Accelerating housebuilding in our cities

Building an effective city partnership for housing growth:
what we have learned

Sheffield Together Partnership October 2026





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FOREWORD

SHEFFIELD HAS COME A LONG WAY IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS. WE KNEW THAT WE NEEDED HELP, SO WE ASKED FOR IT. WE HAVE BUILT A PARTNERSHIP THAT IS WILLING TO ROLL UP ITS SLEEVES AND GET INTO THE DETAILS OF WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE.

Most cities in England are facing strong headwinds in building new homes. For cities like Sheffield – with its legacy of brownfield land – the regeneration challenge is even more complex. How do we sort out these messy development challenges? How do we bring investment, confidence and momentum back to our cities?

Sheffield has come a long way in the last five years. We knew that we needed help, so we asked for it. We have built a partnership that is willing to roll up its sleeves and get into the details of what needs to change. We have seen investment return to Sheffield.

When the Housing Minister visited us in 2025, he recognised the difference. He encouraged us by describing the work here as "an exemplar of ambitious housing growth and place-based regeneration."

We say this not to blow our own trumpet, but to highlight how change can happen. It has been a team effort. Sheffield City Council has partnered with Homes England, the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority, the Sheffield Property Association and key local Housing Associations.

After five years, we have taken the time to review our partnership – to see where we can push harder or need to improve, as well as to think about what comes next. We still have much work to do.

We have also learned a few things along the way. The purpose of this report is to share these lessons with other cities. We have not got everything right, but we have made substantial progress in our mission to accelerate housebuilding and regeneration in Sheffield. We have built a shared ambition, unblocked bottlenecks and strengthened joint working across sectors. We have built a team for Sheffield.

We hope this report is helpful to you and your partners.



Kate Josephs
Chief Executive
Sheffield City Council



Tom Bridges
Regional Executive Director
Homes England

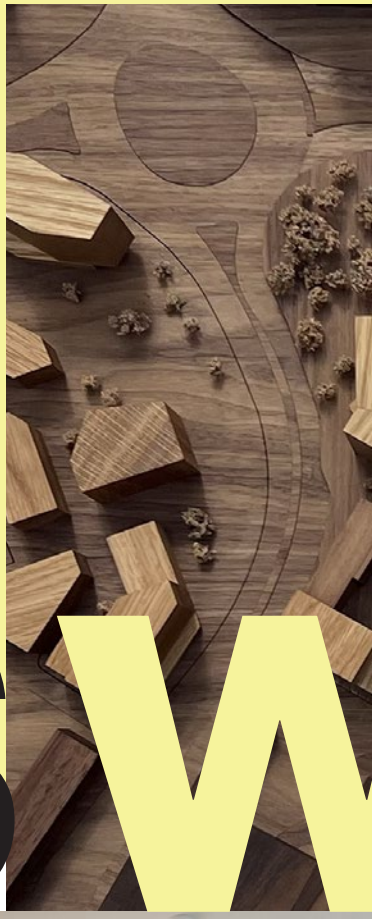
This paper was prepared by Tim Thorlby, Director of Beautiful Enterprise, together with Lee Shostak OBE.
It draws on research interviews with a dozen stakeholders from across the partnership, conducted in early autumn 2026.
All of the contributors' time is gratefully appreciated.

SECTION ONE

Our Mission

Who we are & where we started

The Sheffield Together Partnership (STP) began work in 2021 as a shared ambition to accelerate house building and regeneration in the city. We brought the public and private sectors together to deliver a step-change in investment and housebuilding, bringing new momentum to development in the city.



