

URBAN ENVIRONMENTS WELL-BEING AND HEALTH- SEMINAR 31 MARCH 2004

The Royal Commission's next Study will be on the urban environment. As part of the scoping of the Study, the Commission held a seminar to gather views from interested parties on the themes that it should address. The programme for the day is at **annex A** and a list of participants is at **annex B**.

What follows is a record of the presentations and discussions during the day.

Sir Tom Blundell, Chairman of the Royal Commission: Introduction

The Commission, having announced its intention to study the urban environment in November 2003, has been scoping the study, with this seminar being intended to contribute to that process. You will see from the title of the seminar that we have further defined our study as covering well-being and health. This Seminar is being held as part of the process of deciding the scope of the Commission's study. Our speakers are experts in their fields, and we have asked each speaker to give a short presentation on what they, as individuals, believe are the issues that the Commission should address in this study.

Urban issues are becoming of critical importance around the world. Urbanisation is expected to continue, with close to half of the world's population already living in urban areas and some cities now reaching unprecedented sizes. The effects of urban environments on well-being and health need to be understood if we are to provide quality urban environments for ourselves and for future generations.

Urban areas face many environmental challenges that have a direct impact on the standards of well-being and health. 80% of the UK population live in towns and cities. Our urban areas face many environmental challenges that have a direct impact on the standard of living and the health of the majority of the population. We need to tackle the environmental problems that people actually experience in the places where they live and work. The urban environment has significant problems that affect our health and impose high economic costs. The Commission believes that a new, more holistic approach to address these problems in an integrated way is required. This is not just about pollution. There is a growing body of research that analyses and establishes the relationships between local environmental quality, people's health, their fear of crime and social and economic vibrancy of the community.

Dirty and dangerous places encourage graffiti, vandalism and anti-social behaviour, which in turn undermine public confidence in them and lead people to avoid them. An unattractive and threatening local urban environment encourages people to use their cars for short journeys and to move to a better area if they can. It can discourage investment and lead to abandonment and dereliction. A high quality local environment is a major influence in persuading people to visit a place, spend money there and invest in it. Conversely, a low quality environment can lead to places becoming stigmatised and will drive people, businesses and investment away. This sort of spiral decline is starkly highlighted in some of our poorest neighbourhoods in the UK, where badly designed, managed and maintained public spaces combine with high crime rates, poor housing and joblessness to sustain poverty. There is a strong relationship between levels of deprivation in an area and the condition of the

local environment. Poor local environmental quality, also affects the physical health of communities. Places that are strewn with litter and rotting rubbish attract vermin and disease. Noise, air and light pollution affect the physical and psychological well-being of residents, while traffic can reduce the amount to exercise people take. Increasingly, the health benefits of good local environments are being realised. We instinctively know both good and bad urban environments when we see them but we rarely define the criteria by which we judge them. People want their environments to be clean and safe.

PROFESSOR SIR MICHAEL MARMOT

Social Environment and Health

The presentation examined the social and economic determinants of health. Health, in terms of life expectancy, varied according to where you lived in a city. Mortality was correlated to social class, those in lower social classes having higher mortality rates. Poor health was correlated to material deprivation and household weekly income- unskilled manual workers tended to live in the most deprived areas. Bromley was the best place to live in London with respect to life expectancy.

The Whitehall study of Civil Servants correlated poor physical health with low grade positions in the Service. Also levels of stress (waist/hip ratios of individuals) were greater in those who lived in most deprived areas.

Those living in poor housing (e.g. damp/too small) experienced the greatest number of burglaries; and reported lack of neighbourhood quality in terms of factors such as litter, noise and lack of facilities.

Social cohesion related to structural (the physical environment) and cognitive factors. Neighbourhood social cohesion (family ties/trust/attachment/tolerance) and self-rated assessment of health were all correlated. Structural aspects such as informal ties generated trust, integration into the wider community gave a sense of attachment and generated tolerance and respect of others; and participation in organised groups helped with providing practical solutions when problems arose. Family ties were related to ill-health and lower social spectrums.

