

Reclaiming the City

**Proposals to
Improve the Quality of Life
in the Urban Areas
of England and Wales**



Policy Paper 2

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Reclaiming the City: Summary

For the most part, towns and cities today are good places in which to live, work and visit. They offer a huge potential for the rich diversity of commerce, industry, leisure, culture, sports and caring facilities which is only possible in large communities of people. But they are also places of extremes; too often it is the other side of modern cities, displaying poverty and powerlessness, decay and despair, which is more apparent.

The heart of the Liberal Democrat approach is a positive vision of towns and cities as dynamic, supportive and exciting places. The key to this revival is the rejuvenation of communities and the empowerment of urban people to change their surroundings.

The crucial element in urban regeneration is the construction of a political framework within which local communities can exercise real power. Liberal Democrat proposals for far-reaching constitutional reform provide the context.

Power will be decentralised from central to regional and local government. *Regional governments* (and before they are set up, regional development agencies) will provide the framework for the necessary redistribution of resources from prosperous to deprived urban areas. We also see a role for a new generation of democratically accountable urban development corporations where appropriate and acceptable to enable local councils to work together and with the private sector for their mutual benefit.

Reformed local government will play the key coordinating role in urban regeneration at local level. The network of neighbourhood councils that we envisage below them will improve individuals' access to services (through, for example, 'one-stop shops') and boost participation in the political process. We see local government as the primary agent for bringing together and supporting local businesses and community and voluntary organisations in a partnership of service and enterprise; this will help to empower local people and increase their sense of involvement and participation in their local community. Community Development Trusts offer one potential way forward and should be encouraged.

In economic terms, our approach means *ensuring that urban economies are rebuilt in ways which principally benefit local people*. Past government initiatives have often succeeded only in generating subsidised profits for private sector entrepreneurs and developers, and have been obsessed with commercial property at the expense of community facilities. Liberal Democrat priorities for economic revival at the local level are:

First, *ensuring that urban residents have access to the jobs and training opportunities available*. We will invest substantially in education and training, encouraging their provision through flexible models and innovative approaches geared to the needs of urban areas. We will promote local labour agreements in urban renewal schemes.

Second, *encouraging urban economic development*, particularly by providing assistance to new and expanding businesses. Local councils should coordinate the promotion of enterprise, working together with Local Enterprise Agencies and TECs. We will establish Community Enterprise Agencies where appropriate to assist cooperatives, community enterprises and small businesses, particularly minority ethnic businesses, and to promote LETS schemes. We will free councils from controls on spending capital receipts.

Third, *channelling new funds into urban areas*. We will enable the establishment of Local Investment Agencies, mobilising local funds and channelling outside support to urban regeneration, and provide tax relief for investment in inner city areas.

Thriving communities are the key to creating and maintaining a high quality urban environment. Improvements in the physical environment, particularly if they are implemented by the local community, help people to regain pride in their area, generate respect for and care of civic amenities, and encourage individuals to regain faith in their own abilities.

In pursuit of improving urban environments, Liberal Democrats will *reform the statutory planning system* to promote sustainability and encourage conservation, and ensure that individuals and communities are fully involved at all stages. We will reform the local taxation system to replace the UBR with site value rating and introduce a new Greenfield Development Tax. Liberal Democrat councils will prioritise the maintenance and improvement of public and open space, including in particular green space. We support the provision of public art with community support.

To combat pollution and congestion from transport use, *we will invest substantially in public transport*, including in particular light rapid transit systems and improved bus networks, and encourage greater use of bicycles. *We will introduce road pricing schemes*, feeding the revenue back into local public transport, and adopt stricter traffic management measures. To reduce pollution from energy use, we will promote combined heat and power schemes and introduce *incentives for energy conservation*. We will give councils greater powers and resources to control pollution and secure environmental improvements.

Communities also provide the framework within which individuals can exercise greater control over the public services. We will aim to promote housing and community co-operatives, enabling local people to control their own services and facilities.

Many areas in the inner cities generally suffer from a lower level of public provision than the average, despite their greater need; we will develop funding formulae to reflect accurately levels of deprivation. We will combat the ghetto effect of large scale single tenure estates by developing 'urban villages' with a mix of housing, using 'partnership housing' built with varying levels of public capital subsidy. We will invest in crime prevention and create a more visible police presence in communities. We will target resources on improved primary and community health care provision. Schools in deprived inner cities need additional assistance, and pupils will be encouraged - through, for example, 'mentor' schemes - to benefit from education.

Urban Areas Today

1.0.1 Towns and cities today are places of extremes. Urban centres of population offer the potential for a rich diversity of commerce, industry, leisure, culture, sports, and caring facilities which are only possible in the context of large communities of people. However all too often it is the other side of modern cities, a picture of poverty and powerlessness, decay and despair, which is more apparent.

1.0.2 The heart of the Liberal Democrat approach is a positive vision of cities as good places in which to live, work and visit. This paper offers a view of how the different strands of policy which affect life in urban areas may be directed to increase opportunities for workers and residents, to improve the quality of urban life and prevent the deterioration of living and working conditions. Although referring mainly to inner cities, since this is where problems tend to be most acute, many of its proposals are directly relevant to suburbs and towns as well.

1.1 The Origins and Nature of Urban Decay

1.1.1 Since 1945 a new pattern of decay has emerged in many of the UK's urban areas. This pattern is not unique to Britain; it is also found in many European and North American cities. Its two most important symptoms are a significant loss of employment - particularly prominent in northern industrial towns - and an exodus of inhabitants, most evident in London.

1.1.2 Many of Britain's larger towns and cities, particularly in the Midlands and Northern England, originally grew up around concentrations of heavy industry. The deindustrialisation of the last four decades, however, has seen a steady decline in employment in manufacturing industry. In the absence of effective government policies to

adapt to this change - regional policy, education and training, etc - many former employees have been unable to find work in the new and service industries.

1.1.3 The exodus from the towns by those able to leave is a process which started even earlier. The development of commuter railways in the late 19th century started the decline in the population of central London. Speculative commercial house builders in progressively sprawling suburbs invited young adults, with the job security to raise a mortgage, a chance to bring up their families in cleaner and more spacious surroundings. After the war, slum clearance and the need to replace war-damaged housing led inner city councils to contribute to this process. City dwellers unable to afford to buy houses locally were offered the chance to move to new estates on city fringes or in the new towns.

1.1.4 Communities left in the inner cities were slowly devastated. With the primary wage earners gone, local wealth, and with it the funding base for secondary service industries, evaporated. Six elements of the urban problem are now of particular significance in many areas:

- Urban populations contain concentrations of extreme poverty, including in particular many elderly people, single parent families, and those reliant on income support
- Economic confidence is low, limiting access to both personal and business credit, and the tax base for local revenue raising is poor.
- The local environment is characterised by poorly maintained and run-down buildings, a lack of green space and high levels of pollution.
- Housing is often badly designed and of poor quality, with many estates showing the

effects of cheap construction and inadequate investment in modernisation and maintenance. In some urban areas housing is in short supply with consequent overcrowding and homelessness. Crime and the fear of crime are widespread and social tension is often high.

- Educational performance tends to be poor. Schools are under-resourced and the morale of teachers low. Poor levels of attainment follow. Of those seeking work a high proportion are unskilled or under-skilled.
- Services, ranging from health provision to street cleaning, are frequently of low quality.

1.1.5 Racism is an increasing factor in many urban areas. Whereas previously immigration was a major issue for the inner city, the challenge now is to integrate and involve ethnic minority groups into urban communities while maintaining multicultural diversity. Indigenous communities sometimes feel threatened and respond negatively; the increase in racial attacks is a dangerous symptom of this pressure. Existing institutional structures often fail to tackle such issues adequately, with consequent frustration and social polarisation.

1.1.6 Even where geographical communities have survived, they have become increasingly powerless. Reorganisation of local government in the 1960s and 1970s gave rise to super-authorities made remote from people by their size and failure to reflect natural communities.

1.1.7 The deprivation that is found in many urban areas is both a cause and an effect of the powerlessness of individual residents and of the breakdown of much of the traditional structure of community support. It is associated with the movement away from such areas of many of the more go-ahead, energetic and ambitious people, particularly in working age groups. Since it is often such people who possess the confidence and the ability to articulate political demands, the quality of political leadership in urban areas suffers accordingly. Where a new middle class has moved in, whether by

gentrification of neighbourhoods as in parts of inner London, or by a deliberate decision to build new middle class housing as in parts of inner Manchester or Salford, it has often resulted in middle class ghettos whose residents live in social isolation from the nearby areas of deprivation.

1.2 Government Policy

1.2.1 Many current urban problems stem from the destruction of townscapes and communities by Labour and Conservative central and local government. Slum housing and wartime bomb damage presented a formidable challenge, but in meeting this many councils failed to recognise the significance of traditional town layouts and landmarks, or the ghettoising effect of designating large single use areas. Major mistakes in the design and implementation of much post-war social housing led to the fragmentation of long-established communities and networks, notwithstanding significant improvements in basic amenities.

1.2.2 The particular problems of urban areas began to preoccupy government from the late 1960s, in the context of rising unemployment and growing racial tension. An early concentration on social, educational and community projects gave way in the late 1970s to a stress on the need for economic development; by 1988-89 nearly 95% of the money spent on inner city initiatives by the Department of the Environment went to 'enterprise related' activities.

