

Unknown

From: ian.shanks@bt.com
Sent: 23 January 2008 10:48
To: Housing Consultation 2007
Cc: brendan.dick@bt.com; Graeme.Downie@sc.grayling.com
Subject: Consultation Response - Firm Foundations:- The future of housing in Scotland

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I have attached the BT Scotland response to the above consultation. If you require clarification on any point or any additional information please do not hesitate to come back to me. I have also attached the respondent information form.

<<Housing Consultation Response1.doc>> <<RESPONDENT iNFORMA11ON FORM.tif>>

regards

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25/02/2008



1. Introduction: Communications and Infrastructure

BT Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Consultation “Firm Foundations: the future of housing in Scotland.”

We would like to respond to the vision expressed in the document rather than by addressing the individual questions posed. The role of communications in today’s economy, community and for individuals is immense, and we feel that there are issues relating to communications and infrastructure which should be considered at the very inception of future housing policy.

Communications is crucial and central to life and work and can play a key role in ensuring that communities and housing are sustainable and as environmentally friendly as possible, and it will have a major role to play in an increasing number of aspects of life in the future.

The multi-dimensional role of communications means that communications infrastructure should be a driver in considering future housing development. With the proper inclusion of communications technology in the planning of future housing stock, there would be knock-on benefits or effects into almost every area of public policy. This document will briefly outline the potential benefits in each of these areas including:

- Underlying Trends and Economic Opportunities
- Economy and Skills
- Community (Work-Life Balance)
- Health and Social care
- Physical Environment
- Transport

2. Underlying Trends and Economic Opportunities

Despite the recent credit crunch, house prices continue to rise, increasing the pressure and demand for sustainable new housing. In addition, the cost of managing existing housing stock is growing because of the age of that stock. However, the amount of available land in the UK is limited, particularly in successful economic areas where there is particularly high demand. The existing land, therefore, has to be used in more imaginative ways.

One way of doing this is to ensure that new housing can include effective communications technology infrastructure which might, for example, encourage people to work more flexibly in the future, reducing the pressure on existing office space and, potentially, allowing more housing to be built in key areas. In addition to housing being used to encourage flexible working (through live-work developments, for example), a further option might be to establish local hub offices for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs), virtual contact centres or more local rentable office space with up to date communications infrastructure. These could be established in new communities a

distance from a major city, reducing traffic congestion and pressure on office space in already crowded cities.

We should recognise that, in a wider economic sense, knowledge is increasingly the key currency for growth, and this requires communications – as a ‘life blood’ – to make it work. Homes that are equipped with modern communications infrastructure will encourage a new kind of economy in the UK, new enterprises, including small and home-based businesses.

Many women choose to have children when they are older, and are often, understandably, unwilling to interrupt their career for too long. Again, adapting future housing strategies to acknowledge this reality would allow mothers to return to work earlier and fulfil their own hopes and ambitions and, importantly, contribute to the economy and society. A similar principle could apply to encourage people of all ages to remain economically active, perhaps through part time remote working, where they might otherwise have chosen, for example, retirement.

Future Skills

For those not economically active, housing which embraces technology would make the learning of new skills and capabilities easier, and for those in work, allow continued progress with personal development and upskilling whilst maintaining a healthy work-life balance. We suggest that the knock-on economic benefits of this sort of development would be significant.

For young people, technology has the potential to bring the workplace closer, allowing businesses to interact more closely with potential new employees and, on the flip side, allowing young people to have a better idea of different careers that exist, gather practical information, and then learn the necessary skills or absorb the appropriate knowledge.

This vision of the future is one where technology at home, or in a local community, is the jump-off point for future careers – an inclusive world where technology allows people to access the information that will enable them to make use of the vast range of resources that are available.

Community (Work-Life balance)

It is important that technology does not lead to a faceless society and faceless communities. Our aim should be to make it do quite the opposite. For example, the perception, and therefore fear of crime, is often higher than the reality. Modern ICT and communications technology has the ability to break down barriers and therefore build safer communities for the future where people are no longer afraid of their surroundings. This should encourage real interaction and result in closer communities.

Further, the term “Community” itself needs to be reconsidered. In the age of the Internet, community means a lot more than just a collection of houses near each other. Instead communities can be a lot wider, encompassing a number of neighbourhoods or, in some cases, entire cities. The key aim is to use technology to bring people together, not to have them hiding behind computer screens. Rather than driving people apart, technology in the communities of the future can be used as a way to break down barriers and encourage social activity and participation.

Community should also mean ensuring that people feel able to manage their own lives away from work and maintain a healthy work-life balance. By using technology to create a community in

which individuals feel they belong, they will feel a responsibility and attempt to maintain a balance with their working life that enables them to play a full role in that community.

