Community housing management and stronger communities

Positioning Paper

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1. INTRODUCTION

The primary research question of this project is 'what approaches are currently being pursued in Australia by community housing providers as lead agencies to strengthen communities?' In addressing this, the project aims to provide a better basis for understanding the contribution that community housing can make, as part of a range of social housing products, to meet the varying policy objectives that are loosely covered by the term 'strengthening communities'.

This Positioning Paper is the first research output from this project. The aim of the Positioning Paper is provide an overview of the policy issues to be addressed through the project, to provide a review of the related literature and to detail the research methods that will be used in the project. Subsequent reports will present the findings of the project.

2. WHAT DOES THE LITERATURE SAY ABOUT COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING?

The term community strengthening has a long and rich history in a variety of disciplines. However, in order to address the issue of community strengthening, it is necessary to first examine the literature about community in general, in particular addressing the question, what is community. The literature review will also examine the related areas of community development, social capital and social economy/entrepreneurship.

2.1 What is community?

While concern about the quality of social structures and relationships is at least as old as recorded history, the concept of community, and sociological and economic discussions about this concept, developed in response to the industrial revolution in Europe. Numerous social and economic commentators[1] wrote about perceived shortfalls in the social structures of industrialised towns and their consequences in regard to the health and well being of citizens. One commentator, Ferdinand Tönnies, [1877][2] developed two concepts, Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, to differentiate pre-industrial, agriculture based settlements from larger, urbanised and industrialised towns and cities.
According to Tönnies, Gemeinschaft refers to local areas where people know each other and where relationships are based on mutual aid and trust; Gesellschaft refers to urban societies where individuals experience relative anonymity and can pursue their own interests, without, however, high levels of mutual support and trust from their neighbours. In English, Gemeinschaft is often equated with the English concept community while Gesellschaft is equated with the English word society.

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[1] Such as Durkheim, Emile, 1964, The Division of Labor in Society, New York, Free Press; Mill John Stuart, Considerations on representative government; Ed. Currin V. Shields, New York, Liberal Arts Press [1958]; and many others
[2] Tönnies Ferdinand, 1877, Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, translated and edited by Charles P. Loomis, Michigan State University Press 1957.

The English concept had a slightly different focus:-

> *"This tradition of talking about community in such a way as to restate values of the old rule ethos has a history which goes back to Goldsmith, Crabbe and Sturt. Whereas the German communitarians tended to look a long way back to the Greek polis for their image of community, British communitarians have more often than not looked back to the village community which was beginning to be destroyed in the second half of the 18th-century, if they did not go further with William Morris and see in feudal society the appropriate image of community. "3*

Overtime these subtleties of meaning have merged but the term community still carries with it the overtones of the Gemeinschaft definition and the British yearning for assumed virtues of village life. These meanings can be seen in the liberal use of the word community in all kinds of political policy statements and public sector strategies. Partly perhaps because society is so large and partly because the word society does not carry overtones of harmony, trust, and mutuality, the preferred term is usually community and it is used ubiquitously without most people noticing that while all the values implicit in Gemeinschaft/village life are being evoked, what is actually being discussed is aspects of post industrial society.

Thus it has become the norm to find all kinds of public documents referring to local communities, estate communities, low income communities, ethnic communities, middle class communities and to things which, it is implied, belong to these communities:- community needs, community expectations, community issues, community wishes and so on. Community building, community development and community strengthening are terms which fall within this usage.

During the twentieth century, the meaning of the word community was debated extensively in a number of disciplines and with different emphases4. One writer5 identified 94 meanings. Perhaps the most useful recent sociological definition of community was provided by Willmott6 [1989] who noted 'the essence of the word, as all etymological explanations show, is the idea of "having something in common".' What is in common may be 'a sense of common purpose, a capacity to come together to meet common ends or the existence of local networks available to provide help and support.'
People can have a territory in common, an interest in common and/or sentiments or feelings in common. It is sentiments or feelings in common which lead to a sense of identity or common membership of an 'attachment community'. Whereas members of interest communities may have little actual interaction, 'attachment communities' are based on personal social relationships and on people's perceptions of a sense of identity, solidarity or belonging.

According to Willmott, 'Places are more likely to be 'attachment communities' when the following conditions apply:

- When there has been relative population stability, and thus large proportions of people have had lengthy continuous residence in the area.
- When kin live in the area.

3 Plant, Raymond, 1974, Community and ideology: an essay in applied sociology, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, p 27
4 Eg. Gusfield, Joseph R., 1975, Community A Critical Response, Basil Blackwell, Oxford; Bell, Colin and Howard Newby, 1971, Community Studies, An introduction to the sociology of the local community, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, London; Bott, Elizabeth, 1957, Family and Social Network, London, Tavistock
5 Hillery Jr. G. A., 1955, 'Definitions of Community: Areas of Agreement', Rural Sociology,
6 Willmott, Peter (1989) Community Initiatives: patterns and prospects, Policy Studies Institute London

- When many people work in a local industry.
- When people are alike in social class and income, or share membership of a particular minority.
- When a large proportion of local people have the specific social skills, and the appropriate values, to get to know others quickly.
- When there are many locally –based organisations.
- When a place or its residents are under an external threat, particularly when this results in the creation of local campaigning organisations (though this may be a more temporary effect than the others).
- When physical layout and design encourage rather than discourage casual neighbourly meetings and a sense of separate physical identity.
- When a place is particularly isolated.'

