

The Future of Planning: beyond growth dependence

Summary

planning of our towns and cities has become too dependent on high rates of economic growth

community-based approach

a set of reforms

Introduction

e planning of our towns and cities has become too dependent on high rates of economic growth. It predominantly works by encouraging market-led development and then negotiating for a share of the development pro ts to be used for local community and broader social bene ts. is can work well in certain locations, where there is buoyant market demand and the local community are in agreement with the proposed project.

Embedding community-based planning

Embedding this alternative approach within UK planning requires a set of reforms encompassing new planning guidance, planning tools and new forms of community engagement. e forms suggested below comprise a package of measures which should be considered as a whole; it is through the holistic implementation of this set of reforms that the greatest progress will be made in transforming UK planning to genuinely support a community-based approach.

Reform of planning guidance

Current planning policy guidance, particularly the 2012 National Planning Policy Framework, relies heavily on promoting market-led development. It sees low property-value, low household-income areas primarily as sites ripe for (re)development and fails to provide su cient support for protecting and improving them to meet the needs and aspirations of existing local communities.

Reformed planning tools

Regulation

Planning policies need tools to be implemented. e primary tool currently available to the UK planning system is **regulation** through the planning permission process. Regulation and planning permissions can be reformed to support community-based approaches more e ectively, via the following measures:

Supporting community land use:

- Implementation of exceptions policies as a means of releasing land for community-based development at existing use value
- •Release of sites for community-based options such as self-build
- Designation of Community Assets supporting Justice and Sustainability to protect land uses which are valued by communities and promote equality and environmental sustainability

Promoting meanwhile uses

• Flexibility in development control for meanw

Fiscal measures

In addition to transferring land and property rights, there will often be a need for nancial resources to full the aspirations of community-based approaches. ere is a need for the following scal measures:

- Funding the purchase of land for community development and assets for community management;
- Considering innovative ways to raise such finance;
- Funding the reuse of empty homes, through both subsidies for necessary works and loans to enable their ownership to be transferred;
- Extending subsidies for energy ef ciency measures for those in fuel poverty;
- Reinstating grants for area improvement under community guidance for existing residential and SME needs, and
- Considering changes to tax and grant regimes to incentivise the reuse of empty property, such as the removal of VAT on refurbishment; this may require species investigation to identify the barriers posed by the complexities of current scal measures.

Reformed community engagement

All community-based approaches make considerable demands on local communities – to lead and even manage the processes of change – and also on local planners – to engage more e ectively with local communities. Current community engagement processes are often un t for any purpose other than tokenism in the face of market-led development. e following reforms to local community engagement are therefore needed:

- Ensuring that community engagement provides full, supported opportunities for the voices of lower-income and vulnerable communities to be heard, alongside those representing the just sustainability agenda;
- Utilising and supporting social capital to enable community-based development projects;
- Utilising existing social capital for the management of community assets, providing support through appropriate management structures for collective decision-making and conflict resolution; and
- Using social capital existing within local business communities to support town centre enhancement.

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERING WHETHER GROWTH-DEPENDENT PLANNING IS APPROPRIATE:

- Are the economic conditions right for this mode to be effective?
- Are the social and environmental benefts that will be generated, sufficient to contribute to sustainability?
- Will these be equitably distributed?
- Does the proposed development, together with these benefts, command the support of the local communities?

If the answers to these questions are 'no' and if the more vulnerable groups in the area, who already have a lesser share of society's benefits, losing out through the change that is occurring then an alternative, community-based approach to planning should be considered.

Conclusion: Creating the conditions for local choice

If these reforms were implemented, then $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{4}$