

# Newsletter



No 2 - Spring 2015

## Editorial



### Professor David Mullins

Following on from our busy start to the academic year, the Spring Term has been another productive period for the Housing and Communities

Research Group at the University of Birmingham, but one of growing disenchantment with housing policy.

**Dr Richard Lang** has joined us on a two-year Marie Curie Fellowship to continue his work on the role of co-operative and community-led housing in England and Austria. This project connects closely with the core interests of the group in exploring alternatives to the dominant housing tenures that are now so clearly failing to meet the needs of younger people, low income households and the 'squeezed middle'. It builds on earlier work in Richard's Plowden Fellowship, the Group's research on self-help housing and empty homes and our growing links with the wider community-led housing movement, including a major contribution to the Building and Social Housing Foundation's (BSHF's) 2014 Windsor seminar on scaling up community-led housing and BSHF's current project on building a community-led alliance with support from the Nationwide Foundation. Further news of Richard's fellowship and updates on our collaborative projects with self-help-housing.org and BSHF on Empty Homes Community Grants can be found later in this newsletter.

**Dr James Gregory's** path-breaking programme with Webb Memorial Trust on the purpose and future of social housing has continued with a first meeting of our expert steering group with input from Housing Association's Charitable Trust (HACT), SHOUT, Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH), London and Quadrant HA, and Peter Redmond of Trade Risks. Key themes of the project include the historic purposes of social housing, the impacts of welfare conditionality and the Localism Act and the implications of shifting delivery to the private rented sector. Progress has already been made in securing partners for follow-on projects on hybridity and 'balancing the books', social mix and non-state funded

development and shared ownership. Plans are now afoot for a major conference to connect this research with policy and practice agendas after the 2015 Election.

**Other group work on social housing** has also included David Mullins' continued project with the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations and Peter Shanks from University of Ulster on housing association governance. Roundtable events were held in Ballymoney and Belfast to discuss research findings building towards a final agenda-setting conference on May 7th 2015 at Helm Housing Association in Belfast. David's support for research by Confederation of Co-operative Housing, Tenant Participation Advisory Service and National Federation of Tenant Management Organisations on the business case for tenant involvement is also featured later in this issue.

**Dr Anita Blessing.** In February, we received welcome news of another Marie Curie European Fellowship success for the Group with a project developed with Dr Blessing, who recently completed her PhD at the University of Amsterdam, on investment in affordable housing. This will develop our analysis of hybridity in the housing system by considering the role of institutional investors and the role of community re-investment levers found in the US affordable housing system to trigger locally targeted social investment. Anita joins us in September 2015 for a two-year fellowship and before her arrival she will co-organise a workshop with David Mullins at the European Network for Housing Research in Lisbon in June on hybrid models in housing.

**The Housing and Communities Research Network** continues to be at the heart of the Group's work. This term's regular seminars have included a well-attended event by Chris Watson and Richard Turkington on renewing Europe's older housing, reviewed by Jon Stevens later in this issue. The **next seminar on March 23rd** is on **the role of partnerships in community-led refurbishment of empty homes** with presentations by David Mullins, Halima Sacranie and Matthew Smith of Birmingham City Council.

Group members recently enjoyed an internal seminar on the history of the Small Heath housing cooperatives by Alan Clawley and Jon Stevens. This helped us to understand how community-led housing solutions might be promoted today. **Maddy Bunker, a student on the Undergraduate BA Social Policy (Housing and Communities) Pathway**, suggested the seminar and reviews it in this issue. We are delighted to feature a student's perspective here and hope to do so in each future edition of the newsletter. This newsletter also charts our recent learning on the relevance of Birmingham's path-breaking urban renewal programme of the 1970s for current day community-led housing, we are looking forward to taking this learning forward on May 15th at the workshop Jon Stevens is convening on 'Residents Renewing Their City'.

On **June 9th**, we are holding a **Network Lunch and Ideas Forum** to share thinking about our future work with the Network. As well as short presentations on current research projects and teaching programmes (in which placements with housing organisations play an increasing role) and collaborative PhDs, we will be inviting ideas on how future activities could meet sector needs for research, consultancy and organisational development.

