

## Urban Fringe – An Introduction

The Urban Fringe is a transitional location where city and countryside overlap and is found at the edges of settlements and developed areas. It will not commonly have any major development or infrastructure, and may have agricultural or recreational activities on a fairly large scale. It can also contain scattered small communities and free-standing residential and commercial developments.

The urban areas of the North Western Metropolitan Area are facing continued economic growth and the subsequent urban expansion that goes with it. It is therefore vital that they attempt to control urbanisation and to implement the principles of sustainable development in the precious landscapes around each city. The ReUrBA project has allowed and encouraged co-operation between cities with similar problems and opportunities for sustainable development in the long term and a successful restructuring of these important and valuable fringe sites.

The three Urban Fringe Case Studies of the ReUrBA project are the City of Newcastle in the North East of England and the Municipalities of Gouda and Leidschendam in the Netherlands. Each case is notably different from the others, but all are linked by the common goal of improvement and coherent planning in the periphery of their settlements.

### Newcastle

#### Location

Newcastle-upon-Tyne has a population of 275,000, and is one of the most densely populated cities in the UK. Population increases since 1800 have resulted in the growth of many middle-class suburbs around the city. In the last few decades the urban area has expanded to coalesce with several formerly distinct settlements. The main communications links between London and Edinburgh cross the Tyne at Newcastle, which connects the city to the national rail and trunk road network allowing fast and efficient access to the rest of the country.

#### Problem

The City of Newcastle had suffered from a decline in industry and job opportunities since the mid 1960's. The closure of mining, ship building and engineering works has severely weakened the local economy in the last few decades. Unfortunately there has been no major investment in the region to combat the mass unemployment in manual and engineering sectors. The Council realised that there were no strategic sites within the urban area that met the needs of modern industry or business. To attract these modern technology-based companies the city needed to provide a quality site on undeveloped land, with few developer restrictions, a first class transport system with access to airports and, a pleasant working environment. The former industrial sites within the city were either inaccessible or too small to accommodate these types of employers.

Continuous net outward migration from Newcastle recorded since the 1981 census, has seen the urban population fall from 330,000 to 275,000 by 1998. The impact of outward migration has not been evenly spread across the City. Affluent suburbs with larger dwellings have experienced growth in population over the last 30 years, whereas deprived areas have lost up to 43% of their population between 1971-98. This shows an unmet demand for good quality, large, family-size homes in the more accessible and attractive areas of the city.

New strategic sites must aim to be the most desirable, modern, attractive and accessible development in the region, allowing the north east to compete against national and foreign cities for international investment and employment. The Council and Planning Authority acknowledged the constraining nature of the urban fringe (in this case called Green Belt), but also knew that the city needed to expand. Development was not possible south of the city because of the river, the densely developed East and West Ends have social and economic problems and there is no available land near the city centre. Therefore, the only possibility was to look north of the urban area into the Green Belt. The local authority carried exhaustive research on possible locations for development in order to minimise the detrimental effects on the undeveloped and protected Green Belt land. They reviewed the legal constraints, accessibility, environmental concerns and vitality and viability studies. After ten years of proposals and consultation with both the public and independent and governmental inspectors, the Council finally identified a 500ha site called Newcastle Great Park, which was suitable for

sustainable housing and economic uses. With Government backing, the land was removed from the Green Belt in 1998 and the scheme was finally given approval in 2000.

### **Policy Framework**

National Housing policy states that housing should be primarily accommodated within existing towns and cities. The Government aims for 60% of all new housing to be built on previously developed land within the urban area. However, it goes on to say that economic growth should not be held up by a lack of homes for those wishing to take a job in the city. As such the Local Authorities should always make sure that there will be sufficient housing sites to complement economic development. Therefore, to achieve the main objective of promoting sustainable housing development, social and economic growth has to be reconciled with personal and environmental considerations.

National Planning Guidance on development in the Green Belt states that unless development is of a certain type, such as agriculture, forestry and outdoor recreation, it is inappropriate. The main purposes of Green Belt land are to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas, to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another, to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment and to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict, and other, urban land.

