

THE COALFIELDS RESEARCH PROGRAMME:

DISCUSSION PAPER NO. 6

REGENERATING HOUSING

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I can't understand why anybody who pontificates about economic policy actually can separate out housing and employment. You can't the two go hand in glove and they always have done. You take one away from somebody and the other fails. You give somebody poor accommodation then they are late for work or they are ill all the time and you don't get a full weeks work out of them. You don't give somebody the job and they haven't got the enthusiasm and money to be able to maintain their properties to a reasonable standard. (Housing, St Helens)

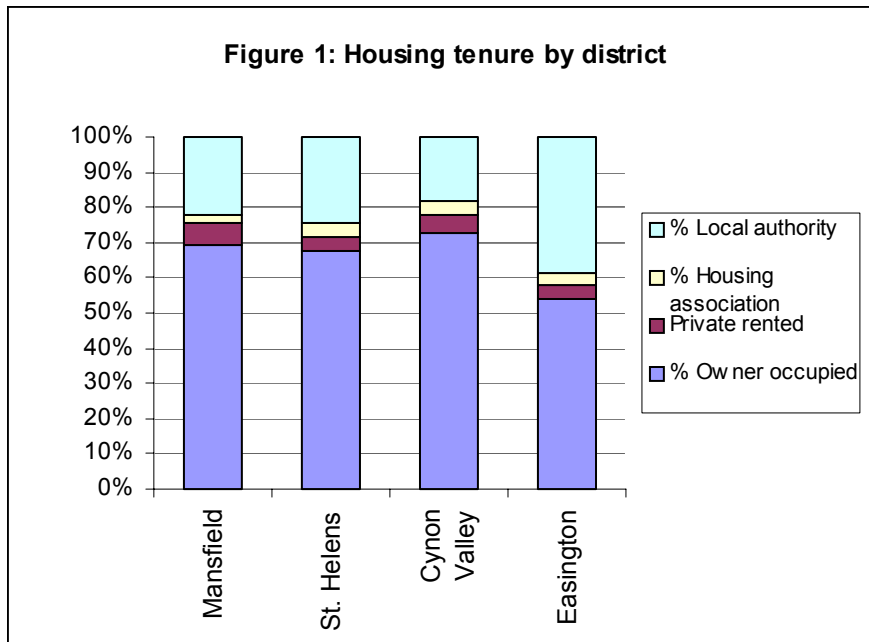
1 Introduction

The aim of this paper is to address the issue of housing in the four coal districts of Cynon Valley, Easington, Mansfield and St. Helens. This will examine the main housing issues in the districts and the problems in regenerating housing.

The decline of the mining industry along with national changes in housing policy have had a detrimental effect on housing condition in the four districts and the coalfields in general. Within the four districts, there are major problems in relation to the overall condition of the housing. It is difficult to pin down a precise cause of housing problems rather there appear to be a number of factors that can be seen as operating at the national, regional and local level. Analysis of interview and other material suggests that the decline of the mining industry, the sell off of Coal Board housing, the increasing influence of private landlords and the general drive to owner-occupation (especially through the RTB) are significant factors in explaining some of housing problems facing the coal districts.

'Regeneration' has tended to focus around job creation and retraining, often at the expense of the social infrastructure. Interviews carried out in the four districts have strongly indicated that housing is a very real problem in the coalfields and is also featured in the Coalfields taskforce report. For those living in the districts the issue of housing is a very real problem. Interviews with M.Ps indicated that housing was one of the main problems brought to them in their constituencies. Despite this housing is not often seen as part of the regeneration process.

The issue of 'housing' presents a number of problems for mining communities and these in turn can be seen to vary across the four districts according to the differing patterns of housing. This can be illustrated at the simplest level by examining the differences in tenure pattern between the four districts. Fig. 1 outlines the tenure differences between the four districts and shows that although they all follow a similar pattern there is a higher percentage of owner occupation in the Cynon Valley and Easington has a higher percentage of local authority housing. These differences in tenure can in part be explained by the differing patterns of housing development in the districts as the Cynon Valley has a history of owner-occupation long before it became the dominant tenure.



