

# Regional development agencies

Article 13 sets out the role of Regional Development Agencies in urban regeneration projects

BY DR PAUL TOYNE

Established in 1999, Regional Development Agencies have become the UK Government's "silver bullet" for improving regional urban landscapes and narrowing the gap between the economies of the south east and the rest of the country.

With a shared annual budget of £2.2 billion, the RDAs work to create jobs, innovation, competitiveness and investment. So how can RDAs link their role in boosting regional economies to investing in our towns and cities? A million pounds spent

on a master plan does not by itself deliver many of the aims that Government is so keen to see.

Yet clean, airy, public spaces, pleasant parks, artworks, and waterfront walkways sprinkled with cafes are generally signs of an affluent area and a thriving economy.

At their outset, the RDAs had significant holdings – office developments, business parks and so on. But most RDAs now have divested this estate management burden, letting the private sector take on these enterprises.

## 'Blueprint' joint venture

Instead, we are seeing new approaches like "Blueprint", a joint venture between the East Midlands Development Agency and Igloo Regeneration, a company which has made its name via building projects which are only implemented if they deliver profit alongside environmental benefits.

Cities are at the core of the UK's economy. But although cities are places where people are choosing to live, loft-style apartments alone will not drive the much needed regeneration of our towns and inner cities.

Instead, if our cities are to be places where people want to stay beyond their twenty-something

years, they need businesses which provide jobs, opportunities for leisure, schools and parks.

These things bring a city to life. It needs to be in high quality buildings, with architecture that is distinctive and memorable, not bland, safe, faceless developments for nondescript offices or chain retail stores. Quality does cost more, but the RDAs can demonstrate to developers that higher costs can deliver better value in the long term.

## Urban Regeneration Companies

Urban Regeneration Companies (URC) are the bodies set up to focus on transforming cities into these liveable places and RDAs play a vital role in making that transformation happen.

In Yorkshire & Humber, Sheffield, Hull and Bradford all have URCs, which bring together developers, business investors, communities and the RDA, Yorkshire Forward, to agree and then implement ambitious programmes of development.

## Urban villages

And even in cities without URCs, RDAs can help local authorities raise their game. RDAs fund planning for "urban villages" and even the development of some of the trickier sites and buildings – like the historic Round Foundry in Leeds' Holbeck Urban Village – can turn an area blighted by pollution and industry into a complex of digital and media businesses.

So one important role of RDAs in urban regeneration is to bring government cash into the regions, but another, arguably more important one, is to bring some focus, drive, pride and ambition back to the redevelopment of our cities.

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PASSIONATE PEOPLE  
make the difference

**There are places across the country where urban decay has been banished, where communities are restored and social enterprises thrive.** The key to this is the committed involvement of people who live there – people with passion for their communities. There are 15 places in the UK, which have been designated as Guide Neighbourhoods, where residents (tenants, owner-occupiers, leaseholders...) have led the regeneration process and are tasked with sharing their secret with the wider world. Community groups from anywhere in England, Wales or Scotland can apply for a bursary to visit one of these Guide Neighbourhoods to see what they have achieved and to hear how they did it. Guide Neighbourhoods are funded through the government's Together We Can initiative.

**Information:** [www.housingjustice.org.uk](http://www.housingjustice.org.uk) or Tel: 020 7723 7273 x229 or Email [regnerate@housingjustice.org.uk](mailto:regnerate@housingjustice.org.uk)

**Making our communities places where people want to live...** restoring pride; rebuilding homes; maintaining estates; greening the environment; clearing litter; improving transport; making neighbourhoods safe; driving out drug dealers, pimps, prostitutes; tackling anti-social behaviour; forming tenant associations; starting social enterprises; creating employment; improving health; working with education; engaging in politics; working with local authority officers; partnering with professionals; training in skills; bringing people together across faith and age divisions; involving young people; setting up community intranets ...**You can too!**





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