In response to the National Policy of building at least 60% of new development on brownfield sites, Newcastle's Local Planning policy links the development of new housing in Newcastle Great Park to development of previously used land. This will provide the Council with a mechanism to secure the development of Brownfield Sites within the city over the long term, which fits in with Newcastle's 20 year Citywide *Going for Growth* strategy. The Going for Growth scheme (part of the ReUrbA Mixed Use Study) envisions 20,000 new houses built within the city boundary over the next two decades, with the majority being on previously developed sites. Therefore it can be said that the Developers contributions are just part of a brownfield to greenfield ratio that may become "7 to 1".

### **Approach and Stakeholders**

Newcastle Great Park will provide an International Business Park, close to the Airport, to attract inward investment. It will create 8,000 permanent jobs, with a further 6,000 possible due to construction and other related industries. The Park will attract new, more profitable and future looking technologies, which employ more highly skilled people, and encourage graduate retention in the City. Up to 2,500 new homes will be built in an area of 117ha over the next 12 years. The dwellings will be of high quality to attract and retain the middle and upper income groups in Newcastle that are leaving the city in such high numbers, who are crucial for the continuing economic regeneration of the city. The design and layout of the dwellings will be to the highest standards, employing energy efficiency and sustainable practices. The housing will be built within a "green" setting, surrounded by both landscaped and natural parkland.

The development will also provide a fully functioning and comprehensive infrastructure system including roads, public transport, cycle and pedestrian routes. The transport system will build on the valuable links provided by the A1 trunk road that passes through the site and is important for attracting business. The environment will be improved by providing landscaping, planting, water features and wildlife habitats, and it is hoped that this will encourage biodiversity. Nearly half of the site will be made into a country park, woodland and open space.

### **Finances**

The city needed to regenerate to survive both economically and socially, but previously the public sector was not willing to fund large scale redevelopment or urban renewal. Furthermore, there were not enough opportunities for housing development or inward investment from the private sector at this time to effect any major change. However it was envisaged that, major development on the undeveloped Green Belt would receive huge investment from the private sector.

A development consortium has been established that is responsible for financing the whole of Newcastle Great Park, in terms of development, infrastructure, legal and consultancy costs. Thus the role of the City Council is as regulator and enabler, but not as developer or funding body. The Council, using planning legislation, negotiated a legal document tying the developers to the payment of costs and provision of facilities. The projected profit of the developers is so great that it can afford to contribute a large amount of money in the design, preparation and legal stages before any building work actually starts, and through construction over the 12 years of the scheme.

The overall value of the contributions to be given by the developers is £23,840,000 (37.48m Euro). This is separated into a variety of categories such as transport links, education provision or landscaping, each receiving different levels of funding. The amounts vary from over £5m down to just £100,000 depending on the perceived importance or requirement for investment.

## **Gouda**

### **Location**

Gouda is a densely populated settlement with a population of 71,000, and is at the core of the heavily urbanised North West Metropolitan Area. It is a Dutch canal city, part of the Randstad and bordering onto the Green Heart, the large undeveloped area in the middle of the industrial and metropolitan conurbation of the western Netherlands.

The original layout of the town was based on the reclamation of land (polders) but this was small scale compared to the more recent development of the town. Until the 1960's, Gouda was a relatively small town, but since then urbanisation has been rapid, and has led to development that has damaged the landscape and fringes of the city. The land surrounding the town is rural and agricultural, which contains valuable landscape and scenery, with good views across the polders. There are also a number of ecological and wildlife zones to the south and east of the city. However the western side of the settlement is highly developed, with industrial and business complexes, and extensive transport infrastructure linking Gouda to the rest of the Randstad.

### **Problem**

Due to the densely built environment in Gouda, all available space is used for housing, business, retail and industrial purposes right up to the urban boundary. If further growth were to occur, land would have to be found on the urban fringe, which puts pressure on the "Green Heart" of the Randstad. Therefore coherent and sustainable planning of this fringe is vitally important and is the essence of the restructuring problem.