Although differences in housing tenure can account for some of the different housing issues facing the districts, it is only part of the picture and obscures some of the intricacies of housing in the districts. This paper aims to show that here are a complex number of factors involved in the housing problems in the districts. In order to do this the paper is divided in to two main parts. The first part examines the housing problems in the four districts focusing on the legacy of NCB housing; private landlords; void housing and community decline. The second part addresses some of the problems in regenerating housing focusing on issues of funding and finance and the problem caused by pepper-pot tenure patterns.

2 Housing Issues in the districts

2.1 Coal housing

There is a long history of housing being provided by the mining industry. Before nationalisation the various coal companies built houses to attract workers and after nationalisation, the NCB constructed purpose built estates to attract workers to the new modern pits.

At nationalisation, one of the welfare benefits for miners was the provision of housing. The NCB provided miners and their families with housing that was of the same standard and conditions as local authorities at the time. In addition, the NCB also inherited approx. 140, 000 houses from the private mining companies much of which was old and in need of repair and modernisation. In 1952, the Coal Industry Housing Association was formed which worked alongside local authorities to build new housing for miners.

However, the provision of housing for miners was to be short-lived as the NCB gradually withdrew from house-building in the 1960s. Sales of NCB stock took place throughout the 1960s as the industry contracted such that by 1971 only 20% of miners lived in tied housing and one third of these were occupied by retired miners and

widows (Ferris, 1996). In 1976, the NCB withdrew from the provision of miners housing. Existing tenants were given the opportunity to buy at a discounted price and then it was offered to the local authorities. The Coal Industry Housing Association was disbanded in 1977.

Although BC had been gradually selling their properties it was not until after the 1984-1985 miners' strike that the selling off of stock was intensified. Previously properties were transferred to local authorities or housing associations or sold to sitting tenants and at that time the selling off to private landlords was unusual (Ferris, ?). The NCB housing policy was changed in 1985 when it was decided that all the stock should be sold off by 1988. However, with the desire to rid themselves of all remaining property BC were now willing to sell their stock to private landlords. This time tenants were given three months to decide if they wanted to purchase their house and if not they were to be sold on the open market. About 69% bought their homes and a further 20% were sold to local authorities or housing associations. This decision by BC to sell their remaining stock can be linked not only to the general decline of mining but also to the government's wish to inject greater commercial influence in the mining industry of which housing provision was not seen as desirable, as Ferris (1993, 2) notes:

From the perspective of social policy, British Coal's decision highlights the role of systems of occupational welfare in a declining industry and the responsibility of Government and employers in discharging previous agreements and undertakings given to employees.

The manner in which these houses were sold off and the broader context of housing finance at the time created a number of housing problems in the coal districts. However, the extent of the problem is not even throughout the districts and this is related to the distribution of housing in the four districts. The problems created by coal housing are most acute in St Helens, Mansfield and Easington. It is in the Cynon Valley that it is not such of an issue which can be related to the history of housing construction in the South Wales valleys in general where owner occupation has been commonplace for a long time.

Many of the properties were not offered to the sitting tenants but instead were sold onto private landlords. In many cases, these were absentee landlords who would speculatively buy large number of houses. In conjunction with the closure of pits this presented a number of problems not just in terms of housing but also larger issues such as community. Although the tenure of these houses did not change (rented) the 'new' landlord brought a number of concerns. There seems to be a consensus throughout the districts that these landlords failed to properly maintain their properties and that this led to decline in housing condition and at times to a decline in community. In addition, the decline in money available to local authorities through the Housing Investment Programme (HIP) meant that they were no longer in any position to buy property from BC.

The particular issue around Coal Board housing also ties in with a number of other issues such as private landlords and decline in community and thus can be seen to tie in with the other housing themes discussed in this paper.

A particularly strong problem that comes out of the research is that the coal board housing tended to be in very poor condition and in need of modernisation and repair.

Regardless of the problems caused by the sell off process the condition of the properties is poor, often dating back to the 19th century. In many cases it was the actual age of the properties that was problematic. The coal company housing was built at the beginning of the century, and in some cases earlier, and thus presents problems in terms of housing condition as many are no longer suitable dwelling as a member of the Mansfield 2010 partnership states:

but it's particularly blighted by the fact that they are in a poor quality residence to start with, a lot of these mining, er, the miners cottages are not 1990 type of premises anymore. They, you know, you've got a row of 8 that need knocking into 2 decent dwellings or something...but the bottom line is, that er, the people who are living in the houses, they're damp, they're crumbling, they're, you know, plaster work falling down, they're unheated, unmodernised, they're unsanitary, and er, they are locked in that position.

