UK COLLABORATIVE CENTRE FOR HOUSING EVIDENCE

Impact of housing design and placemaking on social value and wellbeing in the pandemic

Interim Report

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About the author

Flora Samuel is Professor at the University of Reading where she came from being Head at the University of Sheffield school to help start a school of Architecture delivering 'an education for uncertainty'. She has long been interested in the connections between people and the environment with a particular emphasis on mental health and spirituality and is trying to bring some of this into the industry value agenda, one outcome being her most recent book Why Architects Matter (2018). Flora was the first RIBA Vice President for Research and has been working hard to promote research in architectural practice, most notably through Post Occupancy Evaluation. In 2016 she set up the Research Practice Leads, a group of over 30 practices that meets quarterly to advance the cause of research of architectural research. Together they published the Social Value Toolkit for Architects with the RIBA earlier this year. This, together with her work on social value mapping has attracted considerable industry interest. She leads the 'place' strand within the UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence (CaCHE).

Interviewee abbreviations

Asset Manager Housing Provider (AMHP)

Design Director Development Organisation (DDDO)

Director of Housing Northern Ireland (DHNI)

Local Authority Representative England (LARE)

Architecture Civil Service (ACS)

Public Health organization (PH)

Local Authority Strategic Development (LASD)

North West Industry Commentator (NWIC)

Parks Charity (PC)

Preston Council Representative (PCR)

Scotland Social Housing Representative (SSH)

Senior Member Northern Ireland Civil Service (SMNICS)

Senior planning official in Welsh Government (SPWG)

Supply Chain Manager LoA (SCM)

Local Authority Planning Manager Wales (LAPM)

Councillor Wales (CLAW_0110)

Councillor Wales (CLAW_099)

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UK COLLABORATIVE CENTRE FOR HOUSING EVIDENCE

Executive Summary

The pandemic offers an opportunity to build back better both for future resilience and to address the Climate Change Emergency which has not been forgotten. Changes to the planning system to accelerate economic growth have been shown not to work. Planning is too important to be done hastily. Given the likelihood of a recession great care needs to be taken with the use of scant resources. Planning policy and local authorities that focus on wellbeing and placemaking are more resilient to events such as the pandemic as they already had systems in place that in some way addressed many of the problems caused by the pandemic.

Resilience starts with the home, its design and its context. Flexible space is needed in all homes as they increasingly become places of work. All homes should have access to balconies, daylight and broadband. Digital inclusion has become a major issue as services are increasingly delivered online.

Parks, green space and walking routes have been well used during the pandemic. Not only as a place for exercise and meetings with friends, but also as a place of escape from overcrowded and uncomfortable accommodation during the summer months. They have been particularly important to those people who lack garden space or balconies or even windows in their homes. A statutory requirement for adequate levels of good quality green and amenity space for all new planning proposals is needed across the UK. The Fields In Trust offers a system for calculating levels of space. The pandemic offers an opportunity to rethink density and the way people move around their neighbourhoods. Travel and health need to be seen as an integrated agenda. Public investment is needed in integrated transport systems to ensure access for all.

The use of local services and materials needs to be encouraged at every level, especially public procurement and in the choreography of our high streets. This includes local construction companies who need support and investment (including the development of safer off site construction) as they are best positioned to deliver new homes to their communities. Community spaces need to be protected and enhanced. They play a major role in volunteering efforts and in reducing social isolation and could be expanded to include a other purposes such as health education and the support of small businesses. Redundant buildings such as empty office and workspaces, shops and student accommodation needs to be repurposed in a responsible, holistic way that offers spillover benefits to the community.

The way that government and local authorities deliver services needs to be reviewed in light of learning from the pandemic. Some had great difficulty delivering services in the initial stages of lock down simply because of a lack of laptop provision and IT support, a situation that seemed to be worse in the public sector. Organisations that already had flexible working arrangements with staff that regularly work from home were able to bounce back more quickly. Advanced budgetary planning is needed for emergencies enabling national governments and local authorities to act responsibly and efficiently without concerns about who will pay. After years of austerity there is not enough fat in the system to cover such emergencies.

Going forward the centralisation of services needs to be reconsidered, with the government taking the lead on better dispersion of jobs across the UK, including rural areas, facilitated by digital communication. Dispersed small scale solutions may not lend themselves to current ways of auditing and promoting government achievements in this area (for example numbers of hospitals built). Other forms of auditing that measure impact more holistically are needed to capture the value of small interventions. Perhaps the most important lesson coming from the interviews is that new administrative groupings are needed in government and local authorities to ensure joined up strategy across the health, social care, transport and planning agendas.

Introduction and methodology

The pandemic has highlighted the key role of the built environment of homes and neighbourhoods in fostering resilience. As part of the CACHE project 'Housing Policies and the COVID 19 Epidemic' this interim report sets out initial conclusions from 17 interviews with stakeholders, drawn largely from government, local government and housing provider backgrounds across the UK (in housing the boundaries between private and public sector activity can be very blurred) that took place between June and September 2020 before the second wave of lock downs.