Those living in high quality areas had generally better health. Neighbourhood infrastructure, in terms of the physical environment, health services availability and access to financial services were correlated to health.

The most important element in terms of well-being and health was the social environment. The physical environment could be equated to the social environment. Litter, noise etc, placed a strain on the social environment. Concentration of poverty does matter.

DAVID BIRLEY

Ordering disorder: the impact of neighbourhood nuisances on community well being and what to do about it!

The presentation covered definitions and data on local environmental quality; the prevalence of community safety and poor environmental quality issues among more socio-economically

deprived communities; and described the role and potential of effective neighbourhood management in tackling these issues using case studies in effective neighbourhood management of the urban environment.

The environment was described in terms of traffic, waste, air pollution, vandalism and open spaces rather than open countryside. Nuisances and disorder of urban life affected those living in deprived urban. Environmental problems facing the green open country side were essentially the product of urban demands: cheap food, affordable housing, congestion free motorways for access, recreation and amenity. Getting the urban environment right could help not just the 80% of the UK population living in it but also the remaining 20% who live in rural areas.

A 2002 Environment Agency study showed that urban dwellers regarded crime, vandalism, litter and traffic as the major problems followed by noise. All these problems were less bothersome to rural dwellers. Despite these problems 78% of urban dwellers reported that they were satisfied with their local area.

A community recycling enterprise and tenant management organisation initiatives were given as examples of how such schemes can make a positive contribution to urban environmental improvement and to well being. Also the concept and practice of neighbourhood management was described where the discretionary resources of a range of local authorities and possibly of local community organisations were pooled to be spent on locally identified priorities.

It was proposed that the Commission should undertake detailed scrutiny of the current performance of such initiatives and push for wider recognition of the potential of these schemes by government. If effective ways could be found to tackle the nuisances in urban communities there could be some major pay-offs both in terms of social and environmental policy, environmental justice.

JOHN MCGREGOR

Business in the community; its positive impact on society

Northern Ireland Business in the Community (NIBIC) worked closely with government as well as businesses. The organisation mission was to make a positive impact on society. It promoted corporate responsibility and practiced a policy of "Name and Fame".

Companies were under growing pressures from government and regulators. In addition, they were exposed to media scrutiny and societal expectations. They needed to adhere to standards, provide information on their products, and be open and transparent in their dealings. They needed to attract and retain the best staff.

Northern Ireland's ecological footprint (minimum area need to sustainably maintain consumption) had led to the development of company footprints. NIBIC promoted responsible business practices with respect to the environment and workplace, and its social and economic impacts. In the workplace the focus of companies should be on diversity, developing the potential of individuals, and on the overall health and wellbeing of the workforce. The social impact of NIBIC's activities was on communities, education, and employability of those in the communities. Sixty per cent of graduates in Northern Ireland were females but a major issue was the role of the female in the workplace were females

were not proportionally represented in the higher managerial positions. Incorporating diversity in the workplace was an uphill struggle. Developing peoples' full potential impacted on their health and well-being. The feel-good factor had pay-back added value to employers.

Companies were encouraged to allow their employees to undertake voluntary activities such as donating blood. This was an example of having an impact in the community whilst teambuilding within the organisations themselves.

The development of Laganside site had been successful because it has created a "feel good factor" which in turn promoted delivery. NIBIC encouraged the development of effective partnerships in the community.

In Northern Ireland there was an Integrated Circuit Technology seclusion issue. NIBIC provided ICT education for use in businesses, education and communities. The majority of companies in Northern Ireland were SMEs, employing less than 10 people. These SMEs were largely dependent on European funding which was being withdrawn resulting in a loss of about £600m of funds.

At the end of the day, the role of NIBIC was to "network" competences and get people jobs within the context of what was possible. And the results indicated progress: companies were investing money in communities; professional firms provided advice; SMEs were being supported; employers were investing in education and were committed to improving opportunities for women.

