

Residents Renewing Their City

The Story of Community Forum

In 1973 residents' groups in Birmingham established Community Forum; for the next 25 years Community Forum played a pivotal role in influencing and shaping the City's ambitious programme for renewing the inner city. This account, edited by Jon Stevens, tells the story of Community Forum through the eyes of people who were directly involved and draws some important lessons for today.



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CENTRE FOR URBAN AND
REGIONAL STUDIES



Residents Renewing Their City: the Story of Community Forum is dedicated to the memory of all the people we have lost along the way; people who changed our way of thinking and our way of doing things.

Pre-eminent among the inspiring and visionary leaders of Community Forum were: **Pat Priestman, Joyce Farley** and **Joyce Brown**.

They were aided and supported in their work by many committed and dedicated workers, notably: **Rick Groves, Mike Langstaff** and **Charlie Adams**.

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Foreword

by Ted Taylor, former Chair of the Urban Renewal Sub Committee 1974-77

I am very grateful to Jon Stevens for having sent me this multi-authored account of the work of Community Forum. Reading it has stirred many powerful memories for me of people and events covering the period in the mid-1970s when I was chairman of the Urban Renewal Subcommittee. This was midway through my period as City Councillor for Soho Ward in Handsworth. The ward ran the length of the Soho Road and was critically affected by the policies of house clearance and its eventual replacement by retention and improvement. Brewery Street still contained back-to-back houses and I can remember the residents turning out to wave when I toured the ward on the Saturday following my election. This was one of the few streets that were eventually cleared, although the bulk of the Victorian and Edwardian terraces were retained and improved by the Urban Renewal Programme.

At the eastern tip of Soho Ward, close to the city centre, was the Hockley Flyover Adventure playground, staffed by a powerful Scotsman named Tam, who remains a drinking buddy of mine until this day. Handsworth contained the St James Redevelopment Area, where a team from Community Planning Associates, working with colleagues from the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies (based at the University of Birmingham where I was myself employed) were heavily involved in supporting the local residents' association and with liaising with the City Council. So I was of course deeply interested in the evolution of housing renewal policies and their effect on the people in my ward.

I was elected to Soho Ward in 1971, when the Labour Party was still in opposition. When we gained power in 1972 I was placed on the Education Committee and made chairman of the Youth and Community Sub-Committee. I can remember visiting many community and youth centres to meet local people and their support workers. Sadly, many of these places no longer exist. When I consolidated my position in Soho Ward at a further election I was placed by the Labour group as chairman of the Urban Renewal Sub-Committee (URS), following in the footsteps of my comrade in Soho Ward, Brian Shuttleworth and the councillor from a neighbouring ward, John Hannah. I had great respect for both of these men and for several other members of the Labour group.

Chairmanship of URS gave me a high level of responsibility with, initially at least, a low level of power because the committee was a subcommittee of Environmental Services and as such did not report directly to Council. I discovered that the real power in Urban Renewal lay in its links with the community, importantly through the activities of Community Forum.

It is my experience that politicians often make individual claims for themselves, which are largely unwarranted and I don't want to do that. What I remember is that I did work extremely hard on the programme. One action I was directly involved in was changing the order of priority of the action areas so that Soho Ward, of course, and other middle ring areas such as Sparkbrook were moved up the priority list. Another action was encouraging changes in the procedures leading to home improvement to reduce the random improvement of individual properties (known as 'pepper-potting'), which was leading to poor quality improvements and damage to the structure and inherent value of adjoining properties. During my early inspections with officers, we noted that grants were being used to put cheaply built porches on the front of homes in Victorian terraces that destroyed the coherence of the whole block; to install so-called picture windows, which meant tearing out perfectly good bay or sash cord windows and replacing them with plate of glass in softwood frames, and in carrying out destructive internal works that often threatened the stability of the houses.

One way out of this waste of resource was to increase the degree of central control of standards of work, both on houses and the local facilities, by inviting to meetings of our subcommittee senior officers from all the major departments: architects, environment, planning, housing, education plus the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council. This worked well, although the housing department always seemed unhappy that we were assuming such huge powers over large parts of the housing stock and I can remember that the Chief Housing Officer at the time did take early retirement.

Also of huge, indeed critical importance to making the programme effective was to make it community-based and this was done via the local Urban Renewal Project Teams and their liaison with community groups and by involving these groups in the determination of policy. I also sought advice and can remember a trip to Macclesfield with Rod Hackney to talk to the community that they had formed, based around a small Housing Action Area. Part of my job as chairman was touring the city with a team of officers to address groups of residents, invited to meetings in local community halls, to inform them about the programme and to encourage the formation of residents' associations. When successful, these meetings resulted in individuals from the audience agreeing to form a local steering committee that went on to liaise with Community Forum.

The names that leap back into my memory from the pages of this account of Community Forum's work are, of course, the officers servicing the programme and, in particular Terry Brunt and Geoff Eden, who accompanied me on the tour of neighbourhood meetings. Also I recall people from the local teams, professional workers and community groups: Charlie Adams, Mike Gibson, Jon Stevens, Alan Edgar, Rick Groves and Steve Jacobs. Some became personal friends, including Chris Paris, who called round to my home on his bicycle most Saturday mornings to discuss the programme, giving me the benefit of his experience, clarity of mind and senses of irony and humour. He presented me with a complimentary copy of the book 'Not Much Improvement', written by him and Bob Blackaby, before he left for Australia, giving me no chance to challenge its conclusions.

I consider this account of the activities of Community Forum to be of high importance in that it sets the scene informally but with great clarity that led to the formation of the Urban Renewal Programme in Birmingham. It makes it clear that this huge endeavour set out to serve the community of the inner city and to base its policies on the aspirations and hopes of that community. The programme was of national importance and indeed affected government policy in a positive manner for several years. It also had international ramifications. People employed on the programme as well as the huge collection of influential volunteers can be proud of what we achieved.

I was involved as chairman in the growth phase of the Urban Renewal Programme and at the inception of the Facelift scheme, with the Envelope Programme over the horizon. This account of Community Forum's activities extends to the period when I was no longer directly involved. It charts the great successes at its peak then its progressive decline into the toxic situation precipitated by the change in government in 2010. The withdrawal of public funding to communities and rise in the dominance of private landlords, many of them unwilling to provide decent living accommodation at a fair rent, is sad and has to be fought. I wish the progressive forces in local government and local community groups and of course the ordinary people of Birmingham the very best of luck in combating these negative social forces. There is still a need for Urban Renewal!

Preface

by Jon Morris, Chair of Localise West Midlands

I am delighted that Localise West Midlands (LWM) is publishing *Residents Renewing Their City: The Story of Community Forum* in partnership with the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies of the University of Birmingham and with support from the Barrow Cadbury Trust. LWM continues to promote the kind of community-led and locally responsive solutions that are outlined here.

The Centre for Urban and Regional Studies was very much a part of the debate about housing policy in Birmingham in the post war period and staff from the Centre and from the Planning Department of Birmingham Polytechnic played an active role in supporting resident involvement in the Urban Renewal Programme and in Community Forum from the outset.

It is apt that Barrow Cadbury Trust has supported this report as they were the main funder of Community Forum, as explained in the chapter by their former director Eric Adams. Barrow Cadbury has also been a significant funder of LWM.

As well as currently chairing LWM, I worked for Urban Renewal from 1991 to 1999, so this report has added meaning for me. During that time we worked closely with residents and other Council departments to improve older houses and their neighbourhoods. The aim was to make them better for the people who lived there, not to gentrify them. We planned to give the areas a further 30 years' life, and more than 30 years on these areas are still viable and the improvements still visible. The approach worked in stark contrast to more recent attempts to get homeowners to improve the energy efficiency of their homes.

We also shared good practice mutually with other local authorities running Urban Renewal programmes, and met regularly with Civil Servants to discuss national frameworks and legislations. During this period new legislation was introduced that gave local authorities more freedoms to develop their own urban renewal programmes as they saw fit. Money provided to local authorities by central Government for their Urban Renewal Grant programmes was no longer ringfenced. It was hoped (including by civil servants) that this would open the way for even more locally tailored and imaginative programmes. Instead, at a time of central Government cuts to and growing demands on local authority spending, there were dramatic falls in urban renewal activity across the UK. It would seem that in such a centralised country, greater freedom in just one area is counterproductive.

Community Forum was a powerful partner of Urban Renewal, but it had and created other partners - as did Urban Renewal itself. Birmingham City Council has continued to support and work with community groups particularly in more deprived areas, but there is little doubt that the high point was linked to the Urban Renewal Programme and its area teams.

It was inspirational to bring together the people from Community Forum and Urban Renewal to produce this report and we are grateful to Jon Stevens for the work he has done compiling and editing it. The lessons learnt by those involved continued to influence them in their later lives and careers. Hundreds of thousands have continued to benefit and the report's final section on what has happened since show that those times still inspire people to action today even in this far more hostile environment.

Introduction

by Jon Stevens, former Community Forum Worker

Community Forum was a network of inner city residents' associations and community groups that played a pivotal role in ensuring that local communities were effectively engaged in the implementation of Birmingham's ground-breaking Urban Renewal Programme in the 1970's through to the mid 1990's.

Launched in 1972, the Urban Renewal Programme was the largest programme of private sector market renewal ever carried out by a local authority in the UK. It was a rolling programme of investment in house improvement and neighbourhood regeneration that impacted on dozens of inner city communities; with over 50,000 mainly pre-1919 homes being renovated and improved across the city. The success of the programme relied on extensive liaison and co-operation with property owners and landlords and with local residents' groups.

Community Forum was formed in 1973 and, for the following 25 years, it had a significant influence; firstly, on the overall shape and direction of the programme; secondly, on how key elements of the programme were delivered; and finally on subsequent developments (including the Council's revised approach to clearance and redevelopment). Community Forum was always independent of the Council with its own funding; this was critical to its integrity as a representative body and it enabled Forum to take a constructive but robust approach in all of its dealings with the Council.

In October 2013, a celebratory event was organised to mark the 40th anniversary of the launch of Community Forum. It was attended by around 40 people including former officers and members of Forum; community workers, who worked for/with Forum; local politicians and officers associated with the Urban Renewal Programme; and academics/researchers from Birmingham Polytechnic Planning School (now part of Birmingham City University) and from Birmingham University (particularly from the Centre for Urban Regional Studies). At the event, there was a series of presentations on Community Forum and its impact, followed by a lively and informative discussion in which all present shared their thoughts and memories. All agreed that the role played by Community Forum had been important in ensuring effective community engagement in the programme and there was prevailing view that Birmingham (and other urban areas) had much to learn today from the approaches and methods developed at that time.

This report entitled *Residents Renewing Their City: the story of Community Forum* has been produced by the organisers of the event. The report is based on the presentations made at the event, but they have been extensively rewritten and extended and additional material has been added. The aim has been to create a fuller and more rounded account of the work of Community Forum over two and a half decades and to explain the impact that residents had on the renewal of Birmingham's inner city areas over that period.

The account of Community Forum's work raises a number of questions on the state of urban renewal today; given the almost complete withdrawal of both national and local government from intervention in inner city housing markets over the last twenty years. These questions are addressed in the final chapter together with a description of a number of activities and events that flowed from the original Community Forum get-together in 2013.

Acknowledgements

The celebratory event could not have been organised and this report could not have been written without the work of the steering group of Barry Toon, Sue Lancaster and Esther Boyd (who were all active in Community Forum) together with Jon Stevens and Frances Heywood (Community Forum's original workers). They were ably supported by Liz Priestman, who works with Barry at the Selly Oak Area Caretaker Society.

Barry, Jon and Frances are responsible for five of the chapters in the report. The remaining chapters are by Mike Gibson (originally of Community Planning Associates), Peter Archer (one of the first Urban Renewal Project Team Leaders) and Eric Adams (formerly of the Barrow Cadbury Trust, Community Forum's main funders). More information on the contributors is contained in an appendix at the end of the report.

It should be noted that the views and opinions expressed in the report are those of the authors and they don't necessarily represent the views of Localise West Midlands, the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies or the Barrow Cadbury Trust.

1 Housing and urban policy in the late 1960's and the growth of community action

by Jon Stevens, former Community Forum Worker

'Sweeping away the slums'

After the Second World War, Birmingham in common with other major cities, embarked on ambitious plans to redevelop the whole of the inner ring of the city; an area of mainly overcrowded and insanitary back-to-back Victorian houses that were in very poor condition, compounded in places by extensive bomb damage. Whilst there was widespread agreement, at the time, regarding the need to 'sweep away the slums' and to replace them with modern well-built Council houses, there was considerable debate about how this could be best accomplished.

In 1947 Birmingham City Council included around 32,000 of the worst homes in a Compulsory Purchase Order and almost overnight some 100,000 people, who had previously been mainly private tenants, found themselves as Council tenants. This was Phase 1 of the redevelopment programme and it was followed in 1954 by Phase 2, in which a further 30,000 homes were compulsorily acquired and a similar number of people became Council tenants.

The ambition, scale and complexity of this process - the clearance of thousands of old homes, the construction of tens of thousands of new Council houses and the rehousing of hundreds of thousands of people over a period of less than thirty years - beggars belief in today's world. Seventy years later, Birmingham City Council only compulsorily purchases and clears a handful of houses each year. And social landlords in Birmingham typically build no more than a few thousand socially rented homes each year, of which only a very small number are new Council houses.

Counting the human cost

Over the next thirty years, many problems arose in delivering the programme. Many of the practical questions of building such large numbers of houses so rapidly had been foreseen and to some extent they were addressed over the course of the programme. But the human costs of the process had been underestimated and, in practice, were often discounted or ignored. These costs to individual families and the communities they lived in could be considerable.

When slum properties transferred to the Council, the living conditions of the tenants didn't change immediately. They may have gained a more responsible landlord but many of them were subsequently faced with a long, sometimes interminable wait, before they were rehoused. And the extended process of rehousing and clearance meant that whole neighbourhoods could be blighted for many years. Despite the Council having a 'patch and mend' policy for houses prior to demolition, living conditions often got worse and many people were left in limbo, feeling abandoned, for years to come.

Then, when people were rehoused, their choices were often unduly limited and constrained. Many ended up being moved to an area that was far from their present neighbourhood and their existing friends and neighbours. Indeed, with the development of overspill estates, this could be outside of the city boundary in Chelmsley Wood or Frankley. People were gaining improved living conditions but they sometimes found themselves isolated, cut off from their roots and from employment opportunities.

Furthermore, the form of many of the new housing developments, increasingly characterised by high-rise living (at one point Birmingham had nearly

500 tower blocks), proved increasingly unpopular with many people, particularly families with young children.

The development of the 'twilight areas'

The comprehensive programme of municipal clearance and redevelopment also had the perverse effect of transferring many of the housing problems associated with inner-ring housing - where private landlords had housed the most impoverished people and newly arrived immigrants in the very worst accommodation - into the middle-ring. After the war, these areas of late Victorian and Edwardian 'bye-law' housing built pre-1919, offered housing of reasonable design and quality to both private renters and a growing number of low-income owner-occupiers. But it became clear through the 1950's and 1960's that some of these areas - which became known as 'twilight areas' - were becoming the new slums, as more and more of the larger houses were converted into multiple occupation.

Growing concern and unease

Concern about the wider impact of slum clearance began to be voiced from a variety of sources. Academics such as Peter Wilmott and Michael Young highlighted the destructive effect of clearance and redevelopment on family ties and on local communities in the East End of London as early as 1957 (in their book 'Family in Kinship in East London'). And in Birmingham ten years later, John Rex and Robert Moore in 'Race, Community and Conflict' exposed the conditions that were prevalent in the 'twilight areas', where newly arrived immigrants, in particular, had to endure squalid, overcrowded and insecure housing.

There was a growing public unease as well. In Birmingham in 1965, Canon Norman Power captured this in his book 'The Forgotten People', which vividly described the destructive impact of the slum clearance on people living in Ladywood. All of this fed into a general questioning of the need for large-scale programmes of redevelopment. Then in 1968, with the partial collapse of Ronan Point in the East End of London following a gas explosion, public anxiety about high-rise housing and tower blocks came to a head. Something had to change.

The search for alternative strategies

As the 1960's progressed there was a developing debate about alternative strategies for renewing areas of older housing in Britain's towns and cities. There were several strands to the debate. Some suggested that more responsive ways of undertaking clearance and development, coupled with better-designed housing and neighbourhoods was the way forward. Others argued that comprehensive redevelopment was no longer needed and that it would be much better to refurbish the remaining areas of older housing and to keep existing neighbourhoods intact.

A more fundamental line of argument challenged the efficacy of both of these approaches. Researchers and activists associated with the 'rediscovery of poverty' (as in Peter Townsend and Brian Abel-Smith's book 'The Poor and the Poorest' published in 1965) argued that the underlying problems of alienated and disempowered communities in the 'inner urban areas' would persist whatever housing policies were adopted. What was needed was a more co-ordinated and well-resourced approach to tackling urban problems in the round; with the people affected having a much greater say over the policies to be introduced and how they would be managed.

