SKILLS FOR ENGAGING COMMUNITIES IN THE HOUSING NEIGHBOURHOOD FACILITIES PROCESS: THE EUROPEAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract
This paper discusses skills for improving the engagement of the communities in delivering the neighbourhood facilities for the housing market renewal in Northwest England. It integrates the concept of sustainable communities that recognises the additional skills that are needed by the Built Environment professionals who are involved in the delivery process. In doing so, research findings from an exploratory case study undertaken at Bank Top, England are discussed. It identifies gap between the United Kingdom’s government intentions and local communities’ expectations. The conflict leads to the need for professionals to highlight issues on skills for improving the engagement with the communities in the delivery process. This paper concludes that skills for engaging communities are essential to be acquired by relevant professionals if the objectives of sustainable communities’ agenda are to be met.

Keywords: Community engagement, Housing market renewal, Neighbourhood facilities, Skills, Sustainable communities

1.0 Introduction

In the late 1990s, several areas in Northwest of England were identified as suffering from social and economic deprivations with low housing demand, abandoned neighbourhoods, where local people and services have moved out. To address these problems, the Housing Market Renewal (HMR) initiative was introduced by the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) in 2003. Nine Pathfinders supported by the HMR Funds were established aimed at rebuilding communities through creating places where people want to live and work for the present and for future generations. This puts local communities at a centre of the programme and they should act themselves as agents for HMR. The United Kingdom’s Government (Government) has recognised that community engagement is vital to the success of the HMR process. What little written guidance is available from the Government for community engagement in the HMR process is inaccessible or unused in HMR. However, the local protests on the way that the HMR is being delivered suggest that local communities are not fully engaged, and highlights that the Pathfinders need the necessary skills for improving the engagement with local communities in the HMR process. The Egan report (which is further supported by the professionals in built environment) has recognised the need for considering new skills and ways of working in delivering sustainable communities. However, the report does not specifically address how these skills need to be allocated among different stakeholders. It also fails to describe the skills necessary to improve engagement with the communities.
This paper discusses the Government policies for community engagement practice in the HMR process, and investigates the skills needed for attaining the full level of community engagement in delivering neighbourhood facilities for HMR. It explores:

- the roles of key stakeholders and their levels of involvement in the community engagement process
- the stakeholders’ expectations from the engagement process that leads to the skills needs for improving the engagement of communities; and
- barriers for attaining the full level of community engagement.

Findings from an exploratory study at Bank Top which is situated in the Blackburn Borough Council (Borough) and one of the Elevate East Lancashire HMR pathfinder (Pathfinder) areas in Northwest of England, is discussed and presented. The findings highlight that the skills needed for attaining the full level of community engagement in the HMR process aimed at consulting young people and show some engagement, but this did not really empower the community. This study generates new knowledge about the skills needs for attaining the full level of community engagement in delivering the neighbourhood facilities in HMR.

2.0 Research Background

Since the 1990s, some parts of the North and Midlands of England have been suffering from social and economic deprivations. Many industrial activities collapsed with high unemployment and crime rates. These phenomena contributed to empty and abandoned houses, unattractive neighbourhoods and people leaving the areas. In response to these social and economic deprivations, the Government introduced a sustainable communities’ agenda. This provides a framework for a major programme of action that will over the next 15-20 years, tackle the social and economic deprivations of the identified neighbourhoods across England. One of the strategies is tackling low demand and housing abandonment in the identified areas of the North and Midlands of England.

In recent times, the Government has introduced a number of initiatives designed to ease the problem of low demand and unpopular housing. These initiatives include the New Deal for Communities (NDC) programme, a National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, and a number of neighbourhood specific performance targets, or ‘Public Agreements’ set by the Government. The most recent initiative launched by the Government is the HMR. This ambitious programme seeks to tackle housing market failure in some parts of the North and Midlands of England. This programme was introduced shortly after the publication of the report on Empty Homes by the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Select Committee in March 2002. The report suggested three main recommendations and one of them that called for urgent actions to tackle low demand and abandoned houses is: Radical intervention is needed in some inner urban areas where the housing market has collapsed to make them attractive to a broad range of existing and potential residents. The housing market renewal approach needed to achieve this must be on a large, conurbation-wide scale. It will take a long time and so must be started as soon as possible and will require significant additional funding, of the order of hundreds of millions of pounds per annum (Transport, Local Government and the Regions Select Committee, 2002).

After the report’s publication, the Government announced the creation of nine HMR Pathfinders (Pathfinder) in areas of the North and Midlands: Birmingham/Sandwell, East Lancashire, Hull/East Riding, Manchester/Salford, Merseyside, Newcastle/Gateshead, North Staffordshire, Oldham/Rochdale and South Yorkshire. These Pathfinder areas had received funding of £500 million over three years. No specific targets were announced for the programme at that stage but the overall aim was: To provide lasting solutions for communities blighted by derelict homes through investment and innovation (ODPM, 2002).
Details of the HMR were first announced as part of the Sustainable Communities Agenda introduced by the Government in February 2003. The broad objective for the programme was to entail radical and sustained action to replace obsolete housing with modern sustainable accommodation, through demolition and new building or refurbishment. This will mean a better mix of homes and sometimes fewer homes (ODPM, 2003). A study by the CPRE (2004) revealed that housing market failure is not only central to the physical condition of housing, but also about non-physical interventions and factors such as social deprivation, economic and environmental issues that cause housing to be unpopular. It was supported by Nevin (2004) who summarised the causes of low demand in the Pathfinder areas in three main strands: Housing stock obsolescence; Surplus housing stock; and Unpopular neighbourhoods. Nevin (2004) further concluded that these three main factors have contributed to the neighbourhood abandonment and housing market failure in the identified Pathfinder areas.

