



RETROFITTING NEIGHBOURHOODS

WEBINAR | 13TH OCTOBER 2020

Brian Robson introduced the session, explaining that the series so far has shown the appetite for NHC members to decarbonise their housing stock, finding that it is a case of 'if and not when'. The Decent Homes programmes made great steps to retrofit stock but stopped short of enhancing the wider neighbourhoods, improving the standards of living for residents.

Brenda explained that the approach she would discuss is very much centred on neighbourhoods and alternative energy usage will be very pertinent post-COVID. As a general principle in fuel poverty, she explained that both the running costs and importantly capital expenditure must be considered in reducing costs. The home cannot be made more energy efficient without this capital expenditure and it cannot be the responsibility of the fuel poor to fix this. Transport poverty is also a very important factor to consider, explaining that there are obstacles in providing solutions for those who do not own a car. The solutions to this can be unclear. It is difficult to establish a coherent idea of how many people in the UK are 'travel poor'. Recent statistics suggest 24% of households in the UK do not own a car, rising to 50% when only considering social housing residents. This results in a whole group of people for whom travelling around to amenities is difficult, with those in rural areas travelling half the distance that better off households do, reducing access to health facilities for example. Poorer households who do maintain a car find their regular budget highly stretched.

The 15-minute neighbourhood was explored, a concept by which the main facilities that people require are within a 15-minute walk of your home. These facilities include access to cash, services such as hairdressers, libraries, vets, procurement of food and access to green spaces etc. These are of course locality and household specific, with different needs for everyone. In order to support the development of these neighbourhoods there must be a focus of safe routes to schools, with new greenways and comprehensive bus routes for students to travel to secondary school. There must be more on-demand community transport options, so residents can dial a local bus service or be taken to hospital appointments by car. Deliveries of online goods must be consolidated, reducing the total number of journeys completed by diesel vans. We also need excellent broadband for at home working.

The benefits of this are becoming increasingly clear recently. There are a stronger sense of community and more people can work from home. The programme will support local economies, with less money, food and energy exported, revitalising communities. There will be less air pollution and more walking, with car usage heavily reduced in urban areas. In so far as climate change there will be extra energy costs domestically, but they will be offset by reductions in travel costs and the 'closure of the office'.

Brian identified the projects ability to tie in many different agendas within housing, particularly the premiums that lower income households regularly face in housing and living costs which are exacerbating by effects across the board. Local authority members support cheaper public transport options and cite the reduction of services in rural areas.

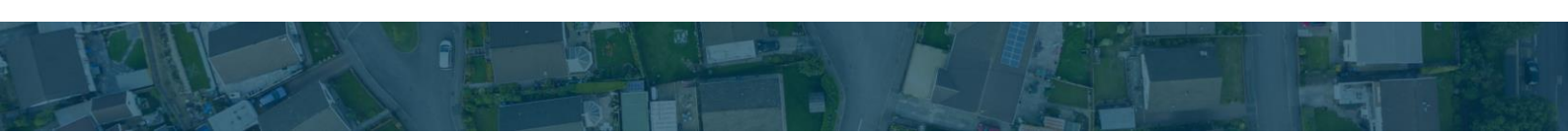
Brenda identified locally-sourced heating solutions, particularly those tied into partnership schemes as be an effective way to tailor schemes to best suite their specific infrastructure. She cited the removal of the 'rat-run' as crucial to the central aims of the plans, reducing the number of idling cars, particularly near schools. During the COVID pandemic we've all found that we are eager to increase our levels of walking and exercise and that appetite to ditch the car may be high.

Helen Grimshaw is a senior consultant on sustainability at URBED.

She shared findings on Cumbria's flood resilience plan. URBED's work varies between spatial planning on a regional scale and down to the levels of streets and buildings, looking at how the latter informs planning at the larger levels. She identified post-occupancy and building performance evaluation as being central to this.

Climate change means we can expect drier, hotter summer and wetter winters. Overheating is happening now in new-build and existing homes. We can see from monitoring data and resident testimony that high temperatures are felt within the home. Overheating guidance commissions by the Good Home Alliance is a great way to consider design principles. Geography and the location of the site matter, as well as the type of scheme and the heating systema and ventilation type.