The remit of this report is to develop an understanding of the impact of the pandemic, largely in terms of social value, on the built environment of housing and places but the conversations inevitably strayed into the areas of healthcare, planning and the wider policy system. It is also important to stress the major differences between planning policy in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales that will become apparent below.

At the same time the team have been collecting a database of research on the impact of the Pandemic on homes and places undertaken during the pandemic. An analysis of this research will be included in the final report but in this fast moving area mention should be made of two important studies that explore the experience of home during the pandemic, one by the Quality of Life Foundation (2020) and one by the Place Alliance (2020).

The findings are structured in two sections, the first capturing some of the changes that happened during the initial lockdown and the second setting out a series of important themes that need to be addressed if we are to build back better. The report is prefaced by an executive summary of the key recommendations developed through the research..

1. Changes made during the initial lockdown

This section begins with a brief mention of adjustments made to working arrangements within organisations before moving on to the development of emergency systems and ways of communicating and supporting tenants and other more vulnerable members of the community. The discussion then moves to the impact of the pandemic on places, the planning system and housing delivery.

1.1 Adjustments to ways of working in organisations

The ability of an organisation to adapt to online ways of working had a major impact on outcomes during the pandemic. 'Digital platforms that we have always had have suddenly become much more important' (ACS). In organisations where people already spent part of their week working from home, the adjustment to home working was quite straightforward (AMHP, p.2). One developer organisation took about two weeks to make the adjustment (DDDO, p.2). Development work continued through the pandemic if slightly delayed even within local authorities (LASD, p.4). In Northern Ireland only about a third of staff had laptops making it very difficult to work from home at first (SMNICS, p.3) meaning that it wasn't really till June that things were running properly online. Despite these challenges a Northern Ireland respondent remarked on the speed with which critical pieces of legislation had been delivered 'a lot of stuff which was always impossible, or which you never could have done all of a sudden became possible' (SMNICS, p.3).

For some the ability to meet without having to travel has been a major benefit resulting in more productivity (ACS).

One respondent strongly regretted the ability to interact with people at work, making tea and so on and believed that these kinds of interactions were still very important (ACS, p.8). It seems that those with childcare responsibilities were under considerable pressure to keep working. Many spoke feelingly of the difficulties of sharing the kitchen table for home schooling with parents and children vying for space and bandwidth to work, an experience shared with many of their customers and clients.

Several of the respondents had been re-deployed or had colleagues who had been redeployed over the lock down period. MHCLG for example set up a special COVID working group involving a large proportion of its staff (ACS). Local authority respondents spoke of the way their organisations stopped work on anything that wasn't considered critical and many moved into other roles (LASD, p.4) then there was a move to 'transition planning' (LASD, p.4). Certainly the pandemic had offered some opportunities for new and improved ways of working (LASD, p.4).

A director of a development organisation observed that nobody was furloughed as the pressure to achieve deadlines remained (projects under construction and those about to hit construction and projects that needed to be put in for planning permission).

A respondent from Scotland observed that some housing associations had furloughed very large numbers of their staff, adding that he found this 'confusing, because they haven't stopped collecting the rent' (SSH, p.8). This respondent speculated that some landlord organisations would be 'sitting on the cash pile' at the end of the year (SSH, p.9).

It became apparent during the interviews that many managers had had to act first even though they weren't sure when or how the things they were doing would be paid for – clearly this had involved some taking major risks around budgetary concerns. An example would be Northern Ireland which has a time lag before it knows when money has come available (SMNICS, p.4). The question of which department was to foot the bill is complex (SMNICS). Worries about where the money would come from are clearly profound in cash strapped local authorities often entirely focused on savings for fear of going bankrupt. 'Although the government's promised all this money, we've not seen any of it yet and I'm not sure we're going to get it' (SCM, p.5). A focus on savings and little else has made it very difficult to capitalise on opportunities presented by the pandemic to develop new ways of working (LASD, p.12).

1.2 The development of emergency systems

There was a real sense of pride within local authorities at the way that they had managed to respond to the pandemic, sometimes in spite of confusing central government messaging. This despite what one disinterested observer described as a lack of faith from central government than local authorities could deliver (NWIC, p.10). Another commented ' I think if you look at local authorities and the way that they've responded in this time they've demonstrated that they're like the most agile and flexible organisations'. Being at 'the heart of their communities' they were better able to get the necessary infrastructure in place than anyone else (LASD, p.12).

The emergency kick started a range of positive collaborations across organisations (SMNICS, LASD, p.13). Several organisations had set up panels developing short medium and long term plans for recovery. In the case of one London borough this included representation from all the private and public sector partnership groups (SCM, p.5). Many local authorities have gold, silver and bronze levels of incident response. During the lockdown 'running a gold' became a semi-permanent state (LASD, p.13). Emergency co-opting of local authority staff to other parts of the organisation and new kinds of groupings had led to new types of understanding, connection and ways of working.

