



### **Conversations on Future Lifestyles:**

Talk it through. Make it happen.

**New Urban Life** – April 2006 Introduced by Graham Freer

Hosted by Andrew Stuck, Rethinking Cities Ltd.

<http://www.rethinkingcities.net/conversations>

A Proposal for **New Urban Life**

#### **Summary**

This proposal outlines the case for the creation of a new campaign '**New Urban Life**' in response to the challenges of climate change. The campaign is distinct in that it focuses on the potential role urban form can play in tackling car dependency. *New Urban Life* seeks to inspire the much talked about, but as yet to be realised, urban renaissance; creating the conditions where truly sustainable urban living can occur.

#### **The Proposal**

Whilst much emphasis is currently being placed on improving the energy efficiency of buildings, little is currently being done to tackle the energy consumption from private motor vehicles. Transport in the UK contributes 22% of green house gases (DTI figures) but, with the exception of car-sharing, there is no real focus within Government policy on reducing car use.

The potential of urban form in reducing car dependency is well understood amongst built environment professionals. Dense, well-connected, urban neighbourhoods not only make public transport, local shops and facilities accessible, they also support their economic viability because of the close proximity of the populations they serve. In practice however the suburban model of housing development still dominates with more than half of all new housing built at less than 20 dwellings per ha.

Running concurrently with our unsustainable approach to house building is the housing crisis in the UK. As the Barker review has identified, over the last 30 years the number of households has increased by 30% whilst the levels of house building fell by 50%. Based on current density standards, we are unable to meet the demand for housing, resulting in increasing numbers of disenfranchised people, excluded from the housing market as a result of spiralling house prices. Our current approach to house building is clearly not working.

A central element of *New Urban Life* is to gain support for a new way of living. Changing perceptions by demonstrating that denser forms of living can be attractive and affordable. It will seek to demonstrate that new forms of city structure, common in Europe, can appeal to families as well as to single people. Developments such as *Bedzeds* (Beddington, South London) and *Homes for Change* in Manchester signal the way, but the concept is still not in common currency.

*New Urban Life* therefore seeks to achieve widespread support for the concept of new urban living by:

- Forming a coalition of pressure groups and built environment professionals, supporting *New Urban Life*
- Form a steering group of high profile individuals to direct and champion the campaign.
- Raising the profile of *New Urban Life* through high profile media stunts and press work
- Capitalising on those currently disenfranchised by the current housing market, connecting with them by providing a new real alternative of dense, high quality and above all affordable urban housing suitable to families as well as individuals
- Inspiring the debate on the form of *New Urban Life* through design competitions (e.g. re-engineering the suburbs)

#### **Outcome**

The focus of *New Urban Life* will be legislative change to facilitate the urban renaissance by seeking to promote an early day motion for:

- A transport energy audit, setting out the standards by which all new developments must accord to minimise the environmental impacts derived from transport.
- Seek a revision to traffic regulations as enshrined in 'DB32' which prevents well connected, mixed use development from being created and thereby:
- Create the circumstances in which new sustainable neighbourhoods can be constructed.