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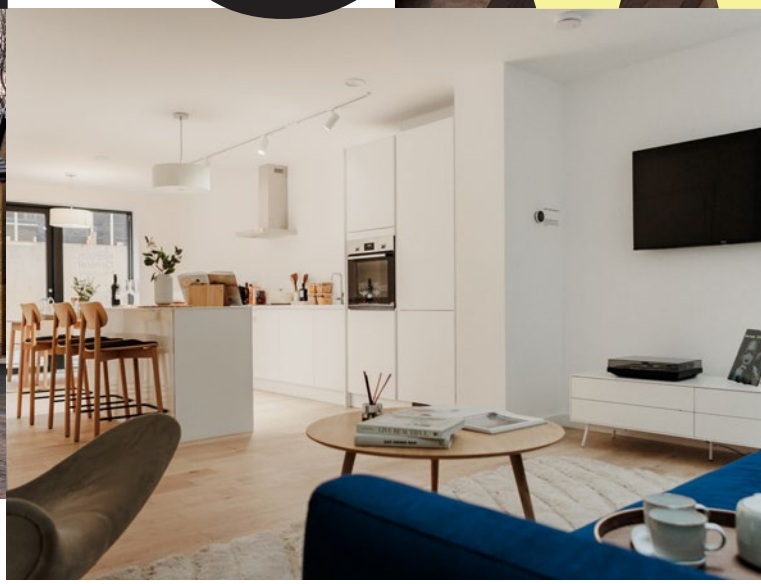


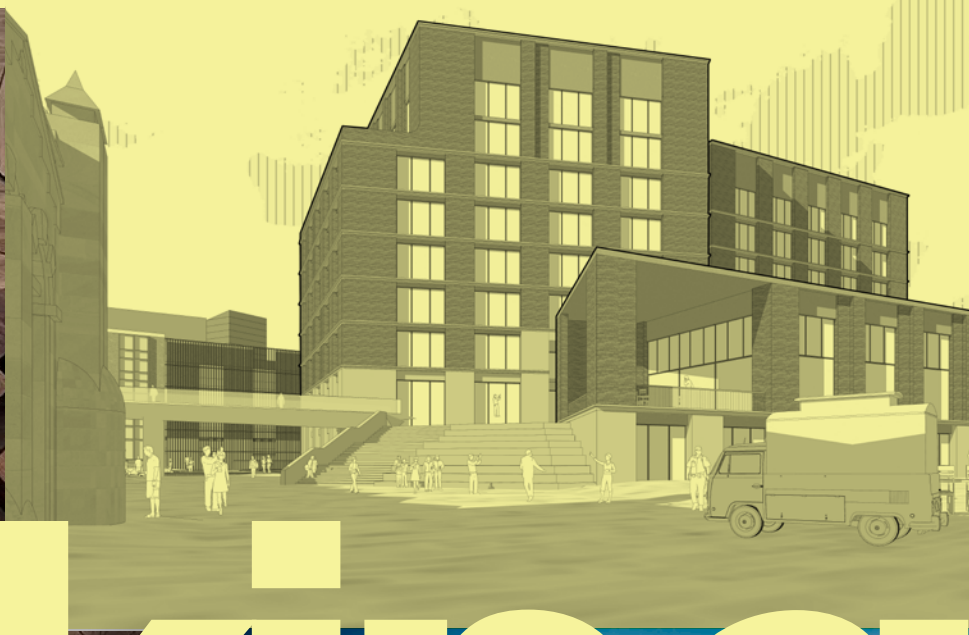
The partnership comprises Sheffield City Council, Homes England and the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA), together with the Sheffield Property Association, representing the private sector and the South Yorkshire Housing Partnership, representing a dozen Registered Providers.

As one of England's largest cities, Sheffield has significant ambitions. The historic shift away from the traditional industries of the 20th Century to the high-tech sectors which are growing here today has given us a challenge to repurpose land and property across the city.

So, we have put in place bold plans to do just that. We want to build nearly 40,000 homes in the city, mostly on brownfield land, and also deliver innovation-led economic growth to create thousands of jobs.

Accelerating the regeneration of the city centre is a key part of this housing and economic jigsaw, and so that is where much of the Sheffield Together Partnership's work has been focused so far.





Working





When we started, we knew that 'business as usual' was not working. We needed to work together much more effectively to overcome the sizeable challenges we saw in Sheffield. We did not have a track record of working closely with each other. Homes England was a funder of projects, but not really a partner. Relationships between the public and private sector were underdeveloped. The level of public investment into the city's regeneration was well below that of other core cities.

Five years ago, we recognised that we needed, collectively, to do better. We wanted to achieve a step change in investment in our city.