Meanwhile, the aspirations of local communities also need to be investigated, as the protest by the local residents on the scale of clearances within one of the Pathfinder areas in the North of England (Clover, 2004; 2005 and Ungoed-Thomas, 2005) suggests a gap between Pathfinder’s intentions and local communities’ expectations. Proposals for the compulsory purchase and demolition of thousands of unfit houses within the Pathfinder’s areas were claimed by the local communities as creating forced migration, and preventing the creation of sustainable communities. The protestors wanted actions that encouraged people to continue to live and work in the Pathfinder’s areas and not to be forced to move elsewhere. The conflict between the local communities’ aspirations and the Pathfinder’s objectives suggested that local communities are unclear about some of the terminology, options and possible outcomes that are being put forward by the Pathfinder in their areas. This highlighted that local communities were less engaged in the HMR process and not given the opportunity to have their views considered in designing their own neighbourhoods.

In addition, the need for engaging local communities has been recognised by the Government as essential for the success of the HMR process (HC, 2005). The extensive legislatives frameworks, especially in the planning works have required all stakeholders involved in the HMR process to exercise engagement with local communities. Even though the Government takes community engagement seriously, and expects the pathfinders to do the same, guidance for community engagement from the Government is very little. In response to this, Elevate East Lancashire, one of the Pathfinders in the Northwest of England has, introduced its Community Engagement Strategy that requires its local authorities and their partners to engage with local communities in the process of delivering HMR (Elevate, 2005). However, the strategy fails to address how local communities should be engaged, or how far the involvement is needed from them in the HMR process. The evidence suggests that the skills for improving the full level of community engagement are required in the HMR process.

The shortcomings of the necessary skills to manage regeneration initiatives were first noted in the Urban Task Force report (1999). The report proposed the setting up of regional resource centres for addressing skills shortages and good practice in urban professionals. Five years later, the Government responded to the issue and appointed Sir John Egan to head a task force into skills for sustainable communities. As a result of Egan’s report and during the Sustainable Communities Summit 2005, the Academy for Sustainable Communities was announced and set up in Leeds. This Academy gives priority to training in broad range of skills and expertise that are required for delivering sustainable communities across UK.

A review of the existing models of professional competences indicated that professionals do recognise the importance of generic skills such as working with others, communication, and problem solving, which are incorporated into their professional practices. These models of professional development, works and approaches can be found in: The UK occupational standards models (cited by Cheetham and Chivers, 1996); The job competence model (Mansfield and Mathews, 1985); The reflective practitioner approach (Schon, 1983); Meta-competencies (Reynolds and Snell, 1988 and Nordhaug, 1990); Core skills (Cheetham and Chivers, 1998);
Ethics and values (Erut et al, 1994); Model for professional competence framework for RICS (Kennie and Green, 2001) and BIFM professional qualification (BIFM, c1999). These models have their own strengths and weaknesses within the context of their own professions. However, this study seeks to investigate the ability of the existing models to deal with the necessary skills demand for attaining the full level of community engagement in the HMR process. Understanding the existing models of professional competences leads to the identification of shortcomings in skills required for engaging local communities by different stakeholders who are involved in the HMR process. These skills are also recognised as the crucial education and training needs for delivering sustainable communities in UK (Hartley, 2002; Egan, 2004; Turner and Townsend, 2004; The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, 2003; Martin & Hall, 2002; Sterling, 2001).

3.0 Overview of Community Engagement Activity in England

3.1 Defining Community Engagement

The term 'community engagement' is used to embrace a whole spectrum of activities that support the two-way communication process between public service bodies and local communities by encouraging them to express their views and how their particular needs are best met (Rogers and Robinsons, 2004). It is about making sure that local communities are fully engaged in making their locality a better place to live, work and play in. Community engagement also refers to both the process and the development of working relationships between communities and the public agencies in delivering services to ensure local communities influence the decision making (Rogers and Robinsons, 2004). However, defining community engagement is not easy when considering different things in different circumstances ranging from the simple provision of information and consultation through to the delegation of power and control to citizens (Arnstein, 1969). Without a clear and common understanding of what community engagement means within the given context, the degree for full level of community engagement is not assessable. The most common definitions of community engagement are:

"...the opportunity, capacity and willingness of individuals to work collectively to shape public life" (Rogers and Robinsons, 2004); and "...developing and sustaining a working relationship between one or more public body and one or more community group, to help them both to understand and act on the needs or issues that the community experiences" (the Scottish Community Development Centre, n.d)

As pointed out by JRF (1994), the implementation of the community participation fails, if the organisations that are promoting the community involvement are unclear about the level of participation on offer. The argument made by JRF (1994) is further supported by Cleaver (2001) who stated that the participatory approaches can be criticised for their inadequate link between the model of individual action and the social structure.

For this study, the thinking of community engagement can be learned from the development of participation in UK planning. A degree of public participation has existed in the UK planning system since the first Town and Country Planning Act in 1947. But it was only officially written into the legislation after 20 years later (1968 Town and Country Planning Act). However, public participation that involved the community only became embedded in the planning process in 1969 through its ‘Skeffington Report’ (Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 1969) and was based in two areas of the development control process and the development plan process (Thomas, 1995). The development of participation in planning process in UK was also influenced by the most widely referenced sources on participation and is known as ‘The Ladder of Participation’ (Arnstein, 1969). It was first discussed by Arnstein (1969), when she wrote about citizen involvement in planning processes in the United States. This has guided this study to the
understanding of the level of community engagement. She described a ladder of participation with eight steps and three degrees of involvement (Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1: The ladder of participation with eight steps (source: Arnstein, 1969)

Based on Arnstein’s ladder of participation, Wilcox (1994) proposed five levels of participation (Exhibit 2) that include: information; consultation; deciding together; acting together; and supporting independent community initiatives. This level of participation suggests that the lower the level of participation, the degree of control and commitment with the initiator and other stakeholders is less.