1.2.3 The publicity given to Conservative initiatives, however, has been quite out of proportion to the amount of resources and assistance provided. Over the years the proportion of urban aid spending which is narrowly targeted on particular areas has risen with the introduction of Urban Development Corporations and, more recently, Housing Action Trusts and City Challenge. The major flaw in this approach is that while the chosen areas are no doubt needy, they do not have a monopoly of the problems.

1.2.4 Local initiative has been compromised by the excessively close involvement with the local implementation of urban regeneration programmes maintained by ministers of both the other parties. (This contrasts ironically with ministers' lax financial oversight of some of the quangos they have established to undertake urban regeneration work - most recently the Welsh Development Agency.) The Audit Commission has recently criticised the stifling and expensive proliferation of bureaucracy which has resulted. Capping and stringent controls on local authority expenditure has also restricted local discretion and accountability.

1.2.5 The main solution provided by the Conservatives to the challenges facing urban areas has been to establish undemocratic and out-of-touch quangos to take over many vital functions from local government, dominated by placemen appointed primarily for their political views. Although members may include many well-intentioned individuals from the private sector, this 'democratic deficit' and lack of public consultation mean that such bodies often show very little real understanding of inner city life.

1.2.6 Almost every year another urban initiative has been launched, either reorganising the various pots of money available and the rules for accessing them, or setting up new teams to coordinate activities. A burgeoning industry of consultants now offers advice on ways around the Byzantine complexity of government 'initiatives'. The Government usually imposes unrealistic timescales, and increasingly awards resources on the basis of competitive 'beauty contests' rather than on the basis of need.

1.2.7 On a wider scale, Conservative tax and social security policies over the last 15 years have favoured the better off at the expense of the poor. The impact has been to remove spending power from inner cities and deprived regions and to concentrate it further in wealthy areas. In 1984 Michael Heseltine pointed out that fiscal policy gave £168m in regional support, largely going to northern cities, while offering £8000m in tax incentives, most of it

flowing to the most prosperous regions in southeastern England.

1.2.8 The abolition of the metropolitan county councils in 1986 removed a conurbation-wide level of government for most areas of significant urban decay. While the 'mets' may have been badly in need of reform, there is a key set of strategic, infrastructural and coordinating tasks which can only be undertaken at city or regional levels. The recent Conservative recognition of this has led them to establish a network of Integrated Regional Offices (IROs), civil servants from the regional outposts of the various government departments. Along with this, many of the previously separate sources of money available have been integrated into a single regeneration budget. Although coordination is welcome, local teams linking six Whitehall departments are unlikely to be able to undertake the key work of strategic planning and infrastructure development, and they also possess no local accountability.

1.2.9 The Government's legacy is thus of failure either to arrest the underlying processes of urban decay or to ameliorate the effects. As the 1992 Policy Studies Institute report *Urban Trends* stated, "... in general the gap between conditions and opportunities in deprived areas and other kinds of place - the gap that the government's 1977 white paper sought to narrow - remains as wide as it was a decade and half ago. In some respects the gap has widened. After 15 years, and many new initiatives, surprisingly little has been achieved."

1.2.10 As a result, the 1980s has seen an inexorable growth in the urban underclass. The huge and nationally increasing gap between the haves and the have-nots has often produced its most visible product in the sight of two cities living side by side but in every other sense further apart. This is not just due to the failure of economic, environmental and social policies, important though these are. It has also been due to the gradual decay and in many cases the deliberate undermining of communities in urban Britain.

The Liberal Democrat Approach

2.0.1 Liberal Democrats start from the premise that Britain's towns and cities can and should be good places in which to live, work and visit. Their cultural diversity and geographical convenience are considerable assets. The physically compact nature of urban communities has real environmental advantages. The wide range of economic, social and cultural facilities they can provide offer opportunities for work, study and leisure impossible in rural areas. Despite the decline of communities referred to above, it is often easier to encourage their revival in compact and historically closely-knit neighbourhoods. It is also true that a flourishing city not only has significant influence for the good on the suburban and rural areas to which it relates, but is also the best evidence of a flourishing country.

2.0.2 The key to the revival of urban areas is the rejuvenation of *communities*, which provide the framework within which individuals can exercise power over their surroundings. This is crucial in all areas of urban policy: economic, environmental and social.

2.0.3 This approach means ensuring that urban *economies* are rebuilt in ways which principally benefit existing local people. Past government initiatives have often succeeded only in generating subsidised profits for private sector entrepreneurs and developers. Economic regeneration has been obsessed with commercial property at the expense of community facilities. Due to a lack of training and education amongst the local workforce, construction projects have failed to benefit the locality. The results, all too often, are wastelands of office development, deserted and unsafe after dark, surrounded by, but effectively entirely separate from, deprived and run-down residential neighbourhoods. Only if purchasing power rests with local people will the local economies be regenerated to the benefit of those who live there.

2.0.4 Thriving communities are the key to creating and maintaining a high quality urban *environment*. Historically, communal and civic responsibility produced and maintained the 'public realm' - public buildings, parks, open spaces and amenities - which were the pride of the communities involved. Particularly throughout the last decade, this sense of responsibility has diminished, partly due to growing poverty in the inner cities and partly due to a lack of any sense of community ownership of the environment. Improvements in the physical environment, particularly if they are implemented by the local community, help people to regain pride in their area, generate respect for and care of civic amenities, and encourage individuals and communities to regain faith in their own abilities.

2.0.5 And communities provide the framework within which individuals can exercise greater control over the *public services*. This includes enabling tenants to control their housing through exercising a say in who manages the properties, parents and pupils to participate in the running of their schools and determination of their education and career plans, and users of public leisure facilities to have a say in how they are run. It is often the case that groups of individuals only discover their real ability to take and exercise power when they are enabled to participate in the running of the social services on which they themselves depend.

2.0.6 All these objectives intertwine and reinforce one another. The existence of strong and vibrant communities is essential to the construction of a congenial and healthy environment, a prosperous local economy, and effective and responsive public services. But conversely, the very process of building these essential elements of urban life will in itself reinforce and encourage those communities to form and prosper.

2.0.7 We do not pretend that any of this will be easy: a pattern of social development

prevalent for at least half a century cannot be reversed overnight. But where Liberal Democrats have exercised power at a local level in Britain's towns and cities, we have shown that even without influence over central government, much can be done to build and foster communities.

2.0.8 A crucial element in tackling the breakdown of social cohesion is the construction of a political framework within which local communities can exercise real power. Even where urban communities have survived the economic, environmental and social pressures described above, they are still relatively powerless within Britain's existing political framework. Liberal Democrats are committed to comprehensive reform of local and central government; we aim to bring decision making not just closer to local communities, but effectively under their control. This also means democratising all the government agencies that operate in the area.

2.0.9 Even under current circumstances, there is a constant groundswell of community action and initiative to tackle many of the problems which people face, and this should be encouraged and assisted. Recent Government policy has served to destroy and discourage communities, generating a vicious downward spiral of decline and deprivation. Liberal Democrats aim to reverse this trend, promoting partnerships between private, public and voluntary sectors, creating a virtuous upwards spiral of development and empowerment.

2.0.10 So often at the root of the difficulties urban communities face are unequal power relationships. People feel frustrated that they are unable to influence events in any way, and central to our approach is the determination to redress this imbalance. Whether in the economic, social or political fields, our proposals aim to empower individuals in their communities, enabling them to take control of their own destinies.

2.0.11 The growing problem of racism must be tackled directly, by recognising the positive contribution made by ethnic minorities. Lord Lester, in the report *Political Speech and Race*

Relations in a Liberal Democracy (December 1993), identified four primary principles which reflect basic Liberal Democrat values in this important area:

- *“The freedom of political speech and public debate ... [although] essential, ... is not an absolute right which has no limits. We are unequivocally committed to the principles of racial and religious toleration, accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance and respect. Liberal Democrats are unequivocally committed to a pluralist society of citizenship based on equality.”*
- *“The right to political expressions cannot be abused by exploiting or encouraging racial, religious or cultural prejudices. Political activities must not only be honest, truthful and lawful; they must seek to avoid, whether blatantly or covertly, stirring up prejudice, or encouraging racial discrimination.”*
- *“Free speech must not be misused in the name of political freedom ... race and religion should never be used as political weapons.”*
- *“The central message of Liberal Democracy should be a positive one; promoting a sense of community in which everyone counts equally, whether as citizens, as voters or as individual human beings.”*

We endorse this approach fully.

2.0.12 The remainder of this paper outlines the application of the Liberal Democrat approach to urban policy under four main headings: institutional, environmental, economic, and social policy. In many cases, proposals which we have set out in more detail in other policy papers - including those covering planning, transport, tax and benefits, housing, health, education, and crime and policing - are relevant. These have not been repeated in detail; instead, those aspects of most direct relevance to urban policy have been highlighted here.

Recreating Urban Democracy

3.0.1 Central to all the proposals in this paper is our belief that urban decline can only be reversed if urban communities themselves take control of their environment and development. The structure of government at all levels and of the relevant statutory agencies is therefore crucial to urban policy. The present structure is conducive to neither community development nor good and effective government.

3.0.2 The level of urban policy problems requires significant and wide-ranging institutional reform. A multiplicity of organisations is involved in urban affairs and this has led to confusion over aims and objectives, and a loss of effectiveness in many areas.

