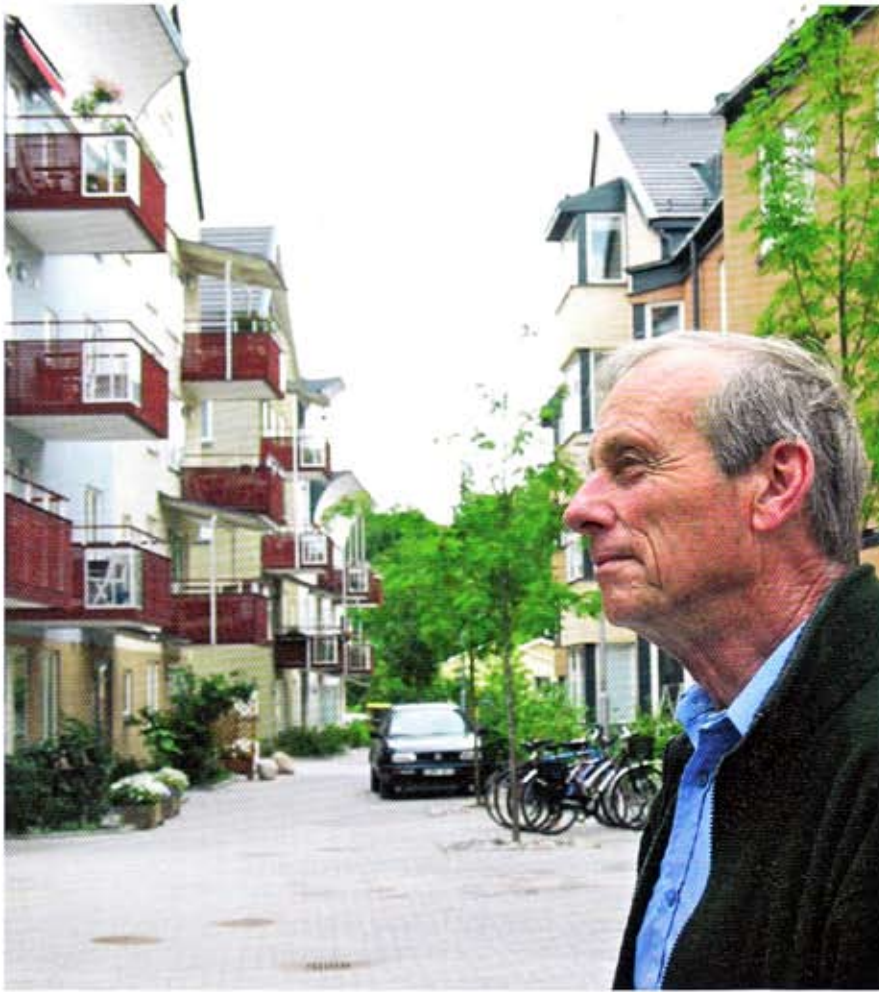


## TOPIC NEWCASTLE GATESHEAD PATHFINDER

Michael Crilly outlines ongoing initiatives on Tyneside



The test will be if the measures of success of the programme are qualitative, not simply empirically driven outputs

The establishment of a pathfinder programme in Newcastle and Gateshead can be misleading for those who don't understand some of the peculiarities and complexities of the housing market in the north east of England. The core of the Tyneside conurbation, in common with most of the 'core cities', is a successful and growing housing market. Both municipalities have benefited from the attractions of the historic neo-classical city centre centred on Grainger Town and the qualities of 'bluefield' development sites on Newcastle's East Quayside and south of the river at Gateshead's Baltic Quays. This urban core is encircled by high value, middle class, liberal voting areas packed full of well maintained, high quality, high density Edwardian terraces and populated by established communities, families and graduates working in the growing sectors of the creative industries.

Yet, similar housing in some areas to the west, east and south of the city centre have very different social characteristics that demonstrate the underlying features

of the pathfinder area on Tyneside and the historical associations with working class housing. The geographical core of the pathfinder is centred along the riverside in areas close to the city centre that have traditionally been dominated by heavy industry and now contain large areas of homogenous low-cost and social housing. The private housing market in the area has been influenced by the stigma attached to the area, and particularly to the housing tenure, as much as the physical characteristics of the location or the housing types. Yet in contrast, the north east of England as a region is stabilising and, dependent upon the statistical evidence you refer to, actually growing in population and housing demand. In this context, there are growth areas and 'hotspots' in many of the peripheral market towns and suburbs.

It is this regional urban context, one where the attraction of residential areas is heavily dependent upon socio-economic factors and typically complex and unpredictable, where the discipline of urban design is becoming one of the key regeneration professions.

In an area where the underlying social factors and perceptions of the area are the primary causes of housing market decline, the challenge is to adopt a design-led approach to addressing location and tenure based stigma. As such, the Newcastle Gateshead pathfinder is not simply a physical programme of regeneration but one that has to be based on the identification and promotion of new housing markets. It is this thematic area of work where urban planning and design has begun exploring different approaches to identifying, testing and promoting new housing choices. Often these areas are deliberately not trying to compete with suburban forms of development but to establish or re-evaluate complementary forms of urban development that help to restructure the social and tenure mix within many of the existing inner city communities and avoid potential residential displacement within the conurbation.