**Turning to recent housing policy developments**, housebuilding is still at a disappointingly low figure, despite cross-sector campaigns and party political sign up to the goal of increased housing supply. Social housing has been subject to increasing conditionality and use of non-housing need criteria and patronage symbolised by the recent proposal to give away council properties to tenants who sustain employment for over a year. The private rented sector is expanding, but with escalating costs that are not matched by local housing allowances and with very little relationship between price and quality. Not surprisingly there is growing public dis-engagement from a failed housing system as indicated by growing support for campaigns such as Generation Rent, Priced Out and SHOUT. Recent public polling suggests that nearly 40% of the electorate

now see housing as an important issue for the 2015 election. In this context, the need for normative research-based policy and practice has never been greater. **H&CRG aims to provide relevant research and a platform for debate** as we move through the 2015 Election period. We urgently need real alternatives to 'Big Housing' and neo-liberal policies and to re-engage society in housing options that provide an affordable, decent and secure base for social progress (the historic purpose of social housing).

**Professor David Mullins, Housing and Communities Group Lead**

## Contents

Editorial	2
Call for Placement Partners	3
Empty Homes	4
Co-operative and Community-led housing	5
Future of Social Housing	6
Student Perspective	6
Seminar and Book Review	8
Forthcoming Workshop	9
Network Lunch and Ideas Exchange Forum	10
New Publications	10

# Housing and Communities Undergraduate Pathway – Call for Placement Partners



As part of their Year 2 studies, students like Maddy Bunker (above) have the chance to spend 40 hours over a ten-week period on an observational placement with a housing organisation.

During this time, they learn about the implementation of a particular policy issue and about life in a housing organisation. This taster can be very helpful in thinking about future career options, as there is nothing like seeing how things work in practice.

In their placement visit, students keep a reflective diary, prepare a short talk for other students on what they have observed, and do a placement report reflecting on their observations in the context of what they have learned about policy implementation at the university. In their third years, students can go on to do their 10,000 word dissertation on a topic developed with their placement partner. This can be of real benefit to partner organisations.

This year we have worked with Redditch Co-operative Homes, Midland Heart, Birmingham City Council, St Basils and Human City Institute to develop a varied range of placement, internship and

dissertation opportunities. Two graduates in 2014 had the opportunity to gain work experience in an applied research setting through short internships with the Human City Institute. We are now looking for additional placement and internship partners for 2015/16 to start in October. Please see our website for a short video with interviews with existing partners on the benefits anticipated for student placements. Please contact David Mullins (D.W.Mullins@bham.ac.uk) if you would like to discuss hosting a placement.

**David Mullins, BA Social Policy (Housing and Communities) Lead**

As we go to press, there is exciting news of a potential new partnership with a housing provider eager to promote educational opportunities in the housing field. This could result in some bursaries for BA Social Policy (Housing and Communities) students to help offset course fees and travel to placement and dissertation partners.

Similar bursary support from other housing providers who want to help build a skilled and well educated housing workforce in the future would be very welcome.

We are also keen to expand internship opportunities along the lines piloted by the Human City Institute.

Please contact  
David Mullins  
d.w.mullins@bham.ac.uk

if your organisation is interested in supporting Housing and Communities student bursaries or internships.

# News on Empty Homes Community Grants Programme (EHCGP)



**Halima Sacranie**

EMPTY HOMES  
COMMUNITY  
GRANTS  
PROGRAMME  
(EHCGP)

February saw two national events to promote findings of our research on the impact of this innovative programme of funding for community-based organisations to bring empty homes into use. Not only have over 4000 bedrooms been brought back into use to meet housing need; the grant has also been made to go a long way by harnessing many other financial and non-financial contributions. Projects have done things differently by being local, providing real volunteering opportunities and addressing skills and employment gaps and providing solutions to 'wicked problems' such as offender resettlement. Most of all EHCGP has supported the emergence of a whole new sector of close-to-the-ground housing providers, filling the gap once taken up by housing associations. In short, as our presentations in Hull and London highlighted, this has been one of the 'best things' to happen in housing policy for years. Both events, in London and in Hull, were well attended and inspiring showcases for the work of projects who took part in the programme. Each event included presentations from 10 individual projects alongside an overview of the Housing and Communities Group research and an introduction from Sally Turner, lead officer for EHCGP at the Department of Communities and Local Government, and Jon Fitzmaurice of Self-Help Housing.Org whose dogged promotion and facilitation of a diverse group of 110 non-registered providers underpins the success of the programme.

