value. The challenge for a local authority, then, is to create more local public value. Moore argues that typically a private company will determine its value by measuring its capital value. In an efficient company good decisions are those that enhance such capital value – its monetary worth. But for a local authority there is no one measure that provides the equivalent of market capital. There are however a series of blocks of public capital that can provide authorities with an equivalent set of targets. And to complete the analogy, a good authority will create more of these types of capital.

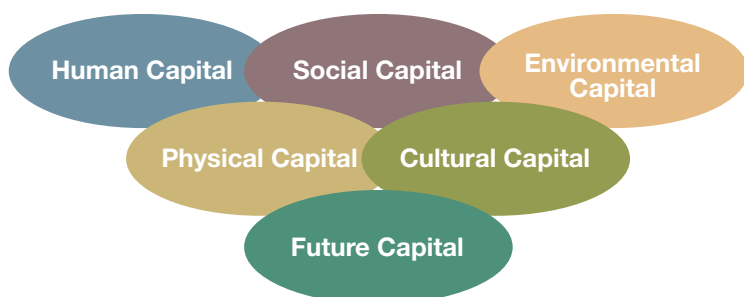
## “Moving from local government to local governance.”

## The building blocks

### Human Capital

Increasingly Britain's prosperity depends on the knowledge economy. Many people had thought a traditional manufacturing base could be maintained. But the scale and the speed of industrialisation in India and China (and elsewhere) has forced a rethink. This is not an argument for the demise of manufacturing, but a recognition that our future lies in value-added goods and services, and our ability to sustain innovation and the value-added element is dependent on our having a highly-skilled and highly-qualified workforce. This change has resulted in some tension when the growth area in jobs doesn't match the skill sets available. This is particularly evident in London and many of our great cities where there has been significant job creation – but these jobs are not being taken by local people. This mismatch is most startling in Tower Hamlets, where thanks to the vibrancy of Canary Wharf and other Docklands developments, the average wage of people employed in Tower Hamlets is significantly higher than anywhere else in the country. But in fact, if you look at the average income of the residents of Tower Hamlets, you'll discover it is one of the poorest communities in England.

In terms of tackling this, the importance of education is obvious. However our focus cannot rely on the mantra “education, education, education”, it needs to be wider. To illustrate, while we all know just how vigorous a debate there has been about the relationship of councils with schools, similar attention has not been paid to the skills of the adult workforce. Authorities need to learn to understand the likely skill needs of their area, and champion initiatives that close any skills gap. Councils also need to focus on the size of the potential workforce which is actually in work already. The percentage of people in work varies considerably from place to place. Often this is connected to issues such as the availability of childcare or just how many people have been able to make the transition from long-term sickness, or disability, back to work. In short, healthy communities tend to be wealthy communities.





## Physical Capital

Historically this has been one of the strengths of local government. Great places are those where local authorities have had the vision and commitment to make the long-term decisions to create an appropriate and effective physical infrastructure. In the past, the authority itself was probably the physical builder of the infrastructure, but looking forward, there are five strong indications that tell us authorities will have to operate differently in future. These are the following:

- 1 The importance of strategic planning becomes more and more significant. The cities where we have seen radical transformation in the last decade (eg Manchester or Sheffield) are ones where the authorities had good master-plans and clear longer-term visions of the place they wanted to create.
- 2 Increasingly the authority is not the builder – but the convenor. Its skill is in creating plans with the buy-in of other stakeholders to create the virtuous cycles of sustained improvement.
- 3 Public finance becomes a lever, to pull in (significantly more) private finance, rather than being the sole funder of the project.
- 4 These days authorities need to think beyond their formal administrative boundaries, be able to collaborate with partner agencies to ensure there are effective solutions to the needs of their citizens (eg transport infrastructure), irrespective of whether the improvement project lies within their formal boundaries or are in fact beyond them. All the research on prosperity in our towns and cities, demonstrates the importance of connectivity as a key driver – in other words how well people and businesses can connect with other places.
- 5 If people are to have pride in place they need to feel a sense of ownership of place, so authorities need to learn to engage local people as they grapple with difficult decisions (and often ones that differing groups of people hold strongly different views on). At the same time, authorities must also be able to delegate to local people, allowing them a vital role in shaping their very local environments.

## Social Capital

Sustainable places need strong social capital. Highly divisive communities are rarely prosperous. The places where we see the most aggravated divisions are not the thriving wealthy places but those where people feel most marginalised. Strong social capital and economic prosperity reinforce each other. The argument that there should be devolution to the town hall and also through

the town hall is not an academic one, rather it is predicated on the need to build greater engagement and sense of community.

Similarly the switch in emphasis from say, an exclusive focus on crime to one on community safety, is a recognition of the need to address people's concerns and fears about their actual experience living in a particular area.

Often this agenda is seen as one that has particular resonance with the big urban areas, but to regard this as purely an urban agenda is wrong. Rural communities face different challenges that affect their social capital. There are strengths (small towns and villages often have a very strong sense of identity) but also particular challenges such as isolation, or lack of affordable housing or demographic challenges such as young adults migrating from many rural areas for work – leaving behind a much older population with no economic base.