One local authority supply chain manager was concerned with supplier relief, making sure that they had the funds to get through (SCM) and making sure they had guidance for reopening. This was particularly important as the bankruptcy of suppliers, including local house builders, would further jeopardise recovery. The local authority had

to ensure there was a fund to cover suppliers who couldn't access from local or central government, for example on line businesses. This role also covered PPE. An internal business steering group was set up to work across the council to agree priorities. There seems to be vulnerability around the interface between private and public sector services, particularly care homes. For example, the respondent had to make sure cleaning contracts stayed in place in care homes and that those staff weren't furloughed (SCM, p.5).

1.3 Communication with the community

How best to communicate with the community became a real issue during the pandemic , particularly when so many suffer from 'digital exclusion' (DHNI, p.9), particularly amongst the elderly. Face to face contact stopped for housing providers except in the case of emergencies (AMHP). Some housing providers made major efforts to develop new ways to communicate (DHNI, p.10) with one experimenting with an App that would enable clients to send photos or films of problems in their building in this way reducing the need for maintenance people to come into the building (AMHP). One respondent observed positively about the move to online communication that the pandemic had shown 'there's another way that we can engage with people that we weren't doing before' (LASD, p.5). Projects that were perceived to need face to face engagement have been delayed (LASD, p.6).

1.4 Supporting vulnerable communities

Local Authorities played a central role in supporting vulnerable communities as they are responsible for social care. Reference was made to useful Local Government Association guidance on mental health and wellbeing (LGA, 2020). An increase in mental health issues and domestic abuse remain major issue (PCR, p.2). Local authorities have played a major role in calling round to check up on shielding people (LASD, p.14).

It became apparent that some housing providers, particularly those whose tenants are drawn from vulnerable communities, were also offering a quasi-social service to their clients, listening to problems, bringing in food and medicine and offering basis resources such as pots and pans to those who generally lived on take away meals (AMHP, p.2). Such high level care was not universal however - one respondent observed that engagement with tenants had been a 'casualty' during the first three months of lockdown: 'it just died' (SSH, p.14). It was felt that these kinds of services are best offered locally by those who understand the context (LASD, p.15).

New definitions vulnerable are perhaps needed in a pandemic. Size of homes, lack of flexibility and open plan living are major issues for wellbeing (DDDO, p.10). In London it is very normal for a four person family to live in a two bed apartment – 'there's not enough space for them to live' (DDDO, p.10).

> . . .and that's one of the factors that has led those in most deprived areas suffering, most under lockdown and, as a consequence of COVID-19, its overcrowding its high density housing impacting people's ability to self-isolate and manage the virus risk but also the huge difficulties that families face when they're stuck, long term in your smallish accommodation without access to outside space without even a balcony (SSH, p.3).

The management of lifts in high rise housing has been a problem and a contributor to social isolation (a major health issue), particularly in places like Glasgow where there is a lot of high rise housing (SSH, p.12). The building management and cleaning of common areas has been an issue (SSH, p.12). Many respondents expressed concerns about those living in small homes (LASD, p.8), particularly those who were shielding and young people furloughed 'in really tight' accommodation with limited access to outside space. 'What will happen in the winter months?' (ACS, p.6). Research by the Quality of Life Foundation has borne out these suspicions that young people have suffered disproportionately during lock down (QOLF, 2020). Social isolation was and continues to be a major concern (NWIC, p.2). One Councillor respondent spoke of the serious impact on the elderly of not being able to meet in existing community spaces 'So the elderly, you have to have an environment which is all encompassing and allows you to do

so many different things" (CLAW_0110, p.2).

Lack of joined up strategy around healthcare, places and buildings can have grave results. One example was cited of a homeless person sleeping rough with enduring mental health and addiction problems 'sending them a letter to ask them to come to an appointment is meaningless' (SSH, p.19).

> how you manage services to a highly vulnerable in the way you want them to just because you want them to deliver services in a different way and acknowledge you know this is some of the conversation about trauma informed service design, we've been getting lots of lectures about trauma informed service design and yet you still walk into GP waiting rooms, and there are no charging points via phone and there's no fresh water available, and they're booking for 10 minute appointments, when they know perfectly well that everyone's going to take 20 minutes so by the end of the day you're stacked up and folks are going daft (SSH, p.19).

Clearly new kinds of service design and facilities are needed to support people in these kinds of situations.

Many respondents expressed concern about the impact of the pandemic on equality (DDDO, p.7). Some second home owners were fortunate enough to move out of London for the entirety of the pandemic in a 'flight from density' (DDDO, p.7). Others – 'the hidden homeless - instead travel from sofa to sofa in an effort to keep off the streets (LARE).