A full report of our research in the North East and Yorkshire and Humberside will be published in April. This adds to our earlier report on the Midlands and helps to make the case for more funding for community-led housing projects like these into the future. Without some public funding, the rich cocktail of inputs these groups provide will not stack up financially; without dedicated funding for community groups, street properties are unlikely to



*Panel discussion at the EHCGP national event in Hull: Sally Turner (left), Prof David Mullins (second from left) and Jon Fitzmaurice (fourth from left)*

be brought into use, and without a focus on wider community, outcomes with huge impact on trainees and clients will be lost. This programme has demonstrated what can be achieved by doing things differently and there is an appetite for more; a survey in December 2014 showed that existing projects could spend an equivalent sum to EHCGP over the next three years.



*The successful formula of EHCGP is summed up by this group of workforce and trainees from Community Campus in Stockton-on Tees. Partnership brings jobs and training as empty homes are brought into use to meet social need. This is indeed one of the 'best things' in housing policy in recent years.*

Findings from the final report on the Empty Homes Community Grants Programme in the North East and Yorkshire will be presented at a number of events in coming months. On the **23 March, we will be hosting Seminar 4 of our 2nd research network series, entitled "Community-Led Refurbishment of Empty Homes**

- **The Importance of Partners**". David Mullins and Halima Sacranie will be reporting on findings from the case study research project evaluating the Empty Homes Community Grants Programme in the North East and Yorkshire. They will be joined by Matthew Smith from Birmingham City Council who will be providing a local authority partner's perspective on the programme. The seminar takes place from 4.15 - 5.45pm in Room 710, Muirhead Tower, University of Birmingham, and after the seminar, there will be the opportunity for relaxed and informal networking in the University's Staff House bar. For more information and to book your place: <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/IASS/housing/2015/23march2015-seminar4-flyer.pdf>

The next planned event for the Empty Homes research output is the Housing – Critical Futures conference on 8 and 9 April at Liverpool University and Liverpool John Moores University. This interdisciplinary conference is organised by Architecture Media Politics Society Journal and forms part of a 2-year broad programme of international events and conferences on the global theme of affordable housing provision. Halima Sacranie will be presenting a paper on the Empty Homes case study finding, focusing on the catalytic role of partnerships in community-led housing. Empirical evidence from 15 case studies of community organisations in the Midlands, the North East and Yorkshire will be used to highlight project successes as well as challenges faced by community-led organisations, and to map the diverse range of partnerships identified.

<http://architecturemps.com/housing-critical-perspective/>

Finally, on May 20th, David Mullins and Halima Sacranie will be presenting findings at the **Empty Homes Conference 2015** which will be held in Birmingham and hosted by the Empty Homes Network. A detailed programme for this will be available soon on our webpage.

**Halima Sacranie (Housing and Communities Research Fellow)**

# The Governance Capacity of Cooperative and Community-led Housing



**Richard Lang**

In January 2015, I returned to the Housing and Communities Research Group for a 2-year Marie Curie Fellowship, undertaking research on the governance of cooperative and community-led housing models, such as Community Land Trusts, Self-help Housing, Community Self-build, and Co-housing. It contributes to a larger international comparative study between the housing sectors in England and Austria, focusing on the potential of different organisational forms to empower residents in both their neighbourhoods and in the wider institutional environment. On a broader scale, the research intends to deepen European dialogue and inform international debates on the new role of cooperative-type models in housing systems.

The Marie Curie project kicked off in January and February with visits to community-led housing events organised by HACT in London, York, and Hull (see also article above on the EHCGP event). These visits helped in getting a better understanding of the progress made in the development of community-led housing models since the 2011 Localism Act and the introduction of related localism reforms in housing and planning. The HACT events turned out to be a great opportunity for re-establishing links to potential case organisations in the field for the next research stages.

