



# ASSET

## COMMUNITIES AND PLACE SHAPING:

THE HOMES AND  
COMMUNITIES AGENCY

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David was a Director of Arup, the international design and development consultancy, and led the firm's consulting business in development, planning, economics, transport planning, and environment. His assignments ranged from planning and development advice on the major developments at Stratford City, King's Cross, Greenwich and Paddington, through to regional programmes for the UK and European Commission. He is a chartered surveyor, planner and economist. David is a Board member of the RSL East Thames Housing Group and chairs the Group's development subsidiary, East Regen. He chaired the RICS Public Sector Advisory Board and is a Director of a community sports trust.

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# COMMUNITIES AND PLACE SHAPING:

## THE HOMES AND COMMUNITIES AGENCY

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### INTRODUCTION

This paper deals with the purpose and objectives of the proposed Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and the issue of communities and place shaping as illustrated with a case study and lessons and issues arising.

The HCA is a new agency which builds on and extends the work of the organisations which are being incorporated into it:-

- English Partnerships;
- The Housing Corporation (investment function, with regulation going to the Tenant services Agency).
- Communities and Local Government (housing delivery programmes and Thames Gateway);

The agency becomes fully operational in December 2008 and will have a unified investment, land and affordable housing remit.

### HCA MISSION

The mission is to create the opportunity

- For people to live in homes they can afford in places they want to live and
- For local authorities and communities to deliver the ambition they have for their own areas

It will be a national agency that works locally to

- **Support** the delivery of new homes
- **Secure** the delivery of affordable homes
- **Accelerate** regeneration
- **Improve** the existing stock and transform neighbourhoods
- **Ensure** delivery is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable

It is important to emphasise that the agency will be concerned about the provision of new homes, the improvement of existing homes and the regeneration of communities.

### NEW APPROACHES

The agency intends to shift the focus from an involvement with individual projects to a much larger and more intensive involvement with programmes and areas generally. The new themes that are emerging are:-

- Focused on the needs of communities and people
- Based on programmes of activity rather than funding projects
- Integrated to meet the needs of areas
- Responsive and innovative to meet changing circumstances

It is important that colleagues in local authorities or in other organisations that intend to engage with the HCA in the future appreciate these new approaches. The agency will need to have the whole story, if I can put it in those terms, and not just focus on one off projects here and there, although some of those projects may well be important.

### PARTNERS' EXPECTATIONS

In talking to colleagues in local government we are aware of the sort of expectations that are out there, including,

- Commitment, passion and quality
- The importance of place
- Long-term flexible partner
- Market facing
- Existing as well as new housing
- Build on current strengths
- Skills and capacity challenge
- This is about people

These issues are being built into HCA thinking going forward and hopefully, on 1st December, it will all work. There will also be many things that will have to evolve in terms of policy, thinking and operations as the new agency develops. But remember many programmes coming to the agency are already committed and in train so there may not be much initial flexibility. Times are hard and budgets are stretched and it is not possible to switch everything off and start again.

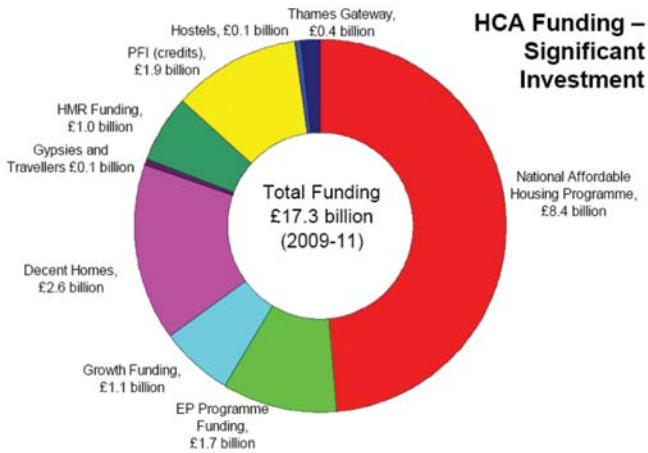
### KEY POLICY ISSUES

There are quite a few key issues that both the HCA and partners are focusing on. The market downturn is obviously the major and most current problem but there is a set of wider issues that were identified well before the market changed, for example

- Homes for vulnerable people
- Homelessness
- Rural issues

- Surplus public sector land
- Public-private partnerships
- Community engagement
- Design and sustainability
- Regional working

## HCA FUNDING



Total funding of £17.3 billion, 2009 to 2011, is a lot of money and the diagram shows where it comes from. Most of it, almost half, comes from what was effectively the Housing Corporation core budget. Although there are a lot of commitments already in the pipeline one of the purposes of the agency is to move the funding around and to work with it more flexibly.

## HCA TOOLKIT

The tool kit that HCA is developing will have a number of components and is likely to be used in different and more flexible ways. Its components include the following.