The move to co-ordinated housing improvement

The idea of improving older housing through programmes of repair and conversion, as an alternative to wholesale clearance and redevelopment, had in fact been gaining momentum since the 1950's. Improvement grants for individual owners had been available since 1954 and in 1964 new legislation allowed Local Authorities to declare Improvement Areas. However, it

wasn't until 1969 and the introduction of General Improvement Areas (GIA's) that the housing problems associated with more run-down areas of housing began to be addressed. Birmingham declared 9 GIA's in 1970/71 covering 5600 homes in areas that were seen as 'marginal' and where the investment would be complementary to the continuing clearance programme.

Tackling urban poverty

Alongside the shift to housing improvement, the Government introduced several programmes to tackle urban poverty. In 1967, the Home Office launched the Urban Programme, which was designed to channel resources to 'areas of severe deprivation'. This was followed in 1968 by the Community Development Programme (CDP), which placed community-based teams in specific areas with a remit to develop wide-ranging proposals for intervention; this included a CDP in Saltley in Birmingham. The Department of the Environment followed in 1972 with three Inner Areas Studies to be based on a 'total approach' to local service provision; one of these (which the author joined in early 1973) was in Small Heath in Birmingham.

'Scratching the surface'

The resources directed to house improvement and to tackling associated urban problems were limited. From the start, there was strong criticism of the inadequacy of the Government's investment in both urban renewal and in addressing endemic poverty. Some felt that such programmes were merely 'scratching the surface'.

However, these shifts in policy did indicate a significant change of approach at both central and local government level. House improvement was a policy that largely relied on grant incentives to encourage owners to invest in their homes; unlike clearance it could not be based on compulsion or coercion. And the programmes to tackle urban poverty introduced new ways of working, in which local people and communities had to be consulted and in which they could access funding directly (albeit the amounts of money were quite small).

The rise of community action and advocacy planning – an important cultural shift?

It can be argued that these changes in how housing and urban policies were developed and later delivered was, at least in part, a response to the community action movement, which evolved in the late 1960's. Community action was a grassroots political movement centred on the home and the neighbourhood rather than on the workplace, the traditional base for working class activism through trade unions.

Community action was typically based on loose coalitions that developed in particular localities and it brought together residents' or tenants' groups - often formed to oppose or resist unwanted change – working in tandem with local voluntary advice and resource centres and with local churches and other places of worship. These coalitions were often supported by political activists operating outside of party structures and by young radical professionals, including architects, planners, social workers and so on. Working in this way could be both a strength and weakness. Having a local focus allowed for concentrated activity, which could attract mass support within the neighbourhood. But the absence of broader structures and links could mean that any gains made were incremental and even short-term.

Closely allied to community action was the idea of advocacy planning. The advocacy planning movement started in the USA. It rejected the idea of value-free planning and design and argued that the poor and minorities were largely excluded from city planning processes, even where those processes were ostensibly intended to improve their conditions. The author trained as an architect in the late 1960's and many of his generation of architects (and planners) were attracted to advocacy planning not least because of their disenchantment with the design and implementation of public housing projects.

These new programmes of housing and neighbourhood renewal were, to some extent, a response to the community action movement. And - as it happened - they provided job opportunities for a new generation of urban professionals, who adopting the thinking behind advocacy planning, were keen to work alongside the communities they served.

An urban renewal strategy for Birmingham

This was the context for a significant new policy initiative in Birmingham when Labour regained control of the Council in 1972. A working group of councillors and officers was formed to draft an overarching policy for both redevelopment and house improvement. It was chaired a young councillor with radical leanings, Brian Shuttleworth, who had firsthand experience of the problems of the clearance areas and who was fully aware of the growing public opposition to clearance and redevelopment. Although the conference did not formally invite submissions, it did receive evidence from local groups and organisations, including those working in the 'twilight areas', then seen as buffer-zones between the declared clearance areas and General Improvement Areas.

The proposals produced and adopted by the Council in early 1973 as their Urban Renewal Policy were extensive and far-reaching. The clearance and redevelopment process was to be accelerated and largely completed by 1977. Sixty-eight General Improvement Areas were to be declared covering 60,000 homes. Twenty-six Renewal Areas were to be established between the clearance areas and the GIA's covering a further 15,000 homes. Initially, these were seen as areas of mixed improvement and small-scale redevelopment but, in 1974, when the Government introduced Housing Action Areas, the Renewal Areas were designated as HAA's with almost all of the housing to be retained and improved. The new policy covered almost the entire 'middle ring' and led to a sustained and co-ordinated investment programme over the next twenty years.

Just as important as the proposals for retaining neighbourhoods and improving housing and the environment were the proposals as to how it would be implemented. Not all of this was contained in the original policy, but the idea that the programme should be delivered locally took root early on, probably as a reaction against the centralised and remote approach to delivery that characterised the clearance programme.

Consultation and liaison

It was recognised that there would need to be widespread consultation over both the policy and how it was going to work in each area of the city, again by way of contrast with the clearance programme. The chair of the newly formed Urban Renewal Sub-Committee embarked on a marathon series of public meetings designed to explain the new policy and to quell widespread fears that the 'bulldozers' were still lurking. The Council took a lot of flak but public attitudes and expectations began to change. And as new teams were established to implement the policy, they were given a clear mandate to establish and to work with residents' groups and to consult with individual home-owners and with private tenants and landlords.

No-one should underestimate what a significant change of approach to policy formulation and implementation this was for the City Council. Post-war redevelopment, however well-intentioned, had been largely based on top-down planning with minimum consultation and choice. By way of contrast urban renewal would be based on consultation and on consent. In addition, discussions were initiated about the need for a city-wide body, a 'community forum', to represent residents' overall views and concerns. (Of which more later).

A distinctive multi-disciplinary approach

The policy was to be implemented by eight Urban Renewal Teams, based in the areas that they served. These teams were generally led by environmental health officers - although the first team was led by a recently-qualified architect - but later on they would be joined by architects,

planners, technicians, housing managers and so on. The initial emphasis was to be on getting the housing repaired and renovated but there was also a commitment to area-based planning and environmental improvement with linked community and social interventions. In terms of co-ordinated service delivery and local responsiveness, Birmingham had seen nothing like this before.

What happened next?

The rest of this account tells the story of what happened next. Mike Gibson describes the circumstances, which gave birth to Community Forum and how Forum developed in its early years.

Barry Toon, the long-term Treasurer of Community Forum, looks back on the long history of Community Forum. He talks about some of the people who helped to shape the organisation and the ways in which Community Forum achieved a significant influence over inner city renewal and on wider housing and planning matters. And he reflects on some of the lessons he has learned.

Jon Stevens describes his years working for Community Forum. He considers the shifting political context in which Forum worked and he explains how the organisation was developed and extended and how it developed into an effective 'community intelligence' network. He gives an account of three important campaigns in the late 1970's and 1980's.

Local delivery working on the ground with communities lay at the heart of the Urban Renewal Programme. In the following chapter, Peter Archer, one of the first Project Team Leaders, describes his experiences of working in Sparkbrook. He highlights the surprising amount of autonomy he had in that role and the interaction he had with local leaders and the community.

When Frances Heywood joined Community Forum in 1984, the world was beginning to change. To start with Forum continued its campaigning work but they also began to look at different approaches to delivering housing renewal with visits to Amsterdam and Rotterdam. When the City began to look again at clearance and redevelopment, Community Forum played a major role in getting them to introduce much more sensible and responsive procedures that protected residents' interests. This led to the formation of the Clearance Working Party. The chapter ends by describing Community Forum's surprising links with Russia.

The Barrow Cadbury Trust supported and funded Community Forum for some 18 years. This funding was crucial to its success as an independent voice for inner city residents. Eric Adams who joined the Trust in 1972 explains how this came about; he comments on why the trustees felt that sustained funding of this kind was worthwhile and reflects on what was achieved by this, over almost three decades.

The account concludes by reflecting on the impact and significance of Community Forum and it describes some of the various activities, which flowed either directly or indirectly from the get together in 2014.

Note. In preparing this chapter and subsequently in this report, I and other contributors have drawn heavily on three books, which covered the history of urban renewal in Birmingham and beyond.

Chris Paris and Bob Blackaby *Not Much Improvement* (Heinemann 1979)

Michael S Gibson and Michael J Langstaff *An Introduction to Urban Renewal* (Hutchinson 1982)

Carl Chinn *Homes for People: Council Housing and Urban Renewal in Birmingham* (Brewin Books 1999)

2 Community Forum: genesis and early years

by Mike Gibson, formerly Community Planning Associates and Birmingham School of Planning and Landscape

Views from an 'elder statesman'

As I recall, I was the first person to speak at the first Community Forum meeting at the Sparkbrook Association Family Centre on May 1st 1973 - an appropriate date. Community Planning Associates (CPA), spurred on by Centre for Urban and Regional Studies (CURS) academic and community worker John Lambert, had set up the meeting. We were all sitting around in a big circle. Faced with a very mixed bunch of some 60 activists from 13 neighbourhood organisations and 9 other voluntary organisations, I was more than a tad apprehensive about how the meeting would turn out. But that episode is why Jon Stevens saw fit to refer to me as the 'elder statesman' of Community Forum at the first reunion 25 years later in a pub with Rick Groves, Pat Priestman, Joyce Farley, Bob Blackaby, Terry Brunt, Frances Heywood and many others.

My arrival at Birmingham School of Planning

I had returned to Birmingham as a full-time post-graduate student at the Birmingham School of Planning in October 1969, having left three years earlier with a Geography degree from Birmingham University to work as a Planning Assistant with Lancashire County Council. In my last year with the County I had worked on an outline action plan for the rehabilitation of a Widnes neighbourhood, hitherto designated for comprehensive redevelopment. As part of this work, I visited the Rochdale neighbourhood proposed for rehabilitation in the landmark Deepdish Study.

The 1968 Town and Country Planning Act had introduced Action Area Plans for improvement rather than redevelopment and the 1969 Skeffington Report marked the beginning of public participation in statutory land use planning. The 1969 Housing Act introduced General Improvement Areas (GIAs), which embedded opportunities for participation in neighbourhood renewal processes. The tide was beginning to turn against comprehensive redevelopment.

Having spent the first thirteen years of my life in a sturdy hill-side back-to-back in Huddersfield (still there now), I had some empathy with those advocating the end of large-scale clearance. Returning to university gave me the chance to get a professional planning qualification and to find a way to get involved in processes, which would shape the future of neighbourhoods like the one I had grown up in. I chose the Birmingham Planning School because there were like-minded people there who shared my commitment to a new approach to urban planning.

A participatory approach to inner city renewal: the Sparkbrook Community Plan

The year before I arrived, the School had been commissioned by the Sparkbrook Association jointly to produce a community-led plan for their area. The City Council, working with the new planning legislation, the 1968 Town and Country Planning Act, had started to prepare a Structure Plan for the whole city. Breaking with past planning practice, they had asked the Association for their (and the community's) views about the retention and improvement of the Sparkbrook area, east of the Stratford Road. Responding to this, the well-established Association (formed in the early 1960s to combat the decline of a respectable area into a slum; as described in Rex and Moore's 1967 book 'Race, Community and Conflict') had formed three Study Groups;

on housing; on child/youth education; and on adult recreational facilities and consumer provision. The work of these groups became the basis for the final plan; developed by a team of students, led by lecturers Alan Edgar (planner) and Alan Green (architect).

Alan Green came to the Community Forum 40th anniversary event and gave me his copy of the *Community Plan: A Plan for Environmental Improvement in Sparkbrook Evolved by the Community*, as he put it 'for the archives'. Reading it for the first time in well over 40 years was a thought-provoking experience. The work we did on the plan was the starting point for Community Planning Associates and I think that it can be seen as establishing the embryonic agenda for Community Forum, which was to emerge four years later.

The finished document set out a detailed action plan for the physical improvement of the area. It proposed combining housing rehabilitation with selective clearance of the worst properties to create space for improved community facilities and shopping areas; with better traffic management through road re-alignments and off-street parking and a network of pedestrian footpaths. But what made the plan different was that it was the product of a pioneering participatory planning process. The planning students did a comprehensive physical, economic and social survey of the area. This included a door-to-door 100% household questionnaire survey, achieving a 50% response rate. (The foreword to the plan records how the survey results 'were transferred onto punch cards... for analysis by the University of Aston Computer Centre'!)

This analysis directly established residents' housing needs and priorities and their views of how the area should be improved. Three alternative plans were developed in consultation with the study groups and presented to a meeting of the Association and the final proposals combined those elements that received the strongest community support. This physical plan was then combined with the wider reports and recommendations from three Study Groups to create what the foreword heralded as a 'a new type of plan, a plan sponsored and prepared in consultation with planning advisors, by the community... a COMMUNITY PLAN.'

Alan Smith and Alan Edgar shared the knowledge gained from this experience with the succeeding intake of post-graduates, which included me. This class of '69 also studied the American literature on advocacy planning and on community action and the academic critiques of UK comprehensive redevelopment. My research project focused on the evolving impact of the 1969 Housing Act on urban renewal, which led me and others to see a shift to GIAs in the city as a means of promoting participatory community planning. The Sparkbrook Community Plan experience had shown that collaborative 'live projects' were valuable for both students and residents, but that the student component of the community planning process had to be followed up with ongoing support from lecturers.

The formation of Community Planning Associates

In September 1971, myself, Harry Gardiner and Chris Paris were appointed as junior lecturers in the Planning School. The three of us along with Geoff Crook and Harry Brown joined with Alan Edgar and Alan Green to create a new type of voluntary planning organisation - Community Planning Associates (CPA). CPA had the explicit aim of supporting community organisations working in deteriorating neighbourhoods which were experiencing or faced with the threat of redevelopment and which were campaigning for the alternative of housing and neighbourhood improvement.

In successive years, we ran student projects in partnership with community organisations raising awareness about the potential for GIA's in several of the Victorian neighbourhoods between the comprehensive redevelopment areas and the middle ring road. The 1972 project focused on the South Road area of Hockley, in partnership with the Handsworth Action Group based at Villa Road Methodist Church. A public meeting and exhibition of the students' work in the Church generated local interest and led to the creation of the Hockley Flyover Adventure Playground run by a committee of residents supported by CPA. (It's still there on the left hand side as you go over the flyover towards West Bromwich).

Another project in Finch Road, Handsworth established working relationships with a range of

community groups in Lozells. In parallel, CPA supported the St James Residents' Association in Handsworth, who were living through a classic example of what Shelter famously called 'the slow death of the slum'. This work included advising the local ward councillor, Brian Shuttleworth, and neighbourhood activists about residents' rights in the bureaucratic nightmare of the clearance and re-housing process. In 1973, we did another project, again with a household interview survey, with Dick Empson of the Balsall Heath Association, who used the data and our proposals to campaign to secure a GIA for the area.

From Sheffield's Grassroots to Community Action to West Midlands Grass Roots

Alan Edgar had left the Planning School in late 1971 and set up the Shelter-sponsored Midland Area Improvement Housing Association (MAIHAL) to purchase and improve some 200 Victorian houses in Handsworth, for letting at subsidised rents to families from the City's Housing Register. He provided CPA with an office in MAIHAL's premises - a converted Victorian Villa in Heathfield Road, Handsworth. Around this time, we decided to produce a newsletter to report on the various projects we were involved in and on other activities across the West Midlands.

In doing this, we were influenced a magazine called *Sheffield's Grassroots*, copies of which had been given to me by a planning student. The magazine launched in 1971, was edited by his brother, a student community activist in Sheffield, Geoff Green. It described the various protests and campaigns by neighbourhood organisations in the city, along the lines of the work we were doing in Birmingham. (Geoff Green later came to Birmingham as Director of the Salfrey Community Development Project.)

Then in January 1972, CPA was asked to provide news from the West Midlands for the first issue of a new national magazine called *Community Action*. Our contribution to the first issue featured MAIHAL's work and the ongoing efforts of the Sparkbrook Association to implement their Community Plan by pressing for a GIA and by launching a pilot housing and environmental improvement scheme with Birmingham Friendship Housing Association, another community-based housing association. We also reported on the campaigning and advice work of the Balsall Heath Association, the Lane Neighbourhood Centre, and several new and emerging action groups in Handsworth, Sparkbrook, Moseley and Small Heath, together with Caldmore Residents' Action Group in Walsall.

A new platform for community action

So in March 1972, we published the first issue of *West Midlands Grass Roots*, printed (like the Sparkbrook Community Plan before it) on the School of Planning's Gestetner machine, but thereafter commercially printed. The three objectives of the magazine set out in the first editorial were:

1. The provision of a means of exchanging ideas and information between community action groups, so that different strategies and tactics can be evaluated and each group is able to benefit from the experience of others.
2. The provision of a means of communication between community action groups and elected representatives and appointed officials of local government, so that the relationship between the groups, their councillors and council officials can be clarified and the role of grassroots organisations defined.
3. The provision of a forum for the critical discussion of the policies of local councils in the West Midlands as they affect the underprivileged groups in the conurbation.

West Midlands Grass Roots was published roughly every two months until the last issue (number 20) in February 1976 when the price was still 10p. The magazine had an average of 20 pages with a circulation that built up to about 800-900 an issue (based on some 300 subscriptions with the rest sold through neighbourhood groups and other community action organisations). The

magazine's first Directory listed 14 neighbourhood groups and 4 neighbourhood based housing associations. A year later there were 26 neighbourhood groups and another 30 entries for housing associations, housing advice centres and other welfare rights groups. The Directory in the last issue listed 65 neighbourhood groups out of a total 110 entries. This reflected both the growth of community action and the increasing reach of the Grass Roots network.