3.0.3 Despite Government protestations, the number of quangos has risen greatly. Many of these institutions, such as Urban Development Corporations, are inadequately accountable to local communities and increasingly directed by Government placemen. The number of government departments with responsibilities in urban affairs also continues to rise, leading to difficulties in coordination and increasing bureaucracy.

3.0.4 Allied to this multiplicity of agencies is constant change in the programme, direction and scope of urban funding and initiatives. This leads to a lack of strategy and long term planning which is replaced by short term fixes which in turn are never allowed to produce results before they are replaced by the next fad. The present Government's attempts to tackle urban issues are fragmented and inadequate. Despite Mrs Thatcher's wish to see the inner cities within the Tory fold, Mr Gummer's present efforts on consultation in London demonstrate how piecemeal and half-hearted

these efforts really are, precluding most of the solutions that urban dwellers seek.

3.0.5 Local institutions become increasingly frustrated as their concerns are overridden by unrepresentative bodies, and this engenders a loss of social responsibility when people perceive that their interests are not being considered. Social cohesion is lost and institutions at all levels, whether political or voluntary, are unable to attract suitable people who are willing and able to make a useful contribution.

3.0.6 Local government has been consistently downgraded by the Government, and an increasing role taken by the voluntary sector as funding is removed from many public agencies. The voluntary sector cannot, however, provide as comprehensive a service as single or multi-purpose authorities, and services and facilities become patchy and particularly ineffective for the disadvantaged.

3.0.7 Latterly, the Government has responded to these increasing concerns by promoting the establishment of mixed ministry regional groupings: Integrated Regional Offices (IROs), comprising the regional functions of the Departments of the Environment, Transport, Trade & Industry and Employment. No new resources will be available, however, and there is some suspicion that this is a further device to emasculate local government, particularly as the Secretary of State has promoted the exercise as "*increasing local accountability*". In addition, a new urban regeneration agency, English Partnerships, has been set up but again effectively without additional urban funding and with a brief limited to property-based physical development objectives.

3.1 Principles

3.1.1 Institutional reform must be built on the *partnership principle*, building coalitions of interest between communities and appropriate technical, voluntary, political and business organisations to achieve a broad range of objectives. The form and function of these partnerships will vary according to the context in which they operate, thus providing a diversity of institutions in response to local and other needs.

3.1.2 Crucial to a vibrant and active institutional structure in urban areas is *community leadership*. This must be encouraged in both the voluntary sector and in local government; at present such initiatives are too frequently impeded and constrained.

3.1.3 Our second key principle is *devolution*; the transfer of functions to the most appropriate local level. This will mean the decentralisation of government powers, for example (from central to regional and local levels) and the formation of new, more locally responsive organisations which can increase the participation of local people in their own affairs. In this way, decisions are taken by people who know the local situation and have a stake in initiatives and activities. Participation and empowerment are increased and people will perceive more readily when difficulties are encountered.

3.1.4 Our third principle is *support for local government*. Liberal Democrats are committed to the restoration of the powers of local government, which have been severely eroded in recent years. This will mean further resources and a reduction in the mutual suspicion which has grown up between local and central government. The role of central government should be to enable and guide local government in tackling local needs and problems; a role presently taken increasingly by quangos. The past excesses of a few local authorities have been used as excuses for attacks on a crucial institutional level in British democracy. Rather, central government should recognise the positive functions of local

government and work in partnership to tackle its increasingly difficult tasks.

3.1.5 Our fourth key principle is *support for the voluntary sector*. Local community, voluntary, interest, self-help and other groups form the bedrock of community life in many urban areas. Larger voluntary organisations have also taken increasing responsibilities for tackling disadvantage and specific social problems. Liberal Democrats welcome the diversity of provision and support that these agencies can provide and aim to assist their work and activities, subject to basic safeguards of democratic control and representation.

3.2 Proposals for Reform

3.2.1 The context for institutional reform is provided by Liberal Democrat proposals to decentralise power from central government to the most appropriate local level, whether regional, district or community. This is discussed in more detail in Federal White Paper 6, *Here We Stand* (1993).

Institutional reform must be built on the partnership principle, building coalitions of interest between communities and voluntary, political and business organisations.

3.2.2 Decentralisation of power to the regional tier is highly important in the the revitalisation of urban areas. Inner cities tend to be poor areas which need redistribution of resources into them from richer areas outside. This is best implemented by a tier of government incorporating both, but at the same time closer to and more in touch with the communities concerned than central government. Until regional governments are established in England, we will promote

regional development agencies to target resources where appropriate and act as a conduit for funds from various sources, including the European Union. Safeguards will be incorporated to maintain democratic control and enable public scrutiny of their activities. They will also provide policy consistency throughout a region for local regeneration and other initiatives.

3.2.3 The process of urban regeneration may often be enhanced both through channelling funds through the expertise of short-term development agencies, and by concentrating aid in certain areas on a long term basis. The Urban Development Corporations have a mixed record: some have proved effective, others much less so; but their main failing has been their lack of democratic accountability. They will in any case shortly be wound up, at the latest by 1998. For the remainder of their life, we will improve their democratic acceptance and accountability by appointing at least equivalent numbers of local government and other sector members to Board membership. We believe, however, that we can learn from their experience in establishing new bodies to assist the work of urban regeneration.

3.2.4 New generation urban development corporations could enable local councils to work together and with the private sector for their mutual benefit. They would have a limited life and gain funds through the purchase and resale of land. They would also continue to be a channel for central government funding for projects which could not be appropriately carried out by local authorities (planning processes and controls would, however, remain with the local council). We envisage their establishment by regional or local government, but in all cases they would be accountable to the initiating body.

3.2.5 We wish to see them used more flexibly and diversely than the old UDCs, depending on local circumstances. We would promote the transfer of experience from elsewhere with regard to urban regeneration and related initiatives; a specific and successful example being the German experiment with

regional government controlled development companies.

3.2.6 Local government services should be integrated and carried out as locally as feasible, wherever possible at local neighbourhood or parish level conforming with recognised community boundaries. They should be delivered through 'one stop shop' points of access with structures related more to peoples' needs than traditional separate departmental arrangements.

3.2.7 Local government has a key role to play in enabling local community initiative and action. Each local authority should hold a public register, available at each local point of access, of all private, voluntary and public sector organisations in the area. The council should also regularly host appropriate issue-based consultations with the community, involving all these sectors in a similar way to the consultation processes now established on policing in London and some other areas. We envisage that these could include consultation on education, housing, health (including the CHC role), and so on. In addition local authorities should have the option of holding publicly available registers of all residential, commercial and other property and land, not least so that a regular audit of assets can be carried out and strategic provision better planned.

3.2.8 Liberal Democrats advocate a comprehensive decentralisation of local government services and decision-making, along the lines pioneered by, among others, the Liberal Democrat council of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Tower Hamlets has established neighbourhood councils, comprising elected councillors for each local community. They operate a local budget, allocated centrally according to local need, and services are based on 'one stop' access points. Certain activities, such as education, which are not appropriate for community level operation, should still be provided at district level.

3.2.9 Liberal Democrats also support the use of citizens' initiatives to give people a direct

say over the policies pursued in their name, whether by local, regional or national government. These would require a petition signed by at least 1.5% of the relevant electorate - for a typical district council, about 1200 people - and would pose specific questions about existing or proposed activities of the relevant level of government. More detail on this proposal can be found in *Here We Stand*.

3.2.10 A crucial role for local government is to finance and assist a broad range of local and community organisations. This will empower local people and increase their sense of involvement and participation within society and local affairs. Such participation may also be increased by the establishment of a series of forums bringing together the various sectors involved in all aspects of local affairs on a regular basis.

3.2.11 Community Development Trusts offer a new and fruitful way forward for communities seeking to gain control over their local facilities and environments. They provide a method of channelling resources from the private sector - usually deriving from planning gain, but also from other sources - into particular localities. The local community is then fully in control of the ways in which the money is used to invest in local facilities and projects, ranging from workshops and renovation schemes to nurseries and play centres. If they are to run properly, they require skilled administration; we would seek to encourage their establishment through providing assistance with start-up and training costs.

3.2.12 Finally, Liberal Democrats believe that assistance to all urban public and voluntary agencies at whatever level should be based on assessment of need and not competition between authorities for ever-decreasing resources, as in City Challenge. Where central government has a role in regeneration and development, it is to sponsor and support good practice and to act as guarantor for partnerships and schemes involving the commercial sector.

3.3 Agenda for Action

3.3.1 In order to help recreate urban democracy, Liberal Democrat priorities for local authorities include:

- Where appropriate, the establishment of urban development corporations to assist regeneration.
- The decentralisation of power to neighbourhood councils, providing services through 'one-stop' access points.
- Finance and assistance for a broad range of local and community organisations.
- The institution of public registers of all private, voluntary and public sector organisations in the locality.
- Regular issue-based consultations with the community.
- Encouragement for Community Development Trusts.

3.3.2 And Liberal Democrats priorities for central government include:

- The decentralisation of power from central to regional and local government.
- The establishment of regional government - and, until it is set up, regional development agencies - as an effective framework for the redistribution of resources to deprived urban areas.
- Enabling the creation of a new generation of democratically accountable urban development corporations by regional and/or local government.
- Legislation to allow for citizens' initiatives at local, regional and national levels.

