

## Townscape in Focus: Challenges and Opportunities

### Townscape, Conservation and Economics

Stephen Wright - John Lewis Partnership

## The Challenge for Developers

- How to balance competing requirements:
  - The heritage agenda
  - Climate change, energy efficiency and renewable energy
  - Accessibility
  - Good design
  - Place-making, town centre vitality, regeneration etc
  - Security, crime prevention etc
- ...and still deliver an economically viable scheme

## Townscapes in Trouble (1992)

- Many issues remain the same, but new considerations need to be incorporated:
  - On-site renewable energy
  - Sustainable construction standards
  - "Designing out" terrorism and crime
- These considerations threaten to create new tensions with the heritage agenda
- Increasing cost of development

## Project economics

- Each scheme has to stack up in its own right:
  - Will the revenue from our new store cover the costs of design, build, servicing, operation, repairs, stock, staff, etc etc PLUS a reasonable return on investment.
- If the demands placed on development are too high, either:
  - Development won't happen; or
  - Development happens elsewhere
- But exercise due caution against developers who plead poverty!

## The need for Councils to consider economics

- Draft PPS4 (Dec 07):

"... local planning authorities should use a wide evidence base to understand both existing business needs and likely changes in the market, to prepare policies to support sustainable economic development in their area."
- ...and...
- "Due to the increasing demands on the land available for development, local planning authorities should seek to make the most efficient and effective use of land and buildings, especially vacant or derelict buildings (including historic buildings). They should also take into account changing working patterns, economic data including price signals and the need for policies which reflect local circumstances."

## Example 1 – PPS6

- Draft PPS6 proposes replacement of the "need" test with a more detailed "impact" test.
- Only the sequential test will remain as a "gateway" test
- If a town centre site is "unviable" the site can be discounted from the sequential analysis
- The risk is that "viability" will be used as an excuse to overlook expensive, difficult and long-term town centre sites in favour of cheaper, quicker, easier to deliver edge / out of centre

## Example 2 – The Merton Rule

- Requirements for on-site renewable energy provision becoming more common
- Policies need to be applied flexibly:
  - Do the technologies suit the building / location, especially where heritage or conservation concerns are high?
  - Do the acceptable technologies provide the sort of energy needed by the development?
  - Are there better ways to achieve the same ends? Sustainable construction, off-site generation, community generation etc?
  - Does the cost of provision make a good scheme unviable?

## The need for a joint approach

- New development in town centres is key to vitality and viability, and sustainable economic growth
- Developers, LPAs, and consultees must work together to balance the competing demands
- Honesty, openness and consistency
- Commitment of resources (e.g. external consultants)
- Developers need to be responsible and demonstrate buy-in to the heritage agenda
- Greater use of Planning Delivery Agreements?

## Creating the right environment for the delivery of good schemes

- Certainty
- Consistency
- Clarity
- Engagement of local authorities and statutory consultees
- Recognition of the difficulties in bringing forward deliverable, viable schemes

## Summary and Conclusions

- Heritage and conservation are important but need to be balanced with the aims of sustainable economic growth, place-making and regeneration
- Each scheme has to be viable in its own right but developers must be responsible and take a long term view
- Councils need to take into account economic factors and viability issues when pursuing the heritage agenda
- Greater resourcing of LPAs is needed, with increased funding and training from Government

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