COVID has given the Local Authorities an opportunity to provide accommodation to the homeless including those that were previously hidden before. This was a top priority in Northern Ireland (SMNICS) as it was in other parts of the UK. A desire to keep the vulnerable homeless out of overstretched hospitals resulted in some ingenuity. One respondent spoke of the need to spread people out across buildings with space for isolation. In Belfast a backpacker hostel into a facility for these people (paid for by the health budget, SMNICS, p.6). Some local authorities have built well publicised capsule container communities for the homeless during lock down. Whilst this addresses some immediate needs one respondent was concerned that proper consideration needs to made about how these homes and their owners are integrated within the local community and that such large developments of this type can become a target for drug dealers if they are placed in isolation. In one council a mobile library was repurposed as a food delivery vehicle for those housed in temporary accommodation. This had a knock on effect of providing consistent contact and increased engagement with previously hard to reach individuals.

The mobilisation of food banks and the delivery of food to people who are shielding, with considerable input from the voluntary sector, was a major issue across the UK. An example is the Lancashire Level Resilience Forum supported a big community engagement effort to develop a major initiative to feed hungry families and help people who were struggling with poverty (PCR, p.2).

Community hubs, many of which have been threatened by cuts, played a vital role in hosting voluntary work. 'we've been so reliant on the community coming together to support the kind of the council's operation as well. And the volunteering for has just been incredible locally.' (LASD, p.11). These thoughts were echoed in another local authority respondent:

> Our voluntary sector has been very good. The volunteering has been very effective. People have come together and, you know, everyone's been doing extraordinary things and I really think this this time period has been quite interesting because not only internally as an organisation every worked effectively I think it's I think it's a probably the most effective have been.' (SCM, p.5).

The LoA respondent stressed the need to protect and indeed enhance space for people to contribute to their communities in his way (LASD, p.11).

1.5 Impact on places

During the pandemic local authority highways departments have been responsible for signage and pavements (although construction stopped road maintenance continued because it is a safety issue). Providing adequate space for social distancing in public spaces is a major challenge. One of the respondents had been active in putting out the Safer Public Places document (UK Gov, 2020). This has led to the opening of cycle lanes, wider pedestrian areas, space for queuing (SCM, p.3) and adjustments to signage and street furniture. He was hopeful that some of these measures which allow for the accessing of facilities in 'a more comfortable and direct manner' might extend beyond COVID (ACS, p.2) as were other respondents (LASD, p.12). He noted challenges around interfaces between pieces of legislation including eating out suggesting that licensing laws would need to loosen to enable proprietors to respond. Social distancing means the expansion of pavement space but at the same time there is more traffic than ever before (DDDO, p.11).

Changes to street layouts had had a major impact on people with disabilities making it still more difficult for them to leave their homes (PH). These and those who were shielding were barely able to move away from their homes (AMHP).

Inequality becomes stark when it comes to transport (DDDO, p.8) People are avoiding public transport for fear of contagion and private car use has risen (DDC, p.8). 'It kind of just basically eviscerates the public transport system which is always on a knife's edge anyway' (DDDO. P.8). Others also predicted a dire future for public transport (LAPM, p.11). As the provision of transport services has moved largely to the private sector routes tend to run only if they are economically viable. The consequences of further reduction of public transport would be serious.

Many made observations about the negative of the pandemic on the High Street, beleaguered even before the pandemic (LAPDM, p.11). One Local Authority had already taken quite a hit even before the pandemic trying to facilitate the setting up a shopping and cultural centre (SCM, p.9). During the pandemic Preston Council made major efforts to keep their markets open while social distancing (PCR, p.2). They offered rent rebates to market traders to help. Business failure is a universal concern for local authorities (SCM, p.5).

One respondent observed that the new levels of reliance on online shopping were likely to continue. While people will want to get out of their homes shopping as a leisure pursuit was likely to dwindle (ACS). Another observed what he thought would be a drop in consumerism (PCR, p.3). This and the recent move towards homeworking is having major impact on the development industry. Development companies are trying to figure out what the new patterns of working will be as well as how to make the best financial return on redundant office space (DDDO, p.11). Empty office space was an issue in Belfast even before the pandemic (DHNI, p.4). Disused student accommodation is also a concern (Mackie and Smith, 2020, p. 8), and not only to universities which sometimes have a legal requirement to fill this space, especially since students (particularly from overseas) contribute so much to local economies. Student accommodation is not really suitable to be rented via the open market, especially since it rarely comes with parking spaces to meet planning requirements. One possible use for redundant buildings in urban settings that addresses a range of issues resilience including density, local food and potentially more urban greenery is urban farming (BBC Future, 2020).

1.6 Impact on planning

In England one aim of the controversial White Paper Planning for the Future (MHCLG, 2020) is to use housing to recharge the economy. One interviewee, interviewed months before the publication of the Government White Paper to speed up planning in England, harked back to the 2008 Labour government kickstart programme and its failure, warning against decisions made in haste. 'politicians of every denomination can't help tinker with the planning system (DDDO, p.6). Another referred to 'the 2010 position where everybody is clamouring to deregulate to allow economic recovery to take place' (ACS, p.4).