The magazine was edited and produced by CPA, with myself working successively with Chris Paris, Mike Langstaff and Norman Flynn, together with an informal advisory group that met once a month to sort out a theme and to ensure contributions continued to flow from community organisations. Alan Green introduced us to his associate Rob Ford, a young architect he worked with. Rob had a penchant for graphics and he subsequently contributed many of the more arresting covers and cartoons. We believed we were achieving our objectives and we certainly established a broad forum for debate with a diverse readership, which included many councillors and council officers. The magazine chronicled the development of community action in Birmingham and to a lesser extent other parts of the West Midlands. A major focus in its early years was promoting a participatory approach in the evolving shift from large-scale clearance to improvement-led neighbourhood renewal.

The genesis of Community Forum

The growing network of groups and neighbourhood centres linked together by *West Midlands Grass Roots* was a necessary but not sufficient condition for the birth of a new type of city-wide organisation - Community Forum.

Another important factor was high-level political support from the city. We had known Councillor Brian Shuttleworth as a ward councillor struggling to help his constituents in the St James Redevelopment Area. He wrote an article about his experiences in the second issue of *Grass Roots*.

During 1972, he occasionally came to the School of Planning for a coffee and to 'pick our brains', as he put it, about a new renewal strategy for the city. He was fully aware of the increasing pressures for change on the ground and he became committed to developing a participatory approach. Driven by his experience of the slow death of the St James area, Brian chaired and steered the thinking of the Standing Conference on Urban Renewal, which had been set up by the new Labour administration in May 1972. They moved quickly and the new Urban Renewal Policy was launched at a public meeting in the Council House on January 31st 1973. This established a three pronged strategy of; accelerating the (more humane) completion of the redevelopment areas; launching a programme of the phased declaration of 68 GIAs targeting 60,000 dwellings for improvement; and establishing 26 Renewal Areas (eventually to become Housing Action Areas) comprising 15,000 dwellings between the redevelopment areas and the proposed GIAs. The Renewal Areas would have a combination of improvement and limited redevelopment, echoing the Sparkbrook Community Plan approach. Although successively modified, this policy shaped the City's neighbourhood renewal programme for two decades and, as we shall see, it provided the operational context of Community Forum.

Councillor Shuttleworth's challenge

Councillor Shuttleworth had invited all the city's community groups to the January launch meeting, during which he suggested some kind of city-wide community liaison group in addition to the local programme of public participation in the GIAs and Renewal Areas. In an April interview with the magazine - 'Grass Roots Meets Urban Renewal Chief' - our reporters (me and Geoff Crook) told him that community groups 'would now like to know how the city see this community forum being established.' He replied

Eventually, I would like to see some sort of federation of community groups and residents' associations, which would appoint representatives to meet the Urban Renewal Conference at regular intervals, say quarterly on an informal 'round the table' basis. In the meantime, I would suggest that the existing groups get together and form a liaison group and then, as other residents' organisations come into being,

they could contribute. I would suggest that a group of about 8 people is formed, but would stress that this group must consist predominantly of ordinary residents, with perhaps just two professional advisors

At CPA we felt that there shouldn't be anything 'eventual' about the formation of a federation. So in same issue of the magazine there was an invitation to all community groups affected by the new programme to come to a meeting on May 1st 1973 at the Sparkbrook Centre. This was the meeting I addressed and in our June issue it was reported that the meeting had decided to form a small liaison group, as suggested by Councillor Shuttleworth, but this would be accountable to a larger group - Community Forum - which would meet once a month to discuss issues to be raised by the liaison group and discuss feedback from the Urban Renewal Conference.

The final condition for the development of Community Forum was the appointment of a full-time CPA worker. As an organisation of unpaid volunteers we knew we were in danger of biting off more than we chew so we decided to create a job for someone to provide some support for CPA volunteers in their work with individual groups, but the key task was to support Community Forum. We knew it was not the type of project that usually attracted grant funding but we felt we had a good track record so we put together a bid to the Barrow Cadbury Trust for a grant to pay a community planner for three years. We were successful and so we advertised the position. There were five strong applicants. One of them came from a planner working for the city council, who had been involved in our work for a while, Rick Groves. In August 1973, Rick Groves started work for CPA and he immediately set about supporting the development of the newly formed Community Forum.

The early years of Community Forum 1973 to 1975

The first two years of Community Forum's existence were eventful to say the least. The Urban Renewal Programme was in its infancy and there were many teething problems, which the groups in Forum were keen to discuss with the politicians and the senior officers trying to get the programme off the ground.

In a 1975 conference paper for CURS, Rick identified three phases in these first two years of Forum's work:

A dialogue approach, when the emphasis was on co-operating with the council, particularly to improve the flow of information between council officers and residents' groups, including joint production of publicity material.

A more militant approach, adopted as the programme's slow progress and the problems centring on officers' claims that they could not present written reports to non-elected bodies such as the Liaison Group, led to increasing frustration and the eventual suspension of the meetings.

A wider political approach, as sustained pressure resulted in the Liaison Group function being replaced by regular informal meetings of the Urban Renewal Sub-Committee and Community Forum's Executive Committee.

Over this period, as Community Forum worked hard to support its member groups in pressing for the acceleration of the programme and as it highlighted areas where improvements could be made based on evidence from community groups, it was sometimes difficult to discern any progress. Indeed in his paper Rick concluded that 'Community Forum cannot claim to have achieved anything more than a minimal influence on decision making and management procedures.'

However, in retrospect this assessment seems far too modest. With Rick's support Community Forum was in fact beginning to make its presence felt. Guaranteed coverage in Grass Roots was attracting wider interest in the local press and hitherto obscure bureaucratic processes were increasingly coming under scrutiny. Community Forum's achievements may have seemed limited at the time but strong foundations of collective neighbourhood action and of innovative thinking were built up in these pioneering and heady years.

And as later chapters show; there was much more to come.

3 The development and achievements of Community Forum

by Barry Toon, long-term Treasurer of Community Forum in discussion with former Community Forum workers, Jon Stevens and Frances Heywood

¶ What kind of organisation was Community Forum when you first joined it?

Community Forum had been going for about 5 years at that time. It was already an established federation of residents' associations and I could see that it represented residents' associations from most of the areas of the city affected by the Urban Renewal Programme.

I joined because the area I was working in, Selly Oak, was a bit on the fringe of things then. I was immediately impressed by the leadership of Community Forum. Pat Priestman was Chair at that time (*she later became Secretary*) and she commanded respect from everyone. And she had several other active residents working alongside her. It also helped that Community Forum had its own worker, Jon Stevens.

I could also see that Community Forum was pretty well connected. There was a real network of advice centres and local projects in those days. Most of those centres, perhaps twenty in all, fed information into Community Forum and helped to support its work locally. And some of their workers were co-opted onto Forum's committee.

I had helped to set up one of them, the People's Centre in Selly Oak. A group of us, including students from Student Community Action, took over an empty property at the top end of Selly Oak where; we provided advice to homeless people on their rights and on squatting; we ran a Claimants' Union; and we helped to set up local residents' groups (including Tiverton Area Residents Association (TARA) which I am still involved in today).

It was through TARA that I first got involved with Urban Renewal and with Community Forum. Originally I was just a committee member of Forum but after a year or so I became Treasurer, which I remained for over 20 years.

¶ How did Community Forum build and work with its membership?

We knew that if Forum was going to have a strong voice and if it was going to be able to campaign effectively, then it needed to have an active membership. Expanding and maintaining our membership was an important challenge. It helped that our membership was open to any group or organisation that shared our aims and this inclusive approach served us well. We mainly represented residents' groups but people could see we were not exclusive. People sometimes accused Community Forum of being mainly white working class but right from the early days we tried to ensure that we represented the interests of immigrant communities, many of whom had only arrived recently.

We developed our local links and contacts in various ways. Sometimes it was by word of mouth from one group to another. Sometimes local activists or workers heard of Community Forum and suggested that people should attend one of our events or meetings. And local Urban Renewal teams were often happy to let people know about Community Forum, even though we frequently challenged the way they were implementing programmes. (*Many local staff shared our concerns and in those days the City Council seemed less paranoid about staff having views of their own.*)

At the height of Urban Renewal, there must have been over 60 active residents' associations and groups across the city. We were in touch with most of them and about half would be actively involved in Community Forum in one way or another. Good communication in those days was

much more about direct contact, either face-to-face or on the phone. Otherwise we had to rely on mailings, which required quite a lot of time and effort. We did pay a lot of attention to the design of our leaflets and posters and some of them were quite eye catching. We also produced various newsletters, some of which were quite outspoken at times. One newsletter that was critical of how housing associations were treating their tenants led to a threat of libel!

Although communication is much easier today, with emailing and social media, it is less personal and there is almost too much information around. Looking back, I think that people had a greater sense of participation in Community Forum than they do with many modern networks.

¶ What were Community Forum's aims in the early years and how did it try to achieve those aims?

Our principle aim was to make sure that residents were fully involved in the development and the implementation of the Urban Renewal Programme and that the Council took residents' views and concerns into account as the programme developed and evolved.

How we interpreted that aim varied over time. Sometimes we would be seeking to question how things were being done, pointing out difficulties and failings, and making suggestions about how it could be done better.

On other occasions, we wanted to influence how the Council was developing the programme, how they were planning ahead and how they were making use of the available resources. We would be trying to ensure our ideas and proposals were taken into account.

And at times it was about opposing and campaigning vigorously against things that we felt were not going to work at all.

¶ How did Community Forum seek to work with the City Council?

Working with the Council was central to most of Community Forum's work. It was good that the idea of a *community forum* had been built into the Council's thinking from the start. It gave us some legitimacy, I think.

How we worked with the politicians and officers depended on two things. Firstly, what we wanted to achieve at any one time: were we trying to influence and shape something, which we broadly felt was a good thing, or were we wanting to oppose something that in our view was wrong? And secondly, what was the position of the politicians and officers towards residents and residents groups at that time: were they inclined to listen and talk or were they unco-operative or even hostile?

The political climate shifted all the time and Community Forum had to keep track of what was going on. We had to court politicians and officers who were friendly to Community Forum and we had to try and outmanoeuvre people who were against us. Politicians' views of Community Forum didn't always follow expected lines. An example of this was Edwina Currie, who started her political career as a councillor in Birmingham. Many of us didn't share her political views but we found that when she became Chair of Housing and Urban Renewal that we 'could do business with her' and she took on many of the concerns that residents wanted to be addressed.

And we had to use different channels. For most of the time, there were formal liaison arrangements - which gave Community Forum a voice at committee level - and when the chair of the committee was sympathetic to Forum then we could have considerable influence. And if the politicians were less friendly, we could often work with officers at the local level (where relationships between residents and their local team tended to be positive). We also had good contacts with a number of quite senior officers, who were sympathetic to Community Forum.

Terry Brunt, who was Deputy Urban Renewal Officer, was a great supporter and he would sometimes have 'clandestine' meetings with our worker to see how issues could be addressed or

resolved, even when some of the politicians or other officers were being obstructive. I can't imagine that happening today!

¶ What issues preoccupied Community Forum in the early years?

It varied. To start with Forum was very concerned that the programme should be rolled out as quickly as possible and that residents should be kept fully informed. Then we became more involved in implementation and in highlighting the problems that were occurring across the city: such as the poor quality of building work on many individual house improvements. We also expressed concern about the piecemeal nature of the programme with houses being improved in an ad-hoc way leading to what became known as 'pepper-potting'.

When there were national policy shifts, we would press the Council to move ahead in ways that we thought were in the best interest of residents. For example we were keen to see all of the Renewal Areas converted to HAA's (following the 1974 Housing Act) rather than many residents being left in limbo and threatened with future clearance.

Or when the Inner City Partnership Programme came in we campaigned (largely unsuccessfully) to get residents involved in making decisions over how the money should be spent.

Sometimes we worked with the Council to get new approaches introduced. Community Forum was arguing for a more co-ordinated approach to house improvement early on and we fully supported the Facelift programme, which then developed into the ground-breaking Enveloping programme.

¶ How successful was Community Forum in pursuing its aims and in tackling issues? And what do you think were the keys to Community Forum's success?

Looking back, I think that Community Forum was partially successful in influencing the actions of the Council and in putting forward ideas and proposals that the Council took on board.

It was a real breakthrough for residents to be able to make an input to the overall strategy and plans of the Council. Some leading councillors and senior officers recognised that listening to residents' views and experiences could make for better policies and that it could also make delivery easier and more effective when residents' ideas were incorporated. It sounds obvious but at that time Birmingham had a very poor reputation when it came to listening to their residents. Urban Renewal began to change all of that but I fear things have largely gone backwards since then.

Of course, there were times when we felt the Council wasn't responding and we were forced to oppose changes that we felt were not going to work at all. Things could get quite heated and we were asked to leave meetings (or we walked out) and sometimes we attracted hostile comments in the press. But we were nearly always able to get things back on an even keel because we tried to adapt our stance to suit the situation. We were not into 'opposition for opposition's sake' because that was not what our residents' association members wanted.

As time went by, I think we became quite effective at campaigning and in adapting our tactics. The residents who led Community Forum became very experienced and knowledgeable, and in the end they knew more about the programme than the most of the politicians (who came and went). And over time Forum gained the respect of many of the officers, who were running the programme. *(You could see this at our 40th anniversary reunion, where many of the officers who Community Forum worked with were keen to attend and to share common memories and experiences).*

Community Forum didn't always succeed in achieving its aims but overall it was one of the most successful community movements that Birmingham has seen. And as far as I can see the levels of public engagement and dialogue that Community Forum achieved have not been matched since.

¶ How important was it for Community Forum to have independent funding?

Having independent funding was critical to our success. It meant we could speak out on behalf of residents without any fear that our funding might be jeopardised. It meant that from 1978 we were not dependent on the Council or any other arm of government.

This gave us confidence and it meant that people had to take us seriously. When we were negotiating with the Council they knew that we were not going to go away and that they couldn't threaten or silence us.

It helped that Barrow Cadbury Trust had long-term commitment to supporting local communities in Birmingham at that time. Eric Adams, their administrator, had a real interest in and an understanding of our work; starting with the support the Trust gave Community Planning Associates and Rick Groves in the early 1970's. Eric and his trustees seemed to recognise that an organisation like Community Forum had to respond and adapt to circumstances rather than having to deliver pre-determined 'outputs' (using the modern jargon!)

¶ Can you explain the role of Community Forum in promoting Area Caretaker projects?

Community Forum began to expand and develop its work towards the end of the 1970's. That was when we became directly involved in the Area Caretaker programme. Local Urban Renewal teams had realised that, where expensive improvements had been carried out to the housing and the environment, it was going to be important to ensure that the area continued to be cared for or the initial investment would be wasted. Local residents were concerned that their smart streets and pavements continued to be kept clean and tidy and that any rubbish was quickly cleared away. They also felt that elderly and disabled residents should be able to obtain help if they required minor repairs to their housing and if their front gardens needed to be maintained.

Community Forum members played a key role in developing the original concept of what became known as Area Caretakers. And we argued that it would be better if a service of this kind was managed directly by residents' groups. We pointed out that residents' groups know their community, they understand the needs of their area and, because they are in touch with local people on a daily basis, they can identify problems right away. Front-line Urban Renewal staff could see this made sense and they persuaded senior managers that this would be a good model to adopt.

On this basis, the Department successfully applied for funding from the Inner City Partnership Programme to support a series of Area Caretaker projects with the responsibility for running the projects resting with local residents' groups. Individual groups were encouraged to apply for project funding and, if successful, they then took on responsibility for recruiting, employing and managing a caretaker and for controlling the budget.

The programme was a great success and, at its high point, residents' groups managed nineteen projects across the city. Despite this success, the Council failed to mainstream the service and today, 35 years later, only one of the original projects is still operating, the Selly Oak Area Caretaker Society. I manage this and we are still doing many of those things we were set up to do.

There have been lots of attempts to copy the idea, with neighbourhood wardens in the 1990's and now with local handyperson schemes. These are currently being promoted by the Local Government Association as a solution to the needs of the growing elderly population. But it would be good if they learnt from our experience.

¶ In what other ways did Community Forum expand and develop its activities in later years?

Community Forum also decided to see if it could broaden its influence by becoming more involved with Council housing. There was some scattered Council housing in the Urban Renewal areas and Council tenants did participate in some of Forum's activities. (*Indeed Pat Priestman, Community Forum's Chair then Secretary, was herself a Council tenant, which gave her a position of real objectivity when it came to representing the interests of inner city residents who were mainly owners*). But the City Housing Department, which had always been highly paternalistic and controlling (as the residents of the post-war clearance areas could confirm) did not fully engage in Urban Renewal, nor did it encourage the involvement of Council tenants locally.

Community Forum had also become aware of the wider concerns of Council tenants on new estates. On some of them, particularly where non-traditional methods of construction had been used, there were growing problems of damp and disrepair which the Council was failing to address. Instead they sought to blame it on the lifestyle of their tenants, sometimes even advising them to keep all their windows open and to turn up their already ineffective and expensive heating!

With a number of tenants' groups we ran a campaign called BADD standing for Birmingham Anti Damp and Disrepair (*described in greater detail in Chapter 4*). The campaign was quite successful and on the back of it Community Forum decided to establish a sister organisation, the Birmingham Tenants' Federation, which was to be a citywide structure that would represent the interests of all Council tenants in Birmingham.

