

# We need a new approach for country-wide growth

If towns and cities across the country outside the South East are to make anything like the contribution to UK growth that they did between the mid-90s and mid-2000s, then something has to be done. Action has to be taken not only for the sake of the urban areas themselves, but to help establish a balance in the UK economy, which is skewing more and more unhealthily to the one corner.

This is why I am supporting the EG and UK Regeneration Building a Better Britain campaign. In Nottingham we are doing our best in difficult circumstances to create a city that can compete nationally and internationally. We have significant investment in two new tram lines, a new railway station, and major investment in research and development at our universities.

As well as the prospect of significant retail investment, we are also extending our district heating system to wider parts of the city centre and developing a high-speed broadband network. We are the only city in the country using its own version of the Future Jobs Fund to try to counter youth unemployment.

But we need to do more. And the development sector is one way that we can do it. This is because the industry provides

## REGENERATION

**Graham Chapman**  
Nottingham city council



**Development provides one of the most effective ways to kick-start the economy**



one of the most effective ways of kick-starting an economy, due to its high multiplier effect. It is also one of the sectors where local government can have a direct impact – through its land holdings and through planning permission.

We can, in the short term, de-risk the cost of development. Planning departments do not need to be slow, unresponsive and inflexible. In fact, they simply can't afford to be so.

In Nottingham we are determined to show that we are open for business by developing planning protocols with the development industry, which will create a new model.

This will apply from initial interest to planning approval so that the council and developer and property professionals are all agreed on how most effectively and cheaply we can do business together.

I stress, this is not about giving away permission for poor-quality development, but about achieving the best developments via the lowest cost and least risky process.

We are removing other financial burdens, too, as we take a much more realistic approach to facilitating development – section 106 contributions, for example.

Yes, we do still expect to see the development set in the context of a high-quality public realm, with access and transport considerations fully addressed, but as for contributions for local park improvement, public art and affordable housing, we will recognise the current realities.

We can be innovative, too – let's think about getting sites away that can link to our huge district heating network, thus providing secure energy sources, reducing the burdens of low carbon compliance.

And what about our development industry partners and the financiers' views; what can they do to close the viability gap? Surely there's an argument now for more realistic

commercial expectations and longer-term profit realisation, through more flexible "open book" transactional arrangements, for example. We could provide land up front and we are prepared to delay payments if that's what it takes, so long as developers provide the funds to make the construction happen and we can agree a long-term valuation and overage arrangement. Pension-fund backed investors have been interested in this approach for some time, but it's still all too rare.

So, is it just the lack of end users that discourages outright purchase? If so, what about the long-term private rental professional client, maybe transferring to part-owner over time? These are difficult questions to answer I realise, but if the regulators were making life easier and less costly, and innovative developers and financiers can operate more flexibly in providing new types of products, then there might be 100 sites across the country that we could get away – and that's a lot of jobs and a significant contribution to GDP.

There's a target the Build a Better Britain Campaign should be able to meet.

*Graham Chapman is deputy leader of Nottingham city council*

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