DUNCAN McLAREN

Rural idyll, urban buzz, suburban hell? Environmental justice and the city

There presentation addressed:

- the distribution of environmental quality and impacts across urban environments
- some historical points about cities, resources and justice
- how different urban environments enabled or constrained sustainable lifestyles, and in particular the scope for enhanced non-financial well-being
- implications of cities for international and intergenerational environmental justice

Future urban policy should encompass sustainability indicators and targets, taxation, rights and accountability mechanisms.

In the past cities were productive in themselves and there was a dependence on the available work force. This was no longer the case. The organisation of space in the city was a reflection of the financial power and there was only one city centre. Halifax in Belfast employs over 2000 people of which only about 150 came from Belfast. The footprint of a city and the scale of the city were important considerations. There were different footprints for different lifestyles. Suburbia are usually larger than urban, London being an exception.

Every one should have the right to a healthy environment. But many of the adverse effects on the environment result from international as well as national activities e.g. chemicals and global warming. Environmental pollution arises because of products being produced and

consumed. Transport impacts on the environment. Environmental demands are in effect commercial- they have to be paid for and there was a blurring of public and private zones.

Health impacts in cities have psycho-sociological effects. Environmental considerations met the terms of developers and not those of the individual. Leisure facilities had to be paid for. Mobility could reverse adverse socio-economic factors. Mobility was normally seen in terms of the car driven by a single male, leaving the women in the deprived area.

In reality we can not return to a rural lifestyle but the urban lifestyle could be made more efficient. By clustering towns around airports, more privatisation and gated communities, we create more “new needs”. Social enterprise solutions compete against high property values.

Policy interventions should include:

Targeting development to local needs and not putting those of the developers first
Redistribution of tax to counter health inequality
Give communities more rights and make corporations more responsible

We have the opportunity to create space, to harness creatively the forces making for urban differentiation ... to seize these opportunities we have to confront the forces that create cities as alien environments, that push cities in directions alien to our individual or collective purpose'

David Harvey, Social Justice and the City

BRIAN HANNA

Urban Environments, well-being and health – the Belfast perspective

Health is a big political issue. Defined poor health using a number of definitions from that of the Prime Minister's 1999 Statement on poor health to that of Derek Wanless* in February 2004 on “Securing good health for the whole population”. Essential reading Marmot's Facts and Figures.

The conflicts within Ireland present the country with difficulties over and above those of other countries in the UK. In Northern Ireland the Loyalist/Nationalist elements had resulted in the election of 51 members spanning 6 political parties. Deprivation was not sectarian.

In 1900 Belfast housing was connected to industrial labour requirements. By 1973 a third of the housing stock was in disrepair and people began to move out of the city. The city centre declined in importance and there were high pollution levels and poor education provision.

The Nobel Index of Deprivation in Northern Ireland (a statistical measure of deprivation across the 577 wards) showed that Belfast (which has 51 wards) suffered from health, education, social environment and child deprivation between over 50-30% compared to other worst wards in Northern Ireland. The indicators for health deprivation were described and the 10 most deprived wards in Northern Ireland identified.

The Laggan Site City Corporation was responsible for a major regeneration programme. The Belfast Gasworks was presented as a case study to show how clean up and environmental improvement can be achieved.

Urban regeneration in Belfast needed to demonstrate that both political camps received benefits from the developments. In reality job opportunities overrode sustainability issues. This meant local jobs for local people. But when local people have not the appropriate qualifications urban regeneration bypasses local communities. Good political leadership is imperative- Barcelona is a good example of how this has been achieved.

Regeneration must not bypass local communities. Local people must be at the heart of the process of regeneration. To improve local environmental quality an integrated long-term approach must be employed. As there was currently no Assembly in Northern Ireland, the Civil Service Departments were currently isolated from the political scene. In the past there had been cross-cutting activities across the Departments so that problems were addressed holistically.