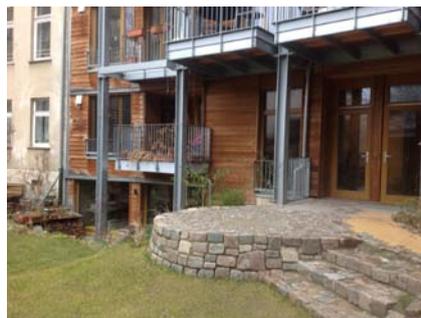
The basis for the current Marie Curie project was established in a pilot study on community-led housing during my short William Plowden Fellowship at Birmingham in 2013. Its final project report has now been published and will be made available as a download on the publications page of the Housing and Communities Group website at the end of March. The Plowden report developed a first typology of English community-led housing models, outlining their main characteristics and highlighting key differences. It includes community-led case studies from the West Midlands.

Interestingly, key results of the Plowden study have largely been echoed by the initial view in re-engaging with the English community-led housing scene in London, York and Hull in 2015. Successful community-led housing projects rely on strategic, experienced partners from local authorities, housing associations or secondary bodies such as umbrella CLTs. There is also a need for a certain degree of external facilitation through public support programmes (e.g. HCA community-led programme and CLG's Empty Homes Community Grants Programme). Nevertheless, fundamental challenges arise in such partnership arrangements

between community-based organisations and government bodies or larger third sector providers. This is due to different organisational logics or the complexity of understanding funding mechanisms in housing. Furthermore, the apparent spatial differences in effective external support for community-led housing suggest that the Marie Curie research project needs to put an emphasis on the configuration of local and regional institutional environments. This seems crucial to understand success and failure in community-led housing.

**Richard Lang, Marie-Curie Research Fellow**

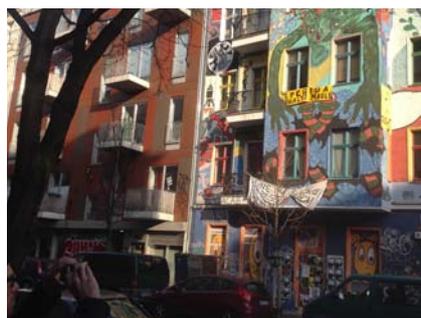
Richard and David recently visited Berlin where there is much greater activity in community-led housing than in England. They found that in addition to long term low land costs and a declining population (both dramatically reversed in the last four years), the key driver for co-housing groups (Baugruppen) has been the existence of specialist architects skilled in working with and supporting groups self-builders. More news of the study trip in the next newsletter, meanwhile a few Berlin photographs.



*Architect designed co-housing for older people, including hospice flats, Berlin*



*Richard visits large co-housing scheme built for 17 baugruppen with 11 architects, Tempelhof, Berlin*



*Co-housing next to formalised squatting scheme in inner Berlin*



*Low cost self-help housing in former Stasi building, Berlin*

## Future of Social Housing



**Dr James Gregory**

Our Webb Memorial Trust programme on the Future of Social Housing is progressing well. Since the last newsletter, we have

made significant progress in the early normative questions, looking at competing accounts of the underlying purpose and value of social housing. We have developed what we hope is a sophisticated typology that, amongst other things, includes an analytical framework that allows us to think more clearly about 'housing rights' and the conditions that may be attached to them.

We believe that this will have great contemporary relevance in the context of recent housing and welfare reforms, but it has also allowed us to take a fresh analytical approach to the history of social housing, bringing greater clarity to the evolution of

contested discourses about desert and need. In December, we presented this early work to the first meeting of our excellent advisory panel (chaired by Emeritus Professor Alan Murie), in what proved to be a lively and very helpful discussion. Following this, we have been conducting a discourse analysis on key political and policy texts from a range of perspectives, and discovered surprising common ground between different political positions.