Discussion in the social psychological literature has tended also to focus on attachments associated with place, particularly neighbourhoods[7]. An often cited article by McMillan and Chavis [1986] reviewed literature attempting to define and measure the sense of community and found 'the recurring emphasis on neighboring, length of residency, planned or anticipated length of residency, home ownership, and satisfaction with the community'[8]. They described a sense of community by defining four elements, namely membership or a feeling of belonging, influence or a sense of mattering, integration and fulfilment of needs and shared emotional connection - 'the commitment and belief that members have shared and will share history common places, time together, and similar experiences'.

In Australia, most public sector usage of the word community reflects the idea of place-related attachments, or place related identity, sense of belonging and sense of connection. Frequently there is an implicit reference to neighbourhoods (a few streets) or at most to local suburbs or local authority area.

What is interesting is that while this usage is so pervasive, the evidence for place related attachments is dwindling. As early as 1964, Webber[9] noted that 'community without propinquity' was becoming increasingly common. In 1989 Wilmott wrote that:-

> *'The rise of dispersed social networks and dispersed communities of interest has meant that, to a greater extent than in the past, local attachments now constitute only one part of social life among others. Most residents look beyond their local community for many of their social relationships, often including some of those most important to them. Local ties are weaker than historically they have been, because they overlap much less often than they used to with other ties, of kinship, friendship, work, leisure and other interests.'*

More recently, writers exploring the impacts of the internet have questioned whether community in the Gemeinschaft or place related attachment sense exists much at all. There is the optimistic point of view:

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[7] Buckner, J. C. (1988) The development of an instrument to measure neighborhood cohesion, American Journal of Community Psychology, 14, 24-40; Hughey, J. B. and Bardo, J. W. (1984) The structure of community satisfaction in a southeastern American city, Journal of Social Psychology, 123. 91-99; Puddifoot, J. E. (1994) Community identity and sense of belonging in North–East England, Journal of Social Psychology, 134, 5, 601-608

[8] McMillan, David W. and David M. Chavis, 1986, Sense of Community: A Definition and Theory, Journal of Community Psychology, 14.1[6-23]

[9] Webber, M. M. (1964) Order and diversity: community without propinquity, in Lowdon Wingo Jnr (editor), Cities and Space, Baltimore, John Hopkins

'In an era of interlinked digital networks, you can live in a small community while maintaining effective connections to a far wider and more diverse world – virtual Gesellschaft, as we might term it, without tongue too far in cheek. Conversely, you can emigrate to a far city, or be continually on the road, yet maintain close contact with your hometown and your family – electronically sustained Gemeinschaft.'10

There is the idea that 'community' is being evoked as a means of exclusion. This idea is graphically represented on the ground by walled and gated new urban developments11, but is also present at a conceptual level:

'The desire for a more communitarian approach to life among residents of affluent, polite and comfortable suburbs coexists with steady rise in the number of alienated, poor and homeless elsewhere. But the very cosiness of the communities we are creating in our chosen streets, suburbs or "villages" (a favourite word) insulates us from the rather less appealing scenes unfolding just around the corner'12.

And there is the view that the old idea of community is simply a myth.

'Pundits worry that virtual community may not truly be community. These worriers are confusing the pastoral myth of community for the reality. Community ties are already geographically dispersed, sparsely-knit, connected heavily by telecommunications (phone and fax), and specialized in content. There is so little community life in most neighbourhoods in western cities that it is more useful to think of each person as having a personal community : an individual's social network of informal interpersonal ties, ranging from a half-dozen intimates to hundreds of weaker ties.'13

Scanning the breadth of literature on the word community one can conclude that it is a word in frequent use, it has diverse meanings and frequently layers of meaning but these are all positive - 'Community' is a 'warmly persuasive word' which 'never seems to be used unfavourably.'14

As a descriptor in public documents 'community' is a safe word because it can be assumed that everyone wants it even if they don't know what it is. As Raymond Plant has noted, "some words have a very strong value meaning and…when they do the descriptive meaning may well become contested or at least they and open to many interpretations."15

In the case of 'community' the value meaning is the one meaning that is reasonably clear, consistent and relatively uncontested.

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[10] Mitchell, William, J, 1999, e-topia, "URBAN LIFE JIM BUT NOT AS WE KNOW IT", The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA

[11] Land, R.E. and Danielsen, K.A. (1997) Gated Communities in America: Walling Out the World?, Housing Policy Debate Vol 8, Issue 4, Fannie Mae Foundation, Washington D.C.