The Federation was originally a sub-group of Community Forum but it then became a totally separate organisation in the early 1980's funded by the newly elected Labour controlled City Council. However tensions developed as a result of changes in political priorities and the objectives of Federation were increasingly seen to be incompatible with those of the Council. Pressure was applied to the Federation to change but this, coupled with organisational weaknesses and internal disagreements, led to the Federation being closed down.

This was pretty much an end to the idea of an independent Council tenants' movement in Birmingham. The Council has since created various consultative structures but in all of them, the freedom of expression of Council tenants has been limited. Community Forum's strength was that it always remained independent and, as I said earlier, it was helped in doing this because of the charitable funding it was able to obtain, mainly from the Barrow Cadbury Trust.

¶ How did Community Forum develop wider links in the UK and abroad?

Because Birmingham's Urban Renewal programme was generally recognised as being the most advanced in the country, Community Forum became involved in organising several national events and conferences (often working with Shelter). We wanted to spread the word and to ensure that residents elsewhere were forewarned and forearmed!

One conference which we held on Enveloping attracted people from all over the country, and it was a truly mixed media experience, with a street theatre performance with specially composed songs, with slide shows and with site visits. I think this conference and our report on Enveloping helped to influence how several Councils developed their own programmes working with their residents. (*There is more about Community Forum's work on Enveloping in Chapter 4*).

Community Forum also decided to look abroad. In 1981 we organised a visit to Frankfurt, one of Birmingham's twin cities. We took a mini-bus load of local residents to look at housing projects, to meet with local groups and to debate with planners and local politicians (*who were most impressed that unlike most delegations we had brought our own interpreter, our then Secretary Howard Sharron's brother*). We were able to compare and contrast housing conditions in Germany with the UK; we collected some useful information but we were also shocked by some of the racial discrimination we observed against 'guest workers' and the slum conditions they lived in.

Several years later we undertook a more formal study visit to Amsterdam and Rotterdam and in the 1990's we also made three trips to Russia! (*There is much more about the 'Three Cities' work and about the visits to Russia in Chapter 5*).

¶ How did Forum's work evolve in the 1980's as investment in Urban Renewal was cutback?

We continued to liaise with the Council over the implementation of the programme and we were constantly looking at better ways of doing things. As the money for house improvement began to dry up, we became concerned that the Council might return to an ill-thought-out policy of slum clearance.

As a result, we did a lot of work on clearance, including carrying out a major research project and publishing a book. We also worked with the Council to introduce much better ways of undertaking clearance and redevelopment when it was necessary. (More details on all of this are contained in Chapter 5)

¶ What role did Community Forum play in the Birmingham for People campaign?

In 1987, when a major redevelopment of the Bull Ring was first proposed, we realised there was no structure to represent the interests of the wider community in how these plans were being drawn up. (*At that point virtually no people lived in the city centre*). In response to this, Community Forum became heavily involved in setting up Birmingham for People, with Pat Priestman, our Secretary, chairing the inaugural meeting at St Martin's Church in the Bull Ring, and with Community Forum providing office space for the initial phase of work in building an organisation.

Birmingham for People was one of the major influences in preventing poor and inappropriate development of the Bull Ring and Markets Area in the 1980's and 1990's. We had learnt lessons from the Broad Street and the Convention Centre

developments where local interests were ignored. How people came together to oppose the rampant redevelopment of one of the last 'people-based' spaces left in the city centre is one of the great missing histories of Birmingham.

¶ Does your experience with Community Forum have any relevance for inner city residents today?

I am still very active in my own area, Selly Oak, and it is still possible for residents to come together locally to press for change but the role of the Council has diminished so much since the 1970's. In those days the Council had a strategic role and it took a lead in addressing housing and planning issues. It often got things wrong and it had to be challenged but by and large it accepted responsibility for improving the housing conditions of its residents.

Now the Council seems happy to leave things to the private sector. We would never have imagined 30 years ago that unscrupulous private landlords would return to haunt the inner city in the way they have. And on the whole the Council seems to wash its hands of any responsibility.

If this makes local action frustrating, then acting city-wide, in the absence of a clear overall housing strategy or plan, is difficult to imagine. The need for some kind of city-wide residents' alliance is still there but it would be very hard to organise. There are far fewer residents' groups and the network of local advice and action centres has long gone.

The Council talks about decentralisation and there is a network of District and Ward committees but they have limited powers and even fewer resources. Nothing compared to what we had at our disposal when there were Urban Renewal Project Teams active in our areas.

4 Working for Community Forum 1975-1983

by Jon Stevens

I started working with Community Forum early in 1975, almost two years after it had been established. For the first three years, I was based in Birmingham Voluntary Service Council, employed as an Environment Liaison Officer but spending over half my time on Community Forum's work. Then in 1978, Community Forum secured funding for a full-time worker from the Barrow Cadbury Trust and this covered my salary and associated costs until I left in late 1983.

The Birmingham Inner Area Study

I had arrived in Birmingham in early 1973 - fresh out of architecture school - to join the newly established Inner Area Study (IAS). This project had been set up by the then Conservative Government to investigate the problems of poverty and deprivation that were seen to be concentrated in the inner areas of large cities and to look at how better co-ordination and more effective delivery of local services might address these problems. Later this was dubbed 'the total approach'. The Birmingham study was located in Small Heath, an area of predominately 19th century terraced housing located on the east of the city beyond the inner ring of large-scale clearance and redevelopment.

The arrival of the Birmingham IAS coincided with setting up of the Urban Renewal Programme and I was able to observe how the programme was being rolled out in Small Heath. I attended the various public meetings held at the outset; these were lively to say the least, with residents questioning the sincerity of the Council's intentions. And I made links with the emerging residents' groups and associations that were springing up across Small Heath and across the city.

The first Urban Renewal Project Team and the recruitment of 'young radicals'

Small Heath was chosen as the location for the first Urban Renewal Project Team, which moved into a local school in Little Green in the north of Small Heath at the beginning of 1974. The team was headed up by a good friend of mine from architecture school, Charlie Adams, who had come to Birmingham, at my suggestion, at the end of 1973 to work in the City Architect's Department. Charlie and I had both worked on community action projects during our final years as students and we were both committed to public participation in local decision-making and to community-led housing renewal.

The staff recruited to the team all tended to be young and enthusiastic, like Charlie, and many of them were keen to be involved this new approach to urban regeneration based on improving existing areas of housing across the city working closely with local residents.

I have wondered since why it was that so many 'young radicals' were recruited to work on urban renewal and I think it was because the Urban Renewal Programme was a new venture that sat outside of the normal departmental structures. Because of this it was not attractive to the usual careerists and opportunists, who dominated the mainstream departments, and this opened the door to young professionals, who were often fired up about new ways of doing things, and also people from unusual backgrounds, who hadn't worked for the Council before and who didn't carry any 'baggage'.

From the start, there was a fertile and lively debate about; the best way to proceed in pursuing

the strategy locally; how to engage effectively with local residents; and different ways of intervening to secure significant levels of housing improvement. Considerable time and effort went into developing and supporting local residents' associations, in setting up systems and processes to support grant-based housing improvement and in thinking about how people could be helped to visualise possible changes (I recall a Perspex model house, for example).

Bringing in new ideas

The IAS provided additional investment to support local workshops and events. We held a community conference and we invited Rod Hackney, a community architect, who had set up a co-ordinated house improvement scheme in Black Road, Macclesfield and another colleague from architecture school, Tom Clay, who was working for Shelter Neighbourhood Action Project in Liverpool promoting housing co-operatives. *(After this Charlie and other local activists became directly involved in setting up housing co-operatives - working in their spare time - and later in my career, I returned to Small Heath to work for Birmingham Co-operative Housing Services supporting those self-same co-ops).*

The IAS also provided additional support for residents groups; including funding to set up a federation of groups called the Small Heath Community Federation which was eventually chaired by Joyce Farley, who went on to become a key player in Community Forum.

At the city-wide level, I became involved in the work of Community Planning Associates (CPA) and in helping to produce their magazine West Midlands Grass Roots. I met Rick Groves the CPA worker and Community Forum's first support worker and, with Rick, I worked to ensure that residents in Small Heath were aware of the wider activities of Community Forum and that developments in Small Heath were reported across the city. At the end of 1974, I attended a meeting on Urban Renewal in the Council House where I first saw Community Forum's newly-elected Chair, Pat Priestman, giving the politicians and officers a roasting over the slow progress in implementing the programme. I was impressed!

Joining Community Forum

At the beginning of 1975, I saw an advert for the appointment of an Environment Liaison Officer, who would work part-time with Community Forum. The idea of working directly for and with residents' groups greatly appealed to me; so I applied and was delighted to be offered the job. I started work in the Spring of that year.

At the time, Community Forum had been going for around two years. A core group of residents' associations that backed Community Forum had developed - with a strong presence in the Saltley, Small Heath, Sparkbrook and Balsall Heath areas of the city and with growing influence in Handsworth and Aston.

I was fortunate that by then a number of individual residents were committing their time to working both locally and centrally, which required a lot of time input on their part. They were led by Pat Priestman, who had been there almost from the beginning, but she was soon joined by Joyce Farley, Joyce Brown, Howard Sharron and later by Barry Toon. And there were many other residents, who supported Community Forum actively over the next ten years, as Forum built a strong and effective committee to lead and guide the organisation.

Effective engagement with local communities - but how?

Community Forum's primary purpose was to liaise with the Council to ensure that the programme was being delivered effectively and that the interests of residents were always seen as being paramount. The Labour politicians that had designed the programme - notably Councillors Shuttleworth, Hannah and Taylor - were committed to effective engagement with local communities (although this was not true of all of their colleagues, nor of many opposition

politicians) but how this could be best accomplished demanded new ways of working and new structures. Most of the senior officers recruited to run the programme were largely supportive of the principle of resident involvement but they too didn't know exactly how this could or should be achieved in practice.

Furthermore, as the programme was rolled out there were many teething problems, which were in danger of undermining public confidence in the new strategy almost before it started. Some of the problems were to do with the limited powers and resources that the Council had at its disposal; some of them were to do with the overcomplicated and sometimes unworkable policies and procedures that the Council put into place; and some of them were to do with the persistent and lingering paternalism that characterised most forms of intervention by the Council in those days (and which sadly continues to this day).

Strategies for working with the Council

In the face of this, Community Forum had to develop ways of working with the Council that would secure maximum influence for residents. In its dealings with the Council, Community Forum had to decide when it made sense to be co-operative and to look to compromise and when it was better to challenge and to confront the Council. When I joined Forum, the organisation had tried several different approaches and the leadership was beginning to understand that careful thought needed to be given as to how residents could best achieve their objectives. (*Barry Toon talks about this in the previous Chapter 3*)

One thing Community Forum realised was that, whatever issues or concerns we wished to raise, we needed to be able to make a strong case backed up by convincing evidence. When raising matters at the city level, we had to be able to show that any problems we had identified were not just isolated or one-off instances. Rather we had to be able to demonstrate that they were part of a pattern. Likewise, when Community Forum wanted to question existing practices, our argument would be strengthened if we could suggest better ways of doing things. Although we didn't use the term, we were developing a research-action approach and it became my job to put much of this into practice.

The importance of good local intelligence

When it came deciding which issues Community Forum should prioritise and how they should approach them, the lively discussions, which took place at our monthly committee meetings were crucial. After a period when they moved around from area to area, these meetings were held centrally in a meeting room located in the Quaker Meeting House in Dr Johnson House next to the old Lewis's store. We realised that meeting in the city centre worked best because it was relatively easy for representatives from residents groups from all areas to catch a bus into the city centre. (It was also fitting to meet there - given the leading role Quakers had played in developing Birmingham's progressive civic traditions).

When things had been given a thorough airing, it was then my job to go out and gather more evidence and sometimes to work up case examples. As time went by, we had contacts with residents in most areas covered by the Programme, and we also developed links with local advice and action-centres and with other projects, many of them faith based or charitable. By the late 1970's, I think it would be fair to say that Community Forum had developed a network of several hundred people who supported our work, who would supply us with information and who would alert us to problems and difficulties. This 'community intelligence network' meant that Community Forum often had a better overview of what was actually happening than senior officers or councillors!

It didn't stop there because Community Forum also had informal links with a number of front-line officers, who would share information with us and who would sometimes tip us off and this went up to the highest level as Barry describes in his chapter. This often made Community Forum unpopular with the 'establishment' and sometimes we were accused of simply being

'leftie agitators'. But this accusation was always implausible, because Community Forum represented such a wide spectrum of people and groups and because our critique of the programme as it evolved was generally well-founded.

Looking back I am amazed at all the things Community Forum did. It is a tribute to the huge amount of voluntary effort resident representatives and leaders put in. But they were well supported by community workers of all kinds and, significantly, by many committed front-line Council staff, who shared our vision.

Three campaigns

Community Forum ran three big campaigns in the late 1970's and 1980's. One of these campaigns was about changing the way in which housing improvement was delivered; one was about developing and improving a new delivery model that emerged in Birmingham at that time; and one was about broadening our way of working and extending our support to Council tenants, who unlike inner city residents were largely excluded from decision-making by the Council. The campaigns had varying degrees of success but I remember them all fondly.

The Cowboy Builders campaign

The Urban Renewal Programme was about improving and renewing a whole swathe of 19th century terraced housing, owned mainly by low-income owner-occupiers who had limited resources. They often struggled to keep their homes in good repair, let alone being able to carry out major alterations. The programme relied on persuading individual owners to carry out improvements taking advantage of a range of improvement grants. The system was quite complicated with varying percentages of the total cost of works payable as grant and with specific rules regarding the allowable works that could qualify for grant expenditure and so on.

This way of achieving large-scale improvement had many limitations but probably the greatest restraint on the system was finding reliable builders with the necessary skills and competence to undertake the work in a timely and cost effective fashion.

Problems caused by what became known as 'cowboy builders' bedevilled the programme and by the late 1970's it was becoming clearer and clearer that something had to be done about it. In October 1978, the committee of Community Forum decided to bring things to a head. All members of the committee agreed to go out and to talk to local residents and to other groups to ascertain the extent of the problem. I was to liaise with everyone as they did this and, on the back of this, to carry out a series of fact-finding visits and to organise evidence-gathering sessions. Horror stories rapidly accumulated and it was decided to organise three detailed surveys in Sparkbrook, Balsall Heath and Selly Oak and to prepare a number of case examples. It was also decided to include the poor quality home improvements being carried out by housing associations and by the Council within our investigations.

As evidence mounted, the committee met to decide how Community Forum should pull it together and how it should be drawn to the attention of the Council. Rather than simply producing a report, which might gather dust if it was simply presented to the Council, it was decided to organise a 'public inquiry'; which would hear about the experiences of individual residents at the hands of 'cowboy builders'; which would receive further evidence from the surveys; and which would be able to discuss the actions needed to resolve the problems. To give the inquiry greater credibility and weight, a qualified planner Mike Gibson (*see Chapter 2*) was asked to act as inspector and to draft an official report.

The inquiry was held on July 1979 and it was attended by 40 representatives from residents groups and other organisations and by 25 individual residents. The inquiry heard about the serious problems that were being caused by unsatisfactory, incompetent and sometimes corrupt builders. A disturbing number of residents had had their lives disrupted, their homes partially destroyed and many had lost their precious savings. The situation was serious and needed to be addressed. At the same time the inquiry heard about some good practice, including the use of

properly accredited builders and the introduction of effective methods of supervision and control, with good and timely communication with residents.

Mike Gibson delivered his report in October 1979 with a series of recommendations on contracts and specifications, on the inspection and supervision of works, on improvements to the approved list of builders and on a range of policy and funding matters. Importantly, the report strongly endorsed the Council's work on systematic and co-ordinated improvement schemes.

When the report was submitted to the Council, Community Forum put out a press release; this had good coverage in the local press - which had already carried a succession of cowboy builder stories. This led to a punchy 15-minute regional TV documentary on cowboy builders, in which several affected residents were interviewed. The combined effect of the report and its attendant press coverage was to put pressure on the Council to respond. Liaison arrangements were reinstated, several of the key recommendations were acted on and it also gave added impetus to the embryonic Enveloping programme (of which more later).

BADD - Birmingham Anti Damp and Disrepair campaign

The Cowboy Builders campaign had brought Community Forum into closer contact with the problems faced by Council tenants living in older housing. And the inquiry report contained recommendations as to how the Housing Department could improve how it modernised older Council homes by working with and involving the tenants. At this time, Community Forum was approached by a number of tenants' groups and activists who were raising concerns about the housing conditions in many of the Council's post-war housing estates where the housing had been built using 'non-traditional' construction.

It was becoming apparent that many of these 'system-built' homes were of very poor quality; they were badly constructed and inadequately insulated; they had serious damp problems (frequently caused by high levels of condensation); and they had partial and expensive to run heating systems. Although they had often only been built a few years earlier, many of them already needed major repairs, which could be difficult to carry out because of the form of their construction.

Isolated protests were taking place across the city but the Council's strategy appeared to be either to ignore or dismiss any protests. If pressed, the Council would often blame the damp problems in particular on the 'tenant's lifestyle'. And if a group became too difficult to handle then often their leaders would be 'bought off' by being rehoused.