There's also a body of evidence that tells us concentrations of poverty generate concentrations of a poverty of aspiration. Councils are critical to building more integrated communities. This role vividly demonstrates the interplay of these different blocks of capital. For example, poor decisions on physical infrastructure such as large edge of town council housing estates are likely to lead to the double whammy of both a reduction in social capital but – because of the likelihood of a poverty of aspiration – also human capital.

## Cultural Capital

One consequence of an economy that is increasingly dependent on knowledge and creative industries is that jobs follow skilled people as much as the other way around. An illustration of this is the transformation of the area between the M40 and M3 corridor. Historically much of this was agricultural, yet today it houses the fastest growing contingent of knowledge and creative industry workers. People have chosen to locate there for quality of life reasons and businesses have sprung up around them.

Successful places are ones where people want to live. Authorities such as Manchester have been able to recreate city centres that 20 years ago were dying, converting into prosperous places where people and jobs are locating.

Cultural investment is thus not a 'nice to have' addition after basic services have been provided – rather it is a critical part of the offer a place has to create in order to attract skilled people and inward investment.

Again the authority is not expected to be the main direct provider – but it is responsible for creating the vision and the climate for core investment that act as the levers to attract talent and resources.

## Environmental Capital

Too often the environmental agenda is seen as an economic cost. We need to rethink this in investment terms. We now know that a zero tolerance approach to issues such as graffiti or abandoned cars delivers sustained change in behaviour, and so in the long term reduces costs. Moreover that focus on building environmental capital helps in other ways, for instance the social nuisance created by anti-social behaviour directly impacts on the social capital of a place.

The Victorians understood the vital importance of green parks and open spaces in cities that were otherwise full of smog. These parks literally became the green lungs of many of our major cities.

We also need to look at the wider environmental agenda. This is not merely an argument about the local contribution to tackling climate change. It is rather that if we are to have sustainable places we need to build sustainability into the way that places operate. The following helps to illustrate this:

- 1 There is increasing recognition that a council's role on the subject of litter is not merely the efficient collection and disposal of waste. Rather it is to promote a reduction in waste creation, and more recycling of those things that we no longer need.
- 2 We need sustainable transport strategies. This connects back to the planning and physical infrastructure requirements considered above. But it would also be wise for authorities to seek transport solutions that can meet changing patterns of work. For example the growth of more cross radial patterns of bus routes in parts of London. In Hackney for instance this has been delivered through the use of a small specialist provider (Hackney Community Transport) using smaller buses than those on the main radial routes in and out of central London. Other urban areas have tried for much greater integration of train and bus routes.
- 3 Some authorities are using planning powers to influence house design to ensure more energy efficiency.
- 4 Historically we have tended to see energy through the periscope of national policy – with the local authority role only connecting through planning policy. Yet as we come to terms with the scale of the challenge there is increasing recognition of the importance of developing local energy supplies - where the authority will play a critical role.

## Future Capital

Given the pace of change, places, as much as companies, need to see how best they can 'future-proof' themselves. One critical aspect of this is digital preparedness; so what percentage of the place is fully networked? What percentage of the population uses digital technology? What percentage of businesses in an area is involved in enterprises that have the potential to thrive when looking ahead?

One of the case studies in this report focuses on Wakefield. This West Yorkshire town has used new technology to pilot new forms of neighbourhood governance. Southwark, in London, has created a partnership with a private business to create a call centre/internet system that not only gives the customer a better service, but also uses the intelligence generated to redesign services and pinpoint deficiencies that need more strategic solutions. The technology therefore underpins the way the physical and environmental structure of Southwark will be maintained.

Moving beyond this we need to think what role authorities might take using technology to support businesses. This can start from simple measures, such as assessing how effective the promotions and links are on council websites. (Making the website an effective site for the whole community not just to council service-users to looking at the potential for a local Google to help drive greater business between businesses in that area). Historically a lot of purchasing decisions were driven by physical proximity, this could be an opportunity for authorities to help create a sense of digital proximity.

## Building Blocks Building Identities

No one building block by itself will guarantee success, but the stronger each block of capital the greater the likelihood of economic and personal success. Councils should strive to maximise these blocks and also recognise their interdependence. We have already noted that bad infrastructure-planning is not just a physical disaster it is often also the cause of so many off-shoot problems. However each of these blocks is interdependent with others.

There is no one perfect desired outcome. There are inherent differences in the physical location of places. Indeed it is the different interplays between these blocks which produce the different identities of places. We also know that this identity or brand, if true and not some marketing creation, makes a vital difference to the ability of a place to secure the inward investment of people and businesses.

# Manchester, the city, the place, the leadership

By Sue Goss, principal at OPM, Leadership Centre adviser



Good leaders are not quick to proclaim that they've 'arrived.' They know where they're going, sustain and support others on the journey, and know that real change takes time. They spend their time exploring the path ahead, watching and listening for changes in the environment, and equipping themselves and their followers to respond.

When I began work in Manchester, I found a city council tightly connected into a city that was transforming itself, with a strong sense of place and a clear vision shared with partners and surrounding authorities. Everywhere I encountered extraordinary loyalty, commitment and passion. It had strong and highly respected political and managerial leadership with a sense of continuity over time. Hard to see, at first, what help they might need!