[12] Mackay, Hugh, 2001, The big picture show, Sydney Morning Herald, Spectrum, April 21-22, p 16..

[13] Wellman. Barry and Milena Gulia, 1997, Net Surfers Don't Ride alone: Virtual communities as communities, in Peter Kollock and Marc Smith, eds, Communities and Cyberspace, New York Routledge

[14] Williams, Raymond (1976) Keywords, Fontana/Croom Helm, London

[15] Plant, Raymond, 1974, Community and ideology: an essay in applied sociology, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, p 12

2.2 What is community strengthening?

The use of this concept is relatively recent but becoming almost as ubiquitous as 'community'.

At one level, virtually anything which any society, tribe or group of village elders has ever done to make things better for the people with whom they live and are connected could be construed as community strengthening. Certainly the establishment of a police force, laws, civic places and democratic institutions would fall within this descriptor. Most of most public sectors could be said to be dedicated to strengthening the communities they serve, whether or not they are perceived to be being successful or wise in their efforts. Perhaps the only major areas of social and civic activity which do not fall within this term are anarchy and self annihilation (and no doubt some theorists would disagree with this).

While community strengthening, and the related term community building, are not being used in these contexts, they are being used as if they refer to something real and recognisable. This leads to the question - what is the 'community strengthening' to which current public policy and strategy documents refer?

There seem to be two ways to answer this question. One way is to identify the particular form and scope of the policies and programs which come under this heading. A second way is to examine current literature for the issues and themes which seem to be informing these public policies. Following is an overview of both approaches to the question.

2.2.1 Community strengthening policies and programs in Australia in the last five years.

To examine these fully is beyond the scope of this overview, however, what we can say is that this term is not being used to describe or refer to permanent mainstream public sector services and facilities. For example, no one is referring to hospitals, police forces, advanced education institutions, anti-discrimination and fair trading agencies as 'community strengthening' – even though it could be argued that that is what these institutions do. In fact when the word community is applied to these it denotes 'lesser' entities as in community hospitals, community policing, community libraries, community museums and so on.

By contrast the term community has extensive currency with reference to limited term, funded programs which are outsourced to the third sector. For example, in his address to the People, Places and Partnerships Conference, Sydney March 2001, the Director General of the NSW Department of State and Regional Development stated:

> 'The Department of State and Regional Development delivers a number of programs and services which provide tools for communities to development local capacity and professionalism in dealing with business. These programs include: the Business Retention and Expansion Program,… the Main Street/Small Towns Program,… the Townlife Development Program…' and the provision of Resources materials, including an annual Community Economic Development Conference and Guide'

The Department of Urban Affairs and Planning (DUAP) runs the Area Assistance Scheme which aims to assist 'communities' [up to and including whole local government areas] to develop locally sustainable social services, programs and facilities. The Scheme funds the start of these through 2, 3 or 4 year funding programs. Very few such programs are 'picked up' on a permanent basis by NSW Government Departments or by their local council.

As another example, DUAP's 'regional Living Centres Program has set aside $1.9 million in 2001 to fund projects that will improve the physical environment of towns and villages in the local government areas of Lismore, Wollongong, Bega, Bombala, Leeton, Griffith, Narrandera, Carathool and Murrumbidgee. The Living Centres teams are working with these local communities and councils to find ways to manage growth, create employment, enhance the environment and create vibrant places. This is a great opportunity to build a better community'16.

The NSW Government announced a Strengthening Local Communities (SLC) Strategy in 2000. The aims of this Strategy are to:
• To support SLC Demonstration Projects in severely disadvantaged communities. Between 8 and 12 communities are selected. The Strategy works with them to organise local community renewal activities.
• To produce a Methods Paper with practical advice for people engaged in community renewal projects. The Paper covers issues such as funding and staffing, involving the community, evaluation, and helpful links.
• To work as a Clearing House (i.e. an information centre) for community renewal activities. Specifically, it supports workers, enhances the Communitybuilders website, and hosts workshops and conferences'.17

The NSW Premier's Department's Strengthening Communities Unit runs the community builders online website whose purpose is 'working together to strengthen communities'. It states:-

> 'Community building is about people from the community, government and business, taking the steps to find solutions to issues within their communities. Coming up with their own solutions to problems that affect them, adapting what has worked elsewhere and enlisting support from government or other partners, gives people a sense of achievement and empowerment. Community building is based on collective participation of people, individually and as a community, who act together to create change. It incorporates many other concepts eg. community renewal, place management, social capital, sustainable communities.'18

Similarly the Commonwealth Government's 'Stronger Families and Communities Strategy' which provides 'much needed assistance to support families and community development'19refers to a series of funded programs providing such things as assistance to families, youth cadetships, leadership development programs and a subsidy for in-home care. The program, however, runs for 4 years.