- Advice, support and capacity building
- Master-planning and project management
- Preferred developer panels
- Strategic relationships with lenders and investors
- Surplus public sector land
- Investment: growth, renewal and affordability
- PFI credits, joint ventures and funding
- Land assembly and site acquisition/disposal
- Compulsory purchase

## THE SINGLE CONVERSATION

The three key elements of the single conversation concept are that

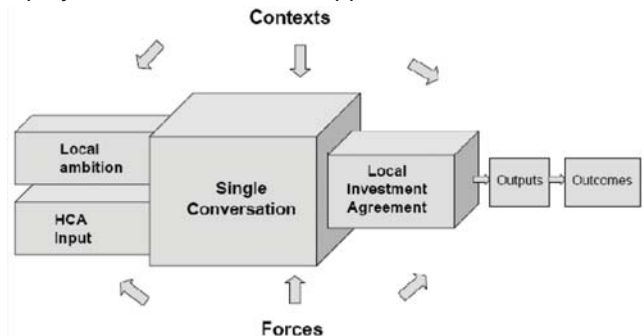
It is a **dynamic** process for how the HCA will agree and secure delivery at the local level in support of national objectives...

...by working with local authorities and their partners in an **ongoing relationship** to achieve their ambitions for

housing growth and renewal, whilst ensuring an appropriate contribution to the delivery of regional (and therefore national) objectives...

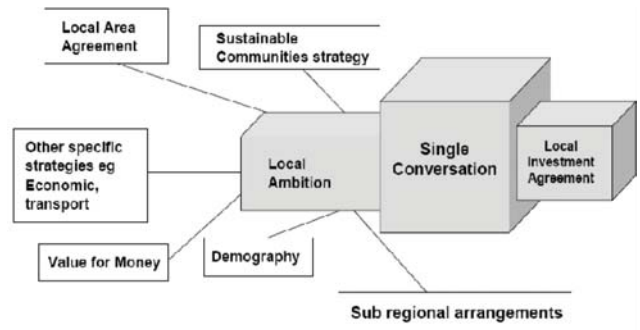
...and by **covering comprehensively** the whole range of issues in an area which previously would have been discussed by a range of different agencies and departments

The need is for a longer-term set of programmes and investment, bringing onboard other partners as well as the HCA and the local authority, with the ultimate objective of changing areas for the better and for the long term. Thus it is not just about a quick fix for a single project but a more holistic approach.

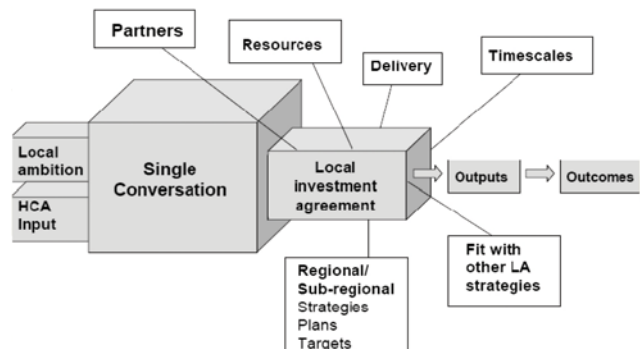


This is the single conversation concept in diagrammatic form. It is taking local ambition, particularly local authority ambition, and involving other partners and players, as well as the HCA, and pulling that all together to produce an investment plan called here a Local Investment Agreement.

## LOCAL AMBITION

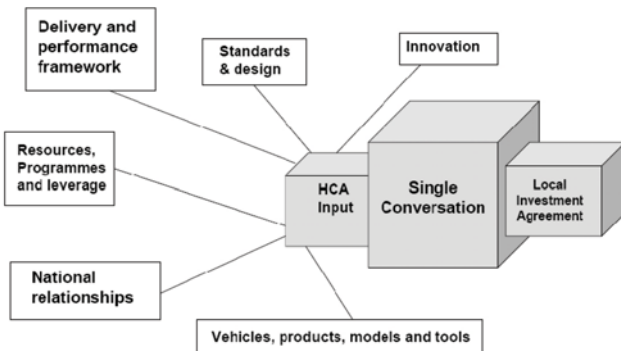


Local ambition includes those elements in the diagram such as Local Area Agreements, Sustainable Communities Strategies, and the like. These are brought together with the HCA tool kit, already mentioned, to build a long-term plan, the Local Investment Agreement.



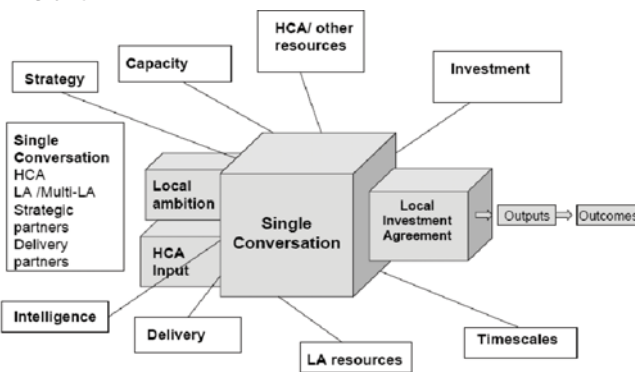
This delivers long-term commitment in terms of eventual outcomes and long term investment commitments from the local authority, its partners, the HCA and others.