Community Forum got together with groups in various post war-estates; some in the inner city like Newtown, Lozells and Nechells and others in outer city estates like Kings Norton and Rubery. People began to realise just how widespread the problems were and it was decided to organise a city-wide petition highlighting the problems, condemning the Council's inaction and their 'blame the tenant' argument and making seven demands for change. Thousands of signatures were collected from a dozen estates and in December 1979 the Housing Committee was lobbied on the steps of the Council House before the petition was presented to the Chair, Councillor Walker.

Three months later, the Committee received a report on the petition from the Housing Department. They acknowledged that damp could be the result of various defects but they still asserted that 'tenants' lifestyle' was the main cause of excessive condensation and the resulting black mould etc. They denied that the repairs system was failing and they also suggested that 'vandalism' was often behind the repair problems experienced by 'certain' families. Once again a 'blame the tenant' line was being taken. Finally, while they acknowledged that good insulation and proper heating systems were desirable, they said that many Council properties lacked central heating and that its installation would be expensive.

Following on from the petition, BADD produced an action pack which contained standard complaints letters, which highlighted the Council's legal duty to keep their homes in good repair and which said that if no action was taken to carry out repairs and resolve the damp problems then legal proceedings would be considered. These letters began to have an impact

and in some areas of the city, where tenants groups had access to free legal advice, the Council began to face legal action using what were known as Section 99 powers. By February the Evening Mail was reporting that 'hundreds (of tenants) may take the Council to court'.

The reaction from the Housing Committee and the Department was often hostile. 'Birmingham's housing chairman has hit out at tenants, who take the council to court for failing to do repairs' (Evening Mail, March 1980). But the Council began to address the problems of disrepair that were being highlighted and the 'lifestyle' argument in relation to excessive condensation was eventually dropped as it became clear that faulty construction and poor ventilation was almost always to blame.

Local action continued for many years on various estates. Most of them have now been either completely refurbished, with full central heating and proper insulation, or they have been demolished and redeveloped. The campaign also provided a platform for establishing - a sadly short-lived - Birmingham Tenants' Federation. (*Barry talks about the Tenants' Federation and its demise in Chapter 2.*)

'Are You Being Enveloped?'

The final piece of work that I did for Community Forum was my proudest achievement. It also introduced Community Forum to Frances Heywood who worked with me on the report and took over from me when I left. As mentioned earlier, Community Forum had campaigned for more systematic and co-ordinated approaches to house improvement. In 1977, the Council had experimented with two 'Facelift' schemes in which the roofs and fronts of 800 houses had been renovated all at once and at no cost to the residents; who could then go on to improve the rest of their homes using individual grants. These schemes had been funded through the Inner City Partnership Programme and on the back of this the Council lobbied for mainstream funding for an extended approach that covered both the fronts and backs of houses; now termed 'Envelope' schemes. The then Labour Government was not persuaded but an incoming Conservative Government gave Birmingham's Enveloping proposals the go ahead in 1979. And later in 1982 it became national policy.

So over the next ten years, Birmingham embarked on a massive programme of housing improvement carried out street-by-street across the whole city. The fruits of this programme can still be seen to this day, although sadly the days of such positive intervention in the inner-city areas by the Council are long gone.

Community Forum tracked Enveloping right from the start. Residents groups were largely supportive of Enveloping but there were growing concerns about how it was being implemented and, as the 'Enveloping juggernaut' gained momentum, there was a real danger that the rights and interests of individual residents were being ignored. When Enveloping became national policy in 1982, Community Forum decided the time was right for 'a residents' guide to Enveloping'.

Community Forum set up an Enveloping Study Group chaired by Geraldine Child from Forum's committee and with two other resident representatives, Pat Priestman and Sylvia Brady. They were joined by a community architect, Hugh Byrd, and by a solicitor, Tim Lee. I was to work with the group and, as mentioned above, we were able to recruit a part-time research worker, Frances, with a small additional grant from the Barrow Cadbury Trust.

It took five months to produce the guide. It was largely based on our own local research; we talked at length to affected residents and experienced resident representatives and we listened to the views of Council officers, the architects and builders working on schemes and so on. Our investigations were written up in a 60-page guide, which was in three parts. The first part described a 'model' Envelope scheme, explaining what Enveloping was all about, outlining its advantages and disadvantages and describing how such a scheme should be carried out. The guide went into some detail covering; the preparatory work needed; what a good 'set up' looked like; how people should be consulted; the problems that can occur once as scheme is in progress; and how they might be overcome and important things people need to know. The

second part provided more technical information on Enveloping and the final part contained a history of the Enveloping approach and some thoughts about how it related to wider housing policy.

Great thought and care went into designing the guide. Frances and I wrote it together and she ensured the text was readable and concise. We commissioned a number of illustrations and cartoons to make the guide attractive and entertaining and we produced it to a high quality, using Birmingham Voluntary Service Council's new offset litho machine. Finally, it was professionally bound using British Gas's print facilities, which were conveniently managed by Joyce Farley.

The guide called '*Are You Being Enveloped?*: A Residents Guide to Enveloping' was launched at a national conference in March 1983, jointly organised by Shelter and Community Forum. It was a lively event with presentations, street theatre by Jan and Spud (including a number of especially composed cautionary songs) and with displays and a double-decker bus trip to see specific projects.

The report was well received by the Council and the first edition sold out rapidly, to be reprinted later that year. In Chapter 6, Frances describes the follow-on work, which gave Community Forum both a strong local and national profile and which influenced how Enveloping was carried out in Birmingham and in other towns and cities.

Leaving Community Forum

For me '*Are You Being Enveloped?*' felt like the culmination of all of the work that I had been doing in and around community action for over 12 years. Perhaps it was time to see things from the other side? I decided to move to Walsall to join their radical programme of decentralisation of services sometimes known as the 'neighbourhood office revolution'. I became a member of the Council's private sector renewal team, joining a number of colleagues from Birmingham. It was a real wrench leaving Community Forum. Working directly with and for residents was what I really believed in.

It was another ten years before I got back to this way of working; in 1993 I returned to my roots in Small Heath, when I took over as Director of Birmingham Co-operative Housing Services. The wheel had turned full circle; particularly when Pat joined my committee in 2005, letting everyone know that this wasn't the first time she had been my boss! Sadly, her time with me at BCHS was all too brief.

5 Delivering the programme locally and working in partnership with communities

by Peter Archer, former Urban Renewal Project Team Leader

Urban Renewal: from planning to delivery

It was not until April 1974 that the Urban Renewal Programme moved from its conceptual stage to its implementation in the 28 newly declared Renewal Areas. All the Renewal Areas had been identified by extracting those parts of the city which originally had been planned for clearance and redevelopment but where the programme had come to a halt due largely to the deteriorating national economic situation brought about by the oil crisis in the autumn of 1973.

As a newly appointed senior environmental health officer, I arrived in Birmingham on the 1st April 1974; the day of local government reorganisation, and the day Sutton Coldfield was annexed to Birmingham. I had just left West Bromwich CBC, which had that same day joined with Warley to become the new Metropolitan Borough of Sandwell. Urban Renewal had taken on 10 new surveyors and environmental health officers to start the massive task of inspecting more than 10,000 homes in the Renewal Areas. At the same time, the Urban Renewal Project Teams were established. Each team brought together a number of professional disciplines. These teams had a large degree of autonomy and worked closely with the new residents' associations, which were mushrooming all across the inner city.

The City Housing Department had earned itself a bad reputation by rehousing many homeless and displaced families in the Renewal Areas in houses many of which had been previously zoned for clearance. All houses in the 28 Renewal Areas were zoned either for retention and improvement (known as the 'purples') or homes for possible clearance (known as the 'pinks'). The Project Teams offered all owners or occupiers of the 'pink' properties a full inspection by an environmental health officer or a qualified surveyor. These free inspections identified the works that would be necessary to bring the house up to a modern condition and to give it a future life of at least 30 years. However, homes could only be reclassified from 'pink' to 'purple' by obtaining a majority of owners in a terrace to support the idea of renovation over clearance and rehousing.

Arrival in Sparkbrook

As the Team Leader for Project Team 2, I was allocated the Sparkbrook and Sparkhill areas. In 1974, one third of Sparkbrook's population were of Irish extraction but there were new migrants arriving from the Yemen, Pakistan and increasing numbers of Asians from East Africa, principally Uganda and Kenya. The East Africans mainly came with families, with money and transferable skills, whereas the immigrants from the Yemen and Pakistan were mainly adult males often accompanied by their sons and were unskilled, often from a rural background. None of these people had access to council housing because of City Housing Department residence rules; these rules were later found to be discriminatory and therefore illegal.

Sparkbrook East, which was one of the first Housing Action Areas to be declared on 4th March 1975, contained 874 houses. These were a mixture of large three or four storey merchant houses such as Grantham and Gladstone Roads and small terraced houses in Dearman Road and Montgomery Street. Many of the large houses, which were in multiple occupation, had 30 to 40 people living in them with few amenities and no fire precautions. As it had been thought that areas such as Sparkbrook were likely to be redeveloped, most of the mainly privately rented

houses had been left to decay and were not only 'unfit for habitation' but were thought to be beyond the point of repair at a reasonable cost.

Working with the community

It was against this background that we started working in 1974. Community development was more advanced in Sparkbrook than in most other parts of the city. The Family Centre in Farm Park was well established and the Director, John Lambert, and his Assistant Director, Steve Jacobs, were well known and respected by local residents. Our team started to hold regular meetings in the Family Centre working closely with the staff and volunteers. To co-ordinate resident involvement in the work of the Urban Renewal team, the Sparkbrook East Residents Planning Committee was formed. During the next ten years, this organisation became a major player in the Urban Renewal Programme.

Two retired ladies were key to the co-operation that developed between the local residents and the City Council. Gladys Allwood, a retired matron, was the chair of Sparkbrook East and Margaret Thompson was a retired secretary from the local BSA works and provided the secretarial services to the committee. Many of the successes were achieved due to their hard work and fearless tenacity. As a small example of their commitment, for ten years an Area Caretaker was employed through an urban renewal grant. All the responsibilities of being an employer were carried out by Gladys and Margaret, from selection and appointment, to payroll, to planning the work programmes for the caretakers. Saleem Qureshi from Gladstone Road was invaluable in keeping the project team informed of the views of the largely Pakistani community and creating links with the two or three mosques in the area. He also provided a free translation and interpreting service!

A unique multi-disciplinary approach

Project Team 2, based at Greencoat House on Stratford Road, had local architects, planners, surveyors, environmental health officers, housing coordinators, ethnic minority officers, social workers, community development officers and administrative support. At one time the team had more than 20 professional staff. Working with the residents, a land use and environmental scheme was designed and costed for each of the ten Housing Action and General Improvement Areas for which the team had responsibility. Within the scheme every piece of land was shown together with its future use; houses to be demolished were identified and details of their replacement provided. Efforts were made to retain Victorian features and new houses were designed and built to fit in with the local street scene. Roads were improved and landscaped, with a few being closed completely to provide new play areas for the local primary school. The fully-costed environmental schemes were presented to the City's Urban Renewal Committee by the chair of the local residents' association. It was rare that a scheme presented in this way was rejected by councillors at the Council House!

The politics of Urban Renewal: the locality vs the centre

In Sparkbrook the Project Team worked closely with the three city councillors and the constituency MP, Roy Hattersley. Roy held his surgery on a Saturday morning at 240 Stratford Road, Sparkbrook, the Labour Party offices. He always said his mail-bag had more urban renewal problems than all the other enquiries about immigration status and so on. Together with the local councillors, Roy Hattersley provided enormous support both at the City Council level and in Parliament. Roy introduced the late Peter Jenkins of the Guardian to the Sparkbrook Team and residents. Following this, the Guardian and the Observer ran a whole series of articles about inner city life and the new ways of working through resident participation.

Those officers working with the residents found it exciting, even exhilarating, but often campaigning for residents' schemes brought them into conflict with senior officers at the Urban Renewal headquarters. This was made all the more difficult as MPs such as Roy Hattersley in

Sparkbrook and Denis Howell in Small Heath often weighed into arguments on behalf of the local team. This did not endear the Team Leaders to many of the City's Chief Officers. However, Reg Bowen, the Urban Renewal Officer, and Mick Archer, Director of Environmental Health, along with Terry Brunt and Geoff Eden, are remembered for the way they supported the process of moving the power from the centre to the inner city neighbourhoods, many of which previously had been seen as marginal 'twilight areas'.

The sheer scale of the programme

The work of Project Team 2 in Sparkbrook was replicated across seven other teams which ringed the City. Teams covered – Small Heath, Sparkbrook, Sparkhill, Moseley, Balsall Heath, Edgbaston, Handsworth, Aston, Lozells, Nechells, Washwood Heath and Saltley. Each team was multidisciplinary with the mix of staff changing over the life of the programme. A capital programme of less than one million pounds in 1973/74 rose to more than £75 million in 1984/85. £75 million for urban renewal was more than for the whole of the City Housing Department, which at that time owned and managed more than 100,000 homes.

It should be noted that in 1983/84 the government put in more than one billion pounds across England for grants and the type of renovations, which were part of the Urban Renewal Programme, including 'Enveloping', 'Limited Enveloping', and 'Block Schemes'. Birmingham received the biggest allocation in the country, but the national allocation was always augmented from the Council's own capital resources. In later years, successive Chairs of Housing, such as Edwina Currie, ensured that the City received massive allocations for its Urban Renewal Programme, and the greatest sin for a project team leader was to underspend on the allocated budget!

The abandonment of the inner city?

This massive and sustained investment in the City's inner city infrastructure has to be compared with the present position. Between 2007 and 2010 the government reduced the level of funding for private housing renewal to around £300/400 million a year for. Since 2010, the government has ceased to invest in private housing renewal. This means about one million mainly elderly, poor or disabled owner-occupiers will receive no financial help from central government in carrying out essential repairs and in improving heating and insulation. However, the impact on general health and well-being is likely to go unmeasured and unreported. It would seem that our areas of older housing and their residents have been largely abandoned by the government.

6 Working for Community Forum 1984-1992

by Frances Heywood, former Community Forum Worker

In a study of Birmingham's voluntary organisations, a researcher once concluded that Community Forum was probably the only voluntary organisation in the city that was actually run, hands-on, by its unpaid, voluntary officers, rather than by paid workers with a committee acquiescing somewhere in the background. Forum's officers - Barry Toon, Pat Priestman, Sue Lancaster and Joyce Farley - met in the office every week. They were always thinking about Forum's core business - improving the housing and environment of Birmingham's inner areas - and always planning ahead. What a privilege to work for such a group. There were also three wonderful part-time secretaries during my time. These were Maureen Shakespeare, Saieda Gharda and Linda Grant.

Joining Community Forum

I came to work for Community Forum in 1984, after nine years voluntary involvement in Aston Residents' Association. This had been sustained by the input of Anne Field and Eileen Hands, two remarkable women who had also fostered the link to Community Forum. And our association had one of the most multi-racial committees in the City thanks to the input of a trainee community worker, Iqbal Dosanjh, working under my husband John, who was, unusually, a social services employee with an attachment to an Urban Renewal Project team.

In 1984, Margaret Thatcher was into the second year of her second term and times were changing. A Government circular in November that year limited the terms under which Enveloping could be carried out and marked the beginning of the reduction of that programme. As reactive campaigning became less productive, Forum became more research-focused and proactive in its work. Also, with the passing of time, greater respect developed between Forum members and some key Urban Renewal officers. Whilst still retaining a critical stance, we were more inclined to work constructively with the officers if this would benefit the residents. Whether we met formally with the Urban Renewal councillors varied at this time, depending entirely on the disposition of the different Chairs of Urban Renewal.

Core themes

Work was necessary at a range of levels. Bread and butter issues were: problems with contractors; people waiting for internal grants (you could have a new roof and windows but still no bathroom, let alone central heating); and areas waiting for 'declaration' that would make an Envelope, or Limited-Envelope scheme possible. We also needed to communicate with the residents' groups, and the (albeit erratic) production of the newsletter 'Residents Voice' was very important. (*My young son, William, produced some great cartoons for it. He later chose a career in housing, working now for a Tenant Management Co-operative.*)

But the core themes that emerge when I look back were as follows: improved implementation of hard-won renewal policies; concern for the structures by which housing renewal was delivered, including issues of democracy and participation, and major forward planning issues, above all in regard to compulsory clearance of houses. In the Clearance Working Party described at the end of this section, all these themes came together.

Improved implementation. The big topic was still the problems experienced by residents undergoing Envelope schemes. The great success of Forum's publication 'Are You Being Enveloped' was now followed up with a tape-slide show, designed to be shown to the residents before work began, with a theme song by Jan and Spud; 'They should have told me everything, then I'd have been prepared'. Made up of slides from real schemes and an accompanying sound track, this travelled round the city from area to area. Officers could and did order it, pay Forum for the hire of the archaic projector and get the show thrown in. We hope it helped many people suffer less misery. We believe it was also useful in helping less experienced officers understand the realities.

Concern for the structures of housing renewal Through our university colleagues, we had learnt that in the Netherlands there were more advanced models of resident involvement in the process of urban renewal. The result was a 3-day visit in 1986 by sixteen assorted residents' group members and officers, plus Eric Adams from the Barrow Cadbury Fund and Rick Groves from CURS, to study urban renewal in Amsterdam and Rotterdam. In Amsterdam, we met some very determined (cobble-throwing) residents! In Rotterdam, we found that the residents had a majority (by one seat) of places on the Renewal Planning group, and were given resources to be able to employ three workers of their own choosing: an independent architect (to provide alternatives to the plans proposed by the City), a social worker and a community worker.