Exhibit 2: The level of participation (source: Wilcox, 1994)

This level of participation that forms the first dimension of the participation framework (Exhibit 4) was developed to inform of the different stakeholders’ stances in the engagement process. This is important to identify what are the stakeholders’ roles and responsibilities in the engagement process (Wilcox, 1994).

Exhibit 3: The three dimensions of participation framework (source: Wilcox 1994)

As illustrated in Exhibit 3, the second dimension of the participation framework is the phase of
participation, which are also known as the participation process that has four main phases: \textit{Initiation; Preparation; Participation; and Continuation}. The third dimension is identifying different stakeholders, the level of participation appropriate, and about where power and control lies between these stakeholders in the process (Wilcox, 1994).

Over time, some social learning has occurred in significant areas by all groups involved in the planning process such as the ‘popular planning’ exercises of the 1980s and the ‘planning for real’ of the 1990s (Rydin, 1999). These programmes aimed to include the local community in the decision-making process. The latter of these programmes is still in use. At this time, local authorities were beginning to address the problems associated with the traditional participative approaches and were refining the applications of the public participation. As a result, the ‘Wheel of Participation’ was developed as a good practice model. A good example is that used by the South Lanarkshire District Council (Davidson, 1998) as shown in Exhibit 4.

![Exhibit 4: The wheel of participation (source: Davidson, 1998)](image-url)
In conclusion, the terms such as Consultations, Involvement and Participation are regularly interchangeable to describe the relationships between different stakeholders in the community engagement activities (refer to JRF, 1994; Wilcox, 1994; Arnstein, 1969; Rogers and Robinsons, 2004). For the purpose of this study, the term of community engagement is used and refers to the full level of community engagement activities that are attained by different stakeholders in the HMR process.

3.2 Defining Level of Community Engagement

This paper adopts four levels of community engagement strategies developed by Elevate (2005): Information-giving; Consultation; Involvement; and Empowerment that provides local authorities with basic principles on engaging local communities. In addition, this paper also adopts five levels of participation developed by Involve (2005). Involve is a new organisation that focuses on the practical issues of making public participation work. These five levels of participation are: Inform; Consult; Involve; Collaborate and Empower. Based on both principles of community engagement strategies, Kasim et al (2007) developed levels of community engagement ladders that are illustrated in Exhibit 5 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of Community Engagement</th>
<th>Community Engagement Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information giving</td>
<td>To provide the local community with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and or solution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation</td>
<td>To obtain local community feedback on analysis, alternatives and or decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>To work directly with the local community throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>To partner with the local community in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of preferred solution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>To place final decision-making in the hands of the local community</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Exhibit 5: Levels of community engagement ladder in the HMR process (Kasim et, al, 2007)

3.3 The community engagement strategies by different HMR Pathfinders

Increasing awareness of the importance of the community engagement in the HMR process is strongly addressed by some of the Pathfinders in their community engagement strategies. These community engagement strategies are summarised in Table 1 and briefly discussed below.

Table 1: Examples of the community engagement strategies by different Pathfinders in the HMR process (source: different Pathfinders’ websites; 2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pathfinders</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elevate East Lancashire</td>
<td>The community engagement strategy (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information-giving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consultation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Empowerment and capacity building</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3.1 Elevate East Lancashire Pathfinder

Elevate East Lancashire’s community engagement strategy (Elevate, 2005) was developed to provide local authorities and their partners with some broad principles that they should be working to when engaging with communities. The strategy outlines its definition of community engagement, and gives details of what it considers to be information giving, consultation, involvement, and empowerment and capacity building. It requires those submitting project proposals to show how they will engage the community. However, there is no further guidance for implementing this community engagement strategy, or who will be monitored in the community engagement process.

3.3.2 Manchester-Salford Partnerships

The community engagement strategy for Manchester has been in place since 2003. The overall aims include: making sure that all different community groups are engaged across the city; building skills to improve community engagement, monitoring what has been done, and if it is working. To achieve those aims, the community engagement strategy was developed which includes: informing; researching, involving, consulting, devolving decisions and supporting community action. But, there is no guideline how this strategy can be actioned, as there is no implementation plan in place. There is also a lack of clarity about how the stakeholders responsible will implement this strategy.

The forthcoming community engagement strategy for Salford outlines how community engagement will be delivered in Salford and recognises four different methods for implementing full level of community engagement. These methods are: Information-giving; community consultation; community involvement; and devolved responsibility. The strategy, which is still not published (at the time of writing this thesis) is produced for Partners IN Salford, the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) for Salford.

3.3.3 Bridging Newcastle Gateshead

The communications strategy for Bridging Newcastle Gateshead Pathfinder was developed in 2003 with the aim to communicate with the targeted groups, and the methods that are used to inform and influence opinions in the community. The strategy is similar to other Pathfinders’ community engagement strategies where five methods are used to communicate with the public: community and stakeholder engagement; consideration of heritage in our programme; innovation, learning and sustainability; equality and diversity; and influencing trends and meeting aspirations.
In summary, the Pathfinders do recognise the importance of the community engagement to be integrated in the HMR process. The Pathfinders’ intentions to implement the community engagement are clearly stated (as summarised in Table 2.5) by producing the strategies and encouraging local authorities and their partners to have full engagement with local communities. But, lack of prescriptions and guidelines on how to engage with local communities, or what levels and skills needs to engage with local communities are perceived barriers for the success of attaining the full level of community engagement in the HMR process. As far as this study is concerned, identifying the necessary skills needed for attaining the full level of community engagement could provide options for fully engaging local communities in the HMR process.

