

Development, growth and regeneration: the triumph of hype over meaning

The following comments relate to the development proposals for the Camborne-Redruth area contained in the Kerrier Local Development Framework document – Kerrier Vision, Strategy and Core Policies together with the proposals outlined in the Camborne Pool Redruth – Area Action Plan (CPR-AAP) – Initial Draft for Consultation.

The CPR-AAP plays great attention to the importance of regeneration for Camborne-Redruth. An image is presented of an area in decline, with considerable areas of brownfield land; lacking investment and in need of change. Hence the focus on growth, development and regeneration. This begs a number of major questions; first, how severe is the problem; second, are the new policies actually new and third, what exactly is meant by the terms growth, development and regeneration. But first, what is the official policy. Let it speak for itself ...

Camborne Pool Redruth is destined to change quickly over the next 20 years to make up for lost time. The plan aims to ensure that the opportunity is taken to make sure that it is change for the better for the future of the whole community. The plan is far sighted and sets out high expectations from change but it still needs to be practicable and feasible. It aims to improve CPR, its environment, employment, housing, recreation, sport and leisure facilities and community services and, over time, to make it a better place in the future for all of us (KDC, Aug 2006).

The plan provides for the development of about 6,000 new jobs on about 50 ha of land, about 6,000 new homes, improved public transport, leisure facilities, community services, recreation areas and pedestrian linkages. It will do it with a better quality urban design to conserve resources and enhance local distinctiveness and it plans to site the mix of new development where it will sustain the local communities and their character. It seeks to conserve the best features of the urban landscape, heritage, including the World Heritage Sites, and the natural environment and to optimise the new opportunities presented by development for their enhancement (KDC, Aug 2006).

The improvement of the economy and employment is a high priority for CPR's regeneration, but there is a close relationship between employment, incomes, housing, the environment and the area's appearance and image New housing development should create decent homes for a wide range of income groups that have the necessary range of skills to help develop the economy, to attract modern business and to support regeneration (KDC, Aug 2006).

Decades of under investment in CPR has been a deterrent to brownfield development and economic, social and environmental improvement. The combination of the legacy of urban brownfield land, the availability of the resources to enable its redevelopment, the priority for its reuse, the housing and economic needs of the area, the higher order of development plans providing for urban growth and the introduction of the URC have created a significant opportunity for change, investment and redevelopment for the improvement and regeneration of CPR that should be fully exploited (KDC, Aug 2006).

In essence the stated aims of the CPR-AAP are for investment to improve and regenerate the area focusing on the development of brownfield land with more housing and employment.

Past policy

So how does the 'new' compare to the 'old'? The CPR-AAP gives the impression the Camborne-Redruth is an area where little investment has occurred; however, this runs counter to its actual development over the last 40 years. 'Since the 1960s considerable effort had been put into developing new industrial estates and many of Cornwall's newer manufacturing companies are located here' (Highways Agency, 2003). Initially an industrial estate was developed at Wilson Way, Pool (25 ha) followed by the large estate at Cardrew (approximately 38 hectares), and land adjacent to Wilson Way at Barncoose (12 ha). The demise of the textile sector in the early 1990s led to the redevelopment of the factory sites on Station Road, with their conversion to retail provision. The retail sector has invested in both the town centres and at Pool, with Tesco's opening one of their largest stores west of Bristol. Overall, investment has consisted of a mix of private and public funding. Some areas of brownfield were developed, notably the Leisure Centre at Pool, and some limited areas also in Pool for employment and housing. The largest area of brownfield land was developed by Heathcoats adjacent to Station Road in the post war period. Considerable amounts of funding were also obtained by Kerrier and used to 'green' old mining sites, often destroying what is now regarded as industrial heritage in the process.

Camborne-Redruth has in fact undergone considerable economic change with the decline of some industries, for example, the old engineering and textiles concerns and their replacement by others, whether new manufacturing or retail. Not only this but the extent of the urban area has increased both for employment and housing land to meet the demands from an increasing population, an unusual aspect of an area in 'decline'.

Regeneration

The CPR-AAP makes 158 references to 'regeneration'. But what is it? 'The meaning of 'regeneration' in Britain has widened since the early 1990s, when it was associated mainly with economic and infrastructure development. It is now an umbrella term understood as the "promotion of the social, economic and environmental well-being of an area"' (LGA, 1998).

'Regeneration is a response to a particular set of problems, and its purpose is in part determined by the ways in which those problems are defined' (Dargan, 2003). Thus regeneration policy should be constructed according to the particular problems of an area and not according to a broad, one-size fits all, template. Yet, regeneration policy in Camborne-Redruth is based on a template that associates economic decline with population decline, a template more suited to the conditions associated with declining northern cities. It operates on the premise that the area has experienced market failure, hence the creation of the URC which is 'a recognition of market failures ... and of the inability of past public sector interventions to correct these failures and create lasting improvements. URCs are a mechanism that is principally focused on one aspect of the problems facing an area – its physical and associated economic regeneration' (Amion, 2001). It is difficult

to distinguish between the new and the old in terms of regeneration policy, both include the provision of additional housing and employment sites; both seek to reclaim brownfield land.

Development and growth

Development can be interpreted in a variety of ways. In strictly planning terms

Development has a legal definition, found in section 55 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. There are two parts to the definition. The first is operational development, which includes the carrying out of building, engineering, mining or other operations in, on, over or under land. The second is changes of use, which covers the making of any material change in the use of any buildings or land (CPRE website, 2006).

