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URBAN REGENERATION

WHAT CAN WE LEARN
FROM THE UK
EXPERIENCE?

You may equate the term 'urban regeneration' with the other side of the world and, when you hear it, imagine wholesale clearance of slum areas full of boarded-up buildings, followed by complete redevelopment. But regeneration is a term that is increasingly being used here.

Slum clearance is of course one version of urban regeneration. Urban regeneration also includes what we are more likely to call, here in New Zealand, "revitalisation", which could involve smaller scale or more incremental physical improvements to an area. The Mainstreet programmes which are now in place all over the country are a good example of this form of urban regeneration. These programmes usually involve a significant focus on economic issues, particularly through the revitalisation of retail, entertainment and arts/cultural activities in town centres and main streets.

A third form of urban regeneration is that promoted by growth management strategies, such as the Auckland Regional Growth Strategy and associated territorial authority strategies, for example Auckland City's Liveable Communities Strategy. These promote urban intensification rather than greenfield development and they also tend to focus on change to the physical environment and built form.

Regeneration, to be a success, must be supported by opportunities for economic and employment growth, and opportunities for a vibrant social and cultural environment. This is one of the main lessons from my experience in the United Kingdom. Regeneration is more than just upgrading the physical environment of an area to hopefully spark private investment.

Urban regeneration in the UK is often a response to poverty and social degradation, conditions which are beginning to creep back into our towns and cities. As economic growth rates between NZ towns and cities begin to vary considerably, along with marked differences in economic and social conditions within some cities, do we also need to start thinking about economic regeneration more seriously? (See photo 1)

THE UNITED KINGDOM SITUATION

The central government in the UK is very

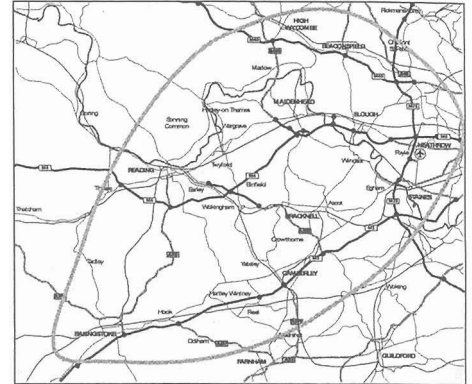


Figure 1.1 Thames Valley Multi-Modal Study: Study Area

supportive of urban regeneration initiatives. There are a number of different funding programmes which can be applied to for obtaining urban regeneration funds. Funding bids are usually made by partnerships formed between the public and private sectors, and local voluntary and community organisations. Many local authorities in the UK with a reasonable proportion of urban land within their jurisdiction have an urban regeneration department or officer.

An example of one of the UK funding programmes, which is now at its tail-end, is the government's regionally administered Single Regeneration Budget (SRB). This was a seven-year programme which began in 1994. The SRB provided financial resources to support regeneration initiatives in the UK carried out by local regeneration partnerships. Its priority was to enhance the quality of life of local people in areas of need by reducing the gap between deprived and other areas, and between different groups. The SRB programme involved 6 rounds of funding, through which over 900 schemes were approved, worth over 5.5 billion in SRB support.

URBAN REGENERATION IN HARINGEY, LONDON

In the London Borough of Haringey, funding has been secured from various funding programmes including the central government's SRB and New Deal for Communities (NDC) programmes, as well as from the European Commission's European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). These provide funding for different geographical areas within the borough



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and each has specific funding criteria. For example, the promotion of economic development through funding of improvements to commercial buildings is a criteria for one of the ERDF's funding streams. Within the broad criteria set for each funding programme, the Council can put forward for assessment those projects which will further its local policies.

Within Haringey Borough, the range of projects which have obtained funding from the various programmes are many and varied. Funding is available for both capital-based projects and revenue-based projects (eg someone being employed or an event being organised). Urban regeneration officers at the council will generally work within a particular geographical area which enables them to build relationships with people working and living in these areas. Funding is used for community-driven projects which have a tangible impact on the environment (in its broadest sense). (See photo 2)

The main shopping and entertainment centre within Haringey Borough is Wood Green town centre, which is one of the largest centres in North London. Over the course of a number of years in the 1990s it was given a major cash injection from central government and the

private sector which enabled a complete rebuild of much of the heart of the centre. These physical works were supported by the employment of a Town Centre Manager and two 'ambassadors', who work with retailers, the police and other organisations to improve the safety of the centre and market it to the wider public. What was a dilapidated, unsafe and underused area, with a very poor reputation, became a regionally important and well-used centre servicing North London. More and more people continue to be attracted back to it, many of whom never would have considered visiting Wood Green town centre in the past.

In an adjacent part of the Borough, funding is being used to employ neighbourhood wardens for a housing estate with a history of social problems such as racial tension and vandalism. The wardens liaise between the residents and the police. The neighbourhood is now a safer place in which to live.

Other funding was used for the upgrading of an existing park, which included physical improvements such as new path lighting, playground equipment, and an entrance sign. This project was also very proactive in terms of providing benefits to youth. There were existing basketball courts within the park which were already well used and in conjunction with an organisation called "Midnight Basketball" (which provides coaching and sports equipment), funds were used to provide lights for the courts so that they could be used after dark.

In most cases, an urban regeneration officer will either respond to a clear need for a particular project which has been expressed by the community, or will look at ways of addressing a particular issue or problem that has arisen. The officer will have responsibility for gathering together the funding, which will be a combination of central government funding and 'match-funding' which generally comes from the local authority itself, from private interests and/or from community organisations.

The urban regeneration officer prepares the project brief which is considered by the intermediary assessing body (sitting between the local authority and central government). This brief must specify particular outputs and milestones which the project seeks to achieve. Consultation with the community is usually carried out in preparing the proposal.

The officer may decide to set up, administer and chair a Steering Group, which is particularly useful if the project is likely to go on for longer

than a year, as stakeholders or 'sponsors' from the wider community are beneficial to keep the momentum and interest going. The urban regeneration officer is responsible for undertaking the day to day management of the project and liaising with other Council staff, contractors, other project funders and so on. A more mundane but necessary aspect of the role is carrying out monthly monitoring to keep track of expenditure and the achievement of outputs and milestones, and reporting this to the funding bodies.

NZ LOOKING FORWARD

The need for urban regeneration in NZ may not currently be as great as in the UK, but it will become increasingly important if our urban areas are to remain economically, socially, culturally and environmentally supportive of, and attractive to, our communities.

To date, we have taken a very 'physical' approach to revitalisation, perhaps reflecting the emphasis of the Resource Management Act. The focus has been on zoning and other planning rules and investment in 'hard' infrastructure like new roads to help an area redevelop. Some shifts are becoming apparent in this approach but funding of more broadly-based regeneration schemes remains a road block. User-pays often means that a poor community cannot generate the cash to fund a major scheme. (See photo 3)

The establishment of the role of Minister of Urban Affairs is a promising start on the road to enhancing the importance of the urban environment in NZ. If the community and policy-makers in NZ decide to further support urban regeneration, then a strong funding base and appropriate mechanisms for funding - including methods of application and how approval is determined - will be critical to its success. □

FOOTNOTES

1. From the website of the office of the Deputy Prime Minister, UK:
www.urban.odpm.gov.uk

Jayne Klein recently returned from the UK where she worked as an urban regeneration officer at the London Borough of Haringey