Health and Social Care Services

With an ageing population, an increasing number of people are finding that they have to double as carers for elderly relatives. If new housing stock were able to cater for this reality then people would be able to continue some level of economic activity whilst also fulfilling their caring and social responsibilities.

The way in which community and social services will be delivered in the future must also change. The idea of people simply waiting to receive a standard social service could disappear, as those in need are able to receive a more personalised level of care, with an amount of face-to-face time appropriate to their needs. For example, it makes no sense for a fit and active person to wait in the house for a visit when they could be checked up on in another way. Similarly, resources ought to be freed up for those in need of more face-to-face care. Telecare and telemedicine are still in their infancy but, with solid technology infrastructure in homes, they could be about to become real alternatives. Technology can enable elderly and disabled people to remain in their homes and communities for longer too, significantly reducing the cost of healthcare.

As well as health and social care, other public services, such as schools and, perhaps, hospitals, could increasingly be changed by the community and housing around them. Again, technology in a community could be used to bring back a true sense of the “local” school or hospital. If a community felt that they had some sort of ownership and responsibility for local facilities then this is more likely to become a possibility. Part of the reason this has diminished in recent decades is a sense of remoteness. Technology has the potential to bring people a sense of ownership and closeness even if they are physically some distance from the groupings or facilities in which they have an interest.

Green

The benefits of improved ICT and communications infrastructure can be seen in almost every aspect of the policy areas described above. Reducing the need for travel for work, through local community hubs for example, would reduce traffic on the roads. Increased use of telecare and telemedicine would reduce travel for carers, nurses and patients, again reducing congestion and emissions.

In addition, the effective use of technology within both individual houses and communities could mean more efficient methods of heating houses, reducing energy consumption and, therefore, reducing emissions. On a community level, better management of the water supply by a small community through the use of technology would again reduce energy consumption. If a process can be made more efficient by technology then it is likely that it will also bring environmental gains.

Physical Environment

It is important that lessons are learned from previous attempts at developing new towns and communities. Buildings and infrastructure need to be planned over a longer term, perhaps 30 years, rather than as a short term solution to an imminent problem. This can save expense at a

later date. Although technology is constantly moving forward, it is essential that, as far as possible, communities are future proofed.

What is most critical is to ensure the correct mix of housing, with local economic opportunities as well as services and infrastructure. Creating satellite towns around large cities which necessitate a lot of travel would add further pressure on regional transport services, reducing their efficiency, and impact upon services such as schools and hospitals. New communities must be planned in the round, taking into account all appropriate factors and using technology as the 'glue'. Technology can be a lynch-pin that can hold these new, not always traditional, communities together, with communications infrastructure taking the same level of precedent that road building did when considering new towns 40 years ago.

Conclusion

Failure to consider communications technology when planning new housing developments in the future would result in missed opportunities. There would be reduced growth in skills, the economy and work opportunities. Communities that are relying on traditional thinking are, in some places, already ailing and leaving large problems unsolved.

If action is taken now to consider technology at the early stages of new developments then it will be possible to maximise the benefits of ICT and reap the benefits of sustainable economic activity and a reinvigorated sense of community.

The arguments we present above highlight some of the possibilities that ICT and communications infrastructure could offer in the future if they are seen as key parts of future housing developments, and are designed in from the beginning.

BT Scotland looks forward to working with Government to deliver this vision.

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RESPONDENT INFORMATION FORM

FIRM FOUNDATIONS: THE FUTURE OF HOUSING IN SCOTLAND

Please complete the details below and return it with your response to the above address. This will help ensure we handle your response appropriately. Thank you for your help.

Name: IAN SHANKS
Postal Address: BT SCOTLAND
PP HW P165
PO BOX 234
EDINBURGH EH12 9UR.

1. Are you responding: (please tick one box)

(a) as an individual go to Q2a/b and then Q4

(b) on behalf of a group/organisation go to Q3 and then Q4

INDIVIDUALS

2a. Do you agree to your response being made available to the public (in Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government website)?

Yes (go to 2b below)

No, not at all We will treat your response as confidential

2b. Where confidentiality is not requested, we will make your response available to the public on the following basis (please tick one of the following boxes)

Yes, make my response, name and address all available

Yes, make my response available, but not my name or address

Yes, make my response and name available, but not my address

ON BEHALF OF GROUPS OR ORGANISATIONS:

3. The name and address of your organisation will be made available to the public (in the Scottish Government library and/or on the Government website). Are you also content for your response to be made available?

Yes No We will treat your response as confidential

SHARING RESPONSES/FUTURE ENGAGEMENT

4. We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for the Scottish Government to contact you again in the future in relation to this consultation response?

Yes No