Rebuilding Urban Economies

4.0.1 Chapter One examined the causes of decline and deprivation in urban areas, particularly the inner cities. Generally speaking, these areas are characterised by high levels of unemployment (far greater than the national average), particularly long term unemployment; a low skills base; a declining manufacturing/ industrial sector; closures of large companies wishing to relocate outside large conurbations; a relatively high level of small businesses; and poor infrastructure. Poverty is disproportionately occurrent in inner cities, which have increasingly become the province of those dependent upon public housing: the old, the sick and their carers, and communities of those unable to find work.

4.0.2 Urban poverty creates a particular kind of vulnerability and decay. People, although less inhibited from travel than are their rural counterparts, feel themselves trapped in their own areas, competing with their equally poor neighbours for the few resources which are available. In some areas, this leads to situations in which the poorest estates suffer the worst from vandalism and burglary as poor people prey upon each other. It can also lead to extremes of violence and racism as communities blame their own poverty upon those who are different from themselves.

4.1 Principles

4.1.1 The key to creating a vibrant local community where local people want to live and work is economic revival. Constructing opportunities for people to use their own skills and talents is the best way to break out of the cycle of poverty, deprivation and decline. This both tackles the problem of state dependency, which can be so debilitating for the individual, and fuels local economic growth. Renewed investment in local enterprise and other outward signs of business confidence can also

often be the trigger for regeneration in other spheres such as environmental improvements, infrastructure, or housing. Promoting a thriving local economy which produces jobs for local people and increases living standards for all is a central strand of our urban policy.

4.1.2 The three main priorities for urban economic revival at the local level are:

- Ensuring that local people have access to the jobs and training opportunities available.
- Encouraging local economic development, particularly by providing assistance to new and expanding businesses.
- Channelling new funds into urban areas.

The three are closely linked. The presence of a pool of skilled and motivated labour will be a major factor influencing a business decision to start up or expand in a particular area. The presence of new and expanding businesses in turn creates new job and training opportunities for local people. And the provision of funding from outside the area may often be essential to stimulate the local economy.

4.1.3 Even if these preconditions are satisfied, however, there will in most cases be a need for some kind of catalyst for change. Not only do local communities need to be *able* to build local prosperity, they also need to *believe* they can do it. The orthodox manner of stimulating change throughout the 1980s was through a large construction project - such as the building of Canary Wharf in London's Docklands. We do not believe that such major works are usually necessary; the establishment and formal launch of a body such as a community enterprise agency (see 4.3.3) may well achieve the same objective in a less destructive way, as long as local people and communities feel they are fully involved in the

process. Once again, it is the empowerment of individuals and neighbourhoods that is vital to success.

4.2 Investing in People

4.2.1 Improving the skills base of the local workforce and their ability to compete successfully for local jobs is crucially important. Adequate provision of education is vital; this is dealt with below in section 6.4. A number of factors militate against the ability of local residents to gain access to employment and training opportunities, including negative attitudes by employers towards unemployed people, inadequate child care facilities, low levels of literacy and numeracy, discrimination against minority ethnic communities, inadequate information and advice about the opportunities available, and a distrust of government training schemes. The key to overcoming many of these problems is twofold: the provision of high quality training which leads directly to a 'real' job, and linking up local unemployed people with local employers.

4.2.2 The Liberal Democrat commitment to investment in education and training is well known; see in particular Federal White Paper 5, *Economics for the Future* (1991), and English White Paper 4, *Excellence for All* (1992). In many inner city areas in particular, in addition to occupational and vocational training, adequate provision of English as a second language, literacy and numeracy education is essential.

4.2.3 We would encourage a range of different types of provision to meet local need and to offer effective choice to local people. Voluntary and community groups are often best placed to understand the needs of different groups within the local community. The training offered must be flexible and geared to both unemployed and unskilled, low paid workers. For example, adult literacy classes in local colleges need to be held in the evening and at weekends as well as during the day, and facilities should include childcare provision.

4.2.4 We would encourage innovative approaches to linking training to jobs, such as 'adult compacts' and 'customised training.' Adult compacts are an agreement between a local employer(s) and an unemployed person that the employer will guarantee a job with training if specified training targets are met. Customised training aims to give unemployed people skills they require to secure actual jobs. The training is tailored to match the requirements of the individual employer and unemployed people successfully completing the training are guaranteed a job or job interview. Training which is linked to work provides experience, an essential factor in guaranteeing employment in the future.

The key to creating a vibrant local community where local people want to live and work is economic revival.

4.2.5 Many unemployed people who have been out of work for a long time need extra support - advice on how best to make an application, for example, or how to conduct themselves at interviews - when looking for a job, both to restore their confidence and to ensure that their job search techniques are effective. In some cities, such as London, the growth in job opportunities in the 1980s bypassed many inner city communities; long term unemployment remained stubbornly high in many areas. As well as making advice and training available, therefore, a concerted effort is required, targeted on individual housing estates, to assist individuals into jobs. The effects of this are gradually felt, with the estate-based community regaining confidence and prosperity as its members gain work.

4.2.6 Another initiative which offers considerable potential is the use of local labour agreements in urban renewal schemes. This is where construction projects such as the renewal of dilapidated housing stock or environmental

improvements are also used as a vehicle for employing and training local people. Careful attention needs to be given to the legality and financing of such schemes. It is quite possible to operate them within the normal cost of construction work provided a separate organisation - such as a local development agency - pays for the local labour element: training costs, initial low output, etc. This mechanism is currently used by developers covered by the Local Government Act 1988 which forbids 'non-commercial matters' from being taken into account when inviting tenders and letting contracts. We would reform this legislation at the earliest opportunity and strongly encourage the use of local labour agreements.

4.2.7 These different methods of bringing unemployed people into direct contact with local employers serve two purposes. Firstly they help unemployed people to get a job. Secondly they help employers to solve their recruitment problems by tapping into alternative sources of labour at a time when traditional sources of recruits - young people - are declining in numbers quite markedly. In so doing employers often lose their preconceived ideas about unemployed people and can often be persuaded to waive unnecessarily restrictive job entry requirements such as formal academic qualifications. Employing local people is often in itself of value, as many businesses (particularly shops) have found. They possess a knowledge of local conditions and people, and do not have to commute over long distances, thus reducing pressure on transport facilities.

4.3 Investing in Business

4.3.1 Local councils should take the lead in providing encouragement for the private sector in deprived urban areas. They should be encouraged, by the provision of matching funding from regional or national governments, and the European Union, to work in partnership with the private and voluntary sectors. To ensure this works effectively, we would free councils from the present controls on spending their capital receipts.

4.3.2 The existing network of about 250 Local Enterprise Agencies bring together private and public sectors - large firms, local councils, churches, unions, and so on - in providing business advice, counselling, and training, in particular for small businesses. They are often very effective, and we would aim to encourage their operations and to expand the network where appropriate. Recent research suggests that the best time to encourage the growth of small businesses is not at start-up but after two to three years, when they are seeking to expand premises, appoint new staff and look for new marketing opportunities; we would aim to redirect intervention to this period.

4.3.3 Sometimes (though by no means always), however, Local Enterprise Agencies adopt a rather conservative approach to encouraging business start-ups, ignoring new possibilities for co-operatives, community-owned businesses and so on. In some areas, there may therefore also be a role for Community Enterprise Agencies, concentrating on assisting the whole range of community-oriented enterprise opportunities. This could take the form of helping local people set up as cooperatives or community enterprises, for example when a number of people on a large housing estate wish to group together to provide local amenities such as launderettes or creches. They should concentrate particularly on minority ethnic businesses.

4.3.4 We would encourage Community Enterprise Agencies to promote Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS), which already exist in a number of urban areas. A LETS scheme functions by publishing a list of goods and services offered for sale by its members, priced in the scheme's own unit of currency. Members buy these goods and services from each other, and the transaction is recorded on a central register. Such schemes encourage the utilisation of local skills without relying on money (which is usually in short supply) and thereby encourage development which is firmly under the control of the local community.

4.3.5 Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) are a potentially important player in this area, though since their establishment they have tended to concentrate more on the training than on the enterprise side of their activities. As we have argued above, there is little point in training people for jobs that do not exist. We therefore wish to see TECs use the advantages they carry in terms of funding and the involvement of the private sector in promoting inner city enterprises - working together with Local Enterprise Agencies as the local circumstances dictate. Local authorities, however, which are the only democratically accountable agencies, must retain the overall coordinating role.

4.3.6 The cost of business premises in the inner city is a deterrent, especially after the introduction of the Uniform Business Rate. The replacement of the UBR by a system of site value rating - Liberal Democrat policy for England and Wales - will help enable councils to ameliorate this problem. Another factor affecting the cost of premises is the difficulty of obtaining insurance cover, either because of high premiums or because insurance companies exercise 'postcode discrimination'. One way to tackle this difficulty is to assist with the initial finance through grants or loans to small businesses to enable them to install security equipment and so qualify for lower premiums.

4.3.7 Federal Green Paper 16, *Citizens at Work* (1990), outlined our support for cooperative organisations, including producer co-ops and credit unions. Small locally-based co-ops can be of particular benefit to the inner cities, encouraging better retention of capital in the local economy and stronger commitment to job retention as well as fuller employee participation. Our proposed Community Enterprise Agencies should support this sector. In addition, we see a much enhanced role for a relaunched and well-resourced Cooperative Development Agency, operating on a regional basis to stimulate the establishment of new cooperative enterprises.

