

Delivery: local powers, local deals, local opportunities

The Northern Position

The challenges for many urban areas in the North can be quite different to those in the South. Whilst there is a similar need for decent, affordable new homes and thriving businesses, the Northern starting point often creates huge disadvantage. Many areas still struggle to tackle the legacy of their industrial pasts: this can include poor housing conditions, Victorian infrastructure, fragmented land ownership and contaminated land. This can result in developers and housing associations seeing few short-term economic incentives to develop, without first unlocking the potential through substantial investment.

Over the past 30 – 40 years there has been a succession of national programmes and tools designed to support area based renewal. These have now largely disappeared. Local areas have been left to tackle fundamental structural problems with inadequate resources and powers. The result has been piecemeal renewal, often focused on growing city centres or peripheral areas, with limited ‘trickle-down’ of prosperity to adjacent inner-urban locations where multiple deprivation is still rife, and life chances limited for too many. *This is holding our cities back.*

Our Ask

The renaissance of area-based renewal, underpinned by a new type of ‘deal’ between Government, combined/local authorities and housing associations. This ‘renewal deal’ would focus on a single place, and integrate existing investment streams in housing, transport and local economic development. In addition, locally led partnerships would have access to more effective compulsory purchase powers and fiscal incentives for housing and business growth. These could include stamp duty holidays, VAT exemption on refurbishment costs, and business rate relief.

Potential Impact

Unlocking potential through ‘renewal deals’ is central to our success in growing our great Northern cities. Our research in 2016 ‘Brain Gain: The Role Of Homes And Place Making In Attracting Graduates To The North Of England’ found that the North of England has a significant qualification deficit compared to the rest of England and that 7,500 highly qualified British residents had been lost from the Northern Powerhouse workforce per year. While availability of jobs is obviously a huge driving force behind where graduates choose to live, our research also found that the cost and quality of housing has a significant impact¹.

Locally led partnerships and renewal deals offer a new approach to tackling these issues by creating solutions with their roots in communities. Through this approach, communities and local leaders have the power to drive forward change and create opportunities. Different policy solutions are needed for different places to deliver outcomes that work for local people. But whilst delivery needs to be driven locally, this will only be effective if Government puts in place a national framework which ensures appropriate levels of housing and infrastructure investment can be targeted spatially, supported by new legal and fiscal powers.

¹ Homes for the North (2016) ‘Brain Gain: The Role of Homes and Place Making In Attracting Graduates to the North of England’