

**RICHARD ROGERS' SPEECH  
UTF REPORT 2 LAUNCH  
22 NOVEMBER 2005**

**TOWARDS A STRONG URBAN RENAISSANCE**

I believe in cities, citizens, the civil society and a city government that is empowered to deliver the vision. All culture comes from cities and they are the engines of our economy. I also believe that the well-designed, compact city is the only sustainable, urban environment.

The UK is one of the most densely populated countries in Europe, yet its urban areas are among the least dense. Countryside sprawl has produced acute social problems in urban areas, as better-off families move out to areas where it is cheaper to build new homes, leaving behind derelict land. Continuous outward movement causes environmental damage, the loss of greenfield, traffic congestion, the fragmentation of urban communities and

the loss of social cohesion. It also creates high rates of joblessness. the concentration of low skills and sharp racial divisions in cities and towns as the poor are left behind and newly arrived groups move into spaces created by the outward exodus All these problems are concentrated in inner London, as in other cities.

In 1998, the Deputy Prime Minister invited me to set up the Urban Task Force to identify causes of urban decline and establish a vision for our cities, founded on the principles of design excellence, social well-being and environmental responsibility within appropriate delivery, fiscal and legal frameworks. Many of our 105 recommendations have been addressed by the Government, shaping much of current and future national policy on England's towns and cities.

In the original Urban task Force Report, we set out a vision; a vision of well designed, compact and connected cities supporting a diverse range of uses – where people live, work and enjoy leisure time at close quarters in a sustainable urban environment well integrated with public transport and adaptable to change. Six years on, and with a third successive Labour Government in place, there are some notable successes:

For the first time in 50 years there has been a measurable change of culture in favour of towns and cities, reflecting a nationwide commitment to the Urban Renaissance.

People have started to move back into city centres: in 1990 there were 90 people living in the heart of Manchester, today there are 25,000 residents; over the same the period the population of central Liverpool has increased fourfold.

By adhering to the principle of sequential testing, re-use of brownfield land instead of building houses on Greenfield sites has been encouraged. Today, a national average of 70% of new development is on brownfield land, compared with 56% in 1997.

Building densities have increased, from an average of 25 dwellings per hectare in 1997 to 40 dwellings per hectare in 2005, making better use of our land and resources.

The Commission of Architecture and the Built Environment is now an established champion of design quality; the Academy for Sustainable Communities and the regional centres have been launches to address the skills deficit.

There has been a significant increase in investment in public transport infrastructure, with greater attention given to the need of pedestrians and sustainable transport.

Cities and regions have greater powers to control their destiny.

Thanks to these measures, and a period of sustained economic growth and stability, England's cities are very different places from the post-industrial centre of unemployed and failing public services of twenty years ago. English cities have established themselves as powerhouses in the UK economy and centres for cultural innovation. They stand more confidently on the international stage.

This progress is cause for celebration, but not evidence that the job is done. New Issues have emerged, and old issues remain, which require renewed attention from government.

Failure to keep up with the challenge of climate change threatens enduring environmental degradation.

Middle class families are moving out of towns and cities in search of better schools, less congestion and a safer environment. In 2001, only 28% of people in inner London were aged 45 or older, compared with 40% across the UK as a whole.

Massive inequality persists in our cities. Competition for space pushes up prices for housing, making access for lower income households much harder.

Social housing supply is too low. The Barker Report estimated that an extra £1.2bn is required each year to subsidise 17,000 additional social housing units.

Growing housing demand is a big challenge. How can we build compact, well-designed, sustainable neighbourhoods which make best use of brownfield sites, are well served by public transport, hospitals,

schools and other amenities, and do not weaken existing urban areas?

Opportunities to create sustainable, environmentally friendly communities are being missed because transport provision and funding is still too dislocated from the overall planning process.

A plethora of overlapping regeneration bodies has seriously diffused and reduced the delivery effectiveness of public regeneration schemes.

Few well-designed integrated urban projects stand out as international exemplars of sustainable communities, despite public investment in new housing.

Design quality is not a central objective for public bodies with responsibility for the built environment.

These often lack design input at board or cabinet level.

Let me demonstrate the above by a case study.

One of the greatest urban opportunities in the world today, the Thames Gateway, is failing to live up to its full potential. Stretching for 50 kilometres from the heart of London to the North Sea, it is defined by a rich and varied landscape along both sides of the glorious River Thames. A large, diverse and economically active population is expected to move into the area over the next decades, creating a city the size of Manchester in the wider Thames Gateway, which stretches from the Isle of Dogs to Southend. And a city the size of Liverpool within the London Thames Gateway itself. The potential for the area to become a model sustainable city, to rival Manhattan, Barcelona and parts of central London, is being thwarted by the labyrinthine complexity of its political and administrative system. In fact, the piecemeal development that marked the free-for-all of the post-war

is still dominated the emerging urban landscape, which is devoid of any character or sense of place. While there are few isolated examples of high quality development, a confusing plethora of nearly 30 institutions - regional and sub-regional partnerships, regeneration agencies, environmental groups and local boroughs – are tasked with managing the development and regeneration process. The fragmented decision-making process is leading to a fragmented urban landscape. A trip down the Thames reveals how we are squandering a great opportunity: small scale, low quality, shoddily built houses stand jeeb by jowl with oversized structures, with no sense of scale, design, character or continuity. The river itself is cut off form most of the surrounding communities.

Despite its over-dependence on offices in its early phases, Canary Wharf stands alone in showing how a well-designed environment can be delivered in a focused

way with a dedicated team responsible for key strategic decisions. Following the establishment of the London Docklands Development Corporation in 1981 – which consisted of a small board of ten people including the CEO of the developers as well as three representatives from the local boroughs – Canary Wharf was completed in record time; from brownfield site to completion of the Canary Wharf tower in the less than four years, creating a new business district that competes with the City of London. Significantly, all other bodies reported to this Board which was advised by a highly respected design committee.

The City of Barcelona delivered a highly successful Olympics in 1992 with an equally focused body run by the Mayor and his Chief Architect, transforming an ex-industrial site into a new piece of city. For the 2012 Olympic Games, London should learn from these

exemplars to become a model of sustainable and well-designed urban environment. The lessons for the future are clear: without a small focused decision making board responsible for strategic decision-making, the delivery of a high quality environment is at risk in the Thames Gateway.

To solve the problems facing us today and build on our successes to date we have to learn from the experience of the past six years, reflect honestly on what has worked and where problems remain, and take decisions now to ensure the mechanisms to deliver an urban renaissance are fit to meet the exacting demands of the vision.

That is why I have asked my colleagues from the Urban Task Force to collaborate in writing this short report. It is not a comprehensive update of 'Towards an Urban Renaissance,' the final report of the Urban Task Force in

1999. Rather, it is an independent report based on the personal experience of Urban Task Force members on the ground, designed to stimulate public debate and encourage new thinking.

I hope this work will help us realise the widely shared vision of a lasting Urban Renaissance in England.

The Report is divided into the same four principles that formed the mission statement of the original Urban Task Force report: design, social, environment and delivery.

Ricky Burdett – Professor of Architecture and Urbanism at the LSE will look at quality of design covered in Chapter 1

Anne Power – Professor of Social Policy at the LSE will look at social well-being in Chapter 2

Tony Burton - Director of Policy, Strategy at the National Trust will consider the environmental challenges in Chapter 3.

Chris Brown – Chief Executive of Igloo Regeneration will examine the delivery, fiscal and legal framework in Chapter 4.

I now hand you over to Ricky Burdett.