> I worry that is going to be highly compromised and create a series of highly compromised developments as we've seen in the past so that's kind of to me even more difficult with the next kind of wave of austerity which will undealt, undoubtedly, come as local authorities probably need to make a deal with the government to get more money and 10 years ago they had to sell a lot of their estate to kind of justify getting funds from the government (DDDO, p.7).

That planning doesn't have to be like this is demonstrated by the Welsh government has over recent years been very active in 're-engineering the architecture of the planning system in Wales' (SPWG, p.3) around a placemaking wellbeing meaning that its policy in this area aligns with the need for community resilience that became so apparent during the pandemic. The Welsh government quickly produced the Building Better Places report (Welsh Gov, 2020), initially conceived as a sign posting document but now containing some embellishments pertaining to the pandemic. A central aim was to put out a clear message of the critical role of the planning system in sustainable recovery (SPWG, p.2). It links to the Royal Town Planning document Plan the World We Need (RTPI, 2020). The next stage in Wales is to give local authorities the confidence to put it into place (SPWG, p.2).

This work, for example the launch of the Wales placemaking charter (with local authorities signing up to the principles of good placemaking), was disrupted with the pandemic as staff were redeployed across the organisation (SPWG, p.1). The timetable of the new National Development Framework of Wales has also had to be revised. This will ensure that all parts of the country have a development plan. Other important work in other parts of the UK like supporting Community Land Trusts was interrupted but not stopped by the pandemic (SCM, p.9). A Scottish respondent called for the revision of Scotland's design guide in the light of the communities need for balconies and open space despite it being a major task (SSH, p.4).

The first lockdown caused delays to the planning process because of difficulties around working online (SMNICS, p.19). There was concern about the temporary removal of community consultation within planning.

> We're having next week our first planning meeting online for the planning officers and legal officers are recommending we should suspend public consultation because……yeah, because of the difficulty we're getting with members of the public to speak. They made a point, but surely members of the public could record a three minute voice recording, or even if they do it, and send that in so we can all see that and hear that. . . . But that's just a way of keeping the public out by …well one further step away from public consultation (CLAW_099, p.11).

Another Councillor was concerned about the move to 'delegated responsibility' during the pandemic. 'We're informed of major decisions, but nothing has come forward. And by the time things have come to planning departments so much work has been put into it by officers and developers, there is very much a sort of oh, well, we've really got to let this through now' (CLAW_0110, Councillor, p.8).

1.7 Impact on housing delivery

The very human impact of a slowing of housing supply to people in desperate need of homes was alive in the mind of respondents. A Scottish interviewee stressed that quality, buying existing houses and making better use of existing empty stock and was an issue as well as supply of new housing (SSH, p.15)

> So going from zero to reconstructing actually what this year would have been the biggest single programme that we've had in 30 years. We were supposed to spend 800 million quid this year the government's money and another 800- 900 million quid of tenants money on providing affordable housing. We've lost a quarter. We've lost the first three months, I don't think we'll be back up to anything like full capacity for the year. And we've got, there are no arrangements in place and no conversation about what does that mean for the carry forward how you manage that into, not just through the financial year boundary next year but through the election (SSH, p.4).

Whilst, as a result in construction being stopped, authorities might be sitting on unspent funds (Housing Revenue Accounts) for housing the cost of delivery in the future is likely to increase. In terms of delivery a Northern Ireland civil servant was a concern that if budget allocations for affordable housing were not spent due to delivery being stopped the funds would be sucked back as underspend and lost to the system (SMNICS, p.18). 'I don't know that we've thought carefully enough about the balance of strategy if you like between generating surpluses to reduce borrowing or reducing rents and increasing borrowing' (SSH, p.11). These kinds of balances are likely to become particularly important now.

The pausing of construction has 'created a whole layer of work' for those on the project management and construction side as they try to figure out different scenarios and approaches to resume construction in order to achieve the same level of productivity as before (DDDO, p.4). Social distancing and other measures will impact on productivity for quite a long time (DDDO, p.4, DHNI. P.2). Shifts may need to be reconfigured to maximise production or programme stretched to allow for continuity of work from one gang of construction workers. The fact that it will take longer for those buildings to be occupied is an additional cost. There is lack of clarity about who will pay and how. Either way the incentive to keep the projects on track is great (DDDO. P.5). The likely rise in construction costs is a major risk for Local Authorities and others involved in housing delivery (LASD, p.6). The Construction Innovation Hub sees in the pandemic an opportunity to advance the cause of safer, more reliable, less wasteful, off site, digitally driven manufacturing. This would be accompanied by value, rather than cost, based decision making (Construction Innovation Hub, 2020).

Business plans are predicated on the benefit of price inflation (DDDO, p.5). Investment appraisals have been based on the traditional house price inflation in London, but value predictions have turned around with the pandemic with more growth outside of London. There has been a similar impact on rentals (ACS, p.9). Given that private sector organisations have made some major assumptions about return when bidding for land and planning construction projects the result 'is all going to be quite painful' (DDDO, p.6)

One local authority respondent spoke of the need to ensure that the local building companies that they work with had sufficient cashflow to continue trading (LASD, p.6) she also spoke of major concerns about the insurance of warranties to cover in the event of the construction process going wrong suggesting that the insurance market would have to accommodate the new situation. These again will add to the overall costs of construction (LASD, p.6).