**The council has three very clear aims for the future; these are the following:**

- Reaching full potential in education and employment
- Building individual and collective self-esteem and mutual respect
- Creating neighbourhoods of choice

This is a council serious about leadership, proof, if proof were needed, can be seen in the determination from its leaders to do better.

“Don’t celebrate too much” I was told, “we have failed at some things – our education performance isn’t good enough – we knew how to change the infrastructure, transforming the aspirations and skills of young people has never been done before.”

“My experience has equipped me for what we’ve achieved so far” said one executive member “but I’m not sure it equips me for the future.” The mind of the leader, in particular, was concentrated on equipping the organisation and the place for the future – “what do we have to become like to achieve these goals?”

Helping them with their leadership development involved reading all the background papers, and then conducting a series of interviews with all 10 cabinet members and all the top management team, as well as Manchester’s own HR team and other consultants who had been working with the city. I decided rather than simply data-gathering, I would use these conversations to give each member of the leadership team the time and the space to reflect – something they all told me they had never had.

“Maybe if we stopped to reflect we might lose the dynamism” said one.

In these conversations, we explored the challenges ahead, partnership working, the new neighbourhood initiatives, the way the executive worked together, the relationship with senior officers and the relationships between the political leadership.

“Not sure you’ll get our politicians to reflect on themselves” I was told. But, through serious discussions we did reflect on personal leadership styles, on how individuals impact on situations, on the dangers of ‘group thinking’ (meaning that weaknesses are not addressed) on the untapped leadership capability of others.

It seemed that the heroic, tough, exhausting management style that had carried the city so far might not do for the future. The leadership was at full stretch, but there was still much to do.

As the place shaping role of the council expands, as attention moves to building “social capital” – the aspirations and capabilities within local communities – there will be a need for more diffused leadership.

Our discussions began to crystallise, and in an away day in July, at which I reported my analysis, we built a shared picture of what might be needed in the future. The skills and mindset we identified were the following:

- Work more effectively across boundaries
- Move from individual competence to orchestrating the whole leadership system
- Use a wider range of leadership styles
- Release creativity. Learn more, analyse, think creatively with others
- ‘Switch on’ more leadership – from the executive and senior management, to backbenchers and partners
- Create space for others to move into

We are now designing a development process which will give the executive and top management team time to reflect on the roles and personal styles demanded by place shaping; enable backbench councillors to develop their leadership role in neighbourhoods; develop the leadership capability of the next two tiers of officers, and build the knowledge base of the leadership team, giving them time to explore ideas and opportunities to learn from leading practice elsewhere.

# Westminster City Council – One City: strong communities and excellent services

By **Sir Simon Milton**, leader of Westminster Council

Stowe Centre: one of many One City projects.



One City is a case study in developing policy to shape a sense of place. It is a five-year programme to improve the quality of life in the city by building strong communities supported by excellent council services. I have described the programme's goal as the following:

"We aim to make Westminster the best-governed city in the world. A model for city management, because we have strong communities and excellent services. A city where people are active in supporting their neighbourhoods. Where people are protected by the public order provided by Police and city guardians. Where we offer increased housing provision and the opportunity to learn in the best city schools. Where we are still the economic centre of the country but where our renewal of the natural environment makes this a beautiful as well as dynamic city."

HRH Prince Edward opening the Stowe Centre



The idea of One City, is about bringing unity to the many communities of Westminster. This will be achieved by having an open and tolerant city, opportunity for all, active citizens and neighbourhood delivery, which will bring services closer to communities.

It encompasses a hard-fought consensus between political and officer leaders, employees and the general public on the key priorities for the organisation in meeting this vision. This opens up new opportunities to build strong communities and to deliver excellent services. Communications, consultation and the leadership to establish a consensus are therefore the foundations of One City.



Stakeholders, councillors and members of the community discuss issues surrounding One City at the One City reception.

## “We aim to make Westminster the best-governed city in the world”

### There are eight lessons Westminster has learnt through developing and launching this programme:

- 1 The leader has to provide the vision** – only the leader has the authority to guide the direction of the whole organisation.
- 2 Prioritise** – have one goal, clear values and a number of limited priority programmes to support it. Know what you want to achieve.
- 3 Buy-in** – it is essential that political colleagues, senior officers, partners and stakeholders, communities and residents feel they jointly own the strategy, and accept that choices have to be made.
- 4 A strong and simple narrative** – essential in engaging people to take the new strategy forward. In particular the strategy must make sense to residents. They have to see their views in it and solutions that make sense to them.
- 5 Customer focus** – One City is fundamentally about setting a new standard in delivery for Westminster residents by ‘*Building strong communities and having excellent services*’. A vital part of understanding the priorities and expectations of residents, and providing solutions to these challenges, is through robust research.
- 6 Must have clear deliverables** – One City has twenty projects, in its first year, which are direct outputs of the strategy dealing with residents’ concerns. The strategy must connect with action on the ground.
- 7 Robust financial and performance management** – the strategy will lose momentum without properly funded projects and the regular checking of performance against targets.
- 8 Aim High** – standing still in terms of service delivery is not an option as the pace of technological change quickens, communities change, resources reduce, expectations increase and communities change. So policy and services have to continually adapt and move ahead of public expectation, through good research and reinforced by effective communication.