Gouda, along with the 5 neighbouring municipalities, the national government, the province of Zuid-Holland and private organisations all have development plans that include the fringe areas making it difficult for a simplified or shared vision to be clearly seen. This obviously leads to problems of incoherence, sustainability, and lengthy delays due to the disagreements between different planning bodies. Because of this situation, no positive or forward-looking change is occurring in the region. This is leaving Gouda lagging behind other towns and cities in the region that are successfully competing for investment and managing growth. Therefore the creation of an integral vision on a regional scale (for the area known as the Region of Central Holland, which contains Gouda as its centre) is vital. This vision will contain the spatial developments for the coming 20 to 30 years for the region as a whole. The 13 Local Authorities will confirm this integral regional vision by the end of the year 2001.

### **Approach and Stakeholders**

To solve the problem the Municipality organised meetings between the government, the neighbouring municipalities and private partners. It talked about the fundamental targets of regional development with the purpose of reducing the disparity between the land use plans and implementing a scheme that was coherent and acceptable to all. A finalised plan would take the strengths and weaknesses of all the municipal plans and create one robust vision that benefits not only Gouda, but the rural areas and surrounding settlements.

The vision being discussed will have to meet set targets as well as fitting in with the various requirements regarding each authorities own spatial vision. The parties have therefore look for a useful and practical compromise within the opportunities given. This new set-up clearly differs from previous plans. In the earlier ones the relevant parties stuck too strongly to their own responsibilities and planning visions and did not have any flexibility or room for compromise.

During the discussions, it became clear that most of the neighbouring municipalities and provinces involved agree on the general spatial/land use policy and ideas (targets, concerns etc.). However, when it comes to the point of implementation and settling on a strategy for each policy, most of the parties are trying to put their own ideas into practice. This is the main problem within the planning process.

In terms of stakeholders, the Central Government has a leading role in the development of spatial planning processes. The Province is expected to further develop the current and future processes of spatial planning within the framework set

by the Central Government. The local authorities, however, can only slightly adjust these processes, and their own policy and strategies are therefore limited.

### **Policy Framework**

The national policy promotes the maximum use of space and all available sites within the urban areas (therefore conserving the Green Heart). There is also a tendency to move the parklands, public amenities and recreational facilities out of town, and indeed, outside the limits of the municipal area. This causes problems when the Local Authorities formulate different goals for the same area in the urban fringe. One of the main aims of the integral regional vision is to achieve a broadly accepted direction for development of the total area covered by the plan, which is the whole Region of Central Holland.

The regional development policy aims at counteracting uncontrolled use of space (in this case the expansion from the city into the open landscape) and legislating for, and promoting, high-density development on brownfield sites. The municipality is even looking into the possibilities of underground development, below the current urban area and extension upwards on top of existing buildings.

### **Finances**

Gouda is responsible for funding the restructuring of the Municipality, while the Region of Central Holland's input consists of co-ordinating the process. Gaining additional funds from EU programmes such as Interreg III will help continue this project and achieve implementation. The Municipality are continually searching for both large and small projects that together will bring about the overall restructuring of Gouda. It is vital that these smaller projects are included in the comprehensive scheme, as the large, heavily funded construction developments will not alone bring about the objective of higher quality environments in the region.

Another essential element in the implementation of urban fringe development in the Region of Central Holland (including Gouda) is the creation of a Development Company. One of the main recommendations of both the integral regional vision for Central Holland and the ReUrbA-project masterplan is the funding of such a Development Company, containing both public and private bodies. Research is needed to determine the appropriate organisation of this Development Company for the Region. These research costs, amongst other things, will possibly lead to an application for European subsidies (e.g. the Interreg IIIB Program).

## Leidschendam

### **Location**

Leidschendam lies on the northern edge of The Hague. The town has a relatively green image due to its fringe location, the huge size of the outlying area, the countless numbers and green character of her public spaces and, the low density development. It has a population of 35,000 people, which will increase to around 80,000 inhabitants at the beginning of 2002, when it will be combined with the municipality of Voorburg, to south of Leidschendam.