We are now pushing forward with the more empirical project objectives. We have developed a series of research questions around the impact of the 2011 Localism Act, which has given local authorities greater freedom in both the allocation of social housing and the way in which they discharge their homelessness duties. Our aim is to understand who is losing access to social housing in the new system, with the additional (and challenging) objective of understanding their subsequent

housing 'journey' in the impact this might have on their life-chances. We have just commissioned the Housing Association Charitable Trust undertake empirical research to support this phase of the project, using their quantitative expertise to unpack the data in Continuous Recording of lettings (CORE) and Local authority homelessness (P1E) returns, and looking forward to the results in early June.

You can learn more about the Webb Memorial Trust's wider work on poverty and inequality at: <http://www.webbmemorialtrust.org.uk/>. The Trust recently held a one-day conference on 'A Future Without Poverty', <http://www.webbmemorialtrust.org.uk/topics/latest-news/>

**Dr James Gregory, Webb Memorial Trust Project Co-ordinator**

## Student Perspective



**Maddy Bunker**

**Perspective: Maddy Bunker Learning from the 1970s and 80s Small Heath Co-operatives: Lessons for Community-Led Housing Today**

As a second year undergraduate on the Housing and Communities Pathway, I am undertaking a placement at Redditch Co-operative Homes. I am particularly looking at the aim of the co-op to develop some Mutual Home Ownership housing in Wednesfield. I started this placement

with limited understanding of co-operative housing in the UK and was very pleased to take the opportunity to attend a lunchtime Housing and Communities Group seminar on the history of co-operative housing in the Midlands.

The speakers both had a very longstanding involvement in the sector. Jon Stevens was a former director of Birmingham Co-operative Housing Services and Alan Clawley was one of the first residents of Small Heath Park Housing Co-operative<sup>1</sup>, where he still lives. They gave presentations on the history of co-operative housing.

Jon started from the first building society that was set up in 1775. This was a mutual organisation and was created as a means to fund the building of houses for the members of the society. He made an interesting distinction about social housing during the inter-war years, dividing it into: Philanthropic-housing associations, Self-help-co-operative housing, and Municipal-local authority housing.

The sixties was a time of public disquiet and protest with a critique of post-war planning that was concerned with the destruction of communities. It was also a time of

<sup>1</sup>Small Heath Park is one of a remarkable group of six housing co-ops set up in Small Heath between 1977 and 1988 which survive to this day. Alan Clawley's Book 'A History of Small Heath Housing Co-operatives' is currently in preparation and will be featured in a future newsletter.

changing government priorities regarding the country becoming a property owning democracy. There were several co-operative housing experiments in the sixties such as co-ownership and intermediate housing, and it was also a time of squatting and self-help co-ops. It was in the 1970s that the first co-operative housing strategy was implemented, with housing minister Reg Freeson, who was very supportive of co-operative housing and a specialist national agency, the Co-operative Housing Agency, was established to promote co-ops. The aim was to support funding and development of co-op housing. Birmingham's six Small Heath Co-operatives are an important legacy of that era.

In Birmingham, during the 1970s, urban renewal was promoted by the city council as an alternative to clearance and co-operative housing was seen as a way to acquire and rehabilitate poor quality private rented housing and as an alternative to large-scale council housing. Alan spoke about how the Small Heath co-ops came to be set up in a part of Birmingham just beyond the large-scale clearance areas where residents were concerned about possible demolition of their homes. The emergence of urban renewal policies in the city provided an opportunity for something different. He felt that the key strength of co-op housing was community cohesion and gave the example that you "only have to walk 20 yards to get things done" such as sorting out repairs.

It was interesting to hear from Alan about how co-operative housing was communicated to the public in those days.

Instead of attempting to explain how the co-operative housing model works, they talked to residents of Small Heath about the need to improve their homes and how this could be done, resulting in people wanting to get involved. There was money to buy properties from private owners, improve them and then rent out to the same tenants on a co-operative basis. I consider that at the present time, it can seem complicated to explain co-op housing and even more so to explain Mutual Home Ownership to prospective tenants. It seems a useful step in the communication of co-operative housing to inform the public about how it might meet their housing need rather than becoming bogged down in detailed explanations of mutuality.