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[16] see DUAP's website: www.DUAP.nsw.gov.au

[17] See NSW Premiers Department's community builders website: wwww.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au

[18] www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au

[19] Media release by John Anderson, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services on 16 April 2000.

The rationale for this strategy is explained in its publicity material (Department of Family and Community Services, nd, p.3):

> *"National and international research shows that strong communities have networks that protect vulnerable people and create opportunities for people to participate more fully in work and community life. In Australia, the experiences of strong communities reinforce this evidence and demonstrate that government family programs work better in strong communities………..*
>
> *Taken together, the evidence provides the basis for this Strategy's development. Recognising the important interrelationships between families and communities, this strategy pursues the dual objective of strengthening families and the communities in which they live."*

The Australian public sector approach is also reflected in third sector literature. For example, The Community Foundation Service, Richmond and Central Virginia, in the USA, a grant giving body, notes:

> *'we believe that the Foundation can improve life for generations of children in our resources are used to help strengthen families and to help build sustainable communities. In a sustainable community, families exercise responsibility for themselves, neighbours share a vested commitment to their common home; citizens influence events affecting the quality of their lives and the community as a whole values and cares for its children.'*[20]

A similar linking between individual and family capacities and community well being is also reflected in a recent Australian Council of Social Service discussion paper[21]. Numerous 'community building' websites[22] reflects similar capacity building themes as well as providing information about funding opportunities and access to resources.
Developing the capacity of individuals and not-for-profit organisations in geographically based places [usually towns and villages] to raise and invest money in local services and social enterprises and to develop social, civic and economic networks within and externally is a common thread in strengthening communities literature. This thread has its basis in the community development literature [including tenants associations and community development initiatives in housing estates], social capital literature, and social economy, social enterprise and social entrepreneurship literature. These contributing sources of theory are outlined briefly below.

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[20] http//www.tcfrichmond.org/grants/strenfam_strencomm.html. Home page of The Community Foundation
[21] Australian Council of Social Services, 1999, Supporting Families and Strengthening Communities: ACOSS Discussion Paper, ACOSS INFO 215> www.acoss.org.au
[22] eg www.communitychannel.org; www.sustainable.org;www.cdf.org.uk; www.communities.org.uk

2.3 Community development and community self help

The theme of developing community capacity and community self help has its roots in an extensive literature on community development theory which developed from nineteenth century concerns about the impacts of industrial societies23. Susan Kenny, in reviewing community development in Australia notes:

> 'Community development differs from traditional service professions in its commitment to develop lasting structures which help people collectively to identify and meet their own needs. Thus, in everyday work, a community development worker's goal is to empower the ordinary people, to overcome isolation, and to ensure that real choices are available. Workers maintain profound respect for the legitimacy of the view points of ordinary people. They identify with the interests of the people they are working with, and learn from them. They approach issues in a collaborative way, and refuse to take on the role of an expert who provides solutions.'24

This approach is echoed in many other sources. For example the UK based Community Development Foundation has a very similar definition;

> 'Community development is a range of practices dedicated to increasing the strength and effectiveness of community life, improving local conditions, especially for people in disadvantaged situations, and enabling people to participate in public decision-making and to achieve greater long-term control over their circumstances.'25

If this sounds just like community strengthening, it needs to be remembered that many community development workers do not see themselves as working within 'the system':

> 'Community development aims to transform unequal, coercive and oppressive structures in society. To fulfil this aim it challenges, provokes, presents unpalatable information, and even disturbs….community development challenges the presumed inevitability or naturalness of existing power structures and social systems.'26

Thus it may be that the language but not the full intention of community development has been adopted in community strengthening policy statements emanating from the public sector.

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[23] see Raymond Plant, op cit. for an overview.

[24] Kenny, Susan, 1994, Developing Communities for the Future: Community Development in Australia, Thomas Nelson, Australia

[25] www.cdf.org.uk

[26] Kenny, Susan, op cit, p 21. See also Rosamund Thorpe and Judy Petruchenia eds., Community work or social change? An Australian perspective, Routledge and Kegan Paul, Melbourne

2.4 Social capital

A discussion on community strengthening would not be complete without reference to the concept of social capital. Lang provides a useful definition of social capital:

> *'Social capital commonly refers to the stocks of social trust, norms, and networks that people can draw upon in order to solve common problems. Social scientists emphasize two main dimensions of social capital: social glue and social bridges.*
>
> ***Social glue*** *refers to the degree to which people take part in group life. It also concerns the amount of trust or the comfort level that people feel when participating in these groups. Social trust and group participation form a recursive relationship. The level of trust influences one's willingness to join a group. Likewise, group participation helps build trust.*
> ***Social bridges*** *are the links between groups. These links are vital because they not only connect groups to one another but also give members in any one group access to the larger world outside their social circle through a chain of affiliations.'*[27]

There is extensive literature examining the relationship between social capital[28] and employment and economic development[29], crime[30], housing[31] and mortality[32] and suggesting that social capital has positive benefits in these and other areas such as education outcomes[33].