But development also has a wider meaning. Though originally regarded as an economic function 'definitions have tended to be broadened over time and development has gradually come to be viewed as a social as well as an economic process which involves the progressive improvement of conditions and the fulfilment of potential' (Wall, 1997). Such a definition encapsulates the difference between development in the broader sense, which involves making something better, and growth that is simply an increase, as in size, number, value, or strength; an extension or expansion of something. Though development as a term is still confusing, we would use the phrase 'improvement of conditions and the fulfilment of potential' as a starting point. In this sense it is fundamentally different from development as set out in current plans.

The AAP clearly states that 'Development and growth is an essential part of the regeneration of CPR' (KDC, August 2006). This linkage of two different and separate activities is both technically incorrect and unwise. There should be a clear distinction between development and growth as outlined previously. Any idea that growth will automatically aid regeneration is dangerously misplaced. Locally the myth of housing (and population) led-growth is being driven by the URC. Underlying all the hype about regeneration, the main aim of the URC's work is to build more houses in a rather desperate belief that more houses and more people will magically regenerate the area. In the words of the Urban Framework Plan '[u]sing housing development as a regeneration-driver' (Llewelyn-Davis, 2001). From the hype one would be forgiven for assuming that expanding the area through population growth is a novel and dynamic idea, never tried before. But it's not. Camborne-Redruth has experienced considerable growth, both in population and extent of its urban land area. The population of Camborne-Redruth has increased by 43% since 1961, significantly higher than the 17% across England. In fact the rate is two and a half times greater! Oddly it hasn't seemed to have made much difference to the area's economy. The area of housing land has increased by 100% and employment land by 300%. It is hard to see where the catching up needs to take place 'to make up for lost time'!

Camborne-Redruth is also Cornwall's largest urban area, regarded in the South West 'Assembly's Regional Spatial Strategy as beneficial in terms of

'critical mass' particularly in relation to the labour market and the ability to support services. Yet this has not bestowed on it the alleged economic benefits hyped up by the URC. Population-led growth was widely discredited as a solution to Cornwall's chronic economic problems back in the 1990s. But the URC appears unaware of this. Instead they stubbornly prefer to repeat on a larger scale the old mistaken agendas and failed policies of the 1970s and 1980s. The failure to come up with really novel and yet sustainable policies for regeneration are disguised by a well-funded PR campaign that is high on rhetoric but sadly short on substance. This obsession with growth policy also sits rather uneasily with the concept of sustainability, particularly the objective in the CRP- AAP that 'the policies and proposals of the AAP should be sustainable'. Apparently there are no limits to population growth in Camborne-Redruth; it can and should continue to rise. Yet elsewhere we read that 'the concept of environmental limits is fundamental to sustainable development' (House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, 2004).

What is apparent is that what passes for development and regeneration of the area is simply growth. The estimated 6,000 new jobs roughly equals the 6,000 additional dwellings planned for the area, with a projected population increase of between 12,000 and 13,000. In that sense they are not new jobs enabling the existing population to obtain better skilled and paid careers. Much of the additional infrastructure planned is again supporting additional population growth rather than development. In practise the policies are remarkably similar to those pursued since the early sixties – more people, more houses, more jobs (to keep pace) and more roads and associated development. It is alarming that the old policies are merely being repackaged and presented as new, exciting visions of the future. It is depressing that the recycling of failed policies is the nearest the plans come to 'sustainability'. It is appalling that none of this is questioned or criticised publicly by our representatives on the local councils or by the local media.

Growth is assumed to be development. It is visible, with an instant appeal, presenting an image of change, movement and progress yet obscuring the underlying trends. It fulfils the need of the project class, those usually transient and highly mobile people who have made a career out of managing grant-aided projects, to provide tangible evidence of success and is easily packaged for an uncritical media. Development proposals can be displayed with glossy gusto at exhibitions, creating the image of 'new' and 'vibrant' ideas despite, on closer analysis, being remarkably similar to tried, tested and tired old ideas. The likely scenario is an increasingly urbanised environment, the creation of a bigger Camborne-Redruth, where the existing clusters of deprivation and despair are simply engulfed by new development; where the gap between new areas of unaffordable housing and the older deprived communities is clearly visible. The 'new' Camborne-Redruth will simply be a replica of other homogenous urban areas, lacking community coherence, without a sense of identity, inhabiting an increasingly less liveable environment, and with its social and economic problems unresolved.

There are undoubtedly economic and social issues to address. Low earnings and housing affordability are major areas of concern. Deprivation is a serious issue. People deserve a greener, better environment. Yet the proposals in the plan do little to meet these needs. In theory it is possible to

plan for the development of Camborne-Redruth in the sense of improving conditions and fulfilling the potential of the area and its people. This might involve upgrading the skills of the existing workforce, providing higher paid employment, ensuring that old industrial sites are re-used, improving liveability by dramatically reducing traffic levels, retaining and enhancing green areas by encouraging diversity rather providing additional soulless and uninspiring municipal lawns. However, by seeking to accommodate unsustainable population growth we can never achieve these desirable goals. Indeed the process of accommodation will lead to the creation of the housing disasters of the 21st century, initially lauded by those who would never live in them, ultimately to be discarded as defunct.

So what will the projected growth mean? If development rates continue at the rate suggested in the most recent plans, then the number of houses in Camborne-Redruth will double by 2061 (from 20,700 in 2001 to 40,500), while the total population will increase from 46,200 to 70,000 within just two generations. Have the people of Camborne-Redruth been asked whether they want to live in an urban area that is twice its present size? What is somewhat amazing is that all of this takes place against a background of increasing recognition that current growth policies are environmentally unsustainable, whether on a local, UK or global basis. As CoSERG argued many years ago in Cornwall at the Crossroads, there is a need to give 'our communities a breathing space by slowing down population migration' (CoSERG, 1988). That need is even more pressing nowadays.

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