The findings were published in 1987 under a title suggested by Maureen Shakespeare, 'A Tale of Three Cities'. We wanted the Urban Renewal councillors to go with some officers and see for themselves, but there had been a scandal about trips abroad on expenses so this did not happen, and our report did not make any tangible impact on city policy, though the visit was thought-provoking for all of those who went, leading us to see how structures (and resources!) could give more say to residents. We also saw the power of 3D models (complete with to-scale models of furniture) to help residents understand renewal proposals. There is an affinity here to the methodology of 'Planning for Real'. PfR is a community-led planning and empowerment process developed by Tony Gibson and the Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation in the late 1970's. Forum later advocated PfR as an excellent structure for resident consultation, though its weakness was always about subsequent decision-making and the implementation of the residents' proposals.

Challenging the return to slum clearance: a community-led research project

As housing policies changed in the 1980's and as the Conservative Government began to reduce the funding for house improvement (after an initial boost under Michael Heseltine), new issues and challenges faced Community Forum necessitating changes in our approach and tactics. From Community Forum's point of view, urban renewal was about the restoration and renewal of old housing, and it had come about as a result of the bad experience of 'slum clearance' in the 1960s and the growing public hostility towards it.

It was Joyce Farley who saw the significance of a report approved by the Council on its private agenda in February 1985. This report, 'A Strategy for Older Houses', proposed the clearance of another 10,000 houses in the inner city, along with some measures that were designed to alleviate the problems of affected residents. It was prepared by senior Council officers and accepted both by the Conservatives when they were in control and by Labour when they took over shortly afterwards. Joyce saw that we needed to prepare to fight the proposal with intelligence and solid information.

We consulted some sympathetic Council officers, who agreed that any clearance programme needed to be planned and managed quite differently from past programmes. Out of this came the idea for a research project to look at the case for and against clearance, to review the impact of clearance on people and communities (based on the clearance programmes that were then being undertaken) and to look at the factors that needed to be considered if more extensive clearance programmes were to be introduced. A bid was submitted to the Inner City Partnership Programme and Community Forum secured a grant to carry out the research. This was something of a breakthrough; a genuinely community-led research project.

We needed a co-researcher who could speak directly to those affected residents who couldn't communicate well using English. Joyce knew of someone through her links to Small Heath Law Centre. Mohammed Rashid Naz spoke Urdu and Punjabi and he was happy to join the team. He and I carried out the work together between October 1986 and September 1988 and our report was submitted to Birmingham Council at the end of 1988.

A toxic situation

We had discovered that - even in places where people were not against moving - the clearance process was horrific. People were left in deteriorating house conditions for years on end, with no information about what was happening. Owners were unable to sell, move or improve. Some private tenants found their homes being sold and re-sold to new landlords who used every unscrupulous trick in the book to frighten them into leaving so the 'compensation' price would be 'with vacant possession' and therefore higher. Other tenants simply suffered appalling and deteriorating conditions, but could not be re-housed by the City Housing Department for fear that as soon as they were accommodated the landlord would let to another tenant who would then also eventually need re-housing.

For owner-occupiers the bitter truth dawned that the 'market value' of a clearance house was never enough to allow them to buy a decent new home. Those who alternatively sought re-housing by the Council in the local area, as was their right, soon learnt that there were no houses to be had. In Small Heath and similar areas the wait for a 4-bed council house was estimated at 60 years. And the quality, size and location of the housing offered was often so poor that residents were incredulous that they were being turned out of their comfortable homes in order to move into something so awful.

Structurally, moreover, there was very poor communication between the various Council departments who had a role to play in the clearance process. These included Planning, Valuation, Legal Services, Environmental Health (Urban Renewal) and Housing. In particular, there was serious hostility from the middle-tier housing managers, who were required to offer their best properties to critical and ungrateful owner-occupiers displaced by clearance, because the officers in another department had declared a Clearance Area.

The Thatcher Governments' sustained attack on Council housing made everything worse, as there was no new-building of Council housing to ease the strain, and there was a constant leaching away of the best stock under Right-to-Buy. This included Council houses allocated to families affected by clearance who saw this was their only route back into owner-occupation. Such families, if they were knowledgeable, refused Housing Association properties (which might have been more suitable) because they carried no Right-to-Buy.

This was a toxic situation and the only bright spot in it were the four Housing Co-ordinators seconded to Urban Renewal teams across the city from the City Housing Department. They used their expertise to help affected residents but these posts were then abolished by an incoming new Council.

Another serious issue was the gross injustice of the so-called Public Local Inquiries conducted by nationally appointed Inspectors, some of whom neither understood the rules they were implementing nor were willing to listen to witnesses who did understand them.

Findings and recommendations and producing 'Clearance; the View from the Street'

Community Forum's report brought all of these serious problems to the Council's attention. The report contained proposals for significant changes and improvements the process - proposals that we had discussed at length with Urban Renewal officers. They included:

Having a system for discovering whether there really was 'satisfactory re-housing' as the law stated, before a Clearance Area was declared

Establishing an inter-departmental officer 'Clearance Working Party' to co-ordinate the whole process better

Pursuing the idea of 'rebuilding grants' which would allow people to return to newly built homes on the site of their cleared homes, if not as owners (because the costs were too high for them to afford) at least as shared owners.

The report received a reasonably sympathetic hearing. In particular, councillors recognised that the Council had to plan and co-ordinate its activities much better and they supported the proposal to establish a Clearance Working Party (of which more later).

I was later able to write up all of the work, which Naz and I had done, as a book called '*Clearance: The View From The Street*'. Naz had died tragically young while the work was going on and we wanted to ensure that his important work wasn't lost and that it reached a wider audience. Barrow Cadbury Trust was as ever supportive and we managed to obtain a grant from Shelter as well. '*Clearance: the View from the Street*' was published in 1990 with a launch to which many Council officers came. For years afterwards, Pat would present a copy to new officers and order them to read it!

Homechoice: assessing rehousing options

The work on clearance had thrown up various issues, which required further investigation. An important one was to do with the re-housing of people affected by clearance. This led us to make another research bid; this time to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. We wanted to develop and try out an approach to re-housing (which we called Homechoice) that had emerged from our earlier work. We had established that there were five key factors that made up people's satisfaction with their homes. The Homechoice system asked people to score their existing homes out of ten in these five categories, then look at the types of housing they might be offered and score those options to see if there would be an over-all improvement. We also commissioned a computer programme that aggregated the scores from one street or block and gave a very good picture of the general effect that clearance would have.

This research was carried out in Birmingham, Sandwell and Derby. Pat Priestman joined the interview team, as did one Birmingham officer. It was a massive task contacting housing providers to discover what they might be able to offer and preparing a separate pack for every household type that gave them the same key information for a range of properties. Residents very reasonably said they could not give a 'condition' score to a property they had not seen, but otherwise the method gave residents a realistic idea of what to expect, and made the subsequent clearance in at least two places much smoother. It also highlighted serious anomalies; for example, it showed the Sandwell Council's Housing Director that they were clearing families with seven children out of four-bed properties when they had no larger replacement properties in their stock.

Unfortunately Homechoice was labour-intensive and did not give the answers Councils wanted, so it was not taken up when the research project ended but some of our work did feed into later work I did on housing choices and options.

The Clearance Working Party

In the meantime, Birmingham had set up a Clearance Working Party (CWP) as recommended in our report, to ensure better co-ordination between the City Council departments. To start with it was composed of 8-10 officers with appropriate authority to speak and make decisions for their different departments. It was to meet every month and consider one third of the City each time, checking what was happening in each of the clearance areas in that sector. This way of working quickly revealed some of the operational problems that bedeviled clearance programmes; such as two departments each waiting for the other to take the initiative in a particular street, with the result that nothing would happen at all and the residents were left abandoned.

After pressure from Forum and overcoming some resistance, it was agreed that there would also be two Community Forum members of the CWP, initially for a trial period of 6 months. Pat Priestman and I took this on and 'after we had passed our probation' we both went on attending: I until I moved to Cheltenham in 1997 and Pat until her untimely death in 2007. Although many Forum members did not know exactly what we were doing, I believe it was perhaps the most important thing I, at least, was ever involved in while I worked for Community Forum. (*The wreath from City officers to Pat at her funeral suggested that they felt the same*).

Our task at this working party was to represent the residents of the clearance areas. Most people go through clearance only once and do not get an overview of the problems, but Pat and I had an overview and could raise residents' concerns in the appropriate way. Before the meeting we would visit some of the streets (separately, so as to cover as many places as possible) and talk to people about what was going on. This meant that when a senior housing officer reported that the local office had made three reasonable re-housing offers to a particular household, who must now accept whatever they were offered, we could counter with the detail that showed that not one of the offers had met the criteria laid down for clearance cases.

And where private landlords of seriously unfit properties were exploiting the position (as described above) the CWP was able to ensure that Environmental Health Officers stepped in to place a Closing Order on the property. This meant the landlord was not allowed to let to anyone else, the tenant was re-housed and the cycle was stopped.

Sometimes the problems were of dereliction, rubbish, vandalism and such things as the water supply being officially cut off. We took photographs of the worst things, and the officers (usually too senior to be on the spot themselves) often asked to borrow them to show the local teams. After a while, it was much less common to find such sights. The local teams started checking themselves and putting things right before we visited - a perfect result.

The role we played was tricky and it is not surprising that officers were apprehensive at first. We had to observe confidentiality about the working party documents, yet be free to speak up for the residents. We had to retain our independence and integrity (no problem at all for Pat) and not be incorporated or think of ourselves as quasi-officers. Information about proposed clearance can be commercially valuable, too. The officers had to trust us and we had to be trustworthy.

What happened at the Working Party could never have happened if we had not had the years of Urban Renewal Project Teams working with residents and the build-up of relationships that resulted. The relationship wasn't cosy, but it was one of growing respect. And this applied not just to the Forum members but to the whole group. At the start the Housing Department did not want to have anything to do with it. The only way to be sure to have a representative present was to locate the meeting in their offices, and to ask an officer from a neutral department to chair the meetings. Gradually, the group began to have short presentations from the different officers about their role in the process and as understanding grew there was patently less hostility. This better communication was absolutely essential in improving the residents' experience of clearance.

I believe the Clearance Working Party had beneficial effects for both the residents and the City Council. People were rescued from nightmare environments more quickly, and the process became more efficient and cost-effective. I believe lives were probably saved.

Some local battles

It is not possible to write down all the things that went on in my time as Forum's worker. I have not described the superb work of the local residents groups in which Forum sometimes became directly involved. There was the struggle by Janet Johnson and other residents for Arley Road, Saltley, defeated in the end by outrageous political chicanery as described in *'Clearance: The View From The Street'* (pages 248-263), or the remarkable fight put up by Iris Broadbent of Jardine GIA which reduced the number of homes to be cleared there from 190 to 31 (pages 64-70), and led to

some very hard work in a subsequent Planning Group, chaired by City Planning Officer, Angus Kennedy. The good work that was done by residents and officers together at the bottom of Witton Road, Aston is there to admire in 2014.

Then there was the work of Robin Dimmick, a one-man encyclopedia of legal knowledge on clearance, who fought to save a block of houses in Hob Moor Rd where he lived. He was defeated partly by the nature of the houses but also by a shameful Public Local Inquiry. I shall never forget independent Environmental Health Officer Steve Wheeler explaining how the 'Needleman Formula' (*a formula that calculated how much it was worth spending to renew a house rather to demolish it*) was supposed to be based on actual interest rates. He was brushed aside by the Inspector who did not wish to take this information into account, and scorned by a City officer who said it was just a point of view.

Spreading the word beyond Birmingham...and as far as Russia!

There were also visits. Pat and I went to Hackney to talk about Enveloping and found ourselves in a political situation where we were completely out of our depth. Some of us went to Liverpool and Kirby to share knowledge about 'Tenant's Choice', which was introduced in 1988, and which it was feared would lead to the take-over of council housing by housing associations or other landlords without properly conducted consultation. In everything we did, the underlying issues were proper information and proper consultation for those who would be affected by housing policies.

And finally, after I had moved to Bristol University, but was still actively involved in the Clearance Working Party, Barry and I made three trips to Russia, with Pat on the second and most important one. In between, a group of Russian residents and officers made a return visit to Birmingham (and Walsall). I had met Professor Elena Shomina at a housing conference in Budapest in 1994. Following the collapse of the Iron Curtain, Elena was trying to promote 'housing movements' amongst former very passive tenants and give them an idea of people having more say in their housing. She was getting good support from Scandinavian academics, but Community Forum was the nearest organisation to her dream. When Pat died, Elena wrote, 'Pat was truly a community activist, and she was our star and leader to follow'. Quite so.

Leaving Community Forum

When I left Forum Pat said, 'You'll never have employers as good as us again you know'. She was right and I never forgot it. Whenever, as an academic, I had to write a CV for a conference, I never left out my origins working for Community Forum, because it was the rock and foundation of everything good I did thereafter.

7 Independent funding for community action in Birmingham during the 1970's and 1980's

by Eric Adams, former Assistant Secretary later Director, The Barrow Cadbury Trust

Funding in 'right ordering'

I joined the Barrow Cadbury Trust as Assistant Secretary to Anthony Wilson in Spring 1972. Prior to that date Anthony had been the sole administrative and grants officer. He had begun to feel that the demand for grants from national and West Midlands bodies was more than one officer could handle in the way he considered to be in 'right ordering' - to use a phrase that describes doing things in keeping with Quaker tradition and practice.

This ethos, strongly supported by Paul Cadbury, Chair of the Trustees, resulted in the Barrow Cadbury Trust being very much demand driven, but with close links once grants had been assessed and made. We were given every encouragement and indeed were expected to take a personal and professional interest in all of the organisations the Barrow Cadbury Trust and the Barrow Cadbury Fund (a subsidiary of the Trust that could support non-charitable ventures) grant aided. Not to control or influence them, indeed to the contrary - but to learn and assist; not merely by funding but also by using our and the Trust's experience and contacts in support.

An interest in community planning

My own personal background had hitherto been one of personal social service, first in teaching and then in the mental welfare field. Paul Cadbury, on the other hand, in addition to having been Chairman of Cadbury Brothers (as the company was then called), had long had an interest in community planning. This was reflected in his position as a Trustee of Bournville Village Trust and in his role as a Liberal City Councillor. In both of these capacities, he had been actively engaged in planning Birmingham's future after the Second World War. It was not surprising, therefore, that the field in which I found myself most immersed was in community work and community development.

Thus in the Autumn of 1973, soon after I had tackled a series of administrative chores, I found myself handling a grant application from a group, which I remember labeling in my agenda notes for a trustees meeting as being from some 'dissident planners!' The application was from Community Planning Associates (CPA) and, at a meeting to discuss the application, I was suitably impressed by them as a group and by the work they were undertaking in deprived areas of Birmingham and other parts of the conurbation, helping local communities to influence and challenge local planning and housing schemes. It was decided to fund CPA so they could take on a full-time worker. That worker was Rick Groves and one of his main tasks was to support an emerging organisation that had been established early in 1973 called Community Forum.

Initial support for Community Forum

The Trust supported the work of Rick and CPA for several years during which time Community Forum grew and prospered. In 1975 Birmingham Voluntary Service Council (BVSC) had attracted funding from the Department of the Environment (DoE) to appoint an Environment Liaison Officer and it had been agreed that the person appointed to this post, Jon Stevens, would take over Rick's role in working with Community Forum. The Trust therefore ceased to

support Community Forum via Community Planning Associates but we maintained an interest in how Community Forum progressed because of Rick's involvement in the BVSC Steering Group.

In 1978, two things happened; firstly Community Forum and Jon's funding from the DoE came to an end. Secondly, the Inner City Partnership Programme (ICPP) was launched and following discussions involving Graham Shaylor, the City Planning Officer, Michael Matcham of BVSC and Community Forum, it was proposed to establish an Inner City Unit to support community participation in both the Urban Renewal Programme and the ICPP. Three staff were to be employed in the Unit; a voluntary sector worker to be funded by ICPP; a youth development worker to be funded by the Gulbenkian Foundation and a Community Forum worker, which the Trust agreed to fund as logical continuation of our earlier investment in Community Planning Associates.

As I recall, one of the positives in my recommendation to the trustees to support the grant was the calibre of the person who was effectively already working for Community Forum, Jon Stevens. By directly funding a worker for Community Forum I came more closely in touch with the residents involved in leading the organisation, notably Pat Priestman, Barry Toon and Joyce Farley. And we were able to see how Community Forum evolved into an effective voice for inner city residents at a time of major investment in housing renewal and in wider regeneration.

By the end of 1980, Community Forum wanted to move away from BVSC and to continue as a fully independent organisation. They applied to the Trust for further funding and with a helpful endorsement from Graham Shaylor, given Paul Cadbury's regard for him, a further three year grant was approved in 1981.

The rationale for continuing and long-term funding

The rationale for continuing and indeed increasing the funding for Community Forum was; to enable Community Forum to provide an independent voice for residents in the City's affairs (which statutory support might compromise); to relieve individual residents' associations of the burden of funding an umbrella organisation; and to ensure professional leadership and experience. This level of grant aid by the Trust continued for over ten years (with Jon being replaced by Frances Heywood in 1984). This reflected the trustees' thinking that Community Forum offered effective leadership and a strong voice for residents and, as such, it was the main plank in the Trust's commitment to this field for many years.