Developing One City included a visioning document called *Westminster in 2008*. In this we started to pose key questions about what the city's new aspirations should be. How will services be delivered in the future? How will Westminster meet the needs of its increasingly diverse society? How will Westminster respond to the change agenda arising externally? This was the subject of extensive debate between members and officers, and identified the key themes of the programme.

These discussions were supported by robust quantitative and qualitative research – this cannot be underestimated in shaping One City, or as a touchstone for my thinking. The research about current resident and community perceptions along with future trends attest to a city changing dramatically over the next 10 years. The Westminster Ethnic Minority Needs Audit done by Imperial College, London identified that “within each BME community, there is great diversity; ethnically, educationally, in terms of social and economic position; in terms of language and literacy skills; and consequently, in terms of service needs.” Two key challenges from this research for One City are that where council services are not provided in a joined-up way, they were less likely to reach those in need, and that this will be exacerbated by ‘problems with language and literacy’.

During the spring of 2005, responding to the research, we decided to introduce a focus on community cohesion in addition to the issues identified by *Westminster 2008*: creating a city in which the different communities in Westminster could share and prosper together.

The next stage was to put a White Paper together setting out the One City agenda: its values, its delivery and transformational agenda for the council. This needed to be a values-based programme, but to be meaningful to citizens and staff it required clear deliverables. So, guided by the research we identified four underpinning values: tolerance, customer service, neighbourhood identity and support for active citizenship.

### One City values

**An open, tolerant society** where citizens can reach their potential expressed through diverse backgrounds and common aspirations

**Citizens as customers** recognising the growing demand for personalised high-quality services

**Delivering for neighbourhoods** because citizens identify with neighbourhoods

**Promoting active citizenship** enabling citizens to help make the city a better place

And to demonstrate delivery, and cover the range of council activities, we proposed four delivery programmes covering order for community protection, opportunity covering social and children's services and housing, enterprise, our business agenda and renewal covering environmental issues.

### One City delivery programmes

**Order** the fundamental role of city government is the protection of people and property

**Opportunity** the council can help realise the aspirations of its different communities through excellent community services

**Enterprise** markets and private enterprise empower individuals, energise communities and enrich the City, helping fulfil its global role

**Renewal** our lasting legacy for future residents of the City will be to leave the built and natural environment better than we found it

Given the cross-cutting aims, financial constraints, local delivery of services and necessity of partnership working to deliver One City, there was a fundamental recognition in the white paper that Westminster City Council must transform itself. This echoes the insights of *Westminster in 2008* and the findings of an IDeA International Peer Review that to become a world-class leader in city management, there was a need for organisational transformation. Chief executive Peter Rogers challenged the organisation after the Peer Review. He said: “Our task is to provide an organisation that is fit for purpose and meeting the challenging and changing demands of managing central London.”

One City deals head-on with these issues moving community need firmly into the policy framework. It recognises the neighbourhood differences between areas such as the Harrow Road, Maida Vale, and the West End, through initiatives such as the Civic Streets programme, part of the renewal strand of One City. It supports the greater involvement of councillors in local decision-making by developing a neighbourhood governance package bringing together all local public services as part of the One City programme and developing strong and focused Area Forums where local people meet to discuss issues. The director of policy and communications Graham Ellis says: “The focus is very much on communities. Giving people the chance to play a fuller role in city life, as active citizens, and to make a better life for themselves and their families.”

# “The focus is very much on communities. Giving people the chance to play a fuller role in city life, as active citizens, and to make a better life for themselves and their families.”

The next stage of the development of One City was the consultation programme, this comprised a number of elements to rigorously test the contents of One City:

**One City** launch, where 400 community leaders heard about the plans

**One City** stakeholder mailing, with 1,000 people invited to take part in the programme

Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) conference and discussion groups

Stakeholder engagement using eight expert panels to review and discuss proposed policies

**One City** Debates and an Innovation campaign that generated nearly 200 ideas on ways to improve life in the city

**Market research:** Branding and Perception Survey & City Survey testing views on services and perceptions of the City Council

Area Forum discussions, across the city

Staff discussion, briefings and a management conference

As well as the One City themes and delivery programmes, the Westminster standard aimed at world-class city management. To consult on these issues and to encourage innovation we held two One City debates in January 2006 with leading authorities at the RSA on the following subjects:

- ‘Civic Renewal: structures and spaces for a modern city’
- ‘One City: building united, active and tolerant communities’

These debates encouraged thinking about the key issues for One City and gained input from and raised awareness with thought leaders.

The Council also launched an Innovation campaign as an open competition for the public to come up with ideas for improving the quality of life in the city. The council launched a website [www.myidea.gov.uk](http://www.myidea.gov.uk) for the public to submit their suggestions. Over 200 people entered this competition which at a grass roots level raises awareness of Westminster City Council as a council that wants to innovate.