3.4 Overview of the legislative framework for community engagement in the HMR process in United Kingdom

Evidence indicates that there are extensive legislative frameworks that have already governed community engagement especially in planning works. These legislative frameworks can be found in:

- Creating Local Development Frameworks (ODPM, 2004)

To summarise, these legislative frameworks have a directly impact on local authorities as it requires them to consider the involvement of local communities at the early stage of the planning process. The implications for the stakeholders who are involved in the HMR process are that there are now statutory requirements for them to engage with local communities. In other words, any HMR activity undertaken by different stakeholders should tie in with community engagement undertaken by local communities. In addition, these legislative frameworks also clarify and raise awareness with local communities and other stakeholders as to how and what extent local communities should be engaged at each stage of the community engagement process.

The importance of the community engagement in the HMR process is also addressed in the Sustainability Framework for Housing Market Restructure in East Lancashire (2004). The framework states that:

"Local people have first-hand experience of the issues and problems in their area and often have useful ideas to contribute. Other stakeholders such as voluntary groups, businesses and other service providers also need to be involved. All these participants need to be identified and involved to develop cross-cutting solutions to common problems. Developing strong local partnerships between agencies and residents is central to ensuring that local people influence decisions throughout the regeneration process." (Sustainability Framework for Housing Market Restructure in East Lancashire, 2004)

The framework strongly stated that effective community engagement has to be at the centre for any housing market restructuring in the East Lancashire. Fully engaging local communities in the HMR work and design process can help to secure their commitment to an area. Furthermore, local residents have a strong sense of the local historic values of a neighbourhood that makes an area feel so special. This will retain the identity of the area even though the clearance and redevelopment works have taken place.
3.5 Overview of the community engagement guidance in the HMR process

Evidence states that there was very little specific guidance on community engagement in HMR process until the following statement made recently by the Government:

‘ODPM will expect the pathfinder’s new forward plans to set out clear and acceptable approaches to community engagement, tailored to their particular circumstances. If these are not satisfactory, funding will be withheld’ (HC, 2005).

This statement was made in response to a report by the ODPM Select Committee on Housing Planning Local Government and the Regions, which included the recommendation that the Government issues new guidance setting out how the Pathfinders engage local communities. Although the above statement may be a response to recent negative media coverage of Pathfinders’ activities (Clover, 2004; 2005; Ungoed-Thomas, 2005; Flanagan, 2005; Tonight with Trevor McDonald programme, 2006) as the Select Committee report itself, it can also be seen as positive evidence that the Government takes community engagement seriously, and expects Pathfinders to do the same. However, these recommendations need further elaboration in terms of policy guidance and specific requirements in order to ensure that they are implemented and accountable to local communities within the Pathfinder’s areas. Guidance such as suggested below would undoubtedly help this process.

‘The Government agrees that community consultation is vital to the success of all regeneration activities, including the pathfinder programme. We will be considering closely the evidence of community consultation as part of the review of Pathfinders in the autumn. We will consider at that point whether further guidance is needed’ (HC, 2005)

The statement above suggests that specific guidance on community engagement in HMR process may be forthcoming but, in the mean time, it does not exist (HC, 2005). Although there are problems with community engagement guidance as described above, Pathfinders are still bound by statutory duties to engage with local communities in the HMR processes such as a demolition or a compulsory purchase order (CPO). With a programme as large as HMR that gives an impact on thousands of people in deprived neighbourhoods, the need for more concrete guidance around community engagement is considered essential. Otherwise, the community engagement in HMR process is left with those stakeholders who have no experience and clear framework to engage with local communities.

In addition, there have currently been no targets, nor did funding link to perform for the community engagement exercise in the Pathfinder areas. However, based on the statement (HC, 2005) there is still an expectation from the Government that Pathfinders will somehow incorporate community engagement into a core of their work and more generally follow a Neighbourhood Renewal Guidance (NRU, 2004). But, HMR deliberately lacks the prescription (ODPM, 2003) to stimulate local innovation. As a result, there is a lack of structures to ensure that this Guidance (NRU, 2004) takes place. The obvious role for local accountability here would be the LSP, but its role in HMR process is unclear. This sits uneasily alongside the expectation that the Pathfinders should follow a Neighbourhood Renewal Guidance (HC, 2005).

The combination of a lack of the Government’s prescriptive framework and a weakness of well-developed community engagement has driven this study to the recognition of knowledge gaps in the skills needed for improving the full level of community engagement in the HMR process. Evidence revealed that the community engagement processes are not fully implemented by different stakeholders within the Pathfinder areas. This is not because these stakeholders are unable to, but there is a lack of written guidance on how this community engagement process is to be carried out. These community engagement structures are weak, non-existent, and not formalised (HC, 2005). There is no equality in participation for decision-making or sharing power among different stakeholders including local communities during the community engagement
process. Even though there are good examples of community engagement process happening in different Pathfinder areas, both in strategic terms and in practical terms, but there is currently little guidance, or strong direction about how the community engagement process should be carried out from the Government.

It is no doubt that community engagement is essential for the success of delivering neighbourhood facilities in HMR process. Implementing the full level of community engagement requires the diversification of knowledge and skills needed by different stakeholders who are involved in the process. These necessary skills for attaining the full level of community engagement are discussed and presented in next section.

4.0 Methodology used in this Exploratory Study

This exploratory study design was developed following the methodology laid down by Yin (2003). It highlights 5 elements of case study design: Research Questions (this element was discussed in section 1 above); Research Propositions; Units of Analysis; Logic Linking Data to Propositions; and Criteria of Interpreting the Findings

4.1 Research Proposition

A proposition is defined by Yin (2003) as

“...directs attention to something that should be examined within the scope of the study”.