And we shared a willingness to try working together differently. We wanted to build an effective partnership that delivered results and was not just a talking shop.

It has been hard work, and – like many – we face significant headwinds; inflation, housing viability challenges, economic uncertainty, public spending constraints. Working together to deliver shared ambitions has never been more essential.

This short document tells our story and shares what we have learned.

SECTION TWO

Our impact

Progress and benefits



BY BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP, WITH SHARED AMBITIONS AND A 'ONE TEAM' CULTURE, WE HAVE MADE TANGIBLE PROGRESS IN TRANSLATING TARGETS INTO IMPLEMENTATION. THESE ARE THE HIGHLIGHTS OF WHAT WE HAVE ACHIEVED SO FAR.

2,000

We have identified and enabled a housing pipeline of a dozen `early win' sites, delivering over 2000 homes, with nine of these starting within two years and `spades in the ground' on 1,100 homes already. These sites have been enabled through a mix of Homes England and SYMCA support, as required - grants, loans, equity investments and revenue.

"The Sheffield Partnership has been the driver for turning around the housing situation in Sheffield… giving us a robust pipeline of schemes, which is more than just a spreadsheet - these are deliverable schemes."

DIRECTOR, SOUTH YORKSHIRE MAYORAL COMBINED AUTHORITY

3

We have put in place Development Frameworks for three major catalytic interventions in the city centre, delivering three new neighbourhoods with over 4,000 new homes and over 1,000 new city-centre jobs between them. These are large-scale, mixed-use developments in the heart of the city. Practical implementation plans have also been developed for each one to make these complex projects happen. The work is happening in stages. Delivery is still an early stage, but progress is being made.

In **Furnace Hill and Neepsend**, two new and distinctive neighbourhoods will be created, delivering a mix of market and affordable housing. This is our first catalyst project. The area has been planned, resources have been identified and approved, developers have now been procured. This project is on its way; we hope to see `spades in the ground' from 2028.

In the **Moorfoot** area, an urban quarter will be reshaped with new public realm and new housing, opening up one of the city-centre's most important gateways. Plans are agreed, resources are being approved, partners are now being secured.

Investments in the **Station Campus** will significantly improve a key gateway to the city for visitors arriving by train and create a vibrant mixed-used quarter with housing and new commercial space. Plans are agreed, resources are being approved and partners are now being secured.

£140M

Homes England engagement in Sheffield has increased from an average £6m per year before 2021 to £140m of commitments made in the last two years, and with a further £65m of investment currently being developed in partnership with SYMCA. There is more to come. This is being enabled by our work in shaping and making major projects that are investable.

"The Sheffield Together Partnership has really been quite significant."

DIRECTOR, SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

Half a £Billion

We estimate that Homes England investment is likely to lever in half a billion pounds of private investment to the city over the next 7 years.

When the Homes England schemes (including Fitzwilliam Square, Park Hill, The Balance, Hollis Croft, Attercliffe, Furnace Hill & Neepsend) are matched with recent SYMCA commitments from the Brownfield Housing programme (including Sylvester Gardens, The Hive, Cotton Mill, Nursery Street, One Riverside, Copper Street, West Bar) this figure rises to approaching £1B private sector leverage committed.

Nine sites

We have assembled key sites in each of the three city-centre neighbourhoods at pace, with nine sites already acquired across these neighbourhoods. Close working between Homes England and Sheffield City Council has been essential in making this possible and speeding up the process. Homes England has also taken the lead on committing to use its compulsory purchase powers, if required, with Sheffield providing one of its first test cases.

200 new affordable homes

The city's integrated affordable housing programme has secured delivery partners for nine sites, which have benefited from funds from Homes England for technical and legal due diligence. These ring-fenced sites are delivering 200 new affordable homes, with more sites in the pipeline for release to the market in late 2026.

Our partnership is also working on longer term plans to deliver housing after 2030 in the Don Valley, including a new neighbourhood in Attercliffe for which a development framework has been prepared.

The partnership was also pleased to be shortlisted for a number of awards during 2026, winning a National Planning Award.

Who benefits?