These initiatives over the autumn and winter of 2005 shaped the consultation and involved over 2,000 people in the process. The results were published as a consultation report, and in March 2006 I announced the first One City programme at the council’s annual budget-setting meeting. Setting out 20 projects across the four delivery programmes, I told the council: “I want One City to deliver a city where people know what their council does and how they can make a difference. Where anyone can access council services, online at any time. Where people are protected by the seamless work of Police and City Guardians. Where we offer increased housing provision and the opportunity to learn in best in class city academy schools”.

The 20 One City projects were rooted in the consultation and responded to resident concerns, projects range from improving parking customer service to providing greater opportunities to get involved in making the streets safer through residents’ intelligence gathering.

The programme was launched to the community with a breakfast event the day after the council meeting. Over the summer of 2006 a number of initiatives including direct mail, community engagement meetings and media stories were used to promote understanding of the programme.

The One City programme is possible because Westminster has effective performance and financial management systems. The progress of the projects is reported each month to the Corporate Management Board and the resources to deliver the projects are generated through a £10 million savings programme called Worksmart. This is the way Westminster generates the resources to pay for service improvement and reward staff by delivering a more efficient and effective council by using new technology to create the savings to do more, better.

One City is work in progress, but it shows how effective consultation, close working and challenge between officers and members and strong performance management can deliver local leadership.

# Wakefield Council

By **John Fisher**, director of the Local Futures Group



Wakefield Metropolitan District in West Yorkshire includes the City of Wakefield and a number of market towns and villages. The past 30 years have seen the decline of the coal-mining industry and, following the closure of pits in the 80s and 90s, a major restructuring of the local economy.

One of the key challenges during the recent review of their community strategy was to ensure a clear and shared understanding among partners of the nature of modern Wakefield and, with them, to create a compelling vision for its future – with place shaping a central theme.





The council and its partners, working through the Wakefield District Partnership, have embraced the place shaping agenda and are moving towards a redefinition of service provision around community and personal needs and choice, delivered by those best placed to meet the needs. This is neatly summed up as *Families and neighbourhoods*, the name they have given their Local Area Agreement. This approach embraces both an emphasis on an improved quality of service to individuals and the decentralisation/devolution of decision-making and delivery patterns to the neighbourhood level.

To make this happen, however, local service providers needed a common understanding of issues and challenges facing the people and places of the district, with a common evidence base to inform policy-making and gauge success. Partners also needed a shared understanding of the wider strategic environment – the international, national, regional and sub-regional factors likely to impact on the district. In an era of double devolution, this strategic information and benchmarking is as important for local leaders as issues within localities.

A programme of research was carried out, in association with the Local Futures Group, and these findings are now being brought together to form a resource-pack that will underpin the council's wider programme of place shaping activities.

### Wakefield today

One of the key elements was an overarching analysis of the 'state of the district' as it is today, based on a range of national statistics. This was seen as a crucial reality

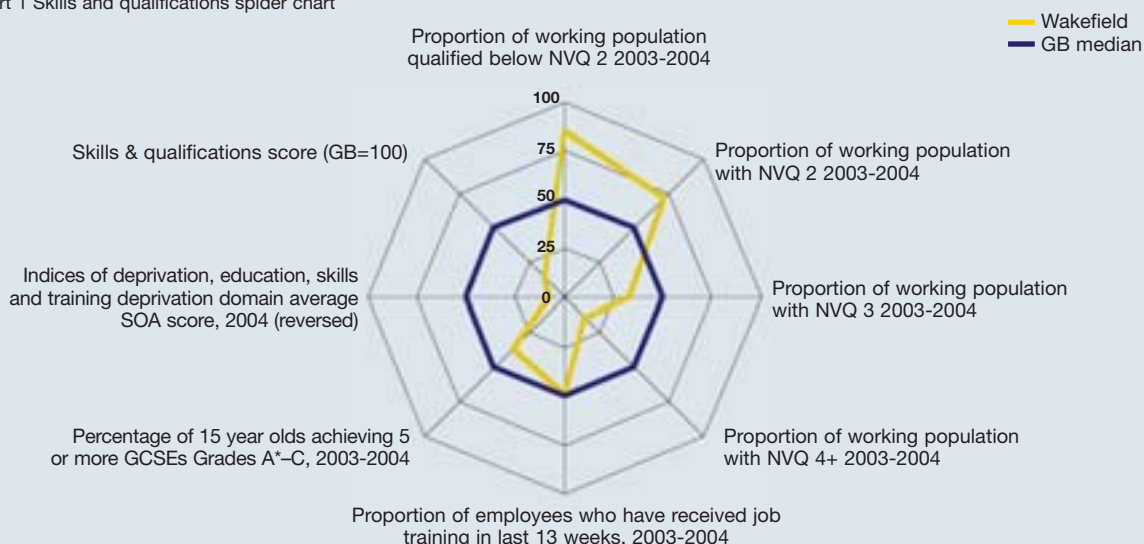
check, ensuring any future vision was based on firm foundations. This wide-ranging study assessed the conditions of 'well-being' – economic, social and environmental – both at a district and neighbourhood level, but set within a regional and national context. Wakefield's relationship with neighbouring areas and, crucially, with Leeds formed part of the analysis. The study also sought to identify the relationship between economic, social and environmental conditions, encouraging a more 'joined-up' understanding of Wakefield, as a place to live and work.