1.8 Summary

The pandemic has provided importance for impetus for reflection on the fragility of our systems. Housing supply and delivery organisations were quick to adjust to home working. The adjustment appears to have been slower in local authority and government settings because of lack of investment in IT. New systems, ways of working and communication have been well received but there is concern about 'digital inclusion', particularly of vulnerable communities. Local Authorities in particular have risen to the task of delivering local infrastructure and care but there is still considerable uncertainty around who will pay for the changes. Improved active travel and air quality during the first lock down were welcomed but there are grave concerns about the future of public transport and the future of the high street. Considerable creativity was deployed in housing the homeless in the short term, but how best to address the growing demand for quality homes is an issue particularly given the halt on construction and rising construction costs going forward. The delivery of services and materials, particularly for small businesses, have been threatened by problems of cash flow. Planning continued subject to small delays, with decisions sometimes being made with a troubling lack of community consultation. Generally, there is a concern about hastily made decisions, groupings and planning easements becoming permanent. Although perhaps a truism, it is important to note that those organisations that have put community resilience at the heart of their policy were better prepared for the pandemic.

2.0 Lessons for the future

This last section of the report focuses on developing some recommendations for sustainable change, taken to refer to the commonly used triple bottom line of sustainability: social, environmental and economic value (Serin et al., 2018). Concern was expressed by several of the interviewees that the government would see centralisation and 'more' as the way go (NWIC, p.9), partly because this suits the way government publicises its achievements. This would work against multiple agendas including Climate Change. The strategy going forward needs to be truly 'smart' (McLaren and Agyeman, 2017) involving very strategic use of resources (DHNI), small but cany adjustments to make the best most of what our communities have to offer supported by advances in digital technology.

A very clear roadmap for government spending is needed that looks at the system holistically and in the long term (DDDO, p.9). Having discussed the impact of the pandemic on the Climate Change Agenda the report examines the home and its setting and the ways it might have to change to develop community resilience, including the provision of green space and the role of density (key to sustaining local services) in this. This leads very directly to the need to support local businesses and to develop local (rather than centralised) healthcare provision as well as a reflection on connections between the healthcare, social care and planning agendas.

2.1 The climate change emergency

The majority of interviewees were adamant that the Climate Change Emergency had not been forgotten (DHNI, p.2, SCM, p.6) and were hopeful that the pandemic would assist in addressing it (LASD, p.11). 'At some point government will need to look at what works, not necessarily for the planning system but for the environment generally' (ASC, p.13). Government pronouncements regarding incentives for retrofit were welcomed but this was considered 'small beer compared with what's needed to kind of tackle the pervasive carbon agenda and related issues' (DHNI). The 'green economy' needs to be put centre stage (ACS, p.7).

Improving the local economy is key to addressing climate change, starting with small but fundamental things like energy efficiency, facilitating walking and local food production with manifold benefits for local employment (IPPR, 2020). It was noted that 'it is difficult to be an environmental activist' if you have two children, work 55 hours a week and live on a minimum wage (PCR, p.3). On this note one Councillor felt people should be given opportunities in this area whether people felt they needed them or not. 'So we should be imposing community gardens, we should

be imposing fruit trees, we should be imposing energy… Anything like that, it needs to be imposed on people. But I think the biggest stumbling block in this is government' (CLAW_0110, p.16). The implication is that regulation is needed to offer the community more opportunities to be sustainable.

2.2 The importance of home for resilience

There is likely to be much more emphasis on the quality of the home with wide agreement that the home is the foundation for resilience and wellbeing (LARE, ACS, LASD, SSH etc).

> I think there's been a kind of real recognition of how important and people's housing is to them in terms of surviving through a period like this. Have you got enough rooms in your house, to have a private space to kind of retreat to or to work from, and how big are the rooms in your house, so they allow that space to kind of homeworking, and for family life. And, and also having like different aspects, so that you can move around the kind of daylight and, and also kind of wanting to have a variety of views potentially is kind of, you know, it's such an intense work experience being a home (LASD, p.8).

Several interviewees noted that the pandemic has resulted in increasing demand for social and affordable housing. Barriers to housing ownership need to be decreased through shared housing and equity products (DHNI, p.2). There are likely to be issues around consumer credit and cautious banks (DHNI, p.2).

The need for flexible space for home working and other activities are an important consideration going forward (LASD, p.9). 'It would appear that the type of house people want to live in has changed' (SMNICS). Various recommendations were made for making homes more resilience including the need for additional space and more flexibility. More bedrooms equal in size are needed to allow for flexibility of use. Decent hall space is needed as a kind of decompression chamber between the outside and inside worlds – it was noted that there seems to have been little or no research into the relationship between housing design and the transmission of illness. There may be demand for homes with dedicated workspace and storage will be more of an issue (DHNI, p.6). One respondent observed that people want to be closer to their families, a particular concern in rural areas (SMNICS). Certainly a more equal dispersion of the population across rural areas seems a likely outcome.