Scope of this study is defined from research questions developed in the exploratory phase. But, these research questions need to be translated into propositions that have testable and measurable form (Brewerton, 2001). Using these research questions, overall research propositions are outlined. However, these descriptive and explanatory questions need propositions to define and shape data collection and analysis. The propositions based on the questions are:

- Factors that contribute to housing market failure in the Pathfinder, the Borough and Bank Top
- The stakeholders those are involved in the community engagement for the Housing neighbourhood facilities process in Bank Top
- The level of community engagement that is implemented by different stakeholders in the housing neighbourhood facilities process in Bank Top
- The stakeholders’ views and expectations are from the community engagement in the housing neighbourhood facilities process in Bank Top
- Barriers for attaining the full levels of community engagement in the housing neighbourhood facilities process in Bank Top

4.2 Unit of Analysis

The unit case of analysis for this exploratory study is bounded by the geographical area of the East Lancashire Pathfinder, the neighbourhood of Blackburn and the ward of Bank Top.

Factor governing the choice of the Pathfinder for this study as it is the centre for the local communities’ protests about the proposal to compulsorily purchase thousands of unfit houses within their local area. This was claimed to create forced migration, and prevent the sustainability
of communities promoted by the central Government (Clover, 2004; 2005). The conflict between the local communities’ aspirations, and Pathfinder objectives, suggests that the local communities were unclear about the benefits of the housing neighbourhood facilities programme that are being put forward by the Pathfinder in their areas. It highlights the fact that local communities are less engaged in the delivery process, and that the pathfinder needs to acquire the skills necessarily to improve the level of the community engagement with local communities in the Pathfinder’s areas.

4.2.1 Interviews Structure and Questionnaires

Exhibit 6: The interviews structure and list of interviewees for an exploratory study at Bank Top, Blackburn, England (source: Exploratory study undertaken in 2005)

The format of the interview questionnaires used in this exploratory study was a combination of semi-structured and open-ended questions. The interviews were held with the following key stakeholders:

- Pathfinder’s ‘strategic level’ staff

These study interviews were significant in gaining an early understanding of the HMR process. This study needs to understand the role of Pathfinder in the overall HMR process and to seek insights into Pathfinder’s experience, along the process, especially experience in engaging local communities within the Pathfinder areas. This interview study was also important to identify key stakeholders that were involved in the HMR process. Review of the company’s strategic documents and other reports were very useful to gain additional information on the company.

- The Borough HMR teams

Based on the findings from the Pathfinder, the study interview with the Borough HMR teams was conducted. It sought to further understand:

- The roles of the Borough in the HMR process.
- Details of the HMR process at neighbourhood level.
- Drivers for housing market failure within the Borough’s ADF areas.
- The Borough’ experiences and expectations engaging local communities in the HMR process.
- The skills needed for community engagement, to be acquired by the Borough’s HMR Teams in the HMR process.

- The representatives of Bank Top’s communities

Based on the findings from the Borough, a study interview with local communities of Bank Top was carried out at ward level. This was to understand the local communities’ experiences and expectations from their community engagement in the HMR process in their local areas. This study interview (which was conducted in semi-structured to open-ended questions) was relevant as it generated first-hand information on local communities’ views and expectations about HMR process. The result of this exploratory study revealed gaps in the necessary skills that needed to be acquired to improve the level of community engagement by different stakeholders involved in the housing neighbourhood facilities for HMR process. The interviews structure undertaken at the Bank Top is illustrated in Exhibit 6 below.

4.3 Linking Data to Proposition

The data that link to the propositions is highlighted in Exhibit 7. The logic of the data requirements can be followed through, from defining elements of ‘level of community engagement’ to determining the potential necessary skills needed by the different stakeholders involved in the HMR process.

Exhibit 7: Exploratory data linked to propositions

This figure shows how the broad questions from which the propositions are derived, drive the data collection issues. These further discuss in next section.

4.4 Criteria for Interpreting the Findings

The criteria for interpreting the findings were in two forms of research techniques. Firstly, data collections were carried out in forms of conducting interviews with the representatives of the Pathfinder, the Borough HMR teams and local community groups plus the associations of Bank Top ADF between February 2005 and August 2005. The interview questions are in forms of semi-...
structure questions and open-ended questions that are centred on community engagement and necessary skills need subjects.

Secondly, data gathered from this exploratory study were analysed using Nvivo2 (content analysis tool), Model Explorer (cognitive mapping tool) and Social Network Analysis (stakeholders’ relationships tool). The data analysis is further discussed in section 6, and the emerging issues from the findings of the exploratory study are further discussed in section 7 below.

5.0 Case Study Area: Bank Top, Blackburn, England

A Bank Top as shown in Exhibit 8 and located within the Wensley Fold ward, is situated in the north west of the Borough. Mainly an area of terraced housing, it covers the area of Bank Top and also part of the Blackburn town centre. The ward covers 142 hectares.

5.1 Overview of housing market in Bank Top

5.1.1 Housing tenure

The proportion of owner-occupied properties in Bank Top is lower than the national or Borough level figure, as 49.6% in the ward are owner occupied, compared to 70.5% in the Borough (Exhibit 9). There is uncertainty in some resident’s perception of their tenure of their homes, as 9.7% of the people in the Borough stated that they rent from the Local Authority, whereas Local Authority housing stock has been transferred to Twin Valley Homes (Registered Social Landlord).
Compared to other wards (refer to Exhibit 10), Bank Top is the fourth highest in having owner-occupied properties, and the second highest in having private landlord rented properties. In addition, as reported by the Blackburn with Darwen Housing and Neighbourhood Service Department (2001), Bank Top is among the highest of voids in the private property sector. The type of housing is mainly pre-1919 terraced houses. About 17.9% of the private rented housing in the Borough with a large amount of pre-1919 terraced property is in Bank Top.