However, the condition of coal housing is not just related to the older housing as the construction of some of the post nationalisation housing is also causing problems such as the NCB estate in St Helens and some of the housing in Peterlee.

Although the condition of the former coal housing is causing problems the main problem seems to centre around the way that these houses have been managed which has subsequently led to the deterioration of housing conditions. As was outlined above, after the miners' strike the NCB actively sought to get rid of the rest of their properties. Sitting tenants were only given a short period in which to raise money to buy their houses and as a consequence many were sold over their heads to private landlords. Many 'absentee' landlords bought large amount of properties with the sole intention of making a quick profit. The issue of private rented housing is covered in more detail in the next section. A major consequence of the sell-off to private landlords has been the decline in housing conditions and the creation of a huge housing problem for those agencies, particularly local authorities, left to deal with the problem. There is a strong feeling that the districts have been off-loaded a massive problem with the selling off of the NCB stock.

A representative from Mansfield 2010 outlines the large number of problems caused by the sell off and the lack of accountability from the private landlords:

The way in which they were sold off at the time of privatisation, it's resulted in this area, people have inherited around them, as part of a, as a consequence of privatisation, a, what I would term an 'absentee landlord', er, who bought at a peppercorn rent, which doesn't justify proper maintenance of the property, and now people are living in these properties which are not properly maintained, are damp or falling down, or whatever it is. Very often with adjacent properties vandalised and er, er, empty and with er, the sole redress, being to get the local authority to sue the landlord under the appropriate statutes, for non-compliance with whatever. Er, which of course, the local authorities would love to do but there is a financial outer limit as to how often they can get involved with suing absentee landlords, and what have you..

Similarly in Easington, there is a sense of frustration at both the sell-off process and the subsequent lack of control over the private landlords:

I think the fact that British Coal sold their houses off very very cheaply, erm, you know, we were in very much a 'competitive', in inverted commas, environment where you know, erm, all organisations had to, you know, maximise their position and do that. I mean a lot of the houses should have been pulled down...It was sub-standard housing in any case. Erm, not just in terms of it's fabric, but in terms of er,

the facilities that it, it you know, that it offered. And unfortunately someone is having to pick the pieces up for that. You've got private landlords there and that makes it even more complex, you know. (John Smith Economic Development County Durham)

This lack of control over housing problems can perhaps be seen as contrasting with economic regeneration where they have been able to reclaim land or provide training. This sense of frustration in relation to housing is a common theme throughout the interviews.

The effects of the sell off of NCB housing are also seen as contributing to many of the 'social problems' in the districts, and this is particularly apparent in the cases of Mansfield and Easington:

I am not saying that it is all down to them but with the collieries closing there was a huge element of NCB housing which was sold off at auctions, absentee landlords in Manchester and London and what was happening...there's been a huge influx of drug related crime in the district to match that accommodation coming available...now you've got to put the two together. (Bill Scorer Economic Development Easington)

2.2 Private Landlords and the Private Rented Sector

Nationally levels of private rented housing have been decreasing since the post-war period. From once being the dominant form of home-ownership in Britain the private rented sector has come to be associated with those at the lowest levels of the social spectrum (although recent years have seen a slight reversal of this trend). District levels tenure rates (see Fig. 1) show the levels of private rented to be comparable to the national average. However, these figures obscure the problem that private rented housing presents in the districts. There are particular areas within the districts where local concentrations of private rented accommodation exist. For example, concentrations of private rented housing can found in Warsop Vale in Mansfield and Easington Colliery in Easington. In other parts of the districts the private rented housing is interspersed with other housing tenures, hiding some of the problems.

In the four districts the housing problem seems to be most acute within the private rented sector. This is particularly related to the lack of control over private landlords and the lack of commitment such landlords tend to have to their own properties and the localities in general. Although council housing has its problems there is a feeling that there is a far greater control over addressing the issues and that Local Authorities genuinely want to improve the housing but are constrained by a lack of finance. In addition there is a feeling that the council stock is of quite good condition in the four districts.

