

Housing: An international challenge

Part Four

Quality and sustainable house building

About:

The LGA's People and Places Board commissioned a short project to share good practice taking place internationally on housing. Examples are drawn from academic research, CECODHAS Housing Europe (the European Federation of Public, Cooperative & Social Housing) and through LGA international contacts.

Five themes were chosen to reflect key issues facing policy and lobbying priorities for local government:

- Raising finance to invest in affordable housing
- Land for building
- Building quickly
- **Quality of building and quality of life.**
- Making the best use of existing building.

Quality and sustainable house building

High quality homes need to be supported by adequate infrastructure to ensure that the costs and impacts of development are met whilst maintaining the viability of the site overall. The current financial climate has meant that this is a challenging circle to square and local authorities in England work with developers to encourage and support schemes that are viable and provide the necessary infrastructure to support both new communities and supporting recovery by creating jobs and attracting investment.

There is much to learn from international experience of building housing, and good practice in building homes that are good quality and designed for current and future housing needs. The case studies in this chapter set out the role of councils to work with communities to ensure high quality design and sustainable housing and the use of financial levers to support infrastructure provision.

International examples

1. The City of Toronto in **Canada** has a housing charter called “opportunity for all”. The charter is designed to guide city council staff in assisting people who face challenges finding affordable accommodation, from single people to seniors and people with disabilities. It is part of the “Housing Opportunities Toronto” programme that also aims to create 1,000 affordable homes every year.

www.toronto.ca/affordablehousing

From Affordability and Choice Today (ACT) in Canada, a program aimed at Canadian municipalities: Housing in My Backyard: A Municipal Guide for Responding to NIMBY

2. The Andria Housing Cooperative in **Northern Italy** developed the template for first time homes for young couples in response to a shortage of affordable housing. The homes are built as small two-storey terraces and are designed to be expandable accommodation by the owner at a later date saving money on the initial building cost. The first floor is left uncompleted but can be converted into bedrooms and bathrooms as needed.

Winner of a World Habitat Award

<http://www.worldhabitatawards.org/winners-and-finalists/project-details.cfm?lang=00&theProjectID=126>

3. West Vancouver in **Canada** found that residents were particularly concerned about housing and neighbourhood character as part of the community planning process. Changes such as older houses being replaced with newer, larger ones and affordability of housing for older and younger people were common themes. The municipality’s response was a year long dialogue on neighbourhood character. The process built

up trust between the community and municipal officials, and led to a number of recommendations including expanding affordable housing options.

www.westvancouver.ca

From Affordability and Choice Today (ACT) in Canada, a program aimed at Canadian municipalities: Housing in My Backyard: A Municipal Guide for Responding to NIMBY

4. Regents Park in Toronto, **Canada**, was built in the 40s and 50s as a self-contained social housing community. After becoming isolated and blighted by crime and poverty over a number of years, the area is being revitalised by Toronto Community Housing into a mixed use, mixed income neighbourhood. The sale of homes in the first phase will fund the redevelopment in later stages. One of the aims of the development is to improve the health and wellbeing of residents and this is being studied as a formal research project. The revitalisation programme began in 2005 and is entering its third phase of construction. This will create 614 rent-geared-to-income units, approximately 50 new affordable rental units, and six new apartment blocks at market rates.

<http://www.torontohousing.ca/regentpark>

5. Some **American** cities have used Tax Increment Funding (TIF) to finance regeneration projects. Within a TIF area, additional tax revenue is captured and used to fund infrastructure development. In America TIF has been used to fund affordable housing and infrastructure such as roads and sewers as well as regeneration.

City of Chicago Tax Increment Funding plans

<http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/dcd/provdrs/tif.html>

6. In **Scotland**, the Highland Council holds a Landbank Fund which provides loans and grants to partner organisations to help them secure and prepare strategic sites for development. The Fund was originally set up using a £5million grant from the then Scottish Executive and £5million from housing land sales. Additional funding has come from council tax payments from owners of second homes and holiday home. The Fund is a revolving facility with loans repaid as land and property is resold or developed.

An evaluation in 2008 found that the Landbank Fund and the Highland Housing Alliance had been successful in bringing forward the development of affordable housing

Scottish Government Research:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/11/26094641/1>

Highland Council

<http://www.highland.gov.uk/>

Further reading:

Delivering Large Scale Housing, RTPI 2013

<http://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/630969/RTPI%20large%20scale%20housing%20report.pdf>

Innovative financing of affordable housing international and UK perspectives, Joseph Rowntree 2013

<http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/affordable-housing-finance-full.pdf>

BSHF World Habitat Awards

<http://www.worldhabitatawards.org/winners-and-finalists/>

Tax Increment Funding – British Property Federation

http://www.bpf.org.uk/en/files/bpf_documents/finance/BPF_TIFS_Paper_Final_A4