A new more sustainable approach to funding

At this time, the thinking of the Trust revolved around three year periods of support to groups or organisations that were undertaking work that related to the Trust's aims and objectives rather than supporting one-off grants. That support for community action via CPA and then Community Forum ran for some 18 years was quite remarkable for its time. In my last few years with the Trust, supported by Paul Cadbury's son Charles, we looked at an alternative, potentially more sustainable funding model. We gave one grantee we already supported a one-off (endowment) grant equivalent to five years of funding on an annual basis. Taking advantage of the interest rates of the time this would enable the organisation to build an endowment fund, which would then deliver long term funding year-on-year roughly equivalent to the original funding we had been giving them. Looking back I regret that we didn't apply similar thinking to our funding for Community Forum but, to my knowledge, this model was not repeated by the Trust.

In my farewell address to the world of charitable trusts, which was entitled 'Philanthropy and the New Civil Gospel', I called for a perspective of sympathy and solidarity with those active in building a civil society; helping individuals to realise their potential and forge relationships with others of vision and dynamism and with trusts themselves forming vigorous relationships with the civic organisations that emerge.

Working with committed and inspiring residents

It was this kind of thinking that inspired the relationship between the Barrow Cadbury Trust and Fund with Community Forum and I believe that it is as relevant now as it was through the 1970's and 1980's, when I had the privilege to work with and to learn from all those committed and inspiring residents and the workers that assisted them.

8 Postscript: the prospects for housing renewal in Birmingham and beyond

by Jon Stevens

The Community Forum 40th anniversary event held in October 2013 was intended purely as celebration of the work of Community Forum and of the achievements of Birmingham's Urban Renewal Programme. But inevitably, during the event, many people reflected on the state of housing renewal in Birmingham in the 21st century. There was a prevailing and shared feeling of loss and disappointment at how things had turned out and this in turn led to discussions on what had gone wrong and what might be done about it.

This postscript describes some of the activities and initiatives around housing renewal in Birmingham and beyond that either flowed from the event or paralleled it in one way or another in the following three years. It is not a detailed account but it does show that some of the energy and enthusiasm that fuelled Community Forum and the Urban Renewal Programme is still around and still driving the people who were first fired up by the idea of residents renewing their city all those years ago.

The withdrawal from urban renewal and its impact

Peter Archer in his talk at the event (and in his chapter in this report) highlighted the scale of the original endeavour; with eight project teams working with residents to deliver a programme of investment in housing and area improvements across the inner areas of the city costing more than £75 million per year by 1984/5. (This is equivalent to a programme of well over £150 million at today's prices). He pointed out that this expenditure in Birmingham was equivalent to almost two thirds of the whole Government programme on housing renewal in England between 2007 and 2010; and that since 2010, expenditure had been cut to nothing, leaving nationally about one million mainly elderly, poor and/or disabled owners with no direct financial help from the Government in maintaining their housing for their and for future generations' benefit.

An issue of equal concern was the dramatic growth of the private rented sector in recent years. At the time of the launch of the Urban Renewal Programme, there were about 65,000 privately rented homes in the city, with 20,000 of these typically in the worst condition and often divided into multiple flats in the inner areas. But private renting was in decline and the assumption was that, as investment supported low-income home ownership and as housing associations - many recently formed for this purpose - renovated formerly privately rented housing using funding from the recently relaunched Housing Corporation, that this decline would accelerate.

By 1991 this appeared to be happening with private rented housing falling below 40,000 homes but from that point on - slowly to start with but accelerating after 2001 - the private rented sector in Birmingham had expanded so that by 2011, it had reached 68,000 homes and since then it has continued to grow. Private renting was now larger than the whole social housing sector, which has been shrinking over the same period as had owner occupation. It appeared that private renting was on course to become the dominant tenure in many areas, reversing a trend that had begun at the beginning of the 20th century

Meanwhile, the City Council had not only lost funding for capital investment; it was also facing major cutbacks to its revenue support from Central Government. This meant that it was increasingly unable to respond adequately to the growing problems of poor housing conditions, harassment and insecurity, which inevitably had accompanied the expansion of the private rented sector.

Intervening in the private rented sector in Birmingham

Immediately following the reunion, a number of those involved felt it would be useful to look further at the effect that the uncontrolled and unregulated growth of the private rented sector was having on those very areas of the city that had been subject to the Urban Renewal Programme a generation ago and to consider what measures the City Council might take to address some of the evident problems this was causing, notwithstanding their restricted resources.

Contacts were made with the Council and an informal working group was established, chaired by Councillor Lisa Trickett, who was then Chair of the Districts and Public Engagement Overview and Scrutiny Committee and who, earlier in her career, had been involved with the Urban Renewal programme in its latter stages. This group, which contained many former staff members from Urban Renewal and several community representatives, commissioned some research by Professor Alan Murie, working with key local authority officers.

This research looked at the latest information regarding the growth of private renting in Birmingham; it also examined a new phenomenon, the number of former Council properties sold through Right to Buy which were now being let by private landlords. The research showed in detail how private renting had expanded dramatically not just in areas of older housing but also in other parts of the city. For example, it confirmed the spread of the sector into many Council estates, such as Kingstanding and Shard End.

Also of concern - but difficult to pick up through the survey - was the extent to which housing associations were withdrawing from older areas and selling off the older homes they had purchased and rehabilitated at the time of the Urban Renewal Programme. Details were hard to obtain but where this was happening on a significant scale, as in Handsworth, it appeared that growing numbers of properties that had once been 'rescued' from the private rented sector were now being returned to market renting. The irony of private landlords taking over formerly publicly owned housing either former Right-to-Buy homes or via sell-offs was not lost on the working group.

'The PRS - A Tenure in Transition' seminar

In November 2013, a seminar was held in the Council House in Birmingham; it looked at the national picture on the growth of the private rented sector; debated the action that the Government should take to better control and regulate the sector; and considered what strategies Birmingham City Council might adopt. In the light of Alan Murie's research, various speakers expanded on the situation in Birmingham. This included a graphic presentation by Barry Toon on the problems experienced in Selly Oak. The dramatic growth in the demand for student renting in recent years and the scramble by landlords to capitalise on this had led to many landlords disregarding planning, building and health and safety controls with impunity.

The seminar heard from three local authorities that had developed strategies for dealing more effectively with the private rented sector; Newham, Hastings and Oxford. These authorities described how - in different ways - they had developed extended licensing schemes for landlords of houses in multiple-occupation (known as HMO's), using the powers introduced by the Housing Act 2004. This act had prescribed mandatory licensing for all larger HMO's across the country; but it also included further, discretionary powers for licensing the much greater numbers of smaller HMO's. Local Authorities had been slow to use these discretionary powers - in parts of Birmingham residents' groups had been pressing for their use for several years - but where the powers had been used, it seemed that they could have a positive impact.

Early evidence from all of the schemes showed that licensing had raised standards across the private rented sector as a whole, it had significantly reduced the number of rogue landlords and it had made it easier to take action against those that remained. Furthermore, in these difficult times, the schemes could be largely self-funded from the fees charged to the affected landlords. The schemes had encountered significant initial resistance from landlords and their representative bodies but once established, most reputable landlords could see the benefits to

them of operating in a regulated market. It was further noted that some authorities had, in parallel with licensing schemes, sought to restrict the uncontrolled growth of the private rented sector using planning powers (known as Article 4 Directions) that can be used to limit the number of HMO's in designated areas.

In the discussion, residents and others expressed their frustration that Birmingham, which had once been at the forefront of urban renewal and in tackling irresponsible private landlords, had failed to fully acknowledge the return of these problems and had been very slow to use the new powers available to them. At the time of the seminar, Birmingham was investigating various approaches to introducing extended licensing and the use of planning powers to regulate the private rented sector but progress subsequently has been limited to a small number of pilot schemes.

The continuing potential for community-led housing renewal

The original organisers of the Community Forum anniversary event also wanted to explore the continuing potential for forms of housing renewal, in which residents and communities played an active role as they had done in the past. It was apparent that the opportunities for local action had greatly diminished over the years but were there still ways in which it could happen?

After discussion amongst the original organising group and some local research and with further support from the Barrow Cadbury Trust, a workshop was organised in May 2015 at Birmingham University, under the auspices of the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies (many of whose members, notably Rick Groves, had played an active role in Birmingham in the Community Forum years). Participants at the workshop included a cross section of people who had been active in the city over 40 years ago, a number of residents still involved in local projects and local politicians and others interested in promoting change.

At the workshop, the speakers from the reunion reflected on the main lessons they felt could be learnt from those times and they suggested how this kind of thinking might still apply under different circumstances. Although all local authorities have greatly reduced capacity and resources, it was generally agreed that a city such as Birmingham could still take the lead in developing an overarching strategy for housing renewal as they did in 1973 when they set up the Urban Renewal Conference. And as then, there was considerable scope for working with local groups and communities to build such a strategy.

But what might such a strategy look like? Clearly it would be very different from the large-scale Council led programmes of the post war period; rather it might be built around a range of community-led initiatives that developed out of the differing needs of affected neighbourhoods. Organised support from the Council and from other agencies such as housing associations would still be crucial but this support should be used to facilitate, support and complement local initiatives. To inform the discussion, the workshop heard about five projects that were still involved in different approaches to local renewal.

Two of these, the Selly Oak Area Caretaker Project and the Saltley and Washwood Heath Practical Care Project, were survivors from the time when the Urban Renewal Programme actively supported local initiatives designed to assist residents in keeping their homes in good repair and in protecting the surrounding environment. Barry Toon described how he now managed the last of Birmingham's area caretaker projects. (In Chapter 3 he describes the genesis of these schemes in the 1970's).

Shahid Miah talked about his practical care project; this had been established at a later stage of the Urban Renewal Programme, when the importance of helping owners to invest in their homes without the benefit of grants was becoming more pressing. His project too seemed to be the last of its kind.

Another project - in which local residents had actively participated in the development of what became known as the Summerfield Eco-Village - had benefited from funding and investment from the most recent area-based renewal programme in the city. Urban Living was part of the then Government's Housing Market Renewal Programme, which supported predominately market-led approaches to urban renewal in north Birmingham, crossing over into part of

Sandwell. Urban Living had run from around 2003 to 2011 and had achieved little of note apart from the Eco-Village. This had succeeded because of the active support of the Summerfield Residents Association, as Chris Vaughan explained.

All three of these projects had continued to the present day because they had adapted to the changing environment in which they operated, they had identified new issues to address and importantly found alternative funding sources. The caretaker project in Selly Oak had at first been able to expand into community safety work and other areas; but latterly it had had to rely increasingly on fee-generating work to survive. The project had been active in pressing for local authority intervention in the private rented sector and had been at the forefront in campaigning for an additional licensing scheme for landlords across Selly Oak. This campaign was bearing fruit but only after many years of pressure.

In Saltley and Washwood Heath, the practical care project had diversified into supporting energy efficiency measures, as had also happened in Selly Oak, and they were seeking to benefit from the Green Deal. (This Government programme subsequently failed spectacularly). And in Summerfield, the residents, apart from defending the gains made by the eco-village, were now involved in various forms of health and well-being work, linking up with the local hospital and new health commissioning groups.

A fourth project, the Stockland Green Opportunity: Housing and Training, had started more recently. A group of local residents brought together by a local councillor, Penny Holbrook, were concerned by the growing instability of their community caused by a significant expansion in private renting and by the exploitation of vulnerable tenants. Penny Holbrook described how they decided to create their own community-based housing organisation to purchase houses, which they would refurbish in a way that created jobs for local young people and then rent out to people in need, in a responsible and sustainable way. The project had been sponsored and supported by a local housing association and in this way they had begun to intervene successfully in the local market.

The final project was the Moseley Big Plan. Austin Barber from Moseley Regeneration Group explained how residents in Moseley had fought to get a locally produced plan for their neighbourhood adopted as what is known as a Supplementary Planning Document. They had been successful after a long process involving considerable time and effort and the plan had been adopted in May 2014. The hope was that this local plan would be able to shape and influence future development across the area with an emphasis on meeting local housing and related needs; whilst retaining the character of the area and addressing issues around sustainability and climate change. Austin Barber also referred to the new system of Neighbourhood Plans that was being trialled in Balsall Heath. Neighbourhood Plans have a more distinct status within the planning system and there is some direct funding available to the community to support the plan making process. The Balsall Heath Neighbourhood Plan was adopted later in 2015.

From 'challenge...confront...collaborate' to 'involve...initiate...innovate'

The workshop ended with an open discussion on possible ways forward; out of this came some ideas and proposals. Central to any new approach or strategy was to find ways in which residents and communities could play a more active role in securing change; for them to be able to *challenge...confront...collaborate* as had been the case with Community Forum. But also for them to be able to *involve...initiate...innovate* as was the case for the five projects. Ways had to be found to support a new generation of community groups, to rebuild the kind of 'community infrastructure' that had underpinned the Urban Renewal Programme and, if at all possible, to identify funding streams that could give residents a more independent voice.

This was by no means an easy task. Despite Government rhetoric about support for the Big Society and so on, public funding streams were becoming more and more restricted. Other sources of funding, such as the Lottery Fund, were in consequence becoming increasingly stretched. However, it was felt that one way or another community-led renewal was still the way forward and that in Birmingham there was still a pool of energy and initiative which could be

tapped with the help of a supportive Council and with the backing of other agencies such as housing associations, of which more below.

At the top of the list of areas for intervention (following on from the seminar in November 2013) was a much more positive active approach to regulating the private rented sector and, where possible controlling its growth, particularly in areas where it was threatening the stability of whole communities. This meant that Birmingham should strengthen and better co-ordinate its approach to enforcement; that it should introduce additional licensing on a much more extensive basis; and it should use planning and other powers to restrict the growth of the sector in a number of vulnerable areas. Wherever possible, the aim must be to get responsible landlords to pay for the services they receive and the benefits they would gain from a more regulated market.

In parallel with this, there was a need for social housing organisations to find ways of reinvesting in the areas that were being 'taken over' by the private rented sector. People were very concerned about the way in which many housing associations had retreated from older areas. Nearly all associations had ceased to undertake new rehabilitation projects or to develop small infill sites many years ago. And recently it had become clear that many housing associations were actively selling off their older properties and 'disinvesting' as the jargon has it. In other words, associations were now abandoning the very areas they or their predecessors were often set up by the local community to serve.

The challenge therefore was for the Local Authority to find ways of encouraging investment in social housing in older areas. This should include extending their recently established new-build programme into such areas and cajoling, pressuring and even shaming large housing associations to cease their disinvestment in older areas and to participate in new forms of regeneration, using their substantial asset bases often built on inner city investment in the first place.

Beyond this, there was a real need to support a new generation of community-led housing organisations, such as housing co-operatives, across the city to stimulate new growth and development as has happened with Stockland Green Housing and Opportunities. This was 'sponsored' by a relatively small local association and it was argued that every sizeable housing association operating in Birmingham should be required to support at least one community-led housing organisation as a condition of their partnering arrangements with the Council.

Finally, it was acknowledged that - although many of the housing and social problems found in areas of older housing were similar to those that were prevalent 40 years ago - there were new issues to be addressed today and these can provide the basis for renewed intervention. One example cited at the workshop was extending the traditional concern about poor housing and its impact into wider concerns about mental health, wellbeing and community breakdown. Another pressing issue was the poor insulation of nearly all older housing and the consequent problems around heating and energy inefficiency. The Green Deal seemed to be failing (as it did subsequently) but what might come next? Job creation and training linked to investment in older housing also presented opportunities; dealing with empty properties in this way had been very successful elsewhere and so on. The point was to reiterate the continuing need for urban renewal and to find imaginative and innovative ways of doing this at the local level with the Local Authority acting more as a partner and an enabler.

A national strategy for housing renewal

The workshop connected in a timely way with wider discussions about the absence of a national strategy on housing renewal. In August 2015, a meeting was convened by Peter Archer and Christopher Watson at Birmingham University to discuss this and to consider whether a national 'campaign' might be established. Out of this came a broader grouping, the Academic-Practitioner Partnership, which brought together former activists, noted academics, and representatives from national public and professional bodies and the building industry. Over a period of eight months, the group debated the issues extensively, bringing together evidence from official sources, from recent Government's retreat from almost all aspects of housing

improvement and renewal, and the paucity of current policy responses.

The group went onto to consider a wide range of arguments for public and other forms of intervention and considered which of these might sway a Government that appeared to be reluctant to act (as had successive Governments since around the turn of the century). The group prepared a report: it was edited by Chris Watson, Alan Murie, Richard Turkington and Peter Archer; produced with the support of Saint-Gobain UK & Ireland; and published on-line by Housing and Communities Research Group at the University of Birmingham

‘Good Housing: Better Health’: rebalancing the housing debate

This report, *Good Housing: Better Health* - a title intended to equate achieving good living conditions with health and wellbeing in its widest sense - was published in July 2016. The report ‘puts forward an action plan to get housing quality back on the policy agenda. And it calls for a wider recognition of housing-related issues such as health, energy efficiency, poverty and social inclusion’. It points out that in the 1980’s (and for forty years before that) the whole housing stock was seen by government ‘as a national asset of highest social and economic importance’ and it calls for a recognition that maintaining investment in our existing housing is as important as building new housing. The report asserts a pressing case for ‘rebalancing the housing debate’ in favour of a ‘whole stock’ approach.