In addition to the large number of properties made available through the sale of NCB housing, extremely low house prices make the coal districts attractive to speculative landlords and the large number of properties for sale make it easy for speculative landlords to buy into the coal districts. Throughout the four district house prices were quoted as being as low as £10,000. One housing officer from RCT made the contradictory comparison of the for sale signs making the streets look like it is coronation day.

The result in the coal districts is that the private rented sector comes to be dominated by mostly absentee speculative landlords. There is a general feeling in the coal

districts that such landlords do not have an interest in providing quality rented accommodation but are more interested in making a quick profit. There is thus a lack of long-term investment from the landlords, as a housing officer from St Helens illustrates:

I think that is where the problem had arisen with the landlords who have purchased the properties, [from NCB] they haven't necessarily been looking at them as long-term investment...because the actual ownership has changed in terms of chunks of properties since the Coal Board disposed of them.

There is also the problem that one landlord that can dominate in certain areas. This has been mentioned in all four areas. For example when discussing setting up of landlord forums they have said there is only one landlord anyway. There is thus the problem of one of two individuals having control over large numbers of property who are largely accountable to nobody, again returning to the issue of accountability. This differs vastly to the council as a landlord.

It is not just that landlords are causing problems. Consultations with landlords indicate that they are unwilling to put money into their housing because of the problems with vandalism and crime to their properties.

2.3 Void Housing

Empty housing is a major problem in all four districts, although probably less so in St Helens. The reasons for the large numbers of void properties can be explained by a combination of factors including the increase in private landlords, NCB housing and a decline in community. For example in RCT in Jan 1998 3,400 (4.1%) properties in the private sector were empty and 442 local authority properties (3.2%) were empty. In Easington it is estimated that in 1996 400 council properties were empty, concentrated in the areas of Horden, Peterlee, Murton and Wheatley Hill. In addition 3,800 properties in the private sector were classified as unfit, mainly in areas of former colliery housing.

At one level the increase in number of voids can be explained by the fact that these communities are no longer sustainable. Many of the smaller village have been losing population over a number of years and many of those interviewed have questioned the logic of sustaining housing in declining villages. Indeed, in Mansfield, Cynon Valley and Easington the local authorities have been forced to demolish properties which is not always politically popular. A housing officer in Easington outlines this when discussing their surplus of housing:

We have got lots of void properties for which we have got no waiting list, we have got the reverse problem to some of the southern authorities...We have got many properties that are structurally sound, reasonable houses and nobody wants them. Nobody wants to move into that village because there is no work in that village because they are mining villages and not many people want to move into them as commuter villages as a nice rural retreat.

Empty council properties seem to be a greater problem in Easington and the Cynon Valley. In both cases it can be attributed to the decline population. However, in the case of Cynon Valley it can be also be explained in part by the geography of the area. The housing officer from RCT recounted how they were losing tenants from their estates up on the hillsides to private landlords who had properties on the valley floor.

The existence of void properties are also seen as contributing to community decline through increased vandalism, as is bluntly put by the RCT (undated, 48):

they depreciate in value, incur vandalism, present potential danger and blight localities.

This feeling is echoed by a housing officer at Easington District Council:

As soon as they go void they are vandalised, problem of anti-social residents, and fairly quickly become an eyesore. We are demolishing quite a number of properties and there are a lot more that we need to demolish.

2.4 Decline in community?

In addition to the physical problems of housing condition, it has been indicated in previous sections that housing also impacts on issues of 'community'. Analysis of the interview material indicated that there was a feeling that the issues surrounding housing were also leading to decline in community. This was not that the poor housing conditions were causing a decline in community for those already living there but that the practices of private landlords were bringing about a decline in community.

In some cases the decline in community is seen as through the instability brought about by individuals only staying for short periods through private landlords, in contrast to the previously stable nature of such communities, as one housing officer in Mansfield outlines:

There has been a more, should we say itinerant population who may find themselves in Warsop Vale one day, and for whatever reason, simply because the landlord didn't like them, for some reason, his probation period has finished, 6 mths minimum, so it's 'bye bye' and off they go to the Council or housing assoc. or another private landlord in a different part of the district. We have had a lot of experience of that. For whatever reason at Warsop Vale, for instance, is declining. Void rates are going up almost on a weekly basis, and the crime is rife. Mansfield Woodhouse, parts of it, are in pretty much the same state.