In England, local authorities can promote social well-being and health under the 2000 legislation. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has demonstrated how local authorities can use different routes to achieve regeneration. It is recommended that the Royal Commission encourages the use of these powers to get urban regeneration moving in tandem with the needs of local communities.

ANNE ELLAWAY

People, Places and Health

Recent research has tended to show that although "who you are" explains a lot of area variation in health outcomes, there is also an effect of "where you live". This has been found for a range of mental and physical well-being measures. Health is generally worse in locally deprived areas. Case studies of two socio-demographically contrasting areas in Glasgow, one more affluent and the other more deprived were explored with respect to factors leading to poor health. Factors in the local environment, together with individual resources with respect to health were studied.

Physical features of the environment shared by all residents such as air and water quality were compared with the availability of healthy environments at home, work and play (e.g. decent housing, safe play areas for children). The services provided to support people in their daily lives such as education, the socio-cultural features of a locality (political, economic, ethnic, religious history, the degree of community integration); and the reputation of an area (as perceived by residents, service or amenity planners, and investors) were also studied. It was found that physical activity encourages good physical and mental health. There were twice the number of sports/recreation facilities in affluent areas as compared to deprived areas. Yet the provision of public transport was poorer in the deprived area and far fewer households had access to cars. Those living in the deprived area were less likely to take a walk or take their children to play areas because of crime rates and play areas being less attractive than those in the affluent area. Yet children brought up in disadvantaged neighbourhoods are more likely to show behavioural disorders.

Quality of life in terms of feeling safe and secure is higher in affluent areas where, for example, people can walk about after dark without fear. In deprived areas there is more evidence of vandalism, muggings, dog mess, needles and syringes. Yet in the affluent area uneven pavements, smells and fumes and speeding traffic are seen as major problems.

There is a “stigma” attached to living in deprived areas and portrayal of this in media coverage confounds the message.

The local social and physical environment is not the only factor influencing health. Personal circumstances such as income levels and employment opportunities impact upon well-being. Not only were people in the more affluent area personally better off but the places where they live tended to be advantaged also. Conversely, in neighborhoods where residents are personally poorer and there were aspects of the built and social environment which are not conducive to good health. These were aspects which are amenable to change through investment and attention.

There are targets set for health outcomes but should not targets be set also for the social aspects of urban life?

AFTERNOON SESSION: SUMMARIES OF BREAK-OUT GROUPS' DELIBERATIONS

GROUP A

Issues discussed:

1) Correlation of phenomena like health/environment and casual mechanisms - don't make naïve predictions! – risk getting wrong policies

The correlation of phenomena such as health and environmental effects and the causal mechanisms needed identification. A clear analysis of issues was required considering how circumstances changed over time. One way forward would be to start with the physical management of issues related to urban environmental quality. Improve areas by moving out “cause”- Clinton.

Evidence suggested that unhealthy areas remained unhealthy: Glasgow was worse in terms of ill-health than Edinburgh; migrants carried their genetic characteristics with them e.g. Russians migrating to Israel. But this did not change the area situation. Socio-economic effects needed to be considered – Wales - closure of cold mines, Northern Ireland - internal conflicts. The objective should be to create self-sufficient communities.

2) Complexity – at all scales local - global - problems of teasing out variables

3) Spatial structure and integrated spatial strategies - what does ‘urban’ mean? Can't avoid defining it need to plan for whole urban environment - how do you plan your time to meet the goal of well-being?

(4) Government - governance partnerships, agencies, who can make what happen, where and when, engaging communities: opportunities and pitfalls around sustainability, planning -

resource intensive! The key government players in England were Defra, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Home Office. What was the role of agencies- who what when? How were communities involved in decision making? What was the role of non-government organisations e.g. Groundwork out of working hours- resource intensive. There was a need to create self-sufficient communities in urban environments. What works? Is it different for different communities? Studies of what works well in other countries should be drawn on e.g. Barcelona was one of the most densely populated European cities- it had very strong communities and short commuting times. There was a strong emphasis on the economy of energy use.