However, progressive urbanisation and development in recent years has put increasing pressure on the green image of Leidschendam. The municipality's planning policy is aimed at conserving and improving the quality of its fringe districts. Due to the very different land use, topographical and neighbouring elements, a site-specific approach must be taken. The Leidschendam case study examines how this undesired and unregulated process of urbanisation and loss of open space at the urban fringe could be stopped and pushed back by reinforcing and exploiting the existing qualities and opportunities in three specific areas. These are:

1. The Duivenvoorde corridor between Leidschendam and Voorschoten. The Duivenvoorde can be seen as one of the last quite natural links between the coast on the one hand and the Green Heart of the Randstad on the other. For this reason it is very valuable and must be conserved.
2. The peat/grassland area east of Leidschenveen, known as the Driemanspolder. The Driemanspolder is formally a large, open polder area, with a growing housing area (Leidschenveen) on one side of the polder and the existing urban fringe of Zoetermeer at the other. Local and regional policy (set by the province of Zuid-Holland) would like the area to become a "robust and water rich link" between the Green Heart of the Randstad and the coast.

3. The banks of the river Vliet adjacent to the Voorburg/Rijswijk/Nootdorp infrastructure junctions. This Westvliet site is located just south of Leidschendam, east of Voorburg and Rijswijk, and lies between the Vliet canal and the A4 motorway. It has a variety of land uses that give an incoherent and fragmented image and as such the urbanisation pressure can be felt everywhere. With the continuous development of housing areas in the Hague-region, under construction until 2005, this fringe area is rapidly turning into an inner-city location.

### **Problems**

All three projects suffer from the lack of space in the Randstad for further urbanisation, the pressures of urban sprawl and the gradual coalescing of settlements. This problem threatens the valuable green image that is so important in the densely populated Randstad, meaning that a solution that safeguards these open spaces and low density areas is needed as soon as possible.

An issue concerning the Duivenvoordecorridor is the amount of land taken by the slow but steady growth of greenhouses, which is becoming a major problem. These cannot be easily removed or cleared due to financial reasons and lack of alternative locations for relocating those companies. There is also concern for the loss of historic Country Houses with their estates and surroundings.

The Municipality must also deal with undesirable business set ups in abandoned greenhouses or farm buildings (such as large-scale retail, storage or caravan accommodation), uncontrolled or illegal demolitions and unapproved development. Because of these practices, alternative uses for such sites must be found as soon as possible. One of the ideas is to create an image of the corridor as an estate area. In order to control this, the local authority is working on the “Structuurvisie Duivenvoorde”, which outlines the local planning policies to maintain, protect and improve the existing qualities by partly changing the land use.

If urbanisation is not controlled, the Driemanspolder might become a narrow green corridor between two highly urbanised areas. This change into an inner city area of the Vlietzone puts pressure on the green character of the site, especially with the existing economic and dwelling areas located within. The question is how to improve the coherence between urban and rural land uses and yet maintain and improve the open and green areas.

### **Approach and Participants**

The approach taken by the municipality has the main objectives of conserving and protecting the rural and environmental characteristics, consolidating the area's buffer-function against urbanisation, improving the spatial and functional coherence and, bringing about a sustainable land-use structure. From the problems described it is possible to see that restructuring should be focused on creation and protection of natural landscape features and changing the present land use of several sites. This can be achieved initially by expansion of the existing country estates and woodlands, and changing the monotonous/uninteresting character of some of the areas by having mixed land use, e.g. combining retail outlets with exhibition gardens and low density housing.

The case study also looks at the possibilities for enhancing environmental and ecological quality in the area. Important elements that can be built and improved upon are water features, biodiversity and characteristic landscape aspects. New recreational sites will be developed and accessibility to green areas for the local population will be improved. Other issues to be looked at in this scheme include improving the interaction between the different governmental levels and departments involved; achieving a relatively fast execution of the plans; establishing which parts of the area are best suited for commercial development as part of a “red pays green” approach; and finally, overcoming the time element, i.e. preventing land prices from rising due to urbanisation pressure, in spite of the actual land use plan. However, the main issue to be addressed in order to resolve these issues is financing. This is especially relevant because the areas of the Duivenvoordecorridor and the Driemanspolder are still<sup>1</sup> part of a buffer zone, in which opportunities for commercial developments, and therefore income, are restricted.

---

<sup>1</sup> In the new Fifth National Report on Spatial Planning the Bufferzones are set aside for new planning concepts.