Many limited term, outsourced programs funding projects in the third sector list social capital development among their objectives. Many are also termed community strengthening initiatives.

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[27] Lang, Robert.E. and Steven P. Hornburg (1997) What Is Social Capital and Why Is It Important to Public Policy, Housing Policy Debate Vol 9, Issue 1, Fannie Mae Foundation, Washington D.C.

[28] An excellent review of the relevance of social capital in the Australian context is contained in Winter, Ian (ed) (2000) Social capital and public policy in Australia, Australian Institute of Family Studies

[29] Putnam, Robert D. (1993) Making democracy work: civic traditions in modern Italy, Princeton, University Press; Knack, Stephen, and Philip Keefer. (1997) Does Social Capital Have and Economic Payoff? A Cross-Country Investigation. Journal of Economics 112(4):1251-88; Johnson, James H. Jr., and Walter C Farrell Jr. (1997) Growing Income Inequality in American Society: A Political Economy Perspective. Paper presented at the National Policy Association Conference "The Growth of Income Disparity," April 10, Washington, DC.; Briggs, Xavier de Souza (1998) Brown Kids in White Suburbs: Housing Mobility and the Many Faces of Social Capital, Housing Policy Debate Vol 9, Issue 1, Fannie Mae Foundation, Washington D.C.

[30] Hirschfield A . and Bowers K.J. (1997) The Effect of Social Cohesion on Levels of Recorded Crime in Disadvantaged Areas, Urban Studies, 34, 8, 1275-95; Kawachi, Ichiro, Bruce P. Kennedy and Richard G. Wilkinson (1999) Crime: social disorganization and relative deprivation, Social Science and Medicine, 48,6 (March); Kennedy, B.P., Kawachi, I., Prothrow-Stith, D., Lochner, K., Gupta, V. (1998) ;Social capital, income inequality, and firearm violent crime, Social Science and Medicine 47(1): 7-17

[31] Saegert, Susan and Gary Winkel (1998) Social Capital and the Revitalization of New York City's Distressed Inner-City Housing, Housing Policy Debate Vol 9, Issue 1, Fannie Mae Foundation, Washington D.C; Temkin, K and Rohe, W.M. (1998) Social Capital and Neighborhood Stability: An Empirical Investigation, Housing Policy Debate Vol 9, Issue 1, Fannie Mae Foundation, Washington D.C.

[32] Wilkinson, R. G. (1996) Unhealthy Societies, The Afflictions of Inequality, Routledge; Kennedy, B.P. Kawachi, I., Lochner, K., Jones, C., Prothrow-Stith, D. (1997) (Dis)respect and Black Mortality, Ethnicity and Disease, 7 (3):207-14; Kennedy, B.P., Kawachi, I., Prothrow-Stith, D., (1996) Income distribution and mortality: Cross-sectional ecological study of the Robin Hood Index in the United States, British Medical Journal [312:1004-1007]; Lomas Jonathon, (1998) Social Capital and Health, Public Health and Epidemiology: 47 9 (Nov)

[33] Wann, M. (1995) Building Social Capital, Self help in a twenty-first century welfare state, Institute for Public Policy Research, London

2.5 Social economy, enterprise and entrepreneurship

A related set of concepts is concerned with social enterprise and initiative and the social economy.

'Social Enterprises' are businesses that trade in the market in order to fulfil social aims. They bring people and communities together for economic development and social gain. They have three common characteristics:

Enterprise Oriented ~ they are directly involved in the production of goods and the provision of services to a market. They seek to be viable trading concerns making a surplus from trading.

Social Aims ~ they have explicit social aims such as job creation, training and provision of local services. They have ethical values including a commitment ot local capacity building. They are accountable to their members and the wider community for their social, environmental and economic impact.

Social Ownership ~ they are autonomous organisations with governance and ownership structure based on participation by stakeholder groups (users or clients, local community groups etc.) or by trustees. Profits are distributed as profit sharing to stakeholders or used for the benefit of the community.

Social enterprises are part of the growing 'social economy'. The social economy is a thriving and growing collection of organisations that exist between the traditional private sector on the one hand, and the public sector on the other. Sometimes referred to as the 'third sector', it includes voluntary and community organisations, foundations and associations of many types. Social enterprises stand out from the rest of the social economy as organisations that use trading activities to achieve their goals and financial self-sufficiency. They are businesses that combine the entrepreneurial skills of the private sector with a strong social mission that is characteristic of the social economy as a whole.'34

Social enterprises include employee owned businesses, credit unions, cooperatives, development trusts, community businesses, social firms, intermediate labour market projects and the trading arms of charities. Social entrepreneurs are the people who exercise leadership and initiative to establish social enterprises and/or to assist voluntary associations to operate in the social economy.