4.4 Providing Finance

4.4.1 A major problem facing inner city residents wanting to set up their own business is the availability of start-up capital. The primarily London-based British banking system has by and large failed the inner cities. It is usually very difficult for people without a proven track record in business to secure a loan on conditions acceptable to them. Some banks have a policy of not making loans to inner city businesses because of the perceived risk; others insist on conditions which in effect involve ceding control of the enterprise to the bank concerned. British banks, unlike many of their continental counterparts, prefer to provide loans rather than equity finance and therefore display little interest in the long-term success of the enterprise.

4.4.2 There is accordingly an urgent need for more decentralised financial institutions with an interest in long term investment rather than short term profits. Local banks have helped in the regeneration of depressed urban areas in other countries, notably the USA. The banking tradition in Britain is different, and local building societies have in the past helped to mobilise local resources to tackle particular pressing need. The US experience is impressive, however, and we believe that there is a strong case for the formation of Local Investment Agencies in the inner cities - working under the aegis of regional government (when established) and in close consultation with the Local Enterprise Agencies described above. These would possess both the necessary financial expertise and the detailed knowledge of local business conditions which is essential to success.

4.4.3 Local Investment Agencies would aim both to mobilise local funds (currently invested in the national banking or building society system and therefore not normally reinvested locally) and channel support from outside the area (from regional government, for example, or from the EC) to local enterprises, as grants, equity, and so on. In addition to local business and trade union interests, local authority and other community interests should be

represented on the board to ensure local control over key investment decisions. (Such representation is of particular importance for businesses run by women, and by people of minority ethnic backgrounds; currently, such individuals find it more difficult on average to attract funds from the High Street banks.)

***There is an urgent need for
decentralised financial institutions
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profits.***

4.4.4 Credit unions can act in similar ways to our proposed Local Investment Agencies and their development should also be encouraged. Credit unions help communities of the less financially strong manage their finances collectively and develop patterns of saving, lending and borrowing which are responsible and avoid usurious interest or unsympathetic creditors. Regionally and locally, support will be given to establish them and to continue them in security.

4.4.5 Central government has a crucial role to play in assisting this process of local economic investment. Tax relief for investment in inner city areas channelled through Local Investment Agencies should be introduced, on a similar basis to Municipal Bonds, which have helped create new enterprises in the USA. Community co-ops and businesses which embody social and community objectives should similarly qualify for tax incentives regarding both retained profits and capital introduced by members and supporters. Credit unions should also qualify for tax advantages, and be granted the power to bank at cost directly with the Bank of England.

4.5 Attacking Poverty

4.5.1 If these measures are successful in encouraging economic regeneration, they will We would assist in the provision of debt counselling and encourage banks and building

also be successful in attacking poverty. The injection of employment and wealth into urban areas will help to create communities which provide opportunities for all the various kinds of people who live within them. Nevertheless, there will still be some urban residents who fail to benefit significantly from urban regeneration - retired people, people whose health or disability prevents them finding employment, and so on. One of the major defects of the present Government's approach to urban policy is its failure to recognise this need.

4.5.2 Assistance from central and regional government should therefore be made available to enable local authorities to embark on a coherent anti-poverty strategy, working together with appropriate voluntary organisations. As well as the comprehensive reform of the social security system which we have outlined in Federal Green Paper 11, *Common Benefit* (1989; shortly to be updated), this requires a number of actions of specific relevance to urban areas.

4.5.3 Each local authority department should assess how its structures impinge directly on the lives of poorer communities. This might include standards of communication between council departments, the physical distance between communities and offices, and even the time it takes to connect a person phoning from the phone booth to a central Housing Aid Office. This process should involve extensive consultation with both the individuals themselves and the voluntary and private sectors.

4.5.4 The provision of localised welfare rights offices and workers is of substantial importance to the success of this strategy. Even under the current system of social security, it has been calculated that the most cost-effective way of raising the incomes of poor communities is to assist them to claim all the benefits to which they are entitled.

4.5.5 Loan sharking is a current contribution to the problems of poverty in the inner cities.

societies to review their lending policies, to help avoid this problem. The support for credit

unions we have proposed above (in 4.4.4) would also be of assistance.

4.6 Agenda for Action

4.6.1 In rebuilding urban economies, Liberal Democrat priorities for local authorities include:

- Encouragement for the provision of training through flexible models geared to the needs of urban areas.
- Encouragement for innovative approaches to linking training to jobs, including adult compacts and customised training.
- The provision of advice and training in job search techniques.
- The promotion of local labour agreements in urban renewal schemes.
- Coordination of the promotion of enterprise in urban areas, working together with and encouraging Local Enterprise Agencies and TECs.
- The establishment of Community Enterprise Agencies where appropriate to assist

cooperatives, community enterprises and small businesses, particularly minority ethnic businesses, and to promote LETS schemes.

- Assessments of how local authority structures can be reformed to assist poorer communities, including the provision of localised welfare rights workers and offices.

4.5.2 And Liberal Democrat priorities for central government include:

- Substantial investment in education and training.
- Reform of the legislation covering local labour agreements.
- The freeing of councils from controls on spending capital receipts.
- Enabling the establishment of Local Investment Agencies, aiming to mobilise local funds and channel outside support to urban regeneration.
- The provision of tax relief for investment in inner city areas.

Improving Urban Environments

5.0.1 The urban environment - the buildings, roads and paths, open spaces, air and water of the towns and cities - is an important determinant of the quality of life in urban areas. Town and city environments possess many advantages. The variety and diversity of the built environment can be one of the real joys of living in a city. The physically compact nature of urban communities has major advantages in terms of limiting pollution and waste, through the potential for energy conservation schemes, for effective systems of public transport and through the possibilities of walking and cycling.

5.0.2 For many of Britain's urban areas, however, the reality is very different. Spaces, streets and buildings which were for years the glory of many of Britain's cities are now a disgrace. Commercial developments, often of banal and inhuman design, have dislocated local communities and wiped away local services and facilities without replacing them. Intrusive buildings and road schemes have removed many historic and familiar districts. The current Government has neglected public transport, and increasing reliance on private car use causes congestion, pollution and noise, with accompanying effects on public health.

5.0.3 In recent years, the role of local authorities in the statutory planning process has been under constant attack. Planning powers have been transferred to central government and non-elected bodies such as development corporations, or relaxed altogether in favour of developers' or speculators' interests. In addition, the present Government has failed to come to terms with strategic planning, including the need to integrate land and transport planning. Market forces have played an undue part, to the detriment of balanced and comprehensive provision, and in sharp contrast to the positive policies of Britain's European counterparts.

5.0.4 As we have argued, a healthy environment and a thriving community reinforce and require one another. Much recent development, particularly in the inner cities, has contributed to the deterioration of conditions and the break-up of local communities. An increasing sense of frustration is felt by local residents who believe they have neither influence nor involvement in the transformation processes which are taking place.

5.1 Principles

5.1.1 The Liberal Democrat objective is to ensure that Britain's towns and cities are places where people want to live and work and where conditions are supportive, attractive and dynamic. A key concept is that of the sustainable city: urban living and working conditions which use minimum resources and development which does not jeopardise future opportunities and the quality of life for residents, workers and visitors. We therefore aim to control pollution, encourage conservation and promote reclamation and regeneration projects.

5.1.2 A key factor is to ensure that local communities are able to exercise as much control as possible over their local environment. New approaches to development and urban management - such the 'planning for real' projects referred to below and the Community Development Trusts we advocate in Chapter Three (see 3.2.11) - are required which are more sensitive to local community requirements and reflect a broader set of objectives than the production of speculative profits or municipal pride. There are clear economic arguments in favour of new approaches. Attractive surroundings, good public transport, high quality design and landscape are reflected in commercial rent

levels; an efficient transport system is vital to local business.

5.1.3 Access to workplaces, services and amenities is important for an improved quality of life, to enable people to play a full part in economic, social and community activities and to benefit from all available facilities - but the present over-reliance on the motor car is rapidly becoming unsustainable. Investment in public transport provision and restraint in the use of private cars is therefore crucial.

5.1.4 The planning system is central to achieving these objectives. Planning in the widest sense means the process of assessing and organising activities so that living and working conditions are improved for as many people as possible. It offers a front line of defence for the urban environment, showing how people can make choices that will enrich and enhance their lives through appropriate development. It can determine how resources may be better used, how the environment may be better protected, and how development activities may be arranged to provide diversity, vitality and long-term stewardship of the environment. It is to this area that we therefore turn first for our policy proposals.

5.2 Planning for Towns and Cities

5.2.1 Our planning policies are set out in full in English Green Paper 6, *Planning for Sustainability* (1993). Reform of the planning process must take account of four key factors:

- Commitment to environmental protection and improved quality of life.
- Local responsibility for local environments.
- Integration of local and strategic planning.
- Incorporation of the concept of sustainability into the planning process, and incentives to encourage sustainability.

5.2.2 New institutional arrangements must be developed to ensure that local people participate fully in shaping the development of their local area. In addition to increasing consultation at every stage of the planning process, initiatives such as 'planning for real' offer direct opportunities for local people to become involved in directing and guiding development and the process of local change. This project, carried out successfully in parts of London's East End, involves very large scale public consultation using actual models of the planning proposals; people are encouraged to experiment with different ideas of their own and feedback is fully taken into account.