'If you're lucky enough to have a private garden, you've been living the dream' (LASD, p.8). Generally the quality of indoor space is really important 'their adaptability, their flexibility, their external amenity and access to external ability' (ACS, p.6). There is likely to be a fall in demand for apartments, in particular high rise, with increasing demand for detached homes and properties with outdoor space (DHNI, p.3). The 'revenge of the suburbs' is a new topic of conversation. House builder research is showing that home buyers are now more interested in the quality of the garden than the kitchen which always used to be the priority (ACS). A local authority respondent observed that her Director of Planning had said 'they would definitely be looking at plans coming through in a different way' and that they would be making sure that minimum standards of outdoor and amenity space were adhered to (LASD, p.8). It would no longer be a 'nice to have'.

2.3 Provision of green and outside space

I think what the pandemic has shown is that access to good quality housing and health have a very strong correlation access to public open space and green spaces' (SPWG, p.10). It seems parks have been more heavily used during lockdown and are important for the alleviation of inequalities (PC, p.3). Several respondents noted the importance of the environment on health and that prevention was better than medical intervention (PC, p.15). The value of well designed, accessible public space needs to be put high on the agenda within government budgets. 'For years it's been pushed down the pecking order in local government budget cuts and all sorts of things, but it really needs to be put high up on the agenda (LAPM, p.12).'

Parks are not however a statutory service and no extra funds were provided for parks to stay open. During lockdown there was a change to the way parks were maintained but even rewilding requires management (PC, p.4). The Fields in Trust Green Space Index offers a measure of adequate provision of green space with Sports England providing active design guides. The Welsh government is working on a methodology for assessing green infrastructure (SPWG, p.6). The provision of good quality public space needs to become a requirement for new developments and plans, demonstrated through metrics.

2.4 Density and Transportation

Increasing density has been encouraged by planners and urban designers in recent years as density is needed to sustain local infrastructure and to maximise the use of public transport, however this obviously works against social distancing (DDDO, p.7). A new kind of 'gentle' density is needs to be defined that offers resilience during a pandemic, a more street based approach (ACS, p.6 & 10). It seems that there is an urgent need for health and built environment professionals to work together to better understand the relationship between density and infection. Super density has long been known to be problematic (ACS, p.6), not least for developers who can only start generating income once the whole building is complete (ACS, p.8). 'I think there's a sort of maxim that the tallest buildings ever built have been done at the peak of the market' (ACS, p.10). It can only be hoped that developers will stop building tall residential buildings as they are known for their negative social and environmental impacts.

Density needs to be considered in relation to transport options (DHNI, p.4, SMNICS, p.13). Some saw the pandemic as a real opportunity to re-examine the transport industry as a whole, as well as the hierarchies around the ways people move around (LASD. P.11, DDDO, p.9, SMNICS). Many commented on the need foster active travel, notably cycling (ACS, p.6, DHNI, p.4) and the benefits of seeing less cars on the street including air quality (LASD, SCM). It is important to build on these improvements (PCR, p.3), restricting personal vehicle use (DHNI, p.4) while simultaneously enhancing infrastructure. Several respondents discussed the idea of the 15 (sometimes 20) minute neighbourhood, the ability to access key facilities within a 15-minute walk (ACS), though this was an issue for the less able (PH).

2.5 Development of local economies

The development of walkable neighbourhoods and the reduced need for transportation has obvious links to the development of the local economy (LAPM, p.11). The need to retain and develop local infrastructure, particularly shops (ACS) has been made very evident (LASD, p.14). Several of the interviewees believed that there could be a shift back to local delivery of goods and services and the active encouragement of local business. 'The Preston Model' built on the idea of 'Local people taking back control' (Preston City Council, 2020) has been an inspiration to several other local authority authorities who are trying to do similar things. In Preston the pandemic response builds on existing efforts to develop the local supply chain, including local SME builders and on providing living wages.

At Preston the council is looking to develop community assets owned by the city. If an asset is under council ownership it has much more of a say over how it is run, to check the conditions of employees and so on. Preston is also looking to set up a regional co-operative bank and also has a programme encouraging worker ownership (PCR, p.2). Great emphasis has been placed on supporting small business in the face of year on year of austerity. At the same time, to assist with the delivery of walkable neighbourhoods and reduced use of transport as well as multiple issues around social value 'properly devolved health and wellbeing and integrated health services' are needed (NWIC, p.10). At Preston the NHS works very closely with the council on the development of joined up strategy (PCR, p.4). This is however rare, in the opinion of one interviewee, local authorities are excessively focussed on economic growth and economic resilience rather than health (NWIC, p.4).