Each organisation in our partnership has its own role to play and also benefits in different ways. In working more closely together, partners are better placed to deliver their own missions:

The Local Authority and local communities

The local authority is able to accelerate housing schemes by closer working with partners, successfully accessing more funding from Homes England, SYMCA and national government for the regeneration of our city. This is delivering more new homes and is directly benefiting local communities in Sheffield.

South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority

SYMCA benefits from a growing and robust pipeline of investable housing-based regeneration projects which can be supported through public grants and private investment.

SYMCA is working to bring in more public and private investment to South Yorkshire, so being able to deliver investable opportunities is key to building this momentum.

Housing developers and investors

The partnership's shared commitment to the regeneration of key sites in Sheffield and its willingness to invest public resources in these projects is helping to build confidence amongst private investors and developers to work in Sheffield. Public sector leadership can help to de-risk private investments and help to attract new resources. Agreed, long term strategies help to provide greater predictability for investors too.

Registered Providers

The partnership helps to build closer working relationships between the region's Registered Providers, the City Council and SYMCA, with a view to developing a deliverable pipeline of affordable housing in the city.

Homes England

The partnership is shaping up packages of projects which the agency, SYMCA and the National Housing Bank can invest in and

"Partners are aligned on the mission, which is very powerful and cuts through issues."

DIRECTOR, HOUSING DEVELOPER



SECTION THREE

How we work

OUR PARTNERSHIP'S HOUSING GROWTH BOARD MET FOR THE FIRST TIME IN DECEMBER 2021 AND WE HAVE BEEN DEVELOPING OUR PLANS AND WORKING TOGETHER FOR FIVE YEARS.

WE CLASSED OUR FIRST 12 MONTHS AS YEAR ZERO, WHILST WE WERE EFFECTIVELY FORMULATING OUR STRATEGY, ARRANGING OUR GOVERNANCE, AND MOBILISING ACTIVITY. OUR WORKING ARRANGEMENTS ARE SUMMARISED HERE.

Clear, shared aims

All partners agreed shared ambitions for the partnership at the outset, with a clear focus on accelerating progress towards the city's housing growth targets

Our partnership arrangements have deliberately been kept simple, with a minimum of paperwork and formality and the emphasis on building good working relationships. A clear, written Programme Initiation Document was drawn up and agreed within Homes England, with key terms agreed with other partners, in order to facilitate a broad shared understanding as to the nature of the partnership at the beginning.

"Senior buy-in within an organisation gives a 'butterfly effect' and means that things just get done faster."

SENIOR MANAGER, NATIONAL HOUSING BANK

Senior leaders are in the room

Our partnership board (the 'Sheffield Together Housing Growth Board') brings together the main housing delivery organisations from across the public and private sectors and ensures that the key senior decision-makers are in the room together. This includes Sheffield City Council, Homes England, the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA), Sheffield Property Association and the South Yorkshire Housing Partnership.

The City Council's Chief Executive chairs the Board and the Leader of the Council attends. The directors of all key departments also contribute.

Homes England's Regional Director attends, together with the senior manager who co-ordinates the work of the partnership.

Our Board meets quarterly to drive progress, identify blockages and make decisions.

In order to make this work and maintain momentum, a sub-group of our Board also meets monthly to review progress and focus on problem-solving, led by the Council's Executive Director, with senior executives from the other key partners - Homes England, the South Yorkshire Housing Partnership, the Sheffield Property Association and SYMCA. There are two project Boards, for the Moorfoot and Station projects, plus other smaller sub-groups focused on managing particular workstreams.

Homes England undertakes the secretariat function, requiring a few days per month of management time. The direct costs of running the partnership are modest. Short board papers are prepared and circulated in advance to aid decision-making.

We prepare an Annual Review of our progress every year and this is circulated to over 500 interested partners. This not only ensures that everyone is fully sighted on the achievements of the partnership but also holds the partnership's 'feet to the fire' by sharing openly and publicly what we are doing, the progress we are making and how we address the challenges we face.

Our catalytic role is understood

Our local authority plays a key role in leading the partnership, fulfilling its role as the lead 'place maker' in Sheffield and ensuring that our partnership is democratically accountable to our local community.