Good Housing: Better Health was well produced and persuasively argued, with a wealth of telling examples, detailed case studies and projections. It ended with a series of practical and inter-linked recommendations for Government and other agencies to respond to. The report certainly merited and continues to merit a detailed response.

Good Housing: Better Health was launched in July 2016 and is available to download at the University of Birmingham website. It has been reviewed extensively in professional media and referred to in other reports examining contemporary housing issues both nationally and regionally. Partnership members have promoted the report, and will continue to do so, at housing, health and related conferences and workshops.

In November 2016, members presented the conclusions and recommendations of the report to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Healthy Homes and Buildings and hope to continue to contribute to the work of this Group. In the West Midlands, the report has helped to inform the preparation of analysis, advice and recommendations on housing submitted to the West Midlands Combined Authority and to candidates for the position of West Midlands Mayor. The Academic-Practitioner Partnership wishes to encourage its work to be used in these and similar ways, and thus to influence present and future policies in favour of a more comprehensive and balanced approach to housing, health and wellbeing.

Some concluding remarks

What started as a simple reunion has had a surprising number of spin-offs. When they met up again in 2013, many of the people who had been involved with Community Forum and with the Urban Renewal Programme felt that the lessons learnt forty years ago were in danger of being forgotten. And in drawing this conclusion they were mindful of the work of several important figures from that time who are no longer with us and who are remembered at the beginning of this account.

This renewed energy and enthusiasm led to a series of events and activities within Birmingham and it also contributed - at least in part - to the production of a significant national report. Despite this activity, signs of movement and progress at both the national or local level are hard to discern. This is not surprising: we have been travelling in the wrong direction on community engagement in housing renewal for too long. But there are signs of awakening across Birmingham - not least in the work of Localise West Midlands - and more so in other towns and cities. It is hoped that the Community Forum reunion and the activities that followed might - in no small way - have contributed to this.

Appendix

Notes on the contributors and the sponsoring organisations

Barry Toon

Barry Toon has been involved in community action in Selly Oak, where he was born and brought up, for over 40 years. In 1973, he set up a local action centre, the People's Centre, which advised local people and students on housing and welfare rights. He was a founder member of Tiverton Area Residents Association (TARA) and he is still a member of their committee.

In 1978, he joined Community Forum as representative of TARA and he subsequently became Treasurer of Forum, a position he held throughout the life of the organisation.

In 1979, Barry and TARA established the Selly Oak Area Caretaker Society (SOACS) with funding from the Inner City Partnership Programme. This project provides care and repair services to vulnerable and older people across Selly Oak. Barry became Project Manager for the project, a position he holds to this day. When direct funding from the city ceased, Barry was responsible for securing funding to support the project from a variety of sources and as result this is the last remaining area caretaker project in the city. Barry also established a successful sister project, Bournbrook Community Safety Project, which provides security upgrades to deter property crime in the Bournbrook area and across the whole area covered by South Birmingham Local Police Unit.

Barry with TARA and SOACS has actively campaigned on housing and community issues in Selly Oak for many years. Most recently he has been successful in getting the City Council to introduce planning controls to reduce the uncontrolled spread of private landlord properties and in persuading the Council to bring forward a landlord licensing scheme. Both the Area Caretaker and Community Safety projects have won numerous awards and Barry's specific contribution has been recognised on several occasions.

Barry holds various positions including; Company Director, Birmingham Social Enterprise Energy Network; Administrator, Joyce Farley Educational Trust; Secretary, TARA/Bournbrook Neighbourhood Forum; and Chair, Community Partnership 4 Selly Oak. Barry has previously worked with the Overseas Development Agency on community development issues and he was a Visiting Lecturer at the Cabinet Office Emergency Planning College, Easingwold. He also works with the University of Birmingham, School of Geography on local development issues.

Eric Adams

Eric Adams joined the (then) Barrow & Geraldine S. Cadbury Trust in 1972 as Assistant Secretary to Anthony Wilson, after a previous career in teaching and mental health social work. He remained with the Trust for 30 years, a period during which he evolved into the Secretary of the Paul S. Cadbury Trust (on the death of its founder and, on Anthony Wilson's retirement, Director of what became the Barrow Cadbury Trust.

His involvement, and personal belief in, neighbourhood development and community involvement stemmed from the brief he was given on joining the Trust, the long term commitment of the then Trust Chairman. Paul Cadbury, in this field and his parental background of public service in the provision of support for children, the destitute and the sick.

Although the job was a full-time appointment, he was given time to be a founder member of the

Charitable Trust Administrators Group and the journal Trust News and the opportunity to accept voluntary commitments throughout his years at the Trust. Over time he served as a member of the Area Health Authority; a member, and later Chairman, of the BBC/IBA Central Appeals Advisory Committee; a Trustee of BBC Children in Need; and Chairman and later Deputy Chairman of the Citizen Organising Foundation (now Citizens UK).

On retirement, he became Chairman of Circles Network, working with people with disabilities, and the Vision Homes Association, providing support for those with profound disabilities. He is now devoted to *otium sanctum* and of late his lifetime support for Leicester City has been duly rewarded!

Frances Heywood OBE

Frances Heywood is a retired Senior Research Fellow of the School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol. Frances's degree was in history from Oxford University and her interest in housing began when she became a resident activist in the Aston area of Birmingham. She became involved with Community Forum when she worked on their report into Enveloping and in 1984 she was appointed Research Officer for Community Forum, covering both housing renewal and clearance issues. It was detailed work on the impact of compulsory purchase that first led her to consider deeply the issues that matter to people in their homes, and how to use this understanding in formulating practical policies.

In 1995, Frances joined the School for Policy Studies. She became a specialist researcher in housing provision and adaptation for disabled people. In this capacity, she led the team who conducted the review for Government of the Disabled Facilities Grant in England in 2005. Frances was a member of 'Homes Fit for Children', a group who campaigned - with success after ten long years - for the abolition of the means test for children's adaptations. Currently Frances is a Trustee of Care and Repair England and of the Joyce Farley Educational Trust in Small Heath, Birmingham.

Frances feels that she owes her career to Community Forum, to the city officers and Birmingham academics who helped her and to the Cadbury and Rowntree trusts, who have funded so much of her work.

Frances enjoys the mix of time with grandchildren, and voluntary, church and arts related activities. Current active interests are the Sutton Sisters (Christian and Muslim together) and the Disability Group of Sutton Coldfield Town Council. Much time in the last five years has been spent in the streets talking to other citizens about a range of issues (tax evasion, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, Green issues). Whether in Aston or Sutton Coldfield, the principles of talking and listening and working for more control by us all over the issues that affect our world seem more important than ever.

Jon Stevens

Jon Stevens trained as an architect, which is when he first became involved in community action in Liverpool and London. On qualifying in 1973, he moved to Birmingham to work on the Birmingham Inner Area Study in Small Heath, where he was heavily involved in the early development of the Urban Renewal Programme. In 1975, Jon moved to Birmingham Voluntary Service Council to work with Community Forum and he subsequently became their full time worker until 1984.

Between 1984 and 1993, Jon worked variously for Walsall Council on their housing renewal team, for Birmingham City Council heading up Summerfield Neighbourhood Office and for the Housing Corporation promoting tenant-led stock transfers under Tenants' Choice (an idea very much ahead of its time which sadly gained little traction).

In 1993, Jon returned to Small Heath to become Director of Birmingham Co-operative Housing Services. Over the next decade or so, BCHS became a leading developer of co-

operative/community controlled housing projects in the Midlands and nationally; including establishing Redditch Co-operative Homes, the largest new build co-op in the country.

Since 2009, when he left BCHS, Jon has been working on a range of community-based housing projects. Much of his work has focused on research and development work into co-operative and mutual housing options for older people and he has produced several publications for the Housing Learning and Improvement Network on this subject.

Between 2010 and 2015, Jon worked with HACT on a refugee housing programme and on a project looking at how housing associations can effectively support community-led housing projects. In 2016, Jon was appointed as an Honorary Research Fellow at the Housing and Communities Research Group at the University of Birmingham, where he has undertaken work on the history of community action and of co-operative housing, and where he has extended his research into older people's housing.

Jon is a committee member of Selly Oak Area Caretaker Society and has worked with his former colleague, Barry Toon, on various projects including the proposed licensing scheme for private landlords.

Mike Gibson

Mike is Emeritus Professor of Urban Planning at London South Bank University and now works as an independent researcher and consultant.

As a lecturer at the Birmingham School of Planning in the 1970s, Mike co-founded Community Planning Associates, edited West Midlands Grassroots and worked with Community Forum. Much of the analysis of neighbourhood renewal developed through this work was included in *An Introduction to Urban Renewal* (Hutchinsons 1982), which he co-wrote with Mike Langstaff. During his subsequent academic career he contributed neighbourhood regeneration through teaching, action research and consultancy, including international comparative analysis of neighbourhood renewal in the USA (with Rick Groves and Terry Brunt) and the Netherlands.

In 1991 Mike moved from Birmingham to Brighton. He co-edited *Housing and the Environment* (Chartered Institute of Housing) in 1994, in which he called for a new national housing policy which would deliver '*...an effective energy efficiency-led programme of housing and neighbourhood renewal*'. This was an idea whose time nearly came with the ill-fated Green Deal but whose time may yet come as a core component of a 21st century national housing renewal strategy, along the lines advocated in 'Good Housing: Better Health'.

Since the early 2000s, he has specialised the development of low carbon, community-based neighbourhood planning and regeneration, dividing his time between working in England and in Istanbul. In England this initially focussed on developing the concept of Carbon Neutral Neighbourhoods and applying it in the development of an innovative Deeside Low Carbon Renewal Area, and in Eaga's Low Carbon Communities Programme. More recently, he has been actively involved in statutory Neighbourhood Plans since their inception, first as a member of Locality's consultancy panel providing technical support, funded by DCLG, for action groups preparing their Neighbourhood Plan. More recently this has included working as the part-time Neighbourhood Plan Co-ordinator for the Hove Station Neighbourhood Plan, which includes the street where he lives. Mike enjoys the irony of being paid (albeit only at honorarium level) by central government for doing the same kind of work which he did voluntarily with Community Planning Associates and Community Forum forty years ago.

His parallel work in Istanbul since the early 2000s, has focussed on developing neighbourhood regeneration as a major component of earthquake mitigation. His work at Mimar Sinan and Kultur universities includes action research with academics and networks of third sector organisations who are promoting a community-based approach to private sector neighbourhood renewal – but in the face of dominant construction sector interests and local authorities driven by a top-down development oriented government. He was initially surprised by the relevance of his formative experience in Birmingham to the evolving situation in contemporary Istanbul.

Peter Archer

Peter Archer trained as an Environmental Health Officer in Croydon, Surrey and qualified in 1968. After a short time working in Kent, he moved with his family to Stourport in Worcestershire and started as an EHO at West Bromwich CBC, later to become Sandwell MBC. Having decided that he wanted to pursue a career in housing, he moved to Birmingham's Urban Renewal Team on 1st April 1974. The first project team in Small Heath was just being set up under the leadership of an architect, the late Charlie Adams. In 1975 Peter was promoted to lead the newly formed Project Team 2 based at Greencoat House in Stratford Road, Sparkbrook. Working closely with the Sparkbrook Association at the Family Centre, local residents and ward councillors, and MP, Roy Hattersley, a fifteen year regeneration programme was initiated and implemented. In 1974 when Peter arrived in Birmingham, Urban Renewal had an annual budget for environmental improvements of just £100,000, when Peter left in 1985 the budget had grown to £85 million! By then, Urban Renewal's capital budget equalled that of the City's Housing Department.

In 1985 Peter was appointed as the City of Bristol's Assistant Chief Environmental Health Officer. He always said that he was appointed on the basis that Bristol wanted to regenerate the inner city using many of the techniques developed in Birmingham. Peter spent 11 years in Bristol most of the time as Divisional Director of Housing, leading on policies for private sector housing, regeneration and community care. In 1996 following the demise of Avon County Council, Peter took the opportunity of leaving local government and moving into consultancy.

Since 1996, Peter has been a director at The Housing Consultancy Partnership LLP (THCP). He specialises in regeneration projects and has been commissioned to undertake many neighbourhood renewal assessments (NRA). He has extensive experience of working with communities in preparing regeneration plans and compulsory purchase orders. Starting in 2001 Peter worked as an Affiliate Housing Inspector at the Audit Commission undertaking more than 40 housing inspections. This work continued until Eric Pickles closed the Commission in 2011.

Peter advises the Local Government Association and the Department for Communities and Local Government on housing policy. He was commissioned to draft the current government housing renewal circular 05/2003. Peter is Chair of Care and Repair, England and Board Member of The Community Housing Group where he chairs the Audit Committee.

Peter is a Chartered Environmental Health Practitioner, a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, a former Chairman of Council and Trustee. Peter was recently elected President of the International Federation of Environmental Health, an organisation with members from 45 nation states. The IFEH now represents globally more than 50,000 environmental health practitioners. His interests now are in the practical applications to tackle health inequalities. He is working to implement the 'WHO – Marmot Agenda' of 'closing the gap in health inequalities in a generation'.

About Localise West Midlands

Localise West Midlands (LWM) was set up in 2002 by a group of individuals who, through opposing the more damaging excesses of the current economic model, had also recognised the need to propose positive models for economic activity.

Our West Midlands focus is intended to make use the region's geographical balance of urban and rural; and also to encourage democratic accountability and a people-centred approach amongst regional bodies.

However we also look beyond the region, seeking to catalyse ideas across the UK and to make links with and support organisations all over the world working on a similar agenda.

Our first project involved the facilitation of increased local purchasing of food by public bodies, with a conference for procurement officers sponsored by Advantage West Midlands and the Countryside Agency. We continue to work on related issues, currently as part of a wider project around the new Midland Metropolitan Hospital.

We engage with national and subnational policymaking particularly via the West Midlands Regional Sustainability Forum.

About the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies

Established in 1966, the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies (CURS) is a leading international centre for research, teaching and consultancy in spatial and social planning studies, an academic and policy discipline that encompasses agendas around urban regeneration, economic development, communities and the governance of public policy.

CURS functions as a cross-University research centre, combining the work of staff in The School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences and Birmingham Business School.

About the Barrow Cadbury Trust

Since its foundation the Barrow Cadbury Trust has been in the vanguard of social change. Inspired by Quaker beliefs and a vision for a more just society, Barrow and Geraldine Cadbury used their increasing wealth, (whilst living modestly themselves), drawn from the company, to tackle profound social ills, including juvenile crime and urban poverty.

In time, Barrow and Geraldine's children became Trustees and their son, Paul Cadbury, took over as Chair in 1959. Paul, his sisters and many of their descendants have all given time to being trustees and have added generously to the Trust's endowment. Our current Chair is Helen Cadbury, a great grand-daughter of the founders.

Our Vision: The Trust's vision is of a just and peaceful society, which recognises the equal value of all people.

Our Mission: The Trust's mission is to use all of our assets, especially our money, to work with others to bring about structural change for a more just and equal society.

“This important book fills a gap. Recent accounts of housing policy are too focused on the role of central government and on pieces of legislation and there are too few accounts that highlight the importance of local action.”

**Professor Alan Murie, Emeritus Professor of Urban and Regional Studies,
University of Birmingham.**

“I consider this account of the activities of Community Forum to be of high importance in that it sets the scene informally but with great clarity that led to the formation of the Urban Renewal Programme in Birmingham. It makes it clear that this huge endeavour set out to serve the community of the inner city and to base its policies on the aspirations and hopes of that community.”

Ted Taylor, Former Chair of Birmingham’s Urban Renewal Sub-Committee

“It was inspirational to bring together the people from Community Forum and Urban Renewal to produce this report...hundreds of thousands of people benefited from the work of Urban Renewal and from the work of residents’ groups and Community Forum and they continue to benefit to this day. The report’s final section on what has happened since, show that those times still inspire people to action today.”

Jon Morris, Chair of Localise West Midlands

Community Forum was a network of inner city residents’ associations and community groups that played a pivotal role in ensuring that local communities were effectively engaged in the implementation of Birmingham’s ground-breaking Urban Renewal Programme in the 1970’s through to the mid 1990’s. Community Forum was formed in 1973 and, for the following 25 years, it had a significant influence on the overall shape and direction of the programme, on how key elements of the programme were delivered and on subsequent developments.

‘Residents Renewing Their City: The Story of Community Forum’ was inspired by a 40th anniversary event held to celebrate the achievements of Community Forum. Following the event, contributors rewrote and extended their presentations to create a personal account of Community Forum. Additional material was then added in the form of an introductory chapter and a postscript. The postscript describes the lamentable state of urban renewal today and it argues that there is a pressing need to once again engage local communities in the regenerating Britain’s areas of older housing.

‘Residents Renewing Their City: The Story of Community Forum’ is published by Localise West Midlands, The Warehouse, 54-57 Allison Street, Digbeth, Birmingham B5 5TH (0121 6851155 or info@localisewestmidlands.org.uk)

The print version of the report costs £10. Further copies can be purchased from the editor, Jon Stevens, at jon.stevens777@gmail.com