5.2.3 Approaches such as 'planning for real' will help to engender a sense of belonging and identify what is unique, special and important about particular localities. Many cities have suffered huge dislocation of communities caused by inappropriate development and wherever possible, familiar elements of the built environment should be retained and carried over into new building within those communities.

5.2.4 Conservation, both of the built and the natural environment, is a crucial element of planning policy. Local authorities should be given greater powers to designate and to offer proper protection to sites, with effective enforcement powers.

5.2.5 We support the growing presumption against development on greenfield or open sites unless it can be demonstrated that there is no alternative. Full encouragement should be given to the reuse and restoration of derelict or formerly used land. The local taxation system should be reformed to promote these objectives, through:

- The replacement of the Uniform Business Rate by a system of site value rating based on the taxation of land values. (See English Green Paper 5, *Shaping Tomorrow's Local Democracy* (1991)).
- A new Greenfield Development Tax based on the increase in the value of the land that

- results from the granting of planning permission. (See *Planning for Sustainability*.)

5.2.6 Each of these proposals also helps to restore power to local communities, since in each case the tax rate is decided by the local authority, and the revenue raised is used for the benefit of the locality. Both would help to encourage the development of derelict sites, discourage the development of out-of-town shopping centres and boost the vitality of town centres.

5.2.7 The planning system, through the preparation of development plans at local and strategic levels should take full account of new thinking with regard to activities, transport and the provision of services and facilities. Planning policy should minimise the need for people to make journeys, by aiming to create, as far as possible, integrated communities, with homes, shops, amenities and work all within reasonable distances.

5.2.8 Both the over-centralisation of facilities and employment and the proliferation of greenfield shopping and industry add to traffic pollution and transport dependency. Out-of-town shopping and service centres usually require people to travel by car, can swallow up greenfields and increase social inequalities by killing urban shopping centres and reducing choice for those who are dependent on public transport and walking. Even the Government is now distancing themselves from the US-style 'drive-in philosophy', and we believe that further controls are necessary to prevent these developments.

5.2.9 The statutory structure and local planning system (including the new generation of unitary development plans) should be reformed to allow the assessment of sustainability for proposed changes in land use and development. This will promote environmental objectives in the development process and lay firm foundations for appropriate development in the future.

5.3 Public and Open Spaces

5.3.1 Liberal Democrats aim to reestablish the importance of the 'public realm'. We want to reintroduce the concept of civic responsibility in relation to public services, parks, gardens, streets and public facilities. Increased support should be given to local authorities to tackle the backlog of maintenance requirements and improvements, and assistance should be given to community groups to initiate local environmental improvement schemes.

5.3.2 We support the provision of public art, such as sculpture, with community support, demonstrating the cultural richness which exists in towns and cities. Communal planning of communal areas and the local environment can in themselves help build communities.

5.3.3 We are particularly supportive of the creation, where possible, of three types of green space: areas of 'city forest,' left wild for extensive leisure use; protected areas for animal life, both wild and in city farms; and allotments, where the ability of city-dwellers to grow their own food achieves both leisure and sustainability objectives. Local authorities have an important role in identifying areas for such green space, and many are often best managed by local community groups.

5.3.4 Planning controls should also prevent the gradual loss of public open space (or semi-public open space such as school grounds and playing fields) for development, a trend which has increased greatly in recent years. The loss of playing fields is particularly serious, since adequate leisure facilities are particularly important for young people. Other recreational areas can be provided with synthetic grass and floodlights to provide safe 'kick-about' areas.

5.4 Transport and Energy

5.4.1 The congestion and pollution caused by road traffic is one of the most urgent problems facing most towns and cities. Our aims are to:

- Use the planning system to reduce the need for transport use (see 5.2.7);
- improve the public transport network; and
- discourage the use of private cars; thus reducing energy use, pollution and traffic congestion. For the economic regeneration of inner cities to be successful, transport infrastructure must be improved without simply making it easier for long-distance commuters to come to work in city centres. Instead Liberal Democrats emphasise the development of short distance public transport systems which are clean, cheap, safe, accessible, frequent and reliable.

5.4.2 We will therefore encourage the introduction of light rapid transit systems and improved bus networks. This requires both additional public investment and a redirection of existing spending (just half of the Transport Department's budget for motorway widening, for example, would be enough to fund 15-20 urban light rail systems). We will simplify the legal process which local authorities have to pursue in order to set up such a system. Even under current legislation, local authorities can support particular bus routes, for example by channelling resources from higher car park charges into them.

5.4.3 We will encourage greater use of bicycles. We would place an obligation on local councils to provide secure cycle ways on strategic routes into the centre of cities. This should operate alongside planning regulations for new non-domestic buildings to require the provision of secure lock-ups for bicycles and adequate changing facilities for employees who choose to cycle to work. Public bodies should be encouraged to provide mileage allowances to encourage employees to switch from travelling to work by car to using bicycles (as many Liberal Democrat-controlled local councils do).

5.4.4 At the same time as providing an attractive and efficient public transport system, we aim to discourage the use of private cars in urban areas. Where individuals still choose to use private transport, they must bear the full

price of the social, congestion and environmental costs they cause. We therefore support the rapid introduction of road pricing - charges on road users for driving on particular stretches of roads at particular times of day - in urban areas.

5.4.5 Various systems of road pricing are possible (see Federal Green Paper 32, *Taxing Pollution, Not People* (1993) for further details); central government should provide grants to cover set-up costs, and the revenue that later becomes available should be reinvested in local public transport. The sums involved could be quite substantial; the Chartered Institute of Transport's 1992 paper *Paying for Progress* estimated a potential annual yield of £400m from London alone. (It also showed how local businesses were major beneficiaries of road pricing, as delivery times and delays fell sharply.)

5.4.6 When combined with investment in public transport and other traffic management measures, including traffic calming, more stringent parking restrictions, pedestrianisation and total prohibition of traffic in particular areas (such as city centres) at particular times, road pricing should have a significant effect on reducing pollution and congestion. Oxford's park and ride scheme encourages sensible dual use of car and public transport and should be copied elsewhere. Measures to control commercial road transport could include night time and weekend lorry bans of the sort enforced in London, the banning of heavy vehicles from residential areas, and overall restrictions on the size of vehicles allowed in the central areas of towns and cities (as for instance has been tried in Paris.) New road building should be seen as the option of last resort.

5.4.7 Transport is not, of course, the only source of pollution and excessive resource use. Liberal Democrats will promote the use of combined heat and power schemes, such as the successful projects in Leicester. We will introduce incentives for energy conservation, including grants for housing insulation, where relatively small sums of money can improve the

quality of life and standards of health, reduce high energy bills and improve the environment. Building regulations should be modified to improve standards of energy conservation. Liberal Democrat MP Alan Beith's Energy Conservation private member's bill, which seeks to place a duty on local authorities to carry out an energy audit of all housing stock in their area, is exactly the kind of initiative which is needed.

5.4.8 Local authorities should be given greater powers to control pollution and secure environmental improvements. Increased penalties should be enforced on polluters of all kinds and extra incentives provided to enable the reuse and reclamation of derelict land. Money raised through fines on polluters should be retained by the local authority for use on local environmental improvements, strengthening the local community's control of its own environment. (Similarly, the revenue raised through road pricing should be reinvested in local public transport.) Individuals should be encouraged to monitor local pollution levels and be aware of their own contribution, and the steps they can take to reduce it.

5.5 Agenda for Action

5.5.1 In pursuit of improving urban environments, Liberal Democrat priorities for local authorities include:

- Using approaches such as 'planning for real' to involve the local community in local planning.
- Adopting a presumption against development on greenfield or open sites.
- Assistance for community groups to initiate local environmental improvement schemes.
- Support for the provision of public art with community support.
- Prioritising the maintenance and improvement of public and open space, including in particular green space.

- Encouragement for greater use of bicycles.
- Experimenting with road pricing, feeding the revenue into local public transport.
- Adopting traffic management measures, including traffic calming, more stringent parking restrictions, pedestrianisation and total prohibition of traffic in particular areas at particular times.
- The encouragement of energy conservation projects.

5.5.2 And Liberal Democrat priorities for central government include:

- Reform of the statutory planning system to promote sustainability, encourage conservation and ensure that individuals and communities are fully involved at all stages.
- Reform of the local taxation system to replace the UBR with site value rating and introduce a new Greenfield Development Tax.
- The provision of increased support to local authorities to maintain public and open spaces.
- Substantial investment in public transport, including in particular light rapid transit systems and improved bus networks.
- Encouragement for local authorities to experiment with road pricing schemes.
- Placing an obligation on local councils to provide secure cycle ways on strategic routes into the centre of cities.
- Promotion of combined heat and power schemes.
- Introduction of incentives for energy conservation.

Giving local authorities greater powers to control pollution and secure environmental improvements.

Serving Urban Communities

6.0.1 In building a civilised environment in urban areas, in empowering individuals and communities, and in providing a diversity of experience and opportunity, the role of public services is crucial. Where domestic poverty is more concentrated, the need for public spending is greater than normal. Poor people are less able to finance their needs - in health, education, leisure and recreation - and less able to supplement public provision where it is inadequate; yet at the same time, because of lower standards of health, educationally deprived backgrounds, and lack of income, they may be more in need of high quality public services.