Innovative techniques were used to profile the area's conditions, for example graphically presenting the findings in the form of spider charts and report cards.

Spider charts present complex sets of data in a form that simultaneously allows national benchmarking while highlighting the relationship between factors. Reflecting its industrial past, Wakefield's skills and qualifications profile in Chart 1 shows, by national standards, an above average proportion of resident working population with low qualifications (NVQ 1 and 2) and a below average with higher level qualifications (NVQ 3 and 4). In a knowledge economy, where human capital is seen as a vital asset, partners were keen to see education and training given high priority, with the aim of seeing a change in the skills and qualifications profile over the course of the strategy.

Report cards were used to summarise performance. The district was given A-E scores, depending on the quintile within which the district scored on national rankings. These scores were applied to a range of economic, social and environmental factors to build up a

Chart 1 Skills and qualifications spider chart



profile of the district that partners could recognise and monitor. The report card is shown in Chart 2 with the headline findings summarised below.

<b>Economy</b> <b>C</b>		<b>Society</b> <b>D</b>		<b>Environment</b> <b>C</b>	
Economic performance	<b>B</b>	Occupational Profile	<b>E</b>	Land & property	<b>A</b>
Industrial structure	<b>E</b>	Prosperity	<b>D</b>	Housing affordability	<b>A</b>
Businesses	<b>B</b>	Deprivation	<b>E</b>	Transport & comms	<b>C</b>
Skills & qualifications	<b>E</b>	Health	<b>E</b>	Services & amenities	<b>E/B</b>
Labour market	<b>D</b>	Crime	<b>E</b>	Natural environment	<b>E</b>

Chart 2 Report card for Wakefield

**Economy:** Wakefield has a relatively large economy, with strong employment growth rates but only modest levels of productivity. While it has a lower than average business density, recent trends suggest the district is performing reasonably well on key business and enterprise indicators. However, the proportion of employment in knowledge economy terms is very low and the skills profile of the workforce is poor.

**Society:** Wakefield’s occupational profile shows a disproportionately large number of people working in semi-skilled and unskilled occupations. Related to this, income levels are fairly low and there are high levels of deprivation. There is evidence of a number of social problems, including high levels of crime and poor health.

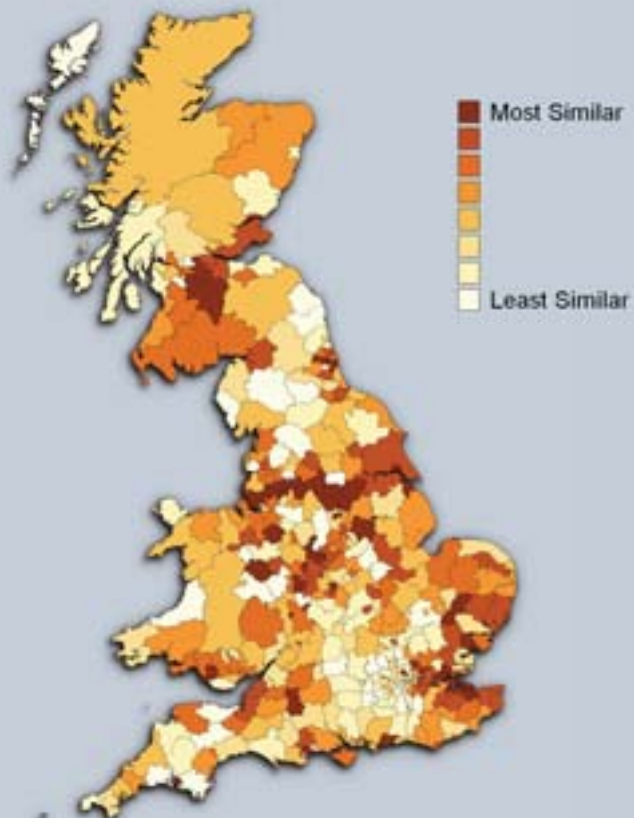
**Environment:** The environmental profile of Wakefield is mixed. Housing is affordable by national standards and there is a relatively good standard of local amenities. The district is also well connected, reflecting its close proximity to Leeds and ease of access to motorway and national rail networks. But challenges remain in enhancing the standard of local services and improving the quality of the natural environment.

In order to better understand Wakefield’s current identity, the council also commissioned research to identify its statistical ‘nearest neighbours’ – areas with the most similar conditions and challenges. Local authority districts across Britain were ranked, in order of similarity, against each of the 20 spider chart profiles created as part of the state of the district research. The findings were brought together to show economic, social and environmental nearest neighbours and concluded by highlighting the most similar districts. Which of these areas, with similar conditions, were performing better? What approaches were being developed elsewhere by authorities with similar conditions? Would it be worth forging a stronger relationship with these areas?

Wakefield’s economic nearest neighbours are shown, in the darker shading, in Map 1, taking into account factors such as economic performance, industrial structure, business and enterprise, skills and qualifications and labour market conditions. The top five comprised Gateshead, North Lanarkshire, Rotherham, Thurrock and Barnsley.

The outcome of this stage of work was shared across the council’s local partner organisations, with the aim of creating a common understanding of current conditions – and challenges – as part of the district’s community strategy review and to support strategic planning.