Flooding events are happening more regularly, increasingly exacerbated with surface run-off issues. In Cumbria many were unable to move back into their homes a year after the 2015 floods, with



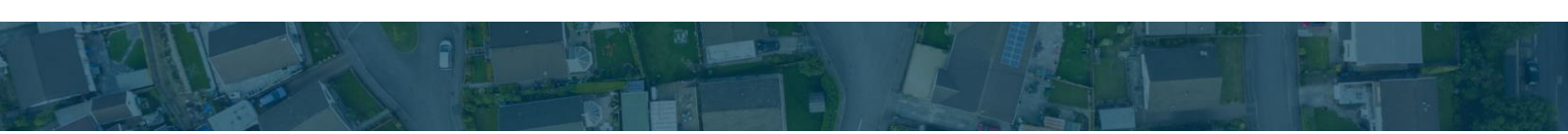
average insurance claims above £50,000. URBED's research look at how the environmental costs of floods could be reduced in the case of the Cumbrian floods, as well as how grant funding could be best placed in future. The dominant approach too often results in replacement efforts to flood damage, rather than introducing more resilient approaches, in cases letting the water in but changes interior finishes so that the water can be removed and the homes more easily repaired.

We must also think beyond the building, with community level approaches identified as better preparing towns for flood events. We must view landscape not as a 'bolt-on' at the end but considering biodiversity, removing run off and allowing natural cooling of urban environments. We must strive to not work in silos and introduce holistic approaches.

Catherine Simmons is project manager at Homebaked Community Land Trust, a great example of community response to failed regeneration. The community felt left behind, and a community land trust retained the assets for their benefit. On the site of a former bakery it was decided that the site should revert to this use, employing local residents. The vision for the site is to develop the terrace street before moving further afield within the community. A mixed-use development seeks to create space for quality living and working. URBED were appointed to work with local residents to identify what that meant for them, creating a 'buzz' in the space with quality housing and local businesses. As property value is low it can be difficult to produce design that makes such projects viable, as well as delivering on its regenerating targets.

Homebaked CLT will progress to register as an RP and is currently partnering with Your Housing Group. As the site is in a low value areas loan-to-value ratios mean that funding secured in this way will only take them so far. Much grant funding is focusing on COVID-related issues so normal funding streams are harder to find at the moment. Catherine explained that there are barriers to completing high quality projects in low-value neighbourhoods. This project has seen the employment of people who are furthest from securing jobs and upskilled. It has seen a multiplying effect for local spending and as such we must strive to create an environment where the benefits of such projects can be identified, and funding then made easier to secure.

Stephen Broadbent leads Bradford Council's Design Quality Funding programme. He spoke on the council's [Homes and Neighbourhoods: A Guide to Designing in Bradford](#) document. He explained that Bradford are one of the geographically largest urban local authorities in the nation with a very



diverse district and the youngest city in the county in terms of demographics. Key challenges to their plan include health, particularly child health; an aging population; air quality, particularly in certain parts of the district; inequality in the most deprived areas; and climate change.

Stephen identified Saltaire as a great neighbourhood as having a connected network of streets, with a flourishing high street, great local facilities, good transport route, green spaces, access to the countryside, employment opportunities, variety of housing and a distinctive character. Whilst this seems an obvious way to structure a community it is in practice rare to find. While in the last few decades we've seen many great developments, we haven't seen this on a neighbourhood level as such. Often developments tend not to connect well to each other, or to local transport links. They rely on the car, with open spaces not particularly well thought out or multifunctional.

The design guide considers the need for an increased need for new housing going forward and as such has plans for new neighbourhoods, though the bulk of work will be spent developing existing neighbourhoods. Engaging across communities and involvement with wider stakeholders are crucial within the project. A holistic view of creating successful places is key, with biodiversity, mixture of tenure, open space, and green streets major criteria to consider.

There are challenges found in the viability of development within certain parts of the district. In addition, cuts to local authority budgets, particularly for maintenance, threatens the council's ability to facilitate function green space. The council is also looking at the amounts of space needed to accommodate the car, particularly around parking. Design skills are key, with plans often drawn up without the vision of dedicated architects and designers.

Stephen explained that involving house builders as part of producing the guide was useful in ensuring that the guide was created pragmatically and was deliverable. Developers are supportive of their aims on interconnect and green spaces, but clear future maintenance must be outlined from the beginning. It can often be unviable for developers to take responsible for this in low-market areas. Brian asked about modern methods of constructions, and the benefits that embracing them can have on Bradford's plans. Stephen explained that any efficiencies would be welcomed and that the approach could aid the delivery of their plan.

Brian asked how we can bring all parties together and ensure that all aims are met as we retrofit homes. Brenda identified funding constraints as an issue, with the role of the local authority for example being key to this. Catherine explained that their work with the local authority had been very positive, with the property granted to the community land trust at nil cost. She reiterated that the community had been key to getting the project off the ground, but that this was enabled by a

local authority who listened to them. Stephen explained that their overall district plan, which centres around health, environment, and inclusion, tied into housing and neighbourhoods. As such tapping into pre-existing aspirations meant that it was easy to get buy in from elected members.