The moving in of 'outsiders' is seen by many as a key element in community breakdown:

The villages definitely. This is where, if you get the wrong people in the stable communities can break down very rapidly. Somewhere like Peterlee is a bit more cosmopolitan and hasn't got the same feel for it as the mining villages have and is a completely different settlement, you can get people moving in and out of there and it doesn't really cause a problem. Seaham is a bit more like our other settlements there is a strong feeling for it. Peterlee being a new town doesn't have that sort of history (Ken Greenfield, EDDA)

In some instances there is a feeling that the 'wrong' sort of people are being moved in, usually referring to single mothers and 'problem' families. This notion that undesirable 'outsiders' are breaking down the communities is particularly strong in the case of Easington and this may be due to the acute nature of the housing problem there, as the following quotes illustrate:

Then you find properties became empty, families moved in from outside the area, perhaps were at the bottom of the heap, and they brought crime into the area. There is

a spiral of decline in housing, which is still a major problem, for East Durham. (Ken Greenfield EDDA)

Yes it is rapid change. I mean we have talked a lot about the council housing stock but the private housing stock I mean we have had a lot of problems with the quality of that, the old colliery housing and there is a lot of private rented accommodation. We have ended up with some of the communities starting to break down because of the importation of people from Tyneside, Teesside, who are being exploited by some of the private landlords in accommodation that is really substandard. (Housing Officer Easington District Council).

However, the association between community decline and outsiders moving in is also present in the other districts:

You know, where my parents live in Park Street in Penrhiwceiber (??109) it, when I was a lad, I mean, most of the houses there was a working male head of the family, there, there was a family unit. You know, when I go back there, quite a large number of the houses are taken over by the, Cynon Taff Housing Association, and you've got young unmarried mothers living there, and I'm not having a 'downer' on unmarried mothers, but the family nucleus appears to be breaking down, and right throughout, you know, the valley, throughout the housing estates, and there are still quite substantial housing estates, at Fernhill, come down to Matthews Town, you know it's the Council who are still responsible for them, but we term 'Council housing'". (Police, Cynon Valley)

3 Issues of Regeneration in Housing

The previous sections outlined the main housing problems in the coal districts, this section will examine some of the problems in tackling housing in the coal-districts. This will include the problem posed by pepper-pot tenures, funding for housing, and the role of housing in wider economic regeneration.

It is clear that housing is an import issue for the coal districts. Most of the respondents mentioned the issue of housing, especially in Easington. However, it was apparent from the interviews that housing tended to play much less of a role in formal plans for regeneration. Housing was seen as an issue but tended not to be seen as part of economic regeneration. It is possible to identify two main reasons for this. Firstly, is the lack of recognition in regeneration initiatives of the importance of including housing. Secondly, there is the financial issue of funding since housing is often ineligible in funding bids, combined with the overall cuts in housing this makes finding money for housing regeneration problematic. Despite these issues there is a strong argument for the inclusion of housing in wider regeneration initiatives, as a housing officer from Easington District Council states:

Yes, I mean you can't change one of the factors without the others. I mean where you have got better quality housing, employment, community centres you are bound to be raising the aspirations in the area generally. And vice-versa the vicious circle where you have got unemployment and they can't afford to do up their houses, and the shops move out and there is crime in the area. So housing is part of the general strategy.