2.6 Making connections between housing, planning and health agendas

A critical issue that came through the interviews is that housing and health are clearly intertwined issues that are being kept artificially separate by the way government and local authorities work. Key to this is a disconnection is between health and planning budgets (CLAW_099, p.24) in the words of one Local Authority Planner:

> I've given various presentations where, for example, in Wales you have the Public Service Boards? So, you'll have key people from the fire service, police, social services, the NHS, all sorts. And you'll give a presentation on the benefits of good public open space, and how it can reduce the NHS's bill by you know, basic stuff, keeping people fit, et cetera, et cetera. And then, if you try to turn the conversation to the NHS, and say, look, why don't you help contribute towards some of this green infrastructure? Boom. You've lost them. . . Absolutely lost them. You cannot have that conversation about people's budgets, 'cause they're so in the public sector, no one is ever going to give any money away. . . But actually, it's an issue that needs to be dealt with, in terms of preventative for the NHS, rather than perhaps all the pills and the medicine at the end, when it's too late really (LAPM, p.13).

The problems of preventative spending are discussed in some detail in a recent report on the impact of social housing (Gibb, 2020). One interviewee cited (with figures) the financial waste caused to the NHS for GP appointments to provide medicalised solutions for social isolation which could potentially be alleviated through the outcomes of good planning. ' And that could be anything from just nice friendly neighbours around the corner with a cup of tea . . . or good housing (NWIC, p.8). Health authorities and government were seen to focus too much on functional interventions, sending people from service to service to relieve social isolation when structural interventions 'which sit largely outside statutory authorities' also need to be considered.

A better understanding is also needed into the optimal spatial scales – for example local labour market area designations, local authority or neighbourhood scales - for different types of cross professional partnerships. The mindset that bigger is better, 'professional silos' and sensitivities around being sidelined are preventing housing experts and doctors from working together. (NWIC, p.6). Doctors don't seem to be too interested in the impact of the environment on health. One interviewee observed that 'the public health guys want to talk to us because none of the clinical guys in their own organisation are interested in talking to them' (SSH, p.18). He believed that housing should be reframed as a 'health intervention' (SSH, p.21).

A further issue is the building of large expensive hospitals - 'we are learning from the current pandemic that big hospitals are not actually a useful place to deal with events' (NWIC, p.6). The building of hospitals is a very public way to demonstrate that something is being done about the NHS (most NHS hospitals have private wings) but it was felt by some interviewees that the number of hospitals built, or beds provided, was not really a useful benchmark for the success health provision (SSH, p.20). The building of large hospitals seems to have more visible political impact than fundamental small systemic changes. An interviewee spoke of a new hospital which had been recently completed in his area without any public transport links (SPWG, p.11). It is critically important that transport planning, walkability and healthcare need to be considered in the round. Mention should be made of some remarkable temporary hospitals built at speed in novel inner city settings, for example the 400 bed Dragon's Heart facility built inside the Principality Stadium in Cardiff by BDP architects with the local NHS.

An industry commentator working at a high level with government was adamant that top down government silos needed to be replaced with a 'place based' approach (NWIC, p.1), although place can mean very different things for different sectors. He observed an urgent need to link housing with healthcare tapping into the voluntary sector (NWIC, p.2). The Welsh Government is alive to this: 'the whole concept of placemaking is that you don't think about silos, you think about the places, and you think about the holistic impact of all policies on places (SPWG, p.10).

Linked to this issue is the relationship between care homes, assisted living – offered through a complex mish mash of private and local authority support - and health provision. A few of the respondents commented on the fact that care homes should be part of the 'health infrastructure' (SMNICS, p.20, DHNI, p.2) and that those working in the care sector need a proper career structure and incentives (NWIC, p.4). Mention was made of Breaking Barriers Innovations has which has developed a range of reports that stress the pressing need for a holistic approach to health and social (2020).

2.7 Summary

I think we have a duty to remember [what happened during the first lock down] and make sure that we deliver' (LASD, p.9). Whilst there was positivity that the pandemic offered an opportunity to build back better to alleviate the Climate Change Emergency, the development of 'pro social planning' (NWIC) and refreshed council strategies (PCR, p.2) there were serious concerns that things would return to business as usual (ACS).

The interviews foregrounded the role of the home, its design and its setting, for resilience as well as the need for community spaces as a nexus for voluntary activity and social care. The pandemic has also shown the key role that parks and green space play in wellbeing. Ensuring basic provision of green space for all communities needs to be a priority going forward. This relates to discussions of density which has to be dense enough to sustain local services while being spacious enough to facilitate social distancing. New emphasis has been given to provision of local services, including healthcare provision, in walkable distances as the current reliance on private cars is not sustainable. These need to be integrated with public transport which needs to be planned in the interest of communities. 'The government employs 300, 000 civil service who could basically be deployed anywhere' (NWIC, p.12). Rather than concentrating its employees in Super Hubs the government could lead the way on a new approach to more dispersed employment. One of the most stark findings from the interviews is the urgent need to better align the healthcare system with care provision and the planning system (for example through the provision of active travel infrastructure) to deliver long term health benefits for all, including the planet.

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