

Without funding, the new public transport system would not materialize.

At present the law allows authorities to seek contributions from developers to meet governmental 'planning obligations' which have arguably been used mainly to fund off-site highway improvements and sometimes other local facilities. The amounts have seldom met more than a small proportion of the impact costs of the development but the result has been to lower land values as the developer tries to deduct his obligation from the price of the land, in effect transforming his obligation into a variable form of betterment charge.

In a government consultation paper aimed at 'Influencing the Size, Type and Affordability of Housing' (ODPM, 2003), it suggests that developers of sites of 0.5 ha and over should help subsidize a proportion of new houses and pass the cost onto the landowner 'via reduced land-sale values' (p. 26). In other words, the Government wishes to secure from betterment a reduction in house prices or rents, to counter the escalation which has arisen in part from planning policies which have reduced the supply of some categories of new homes. The proposal would lessen the possibility of funding sustainable public services (particularly the capital costs of new transport systems), or of alleviating some of the adverse effects of shifts in the location of commerce and industry by transferring back to non-growth areas of low value, the betterment accruing to the inflated value of land in high-growth areas. It remains unclear as to how assurance can be given that funds from accruing betterment values will be channelled into those areas that need it, and will tackle aspects such as counter-urban dispersal, regeneration and environmentally sustainable objectives.

## Conclusion

Both the Bristol and Sheffield studies support the assertion that the current, conflicting factors of dispersal, regeneration policy and environmental objectives can be turned to sustainable advantage, but only if certain principles are followed. The city sub-region is adopted as the scale of the plan; the key issues of locating activity, determining the form and routes of transport, deciding the location for new development and regeneration and defining corridors of intensive use are all comprehensively addressed.

I have to conclude that such an approach will continue to be frustrated by a lack of investment in some regions, low levels of funding generally, the failure to confront issues such as development value, the structure of planning administration and by its

emphasis on procedure rather than product. Unless the Government abandons its apparent obsession with unselective compaction and containment, there is little hope that the statutory planning system in England will realistically help cities and towns evolve sustainably, which seems to be attributable to a real lack of public support and political will in the English planning system.

## Notes

1. CPRE (Campaign to Protect Rural England), who care passionately about our countryside and campaign for it to be protected and enhanced for the benefit of everyone (2004a).
2. *Corridors and green wedges*: The concept of corridors of intensive use separated by green wedges cited in *Sociable Cities* (Hall and Ward, 1998) is at least 75 years old. The MARS group suggested something similar for London in the 1930s and reference has been made to the Finger Plan for Copenhagen in 1948 and to the Markelius Plan for Stockholm in 1952. In the 1960s, Alfie Wood, the then City Planning Officer, proposed linear extensions to Norwich and in 1993, the concept was promoted by the Sustainable Development Study Group of the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA). Yet there is a marked reluctance to adopt its apparent benefits. The reasons seem to be threefold: the administrative structure of the planning system, its lack of real resources and dependence upon the private sector to implement most parts of most plans, and a preoccupation with the processes of planning rather than the product.

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