## **Policy**

The municipality's planning policy is aimed at maintaining the special quality of its outlying area and/or improving it. There are, however, because of the unusual geographical locations, extremely divergent developments in the three suburban locations. This demands an area-oriented approach by the municipality with special attention to:

- The planning context of the locations;
- Their interaction with adjacent sub-areas;
- Obstacles which could impede effective design in the future; and
- Specific development opportunities in the individual sub-areas.

The difficulty with preparing relevant policy is that the municipality is confronted with three different types of restructuring. These are restoration of a valuable landscape at Duivenvoorde, (re)designing a water rich area in the Driemanspolder and landuse restructuring at the Vlietboundary.

Due to its strategic and sensitive location and structure, there have been a large number of policies, proposals, detailed plans and projects prepared in the fringe areas. Because of this, there have been claims on the areas from a number of different directions, so the development of integrated implementation plans has been problematic and time consuming. A number of agencies within each level of government, along with interest groups and the private sector have been involved in this process so creating a consensus between them has been very difficult.

Other policy frameworks apply in addition to the general planning and legal framework consisting of the South Holland West Area Plan (Provincial) and the local zoning plans. The most important are:

- National buffer zone - The Hague-Leiden-Zoetermeer (national)
- The Green/Blue Garland (provincial)
- Area oriented approach - The Hague-Katwijk (provincial)
- Leidschendam Land Use Project (provincial)
- The Provincial Ecological Main Framework
- The Haagland Green Links (Urban Area)

## **Finances**

### **Duivenvoorde**

A lot of money will be needed to realise the great ambitions for the corridor. The issues requiring the greatest costs will be the redeveloping or relocating of companies and the reorganisation itself. On the other hand there will be little income or returns. In the past, the higher levels of government have reserved a relatively small amount of money for the purchase of these companies, so unfortunately, this only took care of a small part of the corridor.

The solution that was proposed in the Land Use project plan, the "Structuurvisie Duivenvoorde", will help meet part of the costs by allowing the construction of exclusive, high quality houses at strategically chosen locations. Their design, layout and aesthetics would be carefully controlled by the municipality to ensure that they would contribute to the social and environmental quality of the area, whilst providing much needed financial income to help implement the plans.

### **Vlietboundary**

There are currently no plans or ideas on how to fund the implementation of the vision. Creating income will have to be contracted out. The economic development locations in the area will have to be the primary bearers of the costs of restructuring the green areas. Due to the incorporation of parts of the Vlietboundary into the Hague, a new type of cooperation and financing with all the municipalities involved will need to be created.

### **Driemanspolder**

An estimated calculation of the investment required has been made on the basis of the proposed plan and basic principles, but as yet, no parties have volunteered or been found to meet these costs. However, part of the funding should come from the Development Company for the Leidschenveen residential district due to the plan for clean water buffering in this district. In addition consideration is also being given to the development of commercial recreational facilities that can provide income and pay for further development or conservation of the area. One example has been for an outdoor water sports centre on the new reservoir.

## Transnational Lessons

### Environment

The most important theme in Fringe Planning is improvement and protection of the precious and sensitive environment. The three Local Authorities clearly acknowledge the importance of sustainable planning with regard to their restructuring schemes. There is equal pressure for both conservation and urbanisation of these areas, and the balance of the two has long been a contentious planning issue. While acknowledging the need for some development to take place around their borders, Newcastle, Leidschendam and Gouda have all tried to limit the development on their fringe areas. This is done by making sure there are strict controls in place to limit the design, style and type of building being constructed, containing, and hopefully, halting any further sprawl.

### Main Stakeholders

It is clear that the local authorities are the main instigators, managers and driving force behind the various restructuring projects in this ReUrbA project. In each case the authority has researched and identified the problem, come up with strategies and proposals, and organised the methodology and participation programmes. However, in each case, the authority has not been able to finance the scheme itself, so has had to find partners in the private sector and/or central or regional government to share in the implementation and physical development costs. This can be seen as a good thing however, as the partnerships can build a stronger, coherent and integrated scheme with both public and private involvement.