6.0.2 Currently, however, poor areas generally suffer from a *lower* level of public provision, in quantity, in quality and often in both. Reasons include difficulty in attracting and keeping good quality staff; a paucity of voluntary work and community action, which in more affluent areas complements the public services; and the fact that those most in need of services are in general those least able to articulate those needs.

6.0.3 The relative poverty of the inner cities is not compensated for by effective redistributive mechanisms. The formula for health service funding, for example, fails to account adequately for relative levels of deprivation and need. Inner city local authorities have low revenue bases and can afford to direct only inadequate resources to social services, education and other areas. The Government's changes to the local authority financing system since 1979 have reduced councils' abilities to spend according to local priorities. The net result is that the current structure of the welfare state fails to provide the higher level of services needed in urban areas.

6.1 Principles

6.1.1 In the remainder of this chapter we describe the key reforms we advocate within the provision of public services and of utilities and amenities. A number of solutions are common across all areas. These include, crucially, the need for funding formulae to reflect accurately levels of deprivation. The *costs* of providing social services, health care and education also all tend to be greater in deprived urban areas and funding formulae should reflect this.

6.1.2 Since the problems of poverty and deprivation impact on the need for all services, the various agencies must also be integrated as far as possible. Minority ethnic communities frequently suffer from particular problems which require specific action to resolve - such as the retention of Section 11 grants.

6.1.3 Over the past two decades, much government and local government money has been channelled into communities in the form of grants to specific voluntary organisations. Many of these have been valuable and have done good work. We believe that communities may choose themselves to be more creative and to seek for money to be put into shared facilities and community resources rather than individual organisations. Both solutions should be encouraged. Community groups should be encouraged to get together to share resources and to develop joint access to expensive and difficult to maintain facilities.

6.1.4 We recognise the importance of the family in the lives of individuals and communities; for many people, their family is their first and most important community itself. All our policy proposals aim to facilitate and to support families to develop extended networks and to stay together if they so choose. Examples include the provision of carers and disability benefits and the provision of locally based childcare.

6.1.5 Above all else, our proposals aim to ensure, as much as feasible, that communities take control over the public services on which they rely. As a number of successful housing and community co-operatives have shown, housing renovation and development, residential care facilities, local crime prevention schemes, health promotion projects and a host of other activities benefit enormously from overall control by the local people involved. When ‘experts’ or even local politicians are in control, which are they in most cases in current circumstances, they inevitably distance, and effectively disempower, local individuals and communities. When the community exercises the authority, the quality of the service or facility is generally higher and the community itself is empowered and encouraged.

6.2 Housing

6.2.1 Britain’s urban areas are suffering severe problems with housing. A key strand is lack of diversity. The consequence of allowing the development of large scale single tenure type estates has been ‘ghettoisation’. Whether rich or poor, such ghettos bring about a social stratification. They confer a wide ranging stigma on people who live in certain estates. Employers

Our proposals aim to ensure that communities take control over the public service on which they rely.

may be loathe to offer jobs to residents. Local schools develop an image as ‘disturbed’ or ‘rough’ which may become self-fulfilling as more able and committed parents ensure their children go elsewhere. The damaging consequences for the spirit of the community on such estates show themselves in different ways. Often the overwhelming sense is of apathy and the search for routes out of the resulting

aimlessness and boredom may be more destructive.

6.2.2 Another issue needing urgent attention is the overall condition of housing in the towns and cities. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Housing Action Area and General Improvement Area programmes funded extensive modernisation programmes, mostly to late Victorian stock. The last few years have seen a massive curtailment of funds for these programmes, leading to a backlog of applications which in some places would take seven years to clear at current investment rates. Much of the housing built this century is reaching a state where without substantial investment it will deteriorate increasingly fast. It is no tribute to the quality of post-war and modern builders that estates built in the 1950s and 1960s are reaching this stage at the same time as private housing built in the 1920s and 1930s.

6.2.3 Despite these difficult circumstances, Liberal Democrats believe that the overall goal is clear. We need to encourage the development of ‘urban villages’ with a good mix of housing in each area. Development Plans at local level should reflect this goal. We must also deal with the triple failure of much urban housing: people who are more upwardly socially mobile move away because they cannot find the larger or better rented or owner-occupied homes which they need; people who want to stay but whose needs have changed are trapped in accommodation of an entirely unsuitable size or type; and people who want to stay near their family or friends cannot be accommodated in or near their community of choice - to the detriment of the individual, family, community and the public purse.

6.2.4 While funding is difficult, it is not impossible. The nature of planning for mixed tenure housing developments may widen the options. Local authorities can maximise the benefit of available funds by joining in consortia with commercial and housing association developers to redevelop some of the worst urban estates. Funding for such redevelopments would include an element of what we term ‘Partnership

Housing', in our housing policy paper *A Place to Live* (1993). This is housing built with varying levels of public capital subsidy and designed to be rented at a range of prices. This type of partnership could achieve several aims:

- A wider social mix of housing.
- Assistance from private sector funds for environmental work.
- The provision of good quality housing would enable council tenants who wished to buy to do so, thus increasing available resources.

6.2.5 To provide for this diversity of need, a mix of providers is needed. In addition to council-owned housing, this should include housing associations; charitable bodies providing specialist supported housing to special needs groups, including people with disabilities; private rented housing (which can meet a real housing need, particularly for mobile workers); and housing co-operatives and other tenant control initiatives.

6.2.6 The last category is of particular importance; the self-management of social housing often acts as the first step back for urban individuals and communities into the mainstream economy, helping to develop and generate skills, a sense of enterprise, self-confidence and control over one's surroundings. In many cases, this local management can extend to residential care and health facilities.

6.2.7 The allocations system for council housing may sometimes be in need of reform. We would encourage council staff to be assigned to particular housing neighbourhoods, enabling them to build up a detailed local knowledge. The points system should be developed to allow tenants to transfer to larger or smaller property more easily, allow intra-estate transfers, allow tenants to 'earn' the right to move on to more desirable properties, allow carers to be housed near their dependants (where possible) and allow some priority to be given for length of residence in the local community. This reformed system should both

widen individual choice and encourage communities to evolve and strengthen.

6.3 Crime and Policing

6.3.1 The fear of crime cannot be overemphasised as a factor which makes urban areas unattractive as places to live. This applies not only to the inner cities but also to large outer estates. Crime levels in cities affect quality of life, infringe personal freedom and affect income. Insurance companies charge more for car insurance to urban residents and insurance costs for business premises are frequently prohibitive or it may even be impossible to obtain insurance at all. Many elderly people are effectively imprisoned by the fear of crime.

6.3.2 The problem of urban crime must be tackled in a multifaceted and multi-agency approach. Firstly, through the planning system. Crime deterrence should be a planning consideration in the design of all new homes and groups of homes, affecting items such as lighting and landscaping. When large numbers of new homes are built there must be an emphasis on the provision of community facilities from the start. So often in modern developments the youth club and community centre are built last, when social problems have already established themselves and the opportunity to establish a sense of pride in a new community has already been lost.

6.3.3 The planning system should be used to bring residents back into city centres. Recent planning policies have led to the separation of city centre retail and office development from residential areas. Only by making city centres 'lived in' can they be prevented from being threatening places to visit at night. Via local councils and the grants system, incentives can be used to encourage the occupation of flats above shops. New developments should include residential accommodation as well as commercial sites.

6.3.4 Policing policy must be fundamentally reviewed, with the emphasis on a much more visible police presence in the community, targeting resources towards high crime areas.

(See Federal Green Paper 22, *Justice and Security in the Community* (1991) for more details.) We recognise that the fear of crime is as much a threat to quality of life as crime itself. Highly visible community policing would provide important reassurance. Recent experiments with single days of high levels of police presence on the streets have indicated their effectiveness in reducing crime rates and reassuring the public.

6.3.5 However, we also recognise the need from time to time to target scarce police resources into special projects, for example to use undercover methods to break local drug dealing rings or to apprehend persistent offenders within communities. Success in the war against drugs internationally, nationally and locally, will be pivotal in the reduction of urban crime. Anti-drugs campaigns should be supported and initiated in all areas of high incidence of the drugs problem on an inter-agency basis. We would particularly support those which work through peer group pressure and education and which concentrate police resources not on the local 'small fry' but on the middle-ranking dealer for high commercial profits.

6.3.6 We believe that the factor which above all determines the acceptability of such operations within communities is the extent to which the local police are known within and are genuinely part of a local community - responding, consulting and working with local people. This helps rebuild the trust between the community and its police officers which is so often missing. For this reason we would also aim to increase numbers of Special Constables.

6.3.7 We will end the practice of closing small police stations and will reverse the trend by opening small neighbourhood police offices. This initiative will combine full use of modern technology to link neighbourhood police offices into the mainstream of police information, with the advantages of a highly visible police presence. This combines a deterrent effect to local criminals with reassurance to the local community. The location of these would be crucial to encourage close working at ground

level with other service agencies. In addition, we would encourage the establishment of local centres, run by local people, to offer advice and help with crime prevention, victim support, personal safety and domestic violence.

6.3.8 Neighbourhood Watch schemes and other similar crime prevention initiatives need a higher level of financial support, combined with a proper training structure if they are to achieve their full potential. It is essential that the work of the police is not seen in a vacuum. Inter-agency cooperation, and full participation by the local community, is vital to solve the problems of security in urban communities. There must be a legal obligation as well as a philosophical commitment to this on all sides. These measures are designed to reflect our conviction that the enhancement of a sense of community is a prerequisite if measures to regenerate urban areas are to be truly effective.