5.1.2 Accommodation types

As illustrated in Exhibit 11, most houses in Bank Top are terraced properties (54%). This is greater than the figures for the Borough (47.9%) and England and Wales overall (26%). However, Bank Top is the fourth highest in having terraced and semi-detached properties, the lowest in having detached type properties, and the second highest in having purpose built flats, and the highest in having other type of property, compared to other wards in the Borough.
5.2 Housing demand and supply mismatch

The 1994 House Condition survey found that Bank Top ward had a higher level of unfit housing than the average for the Borough. As reported by the Housing and Neighbourhood Service Department of Blackburn (2001), Bank Top was declared as the Renewal Area in April 1998. It lies immediately to the west of town centre, and is an area of 1000 dwellings. The area exhibits clear symptoms of low demand, in terms of high void rates, and low prices. Most of the Renewal Area had the highest percentage of sales below £20,000. As reported by DETR (2000) and illustrated in Table 1, Bank Top ward also the highest percentage of voids in the Borough. Average house prices also continued to fall in 2000.

Table 1: Bank Top renewal area demand indicators (source: DETR, 2000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Bank Top</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average House Price</td>
<td>£45000 or less</td>
<td>£22,077 Jan-Sept 2000 BB2-1 Post code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative House Price</td>
<td>60% or less of national mean</td>
<td>15% of national mean July-Sept 2000 BB2-1 Post code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low value sales (£20,000 or less)</td>
<td>5% of sales</td>
<td>43% Apr-June 2000 BB2-1 Post Code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private sector Vacancy Rate</td>
<td>4.5%+</td>
<td>13% Mar 2000 Bank Top Ward</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3 House Condition in Bank Top

As reported by Housing and Neighbourhood Services Department (2001), house conditions are an important reason behind low demand for pre-1919 houses in Bank Top. In contrast to other wards in the Borough where there are pockets of disrepair, Bank Top seems to suffer from chronic and widespread poor housing conditions in the private sector. In 2000 it was estimated that 18,861 private dwellings were unfit with 41% of them were the private stock. The 1994 survey found that 23% of private sector dwellings were unfit because of core defects; disrepair, structural instability or damp. These problems are fundamental to the health and comfort of the occupants, and can be particularly expensive and difficult to remedy.

The level of unfitness is particularly related to age. Pre-1919 dwellings tend to be unfit. Unfortunately, these make up 54% of the total stock and up to 80% of the total private stock in some wards. Across England as a whole, 25% of housing stock dates before 1919. Terraced houses, which make up the bulk of the pre-1919 private stock, also tended to be unfit; 52.6% of
those unfit across the Borough were located in Bank Top. Average repair costs were higher for pre-1919 unfit dwellings. These were £10,593 per dwelling, compared to an average of £9,224. Likewise terraced houses also tended to have higher repair costs, averaging £10,476 (1994 prices).

Between 1994 and 1996 the estimated number of unfit dwellings in Bank Top declined, due to the Borough and private activity. In this period 25 Group Repair Schemes were implemented improving 222 unfit dwellings. Ninety-nine Renovation Grants were paid, and 369 unfit dwellings were cleared. Since 1997, whilst Group Repair has gathered momentum in the Bank Top Renewal Area, the number of grants paid has dropped significantly. However, the older housing stock continues to deteriorate and it is estimated that in the past 4 years the number of unfit dwellings has increased by 1,683, mainly in the private sector (Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council, 2001).

Unfit housing is most problematic where owners do not have the resources to renovate. The 1994 Survey identified 6,470 households with incomes so low that they would not have to pay anything towards the cost of a Renovation Grant. Bank Top is among those wards classified as having householders who tend to occupy properties with above average repair costs, or significantly above average levels of unfitness in the following wards across all house types and ages (Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council, 2001).

5.4 Social Factors in Bank Top

Bank Top is among the most affected area from social factors, which are illustrated in Exhibit 12 and Exhibit 13 below.

5.4.1 Ethnicity Issues

As shown in Exhibit 12 below, all wards have the white population as the highest proportion, with the Asian population falling into the second highest group. And Bank Top is the third highest of Asian community after Audley and Queens Park.


5.4.2 Health Issues

As shown in Exhibit 13 below, the populations of the Bank Top have the highest percentage of both health problems with a Limiting Long Term Illness (LLTI) and whose health is not good compare to other wards.
5.5 Structural Factors in Bank Top

Bank Top is among the areas most affected from structural factors. These are summarised in Exhibit 14 – 17 below.

5.5.1 Migration Issues

Exhibit 14 below shows that Bank Top has the highest percentage of people who moved out of the area, compared to other wards.

5.5.2 Deprivation Issues

From Exhibit 15 below, Bank Top is the third highest deprived area after Audley and Whitebirk (the lower the figure the higher the deprivation score).
5.5.3 Unemployment Issues

Exhibit 16 shows that Bank Top has the highest percentage of unemployment compared to other wards (percentages are based on working age population, except the ‘unemployed’ category, which is based on economic activity).

5.5.4 Working Age Benefits

Exhibit 17: Percentage of JSA claimants for each ADF (source: claimant count with rates and proportions, 2005)
Exhibit 17 shows that Bank Top has the highest percentage of total JSA Claimants compared to other wards. The percentage figures show the number of JSA claimants as a proportion of resident working-age people. (The Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) is payable to people under pensionable age who are available for, and actively seeking, work)

6.0 Data Analysis and Findings

6.1 Drivers for Housing Market Failure

As shown in Exhibit 18, the respondents' perceptions of factors contributing to housing market failure in Bank Top, Blackburn, East Lancashire are presented in three main themes: physical conditions and policy of housing; desirability of the area (social factor), and structural factors.