The overall scale of change anticipated on Tyneside within the four different area frameworks is ambitious. While there are inevitable variations in emphasis between areas, the approach and value of urban design is gradually becoming evident through a variety of different projects. These are unfashionable in focusing upon different design and procurement processes, highlighting

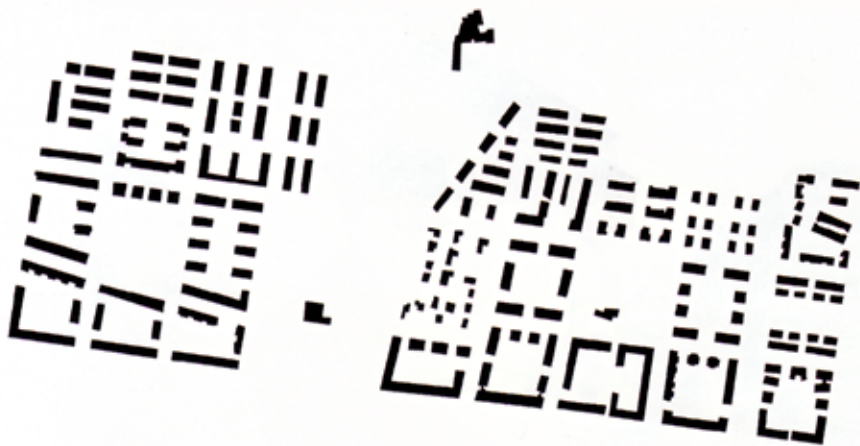
**Above** Vernon Gracie, project architect on the redevelopment of the Byker estate 1969-1982, providing a guided tour of contemporary housing schemes in Stockholm (Bo02 Housing Expo, Hammarby Sjöstad, and Järla Sjö, Nacka) for a group of current Byker residents and ward councillors.

**Opposite page** Walker Riverside is an ODPM pilot area for design coding. Diagram shows the aspects of the public and private realm to be coded.









Above 'Expo' figure ground plan Kronsberg, Hannover

essential services and facilities at a neighbourhood scale – the delivery of a sustainable community. The first phase will be concerned with addressing the level of area based stigma.

Initial market research on housing in the West End of the city, quickly realised that any development would have to become 'world class' in order to address the reputation of the area. The definition of what the over-used phrase of 'world class' actually means in practice has led to a broad benchmarking exercise in international housing expos and the production of a business case for a NExpo (a North East expo based on the postcodes from the pathfinder area).

The idea of a housing expo operates on several levels. It is to provide a physical legacy of a range of examples of sustainable urban development, both refurbishment and new build, that are relevant to many of the northern cities; and to develop a marketing and promotion strategy (that includes short-term exhibition and promotional material) to address some of the social attitudes to living in the inner-city area and perhaps of particular sustainable housing types.

#### SUSTAINABLE HOUSING PROJECT

There are many smaller sites throughout the pathfinder area that are more typically urban 'brownfield' infill, where there are challenges to provide a locally complementary housing mix and additional choice, specifically a market for sustainable housing options.

The city council is incorporating and encouraging sustainable design principles into a series of statutory planning briefs that are being applied to several of these public sector owned brownfield sites throughout key regeneration sites in the city's pathfinder area. As there are limitations to what the planning system can provide on its own, these same principles are being used, this time on a mandatory basis, for the land owner's brief within Newcastle City adopting principles for carbon neutral development. Each of the sites will be testing different tenure mix and a variety of housing types. All of these will aim to be constructed to 'Passive House' standards and using existing BRE sustainability standards. In changing the type of housing, it is inevitable that there will be a different approach required from developers that will influence and guide any approach to site marketing. Thus, the corporate approach to the commercial marketing of the development sites will be based upon a detailed analysis of the views of sustainable housing options by consumer focus groups of house buyers within the sub region and through testing with a variety of 'bespoke' and volume house builders.

#### SUMMARY

In the processes outlined above, there is a growing link between urban design and environmental sustainability that is explicit and directly derived from national urban and planning policies.

The prevalent political confidence, that urban forms of development are inherently more sustainable and that they will become a marketing attraction for the regional housing market, is still to be proven. In a similar way, the assumption that design quality and innovation, even supported by the right type of marketing, can address locational stigma and compensate for higher density living in neighbourhoods with social problems and comparatively poor educational attainment levels may be slightly naive.

The projects show how Tyneside is exploring sustainable housing options at a variety of different scales, aiming to generate a regional market for sustainable housing. In doing so, and attempting to mainstream existing sustainable technical and construction methods through a variety of delivery processes, there is a growing awareness of the importance and impact of political and socio-economic systems in the delivery of sustainable development. Often to achieve the sustainable urban option, there is the need to innovate and take risks in procurement and delivery process and not simply leave urban design as a physical discipline. Ultimately, the various processes are testing the policy tensions between community involvement, with all of the challenges around capacity building and devolving decision-making, and environmental sustainability. Urban designers need to be aware and responsive to these broader social and political concerns.

Yet there is a danger that rather than aiming for the type of urban restructuring set out in the sustainable communities plan, where social mix is achieved through a variety of housing types, sizes and tenures that commercially safer options are pursued.

If the pathfinder programme is unwilling to take risks and test the market potential for different forms of urban living, it may simply become another regeneration funding stream supported by sub-regional quangos. The test will be if the measures of success of the programme on Tyneside are qualitative, not simply empirically driven outputs based on the number of housing demolitions, completions and the audited approach to the use of public finances. At the moment the rhetoric and principles are sound, and there are several examples of innovation in design processes, but the priorities have yet to become consistently evident through the use of the extensive public resources available to the programme.

Michael Crilly is Senior Urban Designer with Newcastle City Council. The views expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect those of Newcastle City Council.