Social enterprise and entrepreneurship has received increasing attention since the mid 1990s driven in part by a concern at the deadening effects of 'handout' welfare funding, and in part by the idea that economic activity and initiative have positive social benefits by enabling people to 'trade' for common purposes and outside the usual structures of the market economy. The intention of social enterprise and social entrepreneurship is to reduce third sector dependency on funding programs and thereby gain a measure of independence and security of continuity.

The social economy literature points to another way in which the idea of community is used, namely to refer to the third sector. The Community Development Foundation notes:

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[34] Social Enterprise London, 2001, Understanding Social Enterprise, 1a Aberdeen Studios, 22-24 Highbury Grove, London N5 2EA (info@sel.org.uk)

'Community activity nurtures human bonds and forms of mutual aid and social capital which neither the state nor the market can provide. One of the main outcomes of effective community life is a rich landscape of community and voluntary organisations.

Some groups, such as tenants' organisations, may include everyone living in a certain estate or housing association. Others, such as a women's health group, a pensioners' club, a youth club, an ethic organisation, are for particular sections of the population. The 'third sector' as a whole (which is also called the NGO sector, the voluntary sector or civil society) includes autonomous organisations at a regional, national and international level as well'[35]

This quotation shows the interweaving of several of the concepts identified above including the idea of social capital as a means to community empowerment. It also demonstrates a major use of the word 'community'. When applied to organisations, 'community' usually denotes the third or voluntary and not-for-profit sector.[36]

Thus the public sector use of community strengthening as an idea seems mainly to be applied to things which the public sector wants done but which are to be done by the not-for-profit sector using public sector funds. The funding mechanism sets limits on what is to be done, both through the term of the funding and its accountability mechanisms. It is noteworthy that in this context, the third, or not-for-profit, sector is frequently refer red to as 'community organisations' implying at one and the same time that they are 'lesser' public sector agencies (as in community hospitals, community policing) and that they are in the ownership of energetic citizens banded together in incorporated associations.

2.6 Putting these themes in another perspective

Today's term 'community strengthening' has grown out of decades of community development literature which itself has a base in the sociology and social philosophy of the nineteenth century.

Community strengthening is used to focus on what people can do for themselves in the places where they live - with perhaps a little help from central government agencies. Community strengthening, is an outcome desired by governments, but as a process belongs to the third sector or to the citizenry. Governments foster social and economic entrepreneurial activity to achieve better social, economic and health outcomes, usually as demonstrated in indicators such as level of education achieved, labour force participation rates and mortality[37].

However, there is another strand of thinking which constitutes a challenge to this approach to improving these indicators. This thinking is that while small scale and local initiatives can make a contribution, their effectiveness is limited and highly dependent on the level of social infrastructure in a place (the provision of schools, public transport, health services and so on), and the presence of an adequate social infrastructure is particularly important in places where a large number of people are living in poverty.

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[35]Community Development Foundation, www.cdf.org.uk, op cit.

[36] for a discussion of these issues see the website of Social Enterprise London: www.sel.org.uk and of the New Economics Foundation: www.meweconomics.org

[37] Vinson, Tony (1999) Unequal in Life, the distribution of social disadvantage in Victoria and New South Wales, The Ignatius Centre for Social Policy and Research, Richmond, Victoria.

Recent UK studies into social exclusion found that those estates and neighbourhoods which are most excluded are not only characterised by poor rating on all indicators and low levels of self help activity, they are also areas where basic social infrastructure is way below the norm.

While social exclusion is defined and located by looking at the characteristics of populations (worklessness, homelessness, truancy, teenage pregnancy etc) research showed that the places where these problems were greatest were those where 'many basic services (in both the public and private sectors) were weakest where they were most needed, with deprived areas having fewer GPs, poorer shopping facilities, and more failing schools'.38.

The UK Government's National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, which is targeted at the 88 most deprived and socially excluded neighbourhoods contains strategies directed at community involvement and self help but these are contained within a framework of actions which require the social and other infrastructure Government departments to coordinate and improve the level of service and (social, health and other) infrastructure delivery to these areas.39 Among the latter strategies, government departments are required to make concerted efforts at 'joined up' public sector management. The two main planks to achieve this are:

- '**local strategic partnerships** 'a single body that brings together at a local level the different parts of the public sector as well as private, voluntary and community sectors so that different initiatives and services support rather than contradict each other' and
- **neighbourhood management** 'with someone visibly taking responsibility at the sharp end'40.

The national Strategy contains 105 major actions all of which are the responsibility of a range of **central** government agencies.

In a similar but vastly smaller way, the NSW Premiers Department has initiated place management strategies in NSW. These have two strands, the first is a series of regional management coordination groups comprising the regional managers of the NSW Government's human service agencies. Their aim is to coordinate their service delivery and the new initiatives of their respective departments. The second strand is the use of place managers in some locations identified by the Department as requiring a specific intervention. For example, place managers have been appointed to Cabramatta and Kings Cross. Their role is much the same as that proposed for UK neighbourhood managers. While we are not aware of any evaluation of the effectiveness of regional management coordination groups, it has been suggested41 that individual place managers are far too under-resourced to achieve much.