(5) Practice - watch elephant trap, assuming what works in one context work in another.

GROUP B

1) Sense of place - making urban areas places people choose to live

Quality of environment and influence on well-being

- What makes a high quality urban environment?
- Aesthetics or practical use of urban space
- Barrier - sale of green space
- Outcome = higher quality of urban
- Living
- Make urban environments more attractive
- Create an attractive built environment

(2) Open space - large and small

- Good quality open space is part of urban
- Regeneration
- Opportunity small public space use/development
- Barrier - Opportunity - link study to
- Educational/health opportunities
- Using health budgets on green/open space

(3) Governance - Local Strategic Partnerships and opportunity for bottom up planning e.g. allotments, skate parks, graffiti and noise

- Governance/Local governance
- Barrier ring fenced funding
- Connectivity as a planning objective
- Quality and density
- Local social accountability
- Use of external funding
- Focus on individuals (bottom up) as well as top down
- Local powers to tackle problems (congestion charge in London)

(4) Foot printing and additional issues - Waste, Sustainable water supply, Flood plain, Contaminated land, Traffic congestion.

- Footprint issues - (e.g. waste, contaminated land, sustainable water supply, flood plain building)
- Comparison tools needed.
- Understanding of impacts
- How to turn footprints into management tools

- Urban lifestyles outside of the city - not sustainable
- Urban management important - tower blocks can be sustainable

(5) Measurement of performance - Sharing comparative experience e.g. Yorkshire urban renaissance

- What gets measured gets done look at indicators etc.
- Yorkshire forward example, aspirational scheme has changed perceptions of the area
- Green flag scheme - environmental performance of cities
- Some things that can't be quantified

(6) Linking themes: Social capital, Efficiency .

- Potential for efficiency in cities (Rockefeller work in the US)
- Broad scope - philosophy to practicality
- Influence research? Flag issues to be researched
- Links between strategies

GROUP C

1) Space (and time) has different interacting guises. What are the functions of the city?

- Places where people live - (not just work)
- Decrease in commuting?
- Industry/outside city, city used for living
- Cities now have cultural role (+ services)
- Centres - people moving back in - suburbs declining but inner city not regenerating

2) Resource & substance flows: pollutants & relevance to aspect of space e.g. trees and imports/exports from cities

- Health and environment trees - lower stress - better air quality
- Lack evidence on mental well-being and physical impacts
- Inequality and epidemiological factors
- Air quality strategies need to entail benefits of green space
- Transport systems to allow mobility - commuting across cities
- Inequality & social issues dispersed in countryside and concentrated in cities

3) Social construction: function and operation, allegative and distribution of resources including environmental justice

- Cities, reflection of how society operates and functions
- displacement of local communities by regeneration
- strategic approach to green spaces

4) Existing cities: Are some surplus? Why are some good to live in?

decline in heavy industry

- move to consumer cities
- need to work with flow
- how to make environment sustainability

quantity and quality of green

spaces (+ public space in general) - community involvement and quality of life

- links to health
 - possible policies
- what is the impact of specific environmental improvements e.g. trees?
density (popn) and transport links
encouraging use of public space

5) Interventions: Is there evidence for what works in what context?

- the role of central government in bringing together partnership and policy coherence

6) Physical and social interventions, causality, flows/influences, and motivations complex:
Public vs. private and individual balance/communities.

More people on street

- walking (low cost)
- spending time in public realm (social interaction)
- encouraging social behavior
- land value role

Role of private sector - can it be better integrated?

Companies cannot be expected to operate charitably - should be out of meeting business needs

Shouldn't just be council responsibility

- need to empower individuals
- social incentive structure
- private wealth, public squalor

City centre regeneration – need to attract large sums of money - or mobilise local communities - v dependent on key individuals - not sustainable - need to locate and nurture infrastructure to encourage social entrepreneurs and community activities

Urban environmental responsibility in the community

7) How to get communities to perform in environmentally responsible way?