It is in Easington that housing is most strongly seen as an important part of wider regeneration, and this may be in part related to the existence of the EDTF, as the literature states:

Housing will play a central role in regeneration. EDC has to ensure that homes to modern standard, which can be afforded by residents, are provided. Partnership with

residents and all housing providers is key to delivering the VISION. (Emphasis in original [Easington District Council Housing strategy statement 1997])

3.1 Regenerating housing in the four districts: the problems

The problems of regenerating housing in the four districts have both similarities and differences. As previous sections showed they all have difficulties with private landlords. This section will also show that they have similar problems with void properties and finding funding for regeneration. The previous sections outlined that the poor housing condition in the coal districts is linked to the legacy of NCB housing and subsequently private landlords. This section aims to outline the problem this creates in attempts to regenerate the housing

However, there are *particular* problems in each of the four districts. Easington seems to have the most prominent housing problem. Easington had high concentrations of NCB housing that was sold to private landlords. In addition to this issue Easington has also had to deal with the housing from the Peterlee Housing corporation (new town) which was handed over to the council to manage. This housing had structural problems which had to be dealt with and there is a feeling that the rest of the housing in Easington suffered as a consequence of this.

Easington, is faced with some massive problems in terms of housing. Erm, and that needs to be given special attention. I think unfortunately, Easington had the legacy of taking over the new town of Peterlee and had to spend something like about a hundred and a hundred and fifty million pounds on refurbishing the new town of Peterlee, which was basically dumped on to them in 1978, by the then Development Corporation which was, you know, Government sponsored. Erm, and left them a massive amount of problems, over an important period in their life. And, as I say, erm, they've had to spend something like a hundred and fifty million pounds on those houses. OK, great, they got grants but, you know, it's caused them huge problems. Erm and to the detriment of other communities, which were where mines were closing, so right the way through that '80's period and it was because of structural problems with the houses, because of landlords responsibilities etc. etc. etc. Then tenants right to buy came through and all that, you know, and so they were faced with a massive upheaval in terms of housing and I think the housing legacy is still, something of that needs to be given, erm, special attention, because, you know, people have to live in those communities. And there concerns that, we all have, that the whole fabric could be breaking down". (John Smith Economic Development Durham County Council)

A big chunk of the housing we have inherited from Peterlee New-town Corporation, and although it was relatively modern housing it had huge structural problems. If you walk round Peterlee there are lots of prize winning properties, with flat roofs, some horrendous designs in terms of the structure and the insulation. In the early days we got a fair amount of government grant and borrowing allocations to solve some of those problems and they are now dried up and I think it is true to say that the Peterlee housing stock absorbed far more than we got in grants and far greater proportion of the finance than we would have liked. In retrospect it has probably held us back in the work that we need to do. (Easington District Council Housing Officer)

In St Helens, besides private landlords, the housing problem again centres around structural problems. In St Helens most of the former coal housing is to be found in 'cement city' a purpose built NCB estate. The type of construction of this housing, although sound, needs modernised. The difficulty in St Helens seems to centre around finding funding to regenerate the housing in 'cement city'.

In Mansfield housing problem is mostly concerned with private landlords and thus attempting to regenerate such housing. The sell-off of NCB housing has left the district with large tracts of poor quality private rented housing which is dominated by one or two landlords. This makes it very difficult for the Local Authority to have any influence over areas where it has no property. The setting up of landlord forums is also difficult where there is very often only one landlord involved.

In the Cynon Valley problems of housing regeneration are to do with the old age of many of the properties and also the question of the sustainability of many of the former mining housing estates. As was stated previously, the Cynon Valley also has a particular problem of losing their own tenants from housing estates on up on the mountainsides to private landlords who have property in the valley floor. This contrasts to Easington where it was stated that there was still a strong trust in the council housing.

3.2 'Pepper-pot tenures'.

Although there are these differences in housing problems facing the four districts there is one common problem facing all four in terms of regenerating housing and that is the issue of mixed tenures. Changes in the housing structure in the four districts whether through the sale of NCB housing, right to buy and shift to owner occupation has led to what is termed a 'pepperpot tenure pattern', which causes problems for both funding and regeneration. This pepperpotting of housing tenure creates a problem for local authorities and other agencies who are trying to regenerate the housing as it means they are not able to fully tackle all the housing, returning again to the issue of lack of influence over housing touched on earlier in the paper. Where houses in a particular street are owned by a mixture of the council, privately and through landlords it makes it very difficult to implement any large-scale improvements as a housing officer from St Helens states:

But one of the difficulties that any landlord would have on the estate is that the owner occupation and private landlord situation is pepper-potted. You can't say well that road is owner occupied and that road is privately rented. So it is very difficult to say for instance we are going to get a housing association to buy in 150 properties say and turn them round by doing full modernisation schemes and have the house, cavity wall insulation that sort of stuff to redress some of the inherent problems that they have got.

