

Attracting and retaining families in new urban mixed income communities

Government across the UK is promoting 'mixed and balanced' communities, and mixed income new communities (MINCs) are now being built in most cities, either to regenerate low-income areas or to ensure social housing is provided alongside market-rate homes in new private developments. Better-off families have an important role to play in renewal, particularly if the goals include improving schools and other opportunities for low-income children. This study, by the Institute of Education and the London School of Economics, examined four inner city MINCs: two in low-income areas (Glasgow and Manchester) and two on regenerated brownfield sites (London). It investigated whether families were living in private sector homes and their motivations for doing so. The study found that:

- Dense inner-city MINCs can be good places for raising children, particularly younger children, if they are appropriately designed and managed.
- The MINCs in existing low-income areas drew primarily 'local' families with previous ties to the area; the London MINCs attracted better-off 'newcomers'. 'Local' and 'newcomer' families benefit their communities differently.
- The main factors attracting families into MINCs were safe, clean, and friendly neighbourhoods, good schools and open spaces enabling children to play and offering environmental amenity. A unified appearance across the buildings of the site (integrating social and market rate housing), neighbourhood staffing, and effective strategic management were all important. Community development was also key.
- Retaining families in MINCs may be more problematic if certain issues are not addressed; many families intended to leave the MINCs, and were likely to be replaced by childless households. The main reason was a lack of homes for sale that larger families could afford to buy.
- Developers are reluctant to address the need for larger family homes in inner-city MINCs, particularly where land values are high. Changing incentives by altering housebuilding and density targets to include size, bedrooms, or type of home would be one option for influencing changes in practice. Learning from European models of high density flats for families could also be helpful.
- The researchers conclude that making MINCs places of choice for families is challenging but possible. Neighbourhoods have to be designed and managed with families in mind as part of the drive for sustainable communities.



Introduction

The Government appears persuaded that sustainable regeneration of low-income neighbourhoods is most likely to be achieved by changing the mix of people as well as the physical environment, and introducing some residents who are better off, thereby ‘transforming’ neighbourhoods rather than ‘improving’ them. For both these existing communities and wholly new ones built on brownfield land, a mix of incomes is also preferred to single-tenure developments. A mix is seen as offering a range of housing options as people grow older, as well as an opportunity for more diverse social interaction.

Many inner-city MINCs will be home to families in social housing. But MINCs are unlikely to:

- achieve their *neighbourhood* renewal goals unless they contain children across the income range, who use the same schools and services, and provide common ground for parents from different backgrounds;
- be *inclusive* if they have only childless households in the market-rate homes, given the divergent lifestyles and interests of family and non-family households; or
- be *sustainable* in the longer term unless singles and childless couples have opportunities to remain when they have their own families.

If MINCs are to succeed, therefore, the question is how to achieve a mix of household *types* not just incomes and, specifically, how to secure the presence of families in both market-rate and affordable housing.

This study focuses on the experience of families in market-rate homes at four flagship MINCs, all of which originally intended to sell homes to families. Two case studies were in neighbourhoods with previous low-income housing: Hulme in Manchester and the New Gorbals in Glasgow; the other two were new brownfield developments in London: Greenwich Millennium Village and Britannia Village.

Families in existing low-income MINCs

Significant numbers of family-size homes for sale were built in both Hulme and New Gorbals. In 2001, 15 per cent of households in market-rate housing in New Gorbals, and 19 per cent at Hulme, had dependent children. These figures are well below city averages for home-ownership (27 per cent in Manchester and 28 per cent in Glasgow, drawing on Census data), and some way below the proportions of families in social housing in the neighbourhoods (24 per cent at Hulme and 25 per cent at New Gorbals). However, they are sizeable enough to suggest there is a market for these families in inner-city neighbourhoods.

The majority of families in the private homes were ‘locals’, with family ties to the area. These families bought early in

the development when prices were lower and had children when they moved. There were also ‘newcomers’ from similar backgrounds, and another group of ‘newcomers’, with higher incomes, who arrived later and had children after they moved.