## HCA INPUT



These are the inputs of the HCA. A key issue is design. Design is not only about making places attractive but also about improving the long-term sustainability of areas and getting value for money. English Partnerships and the Housing Corporation have always seen design quality not as an extra, but embedded in the process and essential to achieving value for money.

The outcome, the single conversation model that evolves when all the inputs and outputs are put together looks like this.



## DESIGN AND VALUE

When I see in the Estates Gazette an authority selling another piece of land occasionally I send for the pack to see whether there are any design standards attached to the sale and am usually told "that's all in the planning". But I firmly believe that as stewards of public sector land, including surplus public sector land, we need to do much more than merely state that we have a planning brief and therefore we have discharged our role in terms of design and sustainability, and proceed to focus on maximising a receipt. Most local authorities have got good green credentials backed up with agreed green environmental policies but if these are not carried through into the management, development or sale of assets then there is a gap. Planning often sets minimum standards, and alone will not deliver high quality development, but sale conditions incorporating authorities green environmental

policies, high quality design briefs and a well informed, responsible and effective disposal strategy will. So in terms of design we will be using the English Partnership and Housing Corporation design standards and making sure those apply not just on a project basis but across the whole programme.

There is a strong business case for good design; it is more than being just about making places visually attractive. Good design fosters making the best use of resources, can ensure the product is fit for purpose, gives value for money, encourages community identity, improves long term liveability and creates commercial value.

## DESIGN: THE HCA STATEMENT OF INTENT

- Good design and sustainable development to be indivisible
- Consistent and high core standards across all HCA activities
- Address the ongoing management of projects
- Promote market improvements and exemplar initiatives; encourage innovation and efficiency
- Have mechanisms and procedures in place to ensure standards are delivered
- Build capacity both internally and externally
- Work in partnership with other national, regional and local agencies
- Consult with partners on our approach

## SKILLS: CURRENT RESOURCES, DELIVERY AND PRIORITIES

A number of consultancies operate under HCA predecessor organisations, for example ATLAS, the National Consultancy Unit, Policy and Economic Teams, and an Urban Finance Team I set up some time ago, and a Low Cost Home Ownership (LCHO) team. All of these have produced a range of guidance, tailored training packages and information and support. This will continue through HCA and will be easier to access.

This area will need to evolve and respond to your views on the type of expertise that would be helpful, for example building licence agreements, information on Escos (energy supply companies), and the like.

HCA wants to raise the game on skills and is looking to build that into the single conversation by

- Developing the key professions (planners, regeneration specialists)
- Enhancing the supply and quality of professionals
- Improving leadership
- Developing a shared framework for individual and collective action, within and between organisations across the sector.

## CASE STUDY: DEVONPORT, PLYMOUTH

In Devonport, down in the South West, is an old Defence Estates site where redevelopment has now started in accordance with an agreed master plan.

Initially we are taking down some massive dock walls that surround the site. The local community helped to kick off the process, and were fully involved from the outset.



It is a massive regeneration project with a firm focus on sustainability. The first phase of development will produce 500 homes, plus extra care facilities, plus affordable homes, and community infrastructure. HCA is working with the local authority and partners on collaborative master planning with planning policy work upfront with an emphasis on speed of delivery and partnership with the private and RSL sectors. The outcomes will be market, affordable and extra-care homes. We will be putting in community management via a Trust and there is a focus on design and sustainability. This project is already an RTPI 2007 National Sustainable Community winner.

It will produce an integrated mixed tenure/income walkable neighbourhood plus employment, schools and education, retail and leisure. The long-term vision is a sustainable community. Conventionally, surplus public sector land is put on the market, sometimes even without a development brief, but almost inevitably whatever happens thereafter is down to the developer. That is not the HCA approach, and I believe that responsible public sector land owners have the responsibility to ensure that disposals not only deliver value for money to meet financial requirements, but part of that responsibility is to ensure development meets the wider sustainable and community objectives that all our organisations subscribe to.

## CONCLUSIONS

The HCA is a new agency intent on developing new approaches and new methods. There is much work to do on detail but it is not too early for local authorities to approach us with proposals. HCA intends to be flexible in achieving both local ambitions and national objectives. Using the single conversation model we have a very clear commitment to collaborative relationships, national, regional and local. But collaboration and dialogue are two way relationships and our partners need to be clear as to what they contribute to deliver the outcomes we both want. I am very much looking forward to working with you.

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