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[38] Social Exclusion Unit, 2001, Preventing Social Exclusion, Cabinet Office, UK p6.
[39] Social Exclusion Unit, 2001, A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal, National Strategy Action Plan, Cabinet Office, UK
[40] Ibid page 10
[41] personal communication from a former place manager.

In DUAP, 'place based management' refers to 'place based' urban and regional planning, a mechanism to assist in the management of 'environmental, social and economic issues in a comprehensive and integrated way'42. In this usage, the Department is referring to local and regional strategic planning processes which endeavour to bring together all the plans, planning instruments, goals, policies and implementation activities which affect a place into one strategic plan. However, DUAP is only at White Paper stage and a long way from addressing implementation issues in the comprehensive, across government way that the UK National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal does.

The report of the UK Policy Action Team on Community Self Help, prepared as part of the research for this Strategy supports this approach. It noted that while community self help is important:

> 'in terms of provision of services, the encouragement of communities' self confidence and self sufficiency, and the development of the notion of citizenship within communities….that self-help is something that must be 'grown' organically from within, rather than imposed from outside;…it is not a cure-all – it is a necessary complement of, not a substitute for, high quality public services'43.

The need for state or national intervention in the living conditions of people is not a new idea44. However, during the eighties and nineties in English speaking countries, the role of community self help has tended to receive more support from national or state governments than the idea that social well being is a function of the level government investment in core services and facilities45.

2.7 Community Housing and Community strengthening

There is little literature that examines this issue in much detail. There is a number of claims about the ability of community housing to strengthen communities, largely in comparison to the role of public housing46. Some work has been undertaken in the UK47, however it must be acknowledged that the scale and context of community housing is very different which reduces the utility of this research. A major study has been undertaken in Australia48, but this has essentially focussed on the one case – community housing in the Argyle estate in Western Sydney.

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42 Department of Urban Affairs and Planning, 2001, Plan First, Review of plan making in NSW, White Paper, NSW Government, p5
43 Active Communities Unit, 1999, Report of the Policy Action Team on Community Self-Help, Home Office, p v.
44 For example, the history of town planning – garden suburbs, model villages, new urbanism – all reflect an idea that infrastructure is important, even if in the case of town planning the focus has been on physical infrastructure. For a review of how town planning has tended towards physical determinism see Gans, Herbert J. 1991. People and Plans: Essays on Poverty, Racism and Other Nation Urban Problems. New York. Columbia University Press, and, more recently, Bohl, Charles C., 2000, New Urbanisms and the City: Potential Applications and Implications for Distressed Inner-City Neighborhoods, Housing Policy Debate, 11,4. For an example of the way in which the Public Housing NSW continues this focus on the physical, see its recent, 2001 leaflet on Community Renewal. The establishment of the National Health Service in the UK and Medicare in Australia are examples of the government provided infrastructure approach in health. The history of public education provides a third example.
45This shift of emphasis has been justified by the rising cost of maintaining and update the public service infrastructure along with such economic 'imperatives' as globalisation and the need to keep direct taxes at a low level.
46 See for example, web sites of the NSW Federation of Housing Associations at http://www.communityhousing.org.au/nswfha/

47 See for example, Ekins P and Newby L (2000) The Big Picture:Sustainable Communities. The Housing Corporation
48 NSW Office of Community Housing (1998) Home and Housed, Sydney

The recent report of the Reference Group on Welfare Reform[49], suggested that housing could be an issue that affects social and economic participation. They suggest that more should be done to encourage community development within public housing estates. They go on to claim that 'This could be achieved through provision of public and community housing in areas of high employment'[50] In their section on Strengthening Communities, the main example is from the Argyle Community Housing Case Study.

The main aim of this project is to fill this gap in the literature by exploring the role played by community housing in community strengthening, and in examining the role that it could play.

2.8 Summary

The term community has a long history. It is a concept that is fairly ill defined but suggests something warm and fuzzy. It is very popular part of Government and politicians 'speak'. However, there can be various types of community that include communities of interest, communities of attachment or place based communities. Hence, when referring to the notion of community it is important to be identify what community is being described.

Community strengthening also has a long tradition – initially in the area of community development. It often refers to economic development of communities and more recent emphasis has been in the field of social entrepreneurship. The area received a boost with the emergence of the social capital debate in the eighties. However, the popularity of the term has been associated government in the last fifteen years as governments have sought to withdraw from direct provision and outsource it to the third sector. In a political context of Governments withdrawing from the direct provision of assistance and services, the notion of communities helping themselves is very convenient[51]. However, recent research from the UK indicates that community strengthening is most effective in a context of high quality public services.