Our partnership operates within, and seeks to implement, the city's agreed land use planning framework and its housing strategy, with Homes England providing technical and financial implementation support, as well as co-ordinating the work of the partnership. The Sheffield Property Association and the Sheffield Housing Partnership also collaborate and contribute to the work.

This partnership does not attempt to 'do it all' but has a clear catalytic role to identify those places and projects where investment will help to build momentum to achieve long-term self-sustaining regeneration.

Workstreams are agreed

From the beginning, our partnership agreed six workstreams to focus its time and funding on. This included workstreams to:

- deliver a pipeline of housing sites in the shorter-term,
- develop the three major catalyst projects in the city-centre projects, aiming to deliver housing in the medium-term and longer-term
- develop a programme of affordable housing in the short term and longer term
- address practical delivery/implementation issues
- monitor performance
- undertake regular communications

We try to ensure that we communicate our work clearly internally between partners, within our member organisations and more widely. We also produce occasional 'think pieces' to stimulate consideration of longer-term challenges, such as a recent discussion on housing viability.

Our city strategy fits within the Mayor of South Yorkshire's strategy

Sheffield Together is a city-level delivery partnership, but we work closely with the Mayor of South Yorkshire to ensure that our work fits within that of the wider Strategic Place Partnership for South Yorkshire. The pipeline of housing projects which we develop is a shared pipeline.

Some of the Homes England team are now co-located at SYMCA's offices in Sheffield. SYMCA and Homes England have also now agreed one of England's first Place Delivery Agreements to guide joint working for the next few years. The established South Yorkshire Strategic Place Partnership is now evolving to take more responsibility and deliver a greater level of resourcing, attended by senior Homes England officers and the Council's Executive Director, with the Place Delivery Agreement providing a new framework for joint action. We will make devolution work for South Yorkshire and Sheffield.



SECTION FOUR

Lessons learned

Sharing our experience

In the last few years, the Sheffield Together Partnership has accelerated progress towards housebuilding in the city by building a consensus on shared priorities, unblocking bottlenecks and strengthening partnerships with the private sector and housing associations.

By focusing on projects of strategic value, partners have co-ordinated their work to deliver to the same objectives, on the same sites and on the same timetables. Joining up our decision-making and investment – across organisational and departmental boundaries - has been at the heart of partners' work.

The relatively modest investment of secretariat time by Homes England to facilitate the work of the partnership, together with the time commitment provided by each partner, is adding value to all of our work and ensuring a greater impact across the board.

Our partnership has collectively reflected on 'what makes our partnership work' and identified a number of specific lessons, which we share with you here.

01

Our Chief Executive leads from the front

Leadership from the Council is essential

The support of the City Council's Chief Executive in chairing the Board from day one, with full engagement from the Council Leader too, has ensured a consistency of senior corporate and political leadership in every board meeting.

The city council has an essential role to play in housing through its planning framework, affordable housing strategy, land ownership and many other public services. The Chief Executive's full engagement in the partnership helps to ensure joined up and timely responses from the council.

This engagement also came with a stance that we were prepared to "invite other partners in" to work together in an open and honest way. This can be an uncomfortable change, but engaging with partners without being open with them would not have been nearly as productive.

02

All partners play at the same level

Senior leadership from every partner is essential

The willingness of other partners to match the Council's senior-level commitment has been essential in ensuring the effective operation of the board. It also sends an important signal back into every organisation that the partnership's work matters. It raises everybody's game. As a result, the Board have been able to take significant decisions and build momentum on major projects. An example of this was our Board's early willingness to approve, in principle, the use of Compulsory Purchase Orders.

"The level of co-ordination within the team means that decisions can be made much faster."

SENIOR MANAGER, NATIONAL HOUSING BANK

"The partnership is not about being best mates; a good relationship is about having a space where we can challenge each other and resolve tensions as well as celebrate what's working"

DIRECTOR, SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

03

Homes England is joined up

Homes England's integrated working accelerates projects

Sheffield Together has benefited from a senior Homes England manager who has drawn together and co-ordinated the work of a multi-functional team within the agency, and who supports the operation of the partnership.