An additional problem in improving pepper-potted estates is funding improvements since it would have to come from very different sources, as the housing officer from St Helens again illustrates:

But again it is a pepper-potting exercise you are not actually picking up a whole row of houses and doing an enveloping scheme on them which would clearly be a solution in the long term. It is just where do you fund that from financially. We haven't got the money as a local authority to do it because of the fact that such a high percentage of them are owner occupied. Then they fall in the catch 22 scenario that they can't afford it because they are on low incomes albeit that their mortgages might be quite small and nobody else is going to put money into it because traditionally owner occupiers are left to fend for themselves.

The effects of pepperpotting are again felt greatest by those living in the communities. One particular group that appears to lose out are owner-occupiers, especially those that bought their properties under the RTB scheme, as a housing officer from

Easington states:

We have sold houses through the right to buy and then improved our own houses but not the right to buy ones and they have ended up with a substandard house compared to the ones that we have improved. So you get a terrace now, some with flat roofs, some are half-baked schemes, some are fully re-modernised and the skyline in some places looks absolutely horrendous. And they are some that we have not been able to modernise to the extent we would have liked to because they are connected to a property that has been bought. As a result of this, surveys we have done have shown that we need to spend something like 250M on bringing the stock across the district to the correct standard....

The inability to tackle housing on a large-scale makes it difficult to tackle some of the associated issues of community breakdown, as a housing officer from Easington states:

At the end of this terrace was this house that was in a terrible state, boarded up, privately owned, that had been bought under the right to buy, presumably the owner had left the country and the vandals had moved in and it was in a terrible state. On one hand it is not our problem because it is not our house but it is in our estate and affects the neighbourhood, brings down the quality, our tenant lives next door to it... So I mean many of the right to buy have been allowed to get into that state and causes many problems for our own housed and we have less power to do anything about it.

3.3 Funding housing regeneration

A further problem in relation to regenerating housing in the coal districts is the very real issue of finding funding. There are a number of issues here; declining finance available to local authorities and the structure of funding regimes. Financially housing can be seen to lose out at a number of levels. From the 1980s onwards housing policy was aimed at reducing public spending on housing and the strong support of home-ownership. Local authorities have also been losing money for housing through knock-on effects of the RTB and declining finances made available for housing from central government. Many of those interviewed felt that the coalfields areas are neglected in the HIP (housing investment programme) and stated that the HIP or Capital Receipts allocation should be ring-fenced for coalfields.

All the districts highlighted the declining finance they were receiving from central government. For example in RCT the capital allocation for housing has declined from £8m in 1992/3 to £3.07m in 1997/98. Due to the capital intensive nature of housing improvement large sums of money are required which is problematic as the money does not appear to be available. A housing officer from Easington reflects this feeling:

Well the problem has been that no matter how involved we as a local authority get unless somebody somewhere can come up with funding to either purchase off the absentee landlords properties and then further invest in them to bring them up to a reasonable standard or get the private landlords to spend the money themselves then having a talking shop is not overly helpful to the people that have to live in the houses. So there isn't currently a very active involvement with the local residents.

Like other areas of local and regional government housing has increasingly had to rely on outside funding for finance. This however, is where housing loses out since most funding regimes are targeted at purely economic regeneration. For example EU funding is not available for housing projects. Funding for housing is available for

housing through the SRB and Eps, but this is subject to problems of the competitive bidding process that was outlined in the previous paper. There is a strong feeling that housing tends to lose out in funding regimes, as a representative from the Government Office for Merseyside states:

I think the housing interests would say that housing lost out quite severely through the SRB when that came along..although I don't suppose estate action was sustainable at the sort of levels that it was...and I think there is a tendency in looking at SRB schemes to..because housing can use up so much capital resource, you then lose the holistic nature of a prog when it's resource constrained but I thin the govt's doing its review of all this and I suspect that with the SRB we'll get some clear steer about perhaps fewer bigger schemes than trying to spread the money around too thinly wh is to some extent what I think we've tried to do...so as to disappoint the fewest no. of people...the only trouble is in fewer bigger schemes it's great for the areas that get it..like City Challenge...but it's not so good for the ones that don't...because they don't know how long they might have to wait...