6.1.1 Physical Conditions and Policy of Housing

![Bar chart]

Exhibit 18: Respondents’ perceptions of the physical condition of private and rented property, the overall quality of housing, and housing policy (source: Exploratory study)

**Empty and abandoned properties**
About 43% and 9% of the respondents claimed that private properties and housing association properties suffer from empty and abandonment respectively, compared to other types properties in Bank Top and other HMR pathfinder areas.

**Quality of houses**
64% of the respondents responded that majority of houses in Bank Top are in poor conditions (reasons given were ‘dampness’, ‘unfit for habitation’, and ‘age’).

**Housing policy**
55% of the respondents quoted that past housing policy has impacted on housing market failure. Examples of features of the old-fashioned houses that made them unfit for modern living were: no
separate kitchen, no toilet or toilet at the back yard, no parking space, shared staircases for one bedroom flats, and having no garden.

6.1.2 Social Factor - Desirability of the Area

As shown in Exhibit 19, 27% of respondents quoted that Bank Top suffers from a bad physical environment characterised by graffiti, rubbish, and litter that contributes to the unpleasant environment. 64% respondents agreed that resident aspirations had changed to desiring a modern living style. Thus, old fashion house designs did not meet with the aspirations of these residents. Bank Top also suffers from poor quality of life. Issues like crime, anti social behaviour and drug dealer activities are among critical factors that contribute to making it an unhealthy and unsafe place to live.

Exhibit 19: Respondents’ perceptions on the desirability of Bank Top (source: Exploratory study)

6.1.3 Structural Factors

As depicted by Exhibit 20, 45% of the respondents claimed that one of key factors contributing to the housing market failure in Bank Top was because people moved out of the area, leaving the existing properties oversupplied. Meanwhile, for the economic factor, 36% agreed that Bank Top suffers from a low skills level and 27% viewed that industrial collapse was another factor contributing to housing market failure.
6.2 Identifying the stakeholders who are involved in the community engagement process for the HMR Process in Bank Top

Identifying different stakeholders involved in the community engagement process for this study was derived from the understanding of the HMR delivery process in Bank Top as discussed below.

6.2.1 The existing HMR delivery process

The existing HMR delivery process as illustrated in Exhibit 21 is based on findings from the interview study visits to the Pathfinder, the Borough, and Bank Top.
Exhibit 21: The existing HMR process in Bank Top, the Borough, East Lancashire Pathfinder (source: exploratory study)

The summary of the levels of involvement by different stakeholders in the HMR process is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Levels of different stakeholders’ involvement in the HMR process in Bank Top, Blackburn, East Lancashire Pathfinder area (source: exploratory study)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholders</th>
<th>The roles and scope of works in the HMR process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Elevate East Lancashire Pathfinder (The Pathfinder) | The Pathfinder is a funding organisation for the defined Pathfinder areas across five local authorities of Blackburn with Darwen BC, Burnley BC, Hyndburn BC, Pendle BC and Rossendale BC. The Pathfinder’s roles are:  
  • to translate the UK Government’s HMR policy for the implementation purpose  
  • to prepare and develop strategy plan and business plan  
  • to prepare framework reports for each of the Pathfinder’s areas  
  • to bid for project funding from central government and other funding organisations  
  • to approve and fund HMR projects proposed by local authorities and other stakeholders  

In preparing these reports, the Pathfinder worked with five Local Authorities within the East Lancashire Pathfinder area. In this case study the Pathfinder works with the Borough. These strategic roles need to be addressed by the Pathfinder in the HMR process. |
| The Borough | In the HMR process, the Borough acts as an agent for the Pathfinder. The Borough |
works not only with the Pathfinder and their partners, but also with the local community of the defined HMR areas. As each of Pathfinder areas has different kinds of issues and problems, the Borough has to thoroughly understand the aspirations and needs of local residents within the ADFs before proceed with the implementation stage. Before the HMR project can be implemented, the Borough has to ensure that the objectives of HMR are met with the aspirations of the local communities.

The HMR process within the Borough as illustrated in Exhibit 21 is summarised as follows:

Firstly, undertaking survey works within the Borough, to identify areas with housing problems of abandonment, unfit conditions, deteriorate, old as well as addressing social, economic and health issues.

Secondly, classifying the areas: HMR teams have to draft the Housing Investment Zone for the Pathfinder projects, starting with the most deprived areas within the Borough.

Thirdly, engaging the community: by issuing Community News letter to disseminate the HMR agenda by consulting and discussing local communities as well as getting their feedbacks/responses on the programmes.

Finally, preparing documentation works: at this stage HMR teams are working with Elevate on preparing the framework paper for the identified areas in the Borough. All the feedback from the community engagement events is included in mapping the document. The Pathfinder will then present the completed documents to central government for funding purposes.

| Bank Top Local Communities | Bank Top local community groups are the representative of the Bank Top local communities with different ethnic background and academic qualifications. These local community groups operate within one community centre, known as the Bank Top Community Centre. Bank Top Community Centre is a meeting place for local communities within Bank Top ADF.

Based on the findings from the exploratory study, the local community engagement happened during the Community Consultations held by the HMR teams of the Borough, with the local residents and community groups, associations or representatives at the Bank Top Community Centre. So far, two community consultations have taken place (August 2003 and November 2003).

Understandings the HMR delivery process demonstrates two key findings:

- Stakeholders directly involved in the community engagement process are located within an active community engagement zone (Exhibit 21). These stakeholders are the Neighbourhood Regeneration Coordinator of Bank Top, the representatives of Bank Top community groups and associations, and the local communities in Bank Top. There is no direct engagement between the Pathfinder and the local communities of Bank Top along with the HMR process, as the Borough HMR team acts as the middle person or agent between the Pathfinder and Bank Top local communities.

- Levels of skills required by different stakeholders for community engagement also sit in an active community engagement zone (Exhibit 21). These necessary skills (skill level 2 and skill level 3) as illustrated in Exhibit 21 are those skills that need to be acquired for community engagement by the different stakeholders in the HMR process.