‘Locals’ were more positive than higher income ‘newcomers’ about the area as a place to raise children. They had supportive social networks, interacted more with social tenants, and felt well-served by the primary schools. Secondary schools were a major concern for these families, as was the high cost of larger homes, which rose rapidly relative to surrounding areas as the regeneration increased land values. Over half intended to move for these reasons – slightly higher than the national averages among families in cities. Higher income ‘newcomers’ also worried about primary schools, and had concerns over safety and social mix.

Given the rising price of homes, ‘local’ families moving out are likely to be replaced by ‘newcomer’ childless households. The number of families in the private sector will probably decline, increasing the social gaps and possibly weakening services for children and young people. This suggests that retaining ‘local families’ or attracting childless ‘newcomers’ to stay once they have children needs attention, if families with choice are to play a lasting role in the community.

Families in new MINCs

In the new communities of Greenwich Millennium and Britannia Villages, there were very few family-size homes in the private sector compared with the MINCs in existing low-income areas, and fewer families living there. Nevertheless, families formed about 12 per cent of private households – higher than estimated by many of those who had worked on the developments, although lower than city and borough averages. The vast majority of the market-rate families lived in flats or maisonettes rather than houses, challenging preconceptions about the type of housing families normally live in.

These families were ‘newcomers’. They often moved in for reasons of ‘convenience’, such as proximity to work, and often did not have children when they made that decision. At Greenwich Millennium Village, some families had also been attracted by the development’s distinctive features, such as its open space, architecture, and “urban” and “mixed” community.

Greenwich has been much more successful than Britannia in persuading private families that it is a good place to raise children, particularly due to the primary school, the open space provision, and the clean and safe environment. Still, many families who were otherwise predisposed to stay thought it likely they would move, either for larger homes or for personal reasons, such as a new job.

The supply of family homes

In all four MINCs, building family homes (of three bedrooms or more) for sale had been an important element in the master plans, but on delivery, many of these homes ended up being too small or were inappropriately designed for children. High costs have also been a problem for those on lower incomes seeking to move into larger homes within the neighbourhood as their families grew. The findings here suggest that visions and masterplans for family homes are not enough; strong partnerships led by the public sector are needed throughout the implementation phases of developments to secure homes suitable for families. Sales and marketing approaches may also need to change to target these groups.

More generally, developers commonly believe there is little market for family homes for sale in inner urban MINCs. A review of the extent of family-sized homes in recent and planned MINCs across England, Scotland and Wales found few existing inner-city MINCs offering family-sized homes. In most cases, the larger homes were in social housing not private housing; these were typically lower density houses, not flats.

Planners reported that they expect this trend to continue. In London, there is a particular dearth of family homes in new developments, with much new private sector housing scheduled to be one- and two-bedroom flats. The lack of larger homes is now causing concern to inner London authorities. Outside London, MINCs with larger family homes are being planned, though few are populated yet.

There are a number of constraints on the supply of family accommodation:

- Land value: where land values are high and there is a demand for one- and two-bedroom flats, these smaller units are more profitable. Indeed, raising land values is often an explicit objective of new MINCs, yet this can squeeze the supply of family homes and take their cost beyond the reach of local people.
- Government building targets. These have been set in numbers of units, without regard to the internal space or the number of bedrooms of properties.
- A lack of confidence among developers in the market for family homes in inner urban areas.
- Developers' reluctance to experiment with flats, rather than houses, in high density areas. In spite of successful examples in other European countries, with one notable exception, all the housebuilders interviewed took it as read that families with housing choice did not want to live in flats. This leads to a 'chicken and egg' situation: developers, believing there to be no market, do not design for families; families see no homes that challenge their traditional concerns

about high density living and generate no demand to which developers might respond.

Designing and managing MINCs

Two further issues were critical to attracting and retaining families: good schools, and safe, clean and friendly neighbourhood environments.