This general feeling is also reflected by a housing officer in St Helens:

SRB money have tended in the past were directed to economic regeneration in terms of job creation with a possibility of housing being on the periphery. But housing was always the poorer relative under SRB and if you made a bid under that heading through government office for Merseyside and then to central government. If it was predominantly housing and housing didn't happen to be...you know a bit of a thing on the side then you were guaranteed to fail it is as simple as that. Civil servants were actually saying in no uncertain terms 'if you are looking to raise money from SRB for housing projects then forget it'. And that was reflected in government housing policy from '79 to '97 that there was no money really pumped into housing of a social nature of any description.... And it becomes another catch 22 doesn't it? You can't regenerate the area unless you pump money into it and you can't pump money into it because it is not an economic regeneration issue it is a housing issue. I think that is were cement city has lost out in many respects in that it has always been a housing issue and the only monies that have been available have been those for anything other than housing.

There was also a feeling expressed that it was not viable in the long term to keep giving out money to repair homes. This reflects the feeling expressed elsewhere that there is a need for the coal districts to become self-sustaining rather than reliant on external funding.

Despite the obstacles in regenerating housing there have been a number of efforts in the four districts to improve housing. Most of these projects were carried out in partnership with a number of agencies. In St Helens the 'Cement City Forum' was set up which brought together the Local Authority, private landlords, tenants and homeowners to tackle some of the problems facing that estate. This area also received money under SRB 4. In Easington a partnership was set up between the private landlords, a housing association and the local authority to successfully refurbish a number of streets in Easington colliery. In Easington Colliery a successful capital challenge bid is being used to revitalise ex-colliery housing. In Mansfield an assessment was made of all the housing which was scored according to the condition of the housing and environmental conditions and social and economic factors. From this a list of target areas was compiled. The first 'renewal area' was Forrest Town, where most of the stock was in the private sector, the coal housing having been sold off prior to 1948. A second area is Mansfield Woodhouse, which is colliery village. These particular projects are funded for ten years. In addition in Mansfield a number of landlord forums were set up to solve the problems of private landlords. [expand]

The coalfield taskforce report (June, 1998) clearly outlined the many housing problems facing the coalfields highlighting the enormity of the problem and the need for financial and legislative changes, as was stated:

We were shocked by the dreadful conditions we witnessed on estates such as Easington and Warsop Vale. We believe that it is unrealistic to expect local authorities acting alone within existing spending limits to remedy the situation (DETR, 1998)

In the government's response to the Taskforce Report (Dec 1998) there was quite a positive come-back for housing. It was stated that the government has allocated a further £28m over the next three years through the HIP to coalfield authorities in England. After this time allocation will be based on proposals from local authorities. Although the government has increased the amount of money available to the coal districts it may only have a limited impact once it is divided between the various authorities. In addition there was no indication of changes in legislation being made to help tackle the issue of private landlords. In both the taskforce recommendations and the interviews carried out there was a strong feeling that what was needed was more control over landlords and the only way to do this was through changes in legislation.

4 Discussion

This paper has outlined some of the main issues in relation to regenerating housing in the four districts. Housing can be seen to related to issues operating at the national, regional, local and community levels. The decline of the mining industry and wider changes in housing policy have impacted on the housing in the districts to produce a *particular* problem. Poor housing conditions are prevalent throughout the Britain but in the coal districts they have a particular form and cause.

The sell-off of NCB has created a large stock of poor quality housing in the hands of absentee private landlords. More widely private landlords are contributing to the run down through poor maintenance and an overall lack of commitment to housing and the community. Increasing numbers in marginal owner-occupation are also contributing to a decline in housing. Local authorities and other agencies have little power to implement housing improvements especially where private landlords are involved.

The decline in central government finance for funding and the marginalisation of housing in funding regimes contributes to the difficulty in facilitating the regeneration of housing. From the interviews there is little doubt that the importance of improving housing is well recognised. Housing is seen as important in maintaining stable communities and jobs for the future. Hopefully this paper has shown the housing is a large scale problem in the coal districts and one that cannot be adequately be tackled in the current financial climate.

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