By 1985, there was growing resistance from the Housing Corporation to co-ops. They were seen as too resource intensive and the Housing Corporation did not want to fund specialist organisations but generic housing associations. This stopped opportunities for development of co-op housing which wanted to focus on certain areas whilst the Housing Corporation did not want this. The co-ops were also built on a model where the tenants as members ran their own housing. It was viewed by the Housing Corporation that ordinary people did not have the skills to run their housing, and by the 1980s, the Housing Corporation would not register new co-operatives. The co-ops also faced the difficulty of fitting in with standardised regulatory requirements and council allocations policy as well as the move from stakeholder to executive models of governance. The 1988 Housing

Act limited the role of co-operative housing even more as priority was given to large housing associations that could secure private funding.

Jon spoke about the present day and his belief that co-operative housing is being reinvented, using examples of mutual housing associations, community land trusts and self-help housing. He felt that as we live in 'generation rent' when many will not be able to own their own home, co-operative housing may be an option worth serious consideration. Just as in the 1970s, it could present an attractive alternative for people forced to rent and a way of improving housing conditions.

I believe that social housing has much to learn from the co-operative housing sector. Some housing association boards have moved towards a larger scale professional and commercial approach. This has caused the role of tenants to be diminished. In contrast, tenant governance is intrinsic to co-ops. The importance of community for co-operative housing is something that we can learn from today.

I found the presentation very informative and it greatly increased my understanding of co-operative housing in the UK. I am thankful to the Housing and Communities Group for arranging it and particularly grateful to Jon and Alan for the seminar.

**Maddy Bunker, 2nd Year BA Social Policy (Housing and Communities) Undergraduate**

The need for new housing co-operatives was highlighted by another undergraduate attending the seminar. He is hoping to establish a student housing co-op to provide a real alternative to private renting and university student accommodation that can often be expensive for students.

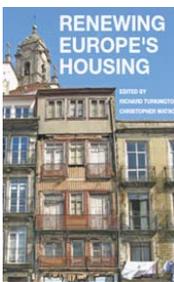
The Housing and Communities Research Group continues to be actively involved in international research collaborations on housing. Professor Richard Ronald and Chris Watson play leading roles in the Asia Pacific Network for Housing Research. Meanwhile Professor David Mullins and Dr Anita Blessing are co-ordinators of the European Network of Housing Research Working Group: Social Housing: Institutions, Organisations and Governance which is convening a workshop on Hybridity and in Community-led housing at the Network's next conference in Lisbon in June 2015. David has been a member of the Co-ordination Committee of ENHR since 2008 and has led the working group on Social Housing: Institutions, Organisations and Governance since 2002.

## Seminar and Book Reviews

### Jon Stevens



*Jon Stevens discussing the history of Co-operative Housing in the West Midlands*



#### Whatever happened to urban renewal?

Reflections from a Housing and Communities Seminar by Richard Turkington and Chris Watson based on their recent book 'Renewing Europe's Housing'.

The January seminar by Richard Turkington and Chris Watson looked at current approaches to the renewal of older housing across Europe based on their recent book 'Renewing Europe's Housing' which includes nine detailed case studies. The studies cover the social democratic countries of Western Europe, the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe, and they also include Turkey. Despite the very different histories and circumstances of these countries, they draw a number of overarching conclusions, which became the main subject of the discussion.

The seminar and the book stimulated some thoughts on the history of urban renewal in the UK and in Birmingham. These thoughts also draw on some work I have been doing on the history of Community Forum. (See below for details of a future meeting on this).

Right at the beginning of their book (on page 2), the authors note that 'housing

production has three main elements: demolition, new building and renewal. Each is important, all are interrelated, and all form part of a balanced housing policy'. That statement seems unexceptional and, if you look at post-war housing policy in the UK, you can see how the balance, shifted over time. From 1950 to around 1970, the main emphasis was on clearance and redevelopment and on new-build, then from about 1970 until about 2000, the emphasis shifted to the renewal of older housing and, latterly, pre and post-war council housing. Since the mid 2000's, there has been a progressive retreat from intervention in housing markets. Government housing policy - such as it is - has switched to supporting mainly private sector new build, whilst housing renewal barely registers in current housing policies. Nowhere is this pattern more evident than in Birmingham, which went through an extensive post war redevelopment programme, involving the clearance of around 60,000 homes and their replacement by 100,000 new built council homes by 1979. This was followed by an equally ambitious programme of improvement of older housing - the Urban Renewal Programme - which affected almost 50,000 homes between 1974 and 1990; followed by a similar programme of improvements to council housing through the 1990's and 2000's.

