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Title: Communities and growth – lessons from a case study of
Northamptonshire and Milton Keynes

Date: 18 December 2012

Originally presented to: Garden Cities for Tomorrow – A Challenge for
the English Midlands,

Example citation: Colenutt, B., Field, M. and Cochrane, A. (2012)
Communities and growth – lessons from a case study of
Northamptonshire and Milton Keynes. Invited Presentation presented to:
Garden Cities for Tomorrow – A Challenge for the English Midlands,
Moulton College, Northampton, 18 December 2012.

Version of item: Presented version

Garden Cities for Tomorrow – A Challenge for the English Midlands

Moulton College, Northamptonshire
18 December 2012

Communities and Growth – Lessons from a case study of Northamptonshire and Milton Keynes

**Dr Bob Colenutt, Dr Martin Field, Professor Allan Cochrane
University of Northampton/Open University ESRC project**

LGA Councillors Survey 2012

- 59% said resident opposition had been a barrier to new housing development in the past two years
- But when development comes with the necessary infrastructure, only 11% said they thought local residents would still be opposed
- “They don’t want new housing down their road if its going to mean congested roads and crowded classrooms” Cllr Keith House, Deputy Chair of LGA Environmental Board

What this presentation will cover

- Outline of the research we are doing on new housing development
- Planning and Delivering Housing Growth in the South-East 2003-2010
- Summary of responses to housing growth
- Implications for large scale housing development
- Final Reflections

Outline of the Research

- Two year study by OU and University of Northampton
“Tensions and Future Prospects for Sustainable Housing Growth – a case study of Northamptonshire and Milton Keynes “ covering the period 2005-2013
- First year 2012: Documents review; interviews with key stakeholders on “growth” and “sustainability”
- Second Year 2013: Alternative planning and housing development models

See www8.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/tensionsandprospects/
for Interim Report and Policy Briefings

Planning and Delivering Growth in the South East 2003-2010

- Background of shortfall in new housing delivery - The Sustainable Communities Plan 2003 was Labour Gov. response- included “Growth Areas” in the SE - MKSM 170,000 new homes 2001-2021
- The private sector was to deliver growth, with Core Strategies engaging communities and making land available, supported by limited Government funding, with Local Delivery Vehicles and an MKSM Inter-regional Board
- Emphasis on “Sustainable Urban Extensions” of 500 plus homes (approx 35% of MKSM total)
- Key idea to make growth acceptable was “sustainable communities” – Sustainability Assessments; Egan Wheel
- Climate of strong scepticism about growth in the South East throughout this period

Nature of Community Responses 1

- MKSM has a history of “growth towns” and experiments with growth -New Towns, Expanded Towns, Overspill Towns; most local authorities in study area supported MKSM growth targets
- But there were significant local variations in community responses to development across the study area, and often differences between local authorities and local communities
- Most common concern was that “infrastructure” would not be delivered; along with doubts about achieving sustainable development (whether environmentally, socially or economically)

Nature of Community Responses 2

- Concerns about the adequacy of consultation and loss of democratic influence at both a strategic and local planning level e.g objections to setting up of WNDC.
- There was no agreed understanding among local authorities, developers and community groups, about what was 'sustainable' in new development, and what was achievable (this remains the case)
- There were strong views on the protection of existing countryside and villages if development goes ahead.
- Political and ideological differences both within and between national and local political parties and within councils about housing development and growth

What was the impact of community responses to growth?

- Some modification of housing designations (with reductions in housing targets when the recession hit)
- All Core Strategies included a long list of (not prioritised) sustainability policies covering construction, brownfield development, transport, open space, and school provision
- Some authorities redoubled efforts to consult carefully and spell out the benefits of growth
- High tide of community opposition was 2009; with a more subdued community response following the credit crunch and 2010 election
- There was initial optimism that Localism would give residents views more influence

Can we draw out implications for large scale housing development such as Garden Cities or major Urban Extensions?

- Cannot generalise about resident response to new housing - it depends on local circumstances
- Importance of local authority/developer leadership and clarity of policy in achieving local community buy-in.
- Flexibility and willingness from LAs and developer sector to compromise with community concerns is important
- Communities strongly opposed if schemes are brought forward without guarantees of essential infrastructure such as schools, open space and services. Community viability is not the same as scheme viability.
- Even if there is buy-in from surrounding communities, creating viable new communities requires specialised attention (<http://newcitizens.wordpress.com>)

Final Reflections

The Garden Cities debate raises two radically different visions for achieving local acceptance of new development;

(a) Models that capture development value in ways that guarantee and distribute community benefits over the long term (as proposed in the Trust-based, some New Town, and in mutual housing models) ; and which as a principle involve existing and new residents in the process/ownership/design of development (TCPA)

(b) Models that do not capture development value but create an incentive system of direct financial/negotiated payments by landowners/developers to residents affected (Policy Exchange)

These competing visions are at the heart of the current policy debate about communities and new housing development.