- Inducing civic pride- litter, cultural views, canada tidy?
- Enforcements and incentives, recycling – money back on bottles.
- Lost culture of civic pride? - Broken window theory, Kensington High St, investment in good environment changes behaviour or relocates problem? Crime usually not pre-meditated

8) Ebb & flow. Outer - inner & back: Is this a natural cycle of development? Does urban include towns?

Annex A: Agenda for day

Agenda

10.00	REGISTRATION & COFFEE
10.30	SIR TOM BLUNDELL , Chair of RCEP Welcome
10.45	STEVE ROBINSON , Facilitator Aims of Day PROFESSOR STEPHEN HOLGATE , Commissioner Introduction of Speakers
11.00	PROFESSOR SIR MICHAEL MARMOT , University College London Social Environment and Health
11.20	ANNE ELLAWAY , Medical Research Council People, Places and Health
11.40	DAVID BIRLEY , Safe Neighbourhoods Unit, London Ordering disorder: the impact of neighbourhood nuisances on community well being and what to do about it!
	COFFEE & COMFORT
12.00	BRIAN HANNA , Ulster University Urban Environments, well-being and health – a Belfast perspective
12.20	JOHN MCGREGOR , Business in the Community, NI Business in the community; its positive impact on society
12.40	DUNCAN McLAREN , Friends of the Earth, Scotland Rural idyll, urban buzz, suburban hell? Environmental justice and the city
13.00	LUNCH
13.30	STEVE ROBINSON , Facilitator Agenda Review
13.40	Brainstorming Session: 3 Groups will address <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other issues to consider • Barriers to change • Helping change happen <p>Group 1: Dr Susan Owens, Commissioner (Leader) Dr Georgina Burney (Rapporteur)</p> <p>Group 2: Professor Jeffrey Jowell, Commissioner (Leader) Mr Andy Deacon (Rapporteur)</p> <p>Group 3: Professor Paul Ekins, Commissioner (Leader) Dr Jonny Wentworth (Rapporteur)</p>
15.00	STEVE ROBINSON , Facilitator Leaders report back to Plenary
15.20	TEA
15.35	Observations, The Way Forward & Next Steps
15.55	SIR TOM BLUNDELL , Chair of RCEP Concluding remarks
16.00	END

Annex B: List of Delegates

Name of delegate	Title	Organisation
Professor Alastair Adair	Head of School of the Built Environment	Ulster University
Mr Paul Bramhill	Chief Executive Officer	Greenspace
Ms Joyce Bridges	Consultant – contracted to do some work on study for Defra	Defra
Professor David Cope	Director	Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology
Ms Carly Davidson (on behalf of) Peter Cush	Senior Scientific Officer	DOENI
Dr Scott Ferguson	Advisory Officer- Settlements	SNH
Tom Franklin	Director	Living Streets
Helen Fitzshannon		Planning Services NI
Ms Judena Goldring (attend lunch/pm)	Director	Defra NI Environmental Policy Division
Miss Caterina Goodman	Communications Officer	Groundwork NI
Simon Hughes	Urban Policy Adviser	Environment Agency
Mr Rob Lynas (on behalf of) Mr Tim Irwin (attend am/lunch)	Sustainable Development Team Leader	Defra NI Environmental Policy Division
Brian Johnson	Director of Local Environmental Research	ENCAMS
Miss Bronwen Jones	Head of Sustainable Development Unit	Defra London
Ms Nerys Jones	Chief Executive	NUFU National Urban Forestry Unit
Dr. Roy Ramsay	Director- Environmental Protection	Environment and Heritage Section, PUSS
Anna Whitworth	Public Space Policy, Liveability and Sustainable Communities Division	ODPM Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Tom Wilde	Research Manager	SNIFFER (Scotland)
John Woods	Director	Friends of the Earth (Northern Ireland)