Birmingham's Urban Renewal Programme was the most extensive programme of intervention in inner city housing markets ever undertaken by any local authority. It was a highly progressive policy, which introduced a range of innovative approaches to renovating older housing supported by wider area-based renewal and improvement, and, which was delivered by locally based multi-disciplinary teams, working closely with local communities and residents groups.

The Urban Renewal Programme came to an end in the mid 1990's, with the withdrawal of significant government funding to support the improvement of older housing and with the switch to the renewal of council housing as a priority. The largely unregulated 'renewal' of Birmingham's older housing is now market-led, driven mainly by the dramatic growth of private renting in both the inner and outer areas of Birmingham and even on council estates, where former Right to Buy properties are increasingly being purchased by private landlords.

Richard Turkington and Chris Watson and their contributors find some interesting parallels (and some significant differences) between past and current approaches to urban renewal across Europe. They note that state-led, area-based, systematic approaches based on 'investment in property' and on extensive community consultation have largely been replaced by market-led (sometimes state-enabled), incremental approaches based on 'investment in people' and on community self-help.

In mapping the trajectories that approaches to renewal have taken in the case study countries they identify (in Chapter Eleven) four key influences; patterns of ownership and tenure (the balance of private/public ownership); policy pathways (government structures and approaches to intervention including community engagement); financial arrangements (government grants, subsidies and loans vs private investment); and policy targets (people vs property targets and determining factors for intervention).

They also examine four current determinants of government policies towards housing renewal. Two of these underpin the retreat from government intervention in housing

markets and urban renewal. Firstly, the widespread adoption of neo-liberal approaches to housing policy, introduced in the UK by the Thatcher government from the late 1980s and adopted and continued by the Blair government of the mid-1990s. Secondly, the impact of the financial crisis of 2008, with its consequential cutbacks in public expenditure accelerating the withdrawal of the state from intervention in housing markets.

All of this could spell the end of housing renewal but they also identify two further factors that are causing a modest rethink on the need for housing renewal. The first of these is the climate change and sustainability agenda, which has highlighted the need to address the least energy efficient parts of the housing stock, typically older housing and unmodernised public housing. This was the main driver behind the Summerfield 'eco village' (which the authors write about in Chapter Three) and it is an important feature of several of the other European examples. And, in some countries, it is shaping government thinking about the need for certain forms of co-ordinated and subsidised 'retro-fitting' programmes (as in the largely ineffective Green Deal in the UK).

A final driver, the 'changing socio-economic geography of cities' highlights the growing inequality and social segregation in many areas of older housing and the very poor housing conditions that are prevalent in such areas. The social breakdown and growing racial tensions that can be found in areas of this type are causing a rethink, in some quarters, about the need for some kind of return to market intervention. However, in the UK, at least, we are a long way from the heyday of urban renewal; with the political parties arguing about the need for forms of limited market regulation rather than any form of direct investment. At this point, it should be noted that it was the social as well and the housing conditions, which shaped Birmingham's intervention in what were known as the 'twilight areas' from the late 1960's onwards and which gave the Urban Renewal Programme its community dimension (e.g. in Small Heath as outlined by Maddy Bunker). In the final chapter, the authors argue that across Europe there is a pressing need to rethink housing renewal and to develop new policies and approaches. They acknowledge that a return to the high levels of direct intervention seen in the UK and in other Western European countries is highly unlikely but they provide some discussion points which were picked up during and after their stimulating presentation.