#### Wakefield’s economic nearest neighbours



**Wakefield futures**

However, addressing current problems and weaknesses was only part of the council's place shaping agenda. In a fast moving global economy it should equally be concerned with anticipating future change and exploiting new opportunities as they emerge. As part of the project, the council, therefore, commissioned a 'Wakefield Futures' programme of research, involving three interrelated pieces of work.

The knowledge economy has been placed at the heart of Wakefield's economic ambitions and time was spent developing a better understanding of its implications for local businesses and for economic development policies generally. A knowledge economy audit was commissioned, with the accent also placed on understanding the social implications of the new economy. As a result, the concept of knowledge communities emerged as a central component of Wakefield's long-term place shaping ambitions.

The second part of the exercise was designed to provide a better understanding of a wider range of future drivers of change. Presentations and workshop sessions explored the impacts and implications for Wakefield of over 50 trends and forecasts. Would ever-increasing car use inevitably lead to higher levels of congestion and pollution? Was Wakefield's economy vulnerable to increasing competition from India and China, who themselves had knowledge economy ambitions? Would global warming, over the lifetime of the strategy, increase concern for the environment?

Future opportunities and threats were then highlighted and incorporated into four scenarios for Wakefield's long-term future. These also drew on generic scenarios provided by Local Futures, framed in the context of two underlying drivers of change: social values and systems of governance (see Chart 3). Having discussed the scenarios, and agreed that all four were realistic over

a 20-year horizon; partners were tasked with assessing the impact and implications for Wakefield.

While most partners found 'National enterprise' the most plausible account of Wakefield's future, they disliked most of its implications. Partners found the 'Global responsibility' scenario most appealing, although they were highly attracted by elements of the 'Local stewardship' scenario. These two scenarios were considered the most favourable to citizens, while 'World markets' was considered the most favourable for business.

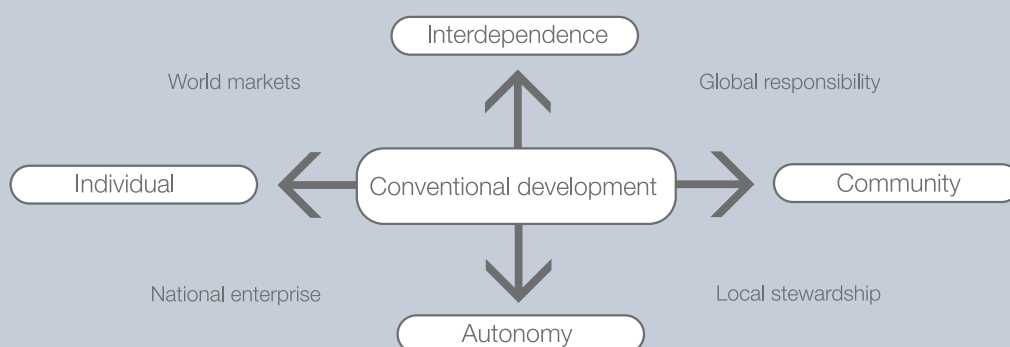
**A vision for the future**

The Wakefield Futures Programme is integral to the continuing development of the district's community strategy, as well as wider strategic planning by local agencies. The programme gives local partners a baseline to both identify emerging issues and measure success. The next stages of the programme are also intended to share this learning with other local leaders, groups and citizens. This will ensure both a wider input into the policy-making process and greater local knowledge of issues and actions needed to ensure the long term economic, social and environmental sustainability of the Wakefield district.

The success of the scenario-planning workshops has given the impetus to take forward scenarios and other visioning techniques into the wider strategic and service-planning arenas. Wakefield Futures is a key part of a continuing programme of work which will allow local leaders to more accurately sense future developments, align resources and energy to meeting future challenges, and respond speedily and efficiently.

This 'sense, align, respond' approach is at the heart of the districts shared approach to ensuring sustainable communities across Wakefield. The Wakefield Futures vision is to build knowledge communities – communities whose citizens, leaders and public servants have a shared understanding of their challenges and of the actions needed to ensure those challenges are met.

Chart 3: Four scenarios for Wakefield's future





# Milton Keynes Council

By **Isobel McCall**, leader



Leadership of place means something very different to every council leader in the land. Leading a community requires the ability to respond to the context in which that community finds itself and requires different skills in different places at different times.

As the leader of Milton Keynes Council, the city that has experienced the most rapid growth across the UK in the last 30 years and is now embarking on plans to double itself again in the next 30 years, leadership of place has great and very special significance for me. We are literally and physically constructing a place. The consequences of getting it wrong are enough to keep you awake at night. The decisions we are taking now to plan, design and build our place will affect how people live in the future, how the community operates and the city's long-term sustainability and success.



At the same time as leading the development of 70,000 new homes and all the infrastructure that goes alongside them, we have to meet the needs of almost a quarter of a million people who already live in our borough, and over 120,000 people who work there, who all have very passionate views about the place they live or work in and what it should be like in the future. If the council leadership can't take the people with it as plans are developed for the city, there could be thirty years of political turbulence to come.