6.4 Education

6.4.1 Quality education is essential to building communities and opening up new opportunities for those living in urban areas. The school is at the heart of the community: a place where young people and parents can meet and make friends. A good school is the foundation stone for community well-being. Conversely, a poor school leads to isolation and despondency. The challenge of building communities is at its most demanding in urban areas where ethnic and social diversity are greatest.

6.4.2 Education, particularly in deprived urban areas, is hopelessly under-resourced: nursery education is almost non-existent in deprived urban areas; primary schools classes of over thirty are commonplace; resources for pupils for whom English is a second language are being cut; and the divisions between poorly-equipped inner-city schools and suburban schools are growing larger.

6.4.3 Liberal Democrats endorse the findings of the 1993 National Commission on Education that funding should be concentrated "*for immediate expansion and improvement on*

deprived areas, in order to help children living in areas of urban disadvantage or rural isolation". The report goes on to make two further specific recommendations that:

- Within five years at most, there should be nursery education places, meeting nationally agreed standards, for all children in deprived areas.
- Pre-school provision should be targeted to children whose mother tongue is not English.

We therefore reiterate our commitment in English White Paper 4, *Excellence for All* (1992), to providing nursery education for all three and four year olds whose parents want it. We call on the Government to restore Section 11 grants to their pre-autumn 1992 levels.

6.4.4 Urban schools have been ill-served by the current Government. The National Curriculum is too inflexible to enable schools to adapt it to meet local circumstances. The league tables of examination results based on the curriculum are too crude to be useful and are particularly misleading when applied to performances by schools in deprived urban areas. The failure of the tables to include any indicator of 'value-added' discriminates against schools whose pupils come from deprived or non-English-speaking backgrounds. We would abandon the Government's flawed league tables.

6.4.5 Labour must share the blame for poor standards in urban schools. Over the past fourteen years it has controlled 70% of local education authorities, many of them in urban areas. The heavy-handedness of many Labour-controlled LEAs has stifled local initiative and driven many talented teachers away from inner city schools. The Liberal Democrat-led local management of schools has released many such schools from bureaucratic interference.

6.4.6 On the other hand, grant-maintained status deepens the divisions between 'rich' and 'poor' schools. In urban areas, the range of local schools makes it easier for concerned middle-class parents to remove their children from schools which are 'failing'. We do not

blame the parents, but the trend serves to emphasise the need for a more equitable distribution of resources and for local strategic planning across urban areas.

6.4.7 Lack of motivation is frequently a problem amongst pupils in urban schools. They can be helped to gain motivation through initiatives such as compact schemes, which provide pupils with role models from local employers. Research shows that the single most important reason for pupils staying on at school was if they knew someone - a relative or friend - who had, and therefore acted as a role model. 'Mentor' schemes, which encourage such links between pupils and older people who benefited from school, should be encouraged.

6.4.8 Schools and colleges in urban areas should provide focuses for community activities by opening up their facilities and making maximum use of buildings and equipment. Catering facilities could be used by older people during the day and sports and arts facilities by community groups at weekends (see Federal Green Paper 28, *All to Play For*). Valuable resources such as computers could be used to provide courses for the unemployed.

6.4.9 A vital complement to a good education service is a well-funded and secure youth service. For many young people, this is the only structured alternative to home or formal school. A strategy that secures local authority and voluntary-run youth provision and guarantees funding on a medium or long term basis for individual projects is imperative.

6.5 Health and Social Services

6.5.1 The design and environment of cities is not conducive to good health, and people who live in declining urban areas have unusually high rates of disabling illnesses. Causes of ill health include the extent to which personal poverty forces unhealthy choices (especially of diet and living conditions), air pollution, the lack of affordable exercise facilities, traffic dangers, the lower take-up of health promotion initiatives

and the easier availability of drugs. The deleterious effects of the lack of personal autonomy experienced by many urban dwellers also damages health.

6.5.2 Health services in urban areas generally suffer from caring for declining population numbers. Some hospitals are too large, making them excessively costly, while primary health care facilities and social services teams are often much more poorly developed than in less needy areas. Pump priming finance should therefore be made available to enable urban health care provider agencies to replace inappropriate old hospital facilities with a comprehensive range of modern ones.

6.5.3 Health audits should be made a regular feature of the strategic planning process at regional authority and district council levels. Planning committees will be explicitly given the power to consider the health implications of planning applications. All local authority departments will be expected to contribute to the Annual Report by the Director of Public Health, indicating the health issues arising within their domain - including levels of pollution - and the action they are taking to address them.

6.5.4 The availability of social care facilities varies widely. In areas where housing is cheap, a relatively plentiful supply of private residential care facilities for elderly and disabled people has developed. In London, high property values combined with rigid social security benefit ceilings have prevented this evolution. The grotesque consequence has been an export trade in elderly and disabled people as health authorities and social services departments send vulnerable people to the cheapest placements. Elderly people should have a right to expect residential accommodation in the area in which they were normally resident, if they so wish. Councils would be given powers to designate specific sites in order to enable necessary developments to occur locally.

6.5.5 In both health and social care areas, minority ethnic groups, an important element in urban populations, tend to be particularly poorly served. The development of culturally

and linguistically competent services has tended to be very slow. Liberal Democrats would use the flexibility offered by the purchaser/provider divide in both health and social care to encourage the development of independent, non-profit provider organisations which could reflect the specific needs of relevant minority ethnic groups where statutory services had failed to make adequate provision.

6.6 Infrastructure and Amenities

6.6.1 Many urban areas in need of regeneration were at their heyday a century ago. They now suffer from a multiplicity of problems associated with aging infrastructure and town planning inadequate for the needs of the 1990s. An important element is the reduction in the range of services and facilities in poorer areas, including retail, publicly provided services and transport. As richer people move out to seek more pleasant surroundings, this has a downward spiral effect on the areas they leave. It becomes less economic to provide services to those who are left; disproportionately the old, lone parents, less skilled, recent immigrants and other groups.

6.6.2 Deteriorating utilities are a growing problem, for example in sewerage. For conditions to improve, local government must maintain responsibility for municipal services and facilities. Further investment is urgently required for upgrading as reductions in programmed maintenance inevitably lead to greater expense in due course.

6.6.3 In recent years there has been a steady drift of shops away from the high street and 'corner shops' into shopping centres. The location of these centres is based around access by road and has led to the decay of local shopping facilities in the city and the build-up of traffic pollution and congestion. These centres often provide only up-market shopping and leave poorer residents with limited choice. Local shops that provide essential services should be encouraged. This can be achieved through financial mechanisms that make it attractive for

shop owners to move in. We would also give priority to those shop owners who would live over their shops. These measures would help to regenerate local high streets.

6.6.4 The many public service resources which exist within urban areas should be maximised to provide facilities for the community. These include school facilities (playgrounds etc, halls, sports facilities, drama resources), facilities provided for tenants and residents and other public facilities. Communal activity is important in fostering a sense of belonging, and of pride in the community. Liberal Democrats will encourage public bodies of all sorts, however currently funded, to make their resources available to the community for the maximum number of hours for which they are not required directly for the purpose for which they were initially provided.

6.7 Agenda for Action

6.7.1 To serve urban communities better, Liberal Democrat priorities for local authorities include:

- Support for housing and community co-operatives, enabling local people to control their own services and facilities.
- Encouragement for the development of 'urban villages' with a good mix of housing in each area.
- Promotion of the development of 'partnership housing' and encouragement for a mix of housing providers, with particular emphasis on self-management.
- Reform of the council house allocation system to encourage the development of communities.
- Promoting initiatives such as 'mentor' schemes to encourage pupils to stay on and benefit from education.
- Building in crime deterrence to the design of new homes and groups of buildings, and

using the planning system to encourage residents back into city centres.

- Encouragement for highly visible community policing, including the promotion of more small neighbourhood police offices.
- Support for Neighbourhood Watch schemes and other similar crime prevention initiatives, and local advice and support centres.
- The introduction of health audits at regional and district level.
- Support for local shops providing essential services.
- The encouragement of the wide utilisation of public service facilities by the community.

6.7.2 And Liberal Democrat priorities for central government include:

- Reform of public service funding formulae to reflect accurately levels of deprivation and costs of providing social services.
- Concentration of additional education funding on deprived areas, in particular on nursery school places.
- Reform of the education system, including making the National Curriculum more flexible and abandoning league tables.
- Targeting additional health resources on replacing inappropriate old hospital facilities.
- Encouragement for the development of health and social service providers targeted on minority ethnic communities.
- Investment in infrastructure replacement and maintenance.

This Paper has been approved for debate by the Federal Conference by the Federal Policy Committee under the terms of Article 5.4 of the Federal Constitution. If approved by Conference, it will form the policy of the Party in England and of the Welsh Liberal Democrats.

Many of the policy papers published by the Liberal Democrats imply modifications to existing government public expenditure priorities. We recognise that it may not be possible to achieve all these proposals in the lifetime of one Parliament. We intend to publish a costings programme, setting out our priorities across all policy areas, closer to the next general election.

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Note: Membership of the Working Group should not be taken to indicate that every member necessarily agrees with every section or every proposal in this Paper.

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