Many skills are required for complex regeneration projects and Homes England is able to draw on a wide range of expertise, as well as various legal powers and flexible funding streams. A high degree of collaboration is needed to make the most of this potential.

Over the last few years, experienced members of 14 different teams from across Homes England have deployed their expertise on projects in Sheffield, working closely together. By considering projects for a city alongside each other, a more rounded perspective on opportunities and risks can also be achieved. Decisions are also made significantly faster.

Currently this team meets monthly to co-ordinate their work, check progress against their agreed programme and ensure good communication. They also meet face to face on an annual basis to celebrate progress and plan for the following year, with a senior leader of the council often joining them to personally recognise their contribution.

Homes England's role is subtly different in this context. It is not just helping to build a 'pipeline of projects' but working with local partners to put together a place-based package of interdependent projects to regenerate a city. The lens is 'place' not just 'project'.

"We spend a lot of time getting our 'ducks in a row' across departments and partners – it's a key reason why this partnership gets things done."

SENIOR MANAGER, HOMES ENGLAND



04

We are 'project makers'

Plans need to be turned into a pipeline of deliverable projects

As in all cities, the City Council leads on developing clear land use plans and development frameworks for our priority regeneration areas. This is essential for ensuring that all partners have a shared understanding of where the priorities for investment lie.

But each priority area then needs to be followed up with a detailed implementation process. The devil is in the detail. Where a city cannot rely on the investment and risk-taking of speculative development, it will need a plan for intervention in the market to manage the risks necessary to build confidence and bring in developers. The partnership needs a firm grip on the implementation process if plans are to be translated into reality.

Homes England plays more than an advisory role here, it is a 'project maker', rolling up its sleeves and helping us to make new packages of projects which are brought to the point of being 'developer-ready'.

An early exercise for our partnership in Sheffield was to identify a pipeline of potential housing sites. These were then checked for land ownership, remediation issues and economic viability so that we could be clear about what the barriers and issues on each site might be. Sites were then prioritised for support after their prospects for implementation were properly understood. We turned a plan into a pipeline.

Land assembly is a key challenge, particularly in complex urban areas. The use of compulsory purchase powers – or in our case in Sheffield, just the prospect of using them – has been a key tool on some sites. We will do whatever it takes.

05

We are building a culture of collaboration

Joining up the work of departments and organisations creates a 'one team' culture

At the heart of Sheffield Together is a set of practical arrangements that not only sees joined up decision-making within Homes England but also within the City Council and then again between the City Council and Homes England.

We have been trying to build one team across organisational and departmental boundaries.

The City of Sheffield is one of the largest local authority areas in England so joining up the work of its departments internally is important - including planning, property, legal services and housing. This work is also co-ordinated externally with housing associations and developers.

We have worked hard to build a 'one team' culture of collaboration, with shared ambitions and a 'can do' attitude. These relationships take time to build; it requires intentional partnership development. Having all sectors represented on the board enables a strong degree of co-ordination.

We are building a shared commitment and an openness and trust with each other. This takes time but is essential. These relationships have strengthened over time as we have learnt how to work with each other and so our effectiveness has also increased over time. The greater trust has allowed greater devolution of responsibilities in some areas, speeding up the work. We work better together today than we did five years ago.

06

We keep moving

Building momentum requires accountability and timely problem-solving

A key element of our ability to make progress is the work and problem-solving that happens between board meetings. The monthly meetings of the board's sub-group are where practical issues or bottlenecks are identified and resolved, or where the decision is made to escalate a thorny challenge. Regular communication and mutual accountability are essential to unblocking these issues.

There is discipline and diligence involved in holding each other to account and fixing problems. The advantage of this is that it helps to build a 'rhythm of delivery'. By keeping key projects high on our list of priorities each week, we ensure that momentum is not lost. There is an expectation of progress.



07

Partners have different roles to play

Homes England can play the role of 'honest broker' in some cases

One of the roles that Homes England has played in our partnership is that of 'honest broker' between local partners. This has helped to identify issues and build more constructive relationships. Sometimes an impartial, external view can help us break out of well-travelled ruts.