Across all sites, more families in private homes had children of primary school age than secondary school age. Primary schools were usually seen as a problem for 'newcomer' families, although they were sometimes appreciated by 'locals'. However, schools in MINCs can build confidence among 'newcomer' families, through community outreach and involvement in pre-school childcare. Engaging newcomers required careful interagency planning, possibly including links to respected area schools and co-ordination between school and housing allocations. Secondary schools are more problematic: they often serve a much wider area than the MINC itself, but are critically important for urban policy.

Families felt safer where the social housing was well integrated into the site, rather than obviously separated by design, location, or a less clean and tidy appearance. Neighbourhood staffing also contributed to feelings of safety, particularly an on-site neighbourhood manager and visible staffing in park areas. Families appreciated a sense of friendliness and community responsibility, difficult to achieve in new high-density areas with a great diversity of residents.

Successful strategies for community-building included: hiring a community development worker, nurturing cross-tenure residents' associations, and providing informal meeting places, such as courtyards and public squares within the overall site design.

Implications for policy

Much of the good practice identified in this study was at Greenwich Millennium Village, an expensive demonstration project with less social housing than at the other areas. Its success underlines the cost of getting mixed neighbourhoods right, and shows that the need for public investment does not diminish simply because there are higher income residents.

Lessons for practice cannot be divorced from bigger issues of strategic planning and delivery. Ensuring that developers build homes for families, and that public agencies work together to deliver effective schools, childcare, play facilities, community support and neighbourhood management requires strong public sector strategic management from start to finish. In some cases, this may need a special body establishing, in others an existing partnership with a named champion in charge.

Government depends on housebuilders to deliver family homes, and needs to find ways to encourage this.

Options include:

- Changing incentives by altering housebuilding and density targets to include additional factors such as size, bedrooms, or type of home.
- Investigating subsidies and shared equity schemes to bridge the affordability gap.
- Promotion by local partnerships of the building of family homes by discounting land sales or linking plots of land for family and non-family housing. They could also support developers in identifying demand for family housing, including among young people who move in early and who may wish to stay in the area when they have children.
- Central Government encouragement of demonstration projects with developers, perhaps using European models, to create expertise and confidence in building inner-urban higher density family environments.

Finally, there are implications from this study for mixed income policy as a whole. Mixing incomes can have some benefits for low-income residents, including increasing local housing options and reducing stigma attached to certain areas, but does not always lead to social mixing and improved neighbourhood services. The benefits depend in part on who the new residents are, and on the income gaps between them. Income mix is not a panacea for low-income communities and the benefits need to be carefully thought through for each local circumstance.

Conclusion

The researchers conclude that it is possible to attract families with housing choice into inner urban mixed

income new communities. There is some demand both from locals and newcomers, possibly more than developers think. New parents can be retained, provided that neighbourhoods are carefully planned, delivered and managed with families in mind. Families with older children can also be persuaded that inner cities offer good environments for child-raising, provided that there are adequate homes and secondary schools. A more co-ordinated approach to 'place-making' is needed to ensure that these issues are examined in the round. With sufficient forethought and ongoing investment, MINCs could be made to work better for family households and, in so doing, could have a valuable part to play in the revitalisation of Britain's inner cities.

About the project

The research had three main strands:

- four case studies of established inner-urban MINCs, including a survey of 100 residents in each area, interviews with families in both market-rate and affordable homes, and interviews with key service providers, planners and developers, and a review of planning documents, evaluation reports and local studies;
- a review of current and planned MINCs in Britain's 25 largest cities; and
- interviews with developers, policy-makers and strategic planners.

The team also reviewed the relevant literature, as well as Census and national survey data on trends and patterns in families' residential choices.

For further information

The full report, **A good place for children? Attracting and retaining families in inner urban mixed income communities** by Emily Silverman, Ruth Lupton and Alex Fenton, is published for the Foundation by the Chartered Institute of Housing (ISBN 1 905018 11 8, price £16.95).

Published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, The Homestead, 40 Water End, York YO30 6WP. This project is part of the JRF's research and development programme. These findings, however, are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Foundation. ISSN 0958-3084

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