6.3 Identifying levels of community engagement in the HMR process in Bank Top

Defining the levels of community engagement for different stakeholders who are involved in the HMR process in Bank Top is essential to:

- Identify the levels of community engagement implemented by different stakeholders.
Investigate what the different stakeholder’s positions are with respect to the levels of community engagement process with the HMR.

Identify the skills needed, and allocations to be acquired by, the different stakeholders in the community engagement process of the HMR.

![Graph showing levels of community engagement](image)

Exhibit 22: Levels of community engagement that took place in the HMR process in Bank Top, Blackburn, East Lancashire Pathfinder (source: exploratory study)

Research findings from the study interviews reveal that there were only two levels of community engagement being implemented in the HMR process in Bank Top (Exhibit 22). 55% of respondents stated that they only experienced an information-giving level in the community engagement process, whilst 64% respondents claimed that they had also experienced consultation-level input into the process. The information-giving was carried out by distributing community newsletters, leaflets, board stands and posters while consultation events were held on the 27th and 30th August 2003 and 9th November 2003 at the Bank Top Community Centre.

Furthermore, the way that these two levels of community engagement were being implemented did not meet with local communities’ expectations. Some local community groups (for example, the ‘elderly’ group) claimed that they were neither informed nor consulted about the HMR that was being developed in their areas. For the consultation events, some local people claimed the events were about informing them about the project, rather than consulting them.

Understanding the community engagement process implemented by different stakeholders in Bank Top revealed two key findings:

- There is no full level of community engagement that was implemented by different stakeholders in the HMR process. Evidence revealed that there are only two levels of engagement (i.e. Information giving and Consultation) being implemented by different stakeholders in Bank Top.

- There is no equality of participation amongst the different stakeholders involved in the community engagement process. For example, local communities in Bank Top were acting as passive participants in the community engagement process of the HMR process. They were only consulted, and not fully engaged, either in the decision-making, or in the preliminary planning design. This contradicts the Community Engagement Strategy developed by Elevate (2005) that outlines four levels of community engagement for local authorities and their partners to engage local communities in the HMR process.
6.4 Defining the stakeholder’s experiences, views and expectations in the HMR process in Bank Top

![Graph showing stakeholder's experiences, views and expectations from the HMR process in Bank Top, Blackburn, East Lancashire Pathfinder (source: exploratory study)](image)

Research findings (Exhibit 23) indicate that the majority (55%) of the respondents viewed that the HMR process did not meet with their expectations. They claimed that the HMR does not represent the local values and culture of the area. Some claimed that local communities were not consulted, especially on issues like places that the community wanted to be inhabited. They wanted local values to be integrated within the programme, which could create a sense of belonging. However, a majority of the respondents (55%) agreed that the HMR had a positive impact on their neighbourhood, whereas 18% of the respondents were uncertain about what the future holds for the HMR within their area.

In addition, the way that the HMR has been delivered does not meet with local communities’ expectations. For example, some local communities claimed that the project breaks up the existing community, and doesn’t represent local values. Local people expect their representative be part of the board, which designs and plans the project. They expected that there should be a long-term relationship between local communities and the people on board.

6.5 Barriers for attaining the full levels of community engagement by different stakeholders in the HMR process in Bank Top.

The research findings (Exhibit 24 and Table 3) identify that most respondents agreed and recognised the needs for the stakeholders to acquire generic skills in addition to the technical and professional skills in the HMR process.

Research findings identify 33 types of generic skills that are important for the HMR process. These generic skills, as tabulated in Table 3, are classified into two main themes: organisational skills and community-based skills. The research findings also identified the skills priorities (which are mainly on community-based skills) that are important for the success of the HMR process.
Exhibit 24: The generic skills that are recognised by the respondents for the HMR process (source: exploratory study)

Table 3: The generic skills recognised by the respondents for the HMR process (source: exploratory study)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generic skills</th>
<th>Skills that are most needed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organisational skills</td>
<td>Organisational skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community-based skills</td>
<td>Community-based skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Administrative skills</td>
<td>1. Local Knowledge skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Creativity skills</td>
<td>2. Supporting skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Innovation skills</td>
<td>3. Communication skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Financial management</td>
<td>4. Consultation skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Outsourcing skills</td>
<td>5. Role-playing skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Project Management</td>
<td>6. Listening skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Presentation skills</td>
<td>7. Convincing skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Planning skills</td>
<td>8. Political understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Skills to deal with</td>
<td>9. Engagement skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stakeholders</td>
<td>10. Motivating skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. Capacity building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. Personal skills</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13. Skill to deal with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>local people</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14. Persuasion skills</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15. Encouraging skills</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16. Community skills</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17. Social skills</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18. Appreciation skills</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19. Expressing views skills</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20. Confidence skills</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21. Common values skill</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22. Ordinary people skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23. Skill to deal with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>neighbours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24. Skill to deal with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 (27%)</td>
<td>24 (73%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>6</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

7.0 Conclusion

This paper has presented key findings from the exploratory study at Bank Top, Blackburn, England. Five main themes of study proposition that recognise the necessary skills requirement for relevant stakeholders who are involved in the delivery process have been identified:

- Factors that contribute to housing market failure in Bank Top

27
• Key stakeholders who are involved in the community engagement process
• The level of community engagement that is implemented in Bank Top
• Local Communities’ views and expectations are from the community process
• Barriers for attaining the full levels of community engagement

These key findings have deduced skills allocation and priorities among different levels of community engagement among different stakeholders involved in the engagement process. This exploratory study also generates thinking on related issues that are used to form part of a framework development for identifying the necessary skills needed for community engagement process. The framework has been applied by author to a Bank Top’s neighbourhood facilities case study phase.

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