08

We seek out new partners

Homes England can connect the city's team to national opportunities

One of the contributions that the agency has made to the Sheffield Together Partnership is drawing on its national networks to introduce potential developers and investors to the city. Regular 'tours' have been run to introduce people to the city if they are not familiar with it, and to answer questions and gauge interest. We welcome new partners on a regular basis.

The agency has also begun to draw together SME housing developers within the Sheffield city region, as a new Sheffield Developers Forum, to support their growing engagement in the city and identify ways we might enable development of the sector for mutual benefit.

The agency can also draw on in-house national expertise and links into its own new National Housing Bank, bringing its 'national toolkit' to bear in overcoming local challenges.



09

We're building a city for the 21st Century

We are not just building houses, we are rebuilding confidence in this city

Whilst hitting ambitious housing targets is high on our agenda, there is a wider mission being addressed in our work. Our long-term aim is to rebuild investor confidence in the city - and in every part of the city - so that regeneration can become self-sustaining. Interventions are chosen for their strategic significance as well as their housing outputs. Our ambitions are huge and our time horizon is long. We are not done yet.

SECTION FIVE

Future parti

Building place-based partnerships for housing growth



"The open and transparent relationship we have with the city council is key to our partnership working."

HEAD OF COMPULSORY PURCHASE, HOMES ENGLAND



nership

We need to change to remain effective

Speaking for our own partnership, we know that we are not perfect and that there is always room for improvement.

As part of this 'lessons learned' review we have identified a handful of issues that need further discussion. As our major catalyst projects begin to mature, we may soon find ourselves with the bandwidth to think about what comes next. Where are the next priorities for us to focus our attention on?

Our agenda for the next five years is still being shaped. In particular, how do we build on the momentum we have achieved to scale up our capabilities to shape new projects and secure greater investment? How can we accelerate our affordable housing provision? Do we need to think more about supply chain issues in the region? There is so much more to do.

The shift towards greater devolution also has implications for how we operate and relate to SYMCA in particular. Today, this is very much a work in progress.

We know that if we are to remain effective then we have to be prepared to keep moving – fixing things that do not work well and addressing new challenges and opportunities.

Working with the Mayor: partnership not duplication

The role of a city-level partnership such as ours – with its focus on 'joining up the dots' of implementation at a local level – is quite different in nature to the Mayor's strategic sub-regional partnership, which is more concerned with inter-authority co-ordination of strategy and resourcing. Both are essential, but they are different in role and require different skills and structures.

Part of our shared challenge going forward is to work out how we can best play to our strengths – adding value to each other's work but without duplicating tasks.

Our role at city level is to shape and make investable projects and bring them to the point of being 'investor ready'.

A sub-regional partnership led by a Mayor has quite a different role. It will need to agree the long-term priorities and resourcing envelopes for each authority area. It will be responsible for appraising and allocating funding to projects and it will, no doubt, have a keen interest in holding city level partnerships to account for their progress.

For local authorities that do not need or want a city-level authority, the Mayor's own partnership will also put in place the arrangements for identifying and developing projects together.

Building your city partnership



FOR ANY LOCAL AUTHORITY INTERESTED IN DEVELOPING A HOUSING DELIVERY PARTNERSHIP, WE SUGGEST THAT THERE ARE TWO KEY QUESTIONS WORTH CONSIDERING.

Q: **Do you actually need a partnership?**

A: Not every city needs a partnership like this one. Only those with a significant scale of challenges and opportunities require this level of working. Partnerships always need to be relevant and proportional to the challenge.

Is there a shared sense amongst city partners that there is an unresolved challenge here that needs addressing? Would a partnership be a proportional response to this?

Q: **Is there appetite for this partnership?**

A: Is there a willingness from the local authority – and other partners – to meet at Chief Executive level on a regular basis?

We have found that the people involved in a process are just as important, if not more so, than the structures. Testing out this kind of mutual commitment at an early stage is probably essential.

Is there a clear vision for what partners want to achieve in the city and the political will to commit to this vision over the long term?

Finally...

If your answers to these two questions are 'yes' then maybe this kind of partnership is for you. We hope some of the lessons we have learned are helpful to you.

If you want to get in touch to find out more, please contact:

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SPA