Living in Milton Keynes is very different from living in almost any other UK city, because of the way it is designed and because of the decisions that the city's forefathers (mostly planners) took at the end of the 1960s to deliver their vision of a modern place. I am very conscious that the council and the community are now facing the consequences of those early decisions, and that we need to carefully think through the possible future consequences of the decisions that we take as we plan the next phase of development.

The original Milton Keynes design means that people live in an estate, or grid square as we know them, with anything up to 2,000 houses in each. Each estate has clearly defined boundaries of swathes of landscaping, trees and fast dual carriageways, known as grid roads, separating it from the neighbouring estates. This makes estates attractive to live in and separates residential areas from busy traffic but makes the delivery of effective public transport economically unviable and means that residents have to rely on private cars. This is clearly not environmentally or socially sustainable (not everyone owns a car) and the grid roads, which cars whizz around on at 70 mph most of the day will literally become grid-locked during rush hours in just a few years.

From the people or community perspective, my perception is that there isn't the same sense of community and level of connection between residents in an estate that you tend to find in the older and more traditional small towns and villages in the Milton Keynes Borough. However, residents love the Milton Keynes way of life and defend it fiercely against attacks, which usually come from people who have never visited it. According to polls it is far more popular with its residents than most UK towns, with satisfaction ratings of around 90%.

Residents often have a community of interest rather than identifying with a geographic locality within Milton Keynes. Clubs and voluntary organisations are flourishing and exist in far higher proportions per 1,000 population than elsewhere in the country. Milton Keynes residents are clearly not closing their front door when they come home from work and isolating themselves from the rest of the community, but are choosing to meet with like-minded people who share the same interests, rather than the people in their street, who they often don't feel the need to know. Of course, apart from virtual groups who keep in touch electronically, this means getting in the car and travelling somewhere else in the city.

What I understand as a community may be different from what leaders of other cities are trying to create in their localities. We all operate in different settings and contexts and what works in other cities may not work in mine. Unfortunately Government policy does not take account of differences in context and tries to push us all in the same direction when it comes to new developments. Government rules on density, sustainability, transport and other planning policies are the same wherever you live. Milton Keynes is under strong pressure to build its new developments to much higher densities than the very low ones used in the original estates, to build with much lower parking standards and to design as if the car is irrelevant. This takes no account of our innovative context, of what makes Milton Keynes attractive and a big success story.



Many of the early Milton Keynes estates don't comply with the latest good practice in urban design and planning although they were award-winning in their time. Local residents don't care about the latest urban design theories and if anyone even breathes a suggestion of making changes to their estates, or any changes to the current Milton Keynes concept they are challenged by huge public opposition. Residents have clearly bought into the innovative Milton Keynes concept but don't want to innovate anymore and want to keep everything as it is!

Opposition to change poses huge leadership challenges as we plan the next 30 years of growth. City leaders and planners have learned from what was done before and are planning things differently to ensure the city is sustainable. We are building larger residential areas each with a critical mass capable of supporting public and private services, shops and schools. All the facilities will be located together so that the opportunities for people to meet up and connect with each other are increased and the need to get in the car is reduced. Public transport is at the heart of the plans. We are planning a modern version of the traditional small town High Street concept.

But is that what people want in our New City? The plans for the next few years of development are being met with hostility as they are different from the existing grid roads and grid squares that current residents live in. The Council leadership and the English Partnerships body responsible for developing the new areas are under attack for daring to change Milton Keynes although the reasons for the changes are good ones. If you try suggesting to people who moved to a city designed for the car that they should get on the bus and leave their car at home, you are attacked in the local press for the next month!

In the Milton Keynes leadership of place context we are not only having to design and build a new place, but having to persuade reluctant residents of the need to design the extension of their place differently from the original one they have grown to love. This doesn't mean ripping up the original blueprint for Milton Keynes and

starting again. It means building on the city's unique selling points, such as the huge swathes of green spaces and easy grid road movement but also addressing the aspects of the original design that don't work 40 years on. The dilemma is that these popular unique selling points cause other problems such as reliance on the car and potential exclusion from jobs and services for the 20% of residents who don't have access to their own transport.

One thing that all councils share in leadership of place is a delicate balancing act. The elements that are being balanced are different in different places. In Milton Keynes, we have to juggle the long-term success of the city against the views of existing residents about what makes Milton Keynes a very successful and popular city in 2006. We have to be careful not to destroy what makes the city successful while trying to adapt it so that it is sustainable in the long-term. If we change the unique selling points so that residents and businesses no longer want to invest in coming to Milton Keynes, or existing ones leave, we will have destroyed the success story. However, if we don't change anything, as we build more homes we will be building in long-term problems such as grid-locked grid roads and a two-speed city with a marked contrast between public housing estates built in the seventies where there is already deprivation, and shiny new estates.

Leading the building of new communities containing 70,000 new homes is challenging enough, but unlike our city forefathers we are not starting from a blank sheet, or from greenfields and very few residents. We have to ensure that the new communities that we build integrate with the existing city in every sense of the word, build on its success, and don't destroy it. Even more challenging is responding to the existing community's views about what we are doing to their city, and trying to persuade people that no city can stay as it is for ever and has to evolve like any living organism or it will die. We have to take on board their views, take them along with us but keep the long-term sustainability of the city firmly in our sights.





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