Several themes and lines of argument emerged. Firstly, although sustained intervention by the state may no longer be feasible, it was argued that at both the level of central and local government, the state could and should take a leading role in formulating renewal strategies, in introducing different mechanisms for intervention, in providing enabling measures and, importantly, in using to the full extent existing and new regulatory powers. Secondly, local communities working with local government must be given a central role in shaping and implementing change, according to the needs and priorities of their areas. Such change may be incremental and preventative rather than on a large scale but if communities are given a long-term interest in the process then it could be transformative. Thirdly, new kinds of

partnerships need to be forged to support and foster the renewal process. Not-for-profit and voluntary organisations need to make a long-term commitment to the renewal process. Finally, limited state funding can be used to lever in further resources, from old and new types of social investors and from mainstream sources of private funding.

In the UK, it was agreed that there is an urgent need for re-engagement and for rethinking along these lines to rebalance housing policy that recognises that housing renewal is a key aspect of housing production and a neglected way of addressing pressures on housing supply.

**Jon Stevens, March 2015**

## Residents Renewing Their City

the legacy of Community Forum and key lessons for the future

**A half-day workshop organised by Localise West Midlands  
with the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies**

12.30 to 5.15pm on Friday 15 May 2015

Michael Tippett Room, Third Floor of the Staff House, Birmingham University

Community Forum was a network of inner city residents' associations and community groups that played a pivotal role in ensuring that local people were effectively engaged in the implementation of Birmingham's ground-breaking Urban Renewal Programme in the 1970's through to the mid 1990's. This workshop is based on a recently published account of the work of Community Forum called *Residents Renewing Their City*. The account of the work considers the role that residents and communities played in that the renewal of Birmingham's inner city areas and it also raises a series of issues that are highly relevant today, including:

- The case for a strategy for co-ordinated intervention to tackle the pressing housing and related issues that now affect Birmingham's inner city areas
- How residents and local communities might be fully engaged in formulating and in implementing a new strategy and in undertaking local projects
- Developing multi-disciplinary and localised approaches to delivering local services in a flexible and accountable way in an era of austerity

Speakers include: Barry Toon, Jon Stevens and Frances Heywood, formerly of Community Forum, Mike Gibson, former member of Community Planning Associates, Peter Archer, former Urban Renewal Project Team Leader, Chris Watson, from the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies and a Birmingham City Council representative.

Plus five case examples of resident-led renewal including: Summerfield Eco Village, Stockland Green Opportunities, Balsall Heath Neighbourhood Plan and Selly Oak HMO Action Project.

To book a place contact: [jon.stevens777@gmail.com](mailto:jon.stevens777@gmail.com)

## Network Lunch and Ideas Exchange Forum – June 2015

The Housing and Communities Research Group are holding a summer ideas forum to help shape its future work with housing network partners on the 9 June, from 12 - 3.30pm at the Nicolson Building at Winterbourne House, University of Birmingham.

This exciting event will include short presentations from research group members and current project partners to highlight to scope of our current work. This will be followed by informal discussion over lunch, followed by three idea exchange workshops on a) future research partnerships, b) consultancy and continuing professional development and c) teaching programmes (in which placements with housing organisations play an increasing role) and collaborative PhDs. We are keen to engage with partners on all three areas. We end the day with afternoon tea and the opportunity for more networking and conversation.

For more details and to book your place please see our events page at:

<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/social-policy/housing-communities/events/index.aspx>

## New Publications

In March 2015, a new publication from Confederation for Co-operative Housing, Tenant Participation Advisory Service, National Federation of Tenant Management Organisations and the University of Birmingham makes a convincing case that tenant involvement in housing organisations can produce financial, service, social and community benefits. The report includes some depth case studies that demonstrate how some social landlords have saved substantial sums by listening to tenants and involving tenants in key strategic decisions such as large scale procurement processes. The report is being launched at the House of Commons on March 19th and will then be made available on the Housing and Communities website.



### DIARY DATE

We are keen to hear from you. If you have comments on any of the items in this newsletter or would like to engage with us in the projects described here please contact us. Short news items, think pieces or book reviews are always welcome. There will be time for a fuller discussion at our Network Lunch and Ideas Exchange Forum on June 9th 2015. For early booking please register on: <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/social-policy/housing-communities/events/index.aspx>