### Strategic Framework

Newcastle and Leidschendam are part of a larger strategic framework. Newcastle Great Park is part of the citywide Going for Growth strategy, and the fringe areas of Leidschendam are included in the provincial water plan and Green/Blue Belt strategy, as well as the national buffer zone. The Gouda plan is the first of its kind in the whole of the Netherlands. They have decided that there are too many plans, parties, money and interests involved and the system is becoming too complex. The spatial planning system has to become flexible, clear and cohesive again. They want to make the Gouda project an example of good practice for the Randstad and the Netherlands. However all three are attempting to involve higher levels of government and private partners to create an integrated and coherent plan. Therefore it is not necessary to be part of a larger framework to have a wide reaching and well supported plan.

### Links to Previously Developed Sites

There is an opportunity to link the advantages of fringe sites to the benefits of development on inner city brownfield land. For example, Newcastle City Council and the Developers have signed a unique 2 for 1 agreement, that guarantees 2 houses built in the urban area for every one in the Great Park over the next 12 years. The two Dutch cities have learnt the value of strictly controlled fringe development, with limited land uses it is possible to make a viable and environmentally friendly development, based around recreation and low densities.

### Funding Mechanisms

The three Local Authorities all identified finance as one of the most important issue in planning and developing the Fringe areas. Without sufficient funds the complex and time-consuming strategies will not be implemented. Newcastle and Leidschendam have realised the benefit of private sector investment, allowing the developers to build housing on a limited scale in the valuable fringe land, bringing in income and possible contributions in return for making the land available. In this way, allowing development on one small area can have benefits for the rest of the fringe region, providing funds and safeguarding undeveloped land for the foreseeable future.

It is important for the Local Authority's to look for as many funding opportunities as possible to guarantee implementation at the earliest stage. In the Region of Central Holland (including Gouda as its centre) the small projects, which have no guarantee for realisation due to a lack of financial resources, need to be subsidized with EU finance in order to implement the synergy within the ReUrbA-case study of Gouda/Region of Central Holland as a whole (including the necessary location-related, spatial planning methods).

|                   |
|-------------------|
| <b>Conclusion</b> |
|-------------------|

| <b>Element</b>                     | <b>Newcastle</b>  | <b>Gouda</b>   | <b>Leidschendam</b>  |
|------------------------------------|---|--|--|
| <b>Environment</b>                 | Seen as beneficial for economic growth  | Will attempt conservation but accept limited development                           | Must maintain green image, links between coast and Green Heart, and distinction between town and country |
| <b>Links to Urban Area</b>         | 2 for 1 agreement, guaranteeing urban development                                   | Fringe is transition zone between high and low density development.                | Change of existing land uses, force high density in city centres, low density in fringes                 |
| <b>Bodies or Agencies Involved</b> | Council does planning, but design and implementation in partnership with developers | Municipality funds the scheme, with neighbouring authorities and province involved | Municipality does the planning, Provincial and National Govt's assist with implementation                |
| <b>Strategic Framework</b>         | Part of Citywide strategy   | One of the first plans in the country to be developed in this way                  | Part of Regional Water Plan, National Bufferzone and Provincial Green/Blue Belt                          |
| <b>Finances</b>                    | The Developers pay for all implementation   | Funding from EU Public Private Partnerships and                                    | Private enterprise and by selling off Municipal land   |

Without a clear and firm effort to manage growth carefully in the Urban Fringe, development will most likely continue in a dispersed and inefficient pattern, making the future provision of public facilities and services very expensive. In addition, uncontrolled development in these areas will intensify conflicts with agriculture and environmentally sensitive features. More compact, deliberately designed community patterns can reduce land conflicts and encourage the preservation of rural character. A well-planned and managed Urban Fringe can be an effective buffer between more intensely developed urban and suburban areas and the agricultural and environmentally sensitive sites.

Hopefully the ReUrbA project can help us learn how to plan and manage these valuable areas effectively, without giving in to pressures from self-interest groups or bodies not looking at the wider strategic framework. This is an important element of planning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, where the fringe areas must not only be conserved, but also made into a sustainable, strategic and integrated transitional area between the urbanised and rural regions.