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[49] Reference Group on Welfare Reform (2000) Participation Support for a More Equitable Society, Final Report, Canberra.
[50] Ibid p 25
[51] This is also likely to be a factor in the popularity of social capital concepts amongst Governments

3. HOW DOES COMMUNITY HOUSING HELP STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES? A FRAMEWORK

As a way of providing background material for those participating in the focus groups, it is useful to provide a framework to explore the question of how does community housing help strengthen communities. The framework is based on a series of workshops undertaken by the NCHF in 2000.

The framework will be developed by answering a number of key questions including:

(a) Does community housing make a particular difference to strengthening communities? In particular how does community housing contribute to social and economic participation.
(b) How do community housing managers help build sustainable communities?

(a) Does community housing make a particular difference to strengthening communities?

The starting point for considering what community managed housing contributes to building stronger communities is to recognise that the core business of community housing is housing management per se. Community housing managers do not usually manage housing in order to strengthen the communities. Rather, they may add community development activities if it helps support their tenants or sustain their tenancies.

However, community housing management may seek to achieve a number of layers of additional outcomes as part of their housing management. They may respond to their tenants' housing needs by providing a more responsive and flexible approach to appropriate allocations (especially location and dwelling type), rent management, design and maintenance. They may also ensure that external supports are available to ensure that tenancies and independence are sustained. Both of these are what Jeff Lyons has identified as 'housing service delivery52'.

Then there is also what Lyons calls 'community making'. This focuses on the communities that form between tenants and workers, support workers and interest groups. As much as anything it is the outcome of a way of working as a housing manager. (This is particularly important where tenants live or work together – in rooming houses, in co-ops). It is very important for people who would otherwise be isolated (this relates to what the literature calls a community of interest).

But community housing also explicitly engages with a wider local community (this is the community of place). Some organisations arise as a result of community development work, where a need for housing – say for older people – is identified and responded to by a local community. In some cases the housing response is driven by a general community desire – perhaps expressed though local government – to maintain diversity. This commitment to social mix can be seen clearly in the City of Port Phillip. The Council, in partnership with St Kilda Housing Association, is developing social housing and maintaining the diversity of that area of Melbourne.

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[52] ('Community making – what it is we do', *CHFV News* September 1999).

Less frequently, community housing managers have to face the wider disadvantage of the communities in which they work, in order to sustain their tenancies. This could be true of small rural communities or in large housing estates. In some communities housing managers can be the lead agency for identifying and brokering responses to very wide community needs. This is probably seen most clearly in indigenous communities. Infrastructure, health, employment programs and many other services may focus on the housing organisation. Housing workers in these communities end up filling the role of community development officer/community information officer.

What does community housing contribute to social and economic participation?

Feedback from community housing tenants suggests that once you have stability and security of tenure confidence increases, as does the scope to develop skills and the incentive to participate in the community. For instance, a Filipino co-operative in NSW has started cleaning the local park. Another example, from SA, is a group of young community housing tenants who have started a clothing co-op and are now lobbying on behalf of the community housing organisation.[53]

This aspect of community housing is an important link into another key government policy agenda – the reform of our welfare system. The final report of the Reference Group for Welfare Reform mentions a number of the roles for housing referred to here.

First, it recognises that housing affordability has a profound impact on whether low income households have ready access to labour markets. Overcoming this barrier is a significant precondition for a welfare system that is focused on increasing participation. It also recognises that social housing rent structures create a poverty trap for households re-entering the labour market. Finally, it recognises that social housing can play a role in establishing the social partnerships that help build socially and economically viable communities and regions. It recognises, in passing, the individual capacity building that participatory social housing management can provide.

b) How do community housing managers help build sustainable communities?

The following is a preliminary list of some ways of working used by community housing managers that seem to be successful in strengthening communities.

Facilitating individual participation
- Individual tenants form collective activities – e.g. neighbourhood watch
- Participation in housing organisations provides a pathway to other participation – e.g. co-ops

Identify the priorities for the community itself
- The starting point is to ask people and communities what they want.

Mobilising community resources
- Acting as a lead agent
- Capacity to mobilise community attitudes
- Capacity to facilitate community linkages

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[53] These examples will be described in more detail in subsequent reports.

Stabilising community fragmentation
- Can be the 'incubator' for sustainable communities.
- Individual projects – e.g. Claymore – can form sustainable micro communities.

Building social mix
- This is often presented as a requirement for stronger communities. However, this needs to be examined in more detail.
- Allocations policies that do not exacerbate disadvantage and which select for groups who chose to live in the same community are important.

Using housing providers as a lead agent
- Social housing managers have an impact on all the aspects of a tenant's life linked to their home. As a result, they are often the first point of call for tenants as needs arise.
- The effectiveness within which tenants manage their social and economic participation directly impacts on the viability of the housing organisation. Managers, therefore have a direct interest in improving participation and social cohesion.

4. METHODOLOGY

The approach adopted in this project is to use a focus group approach to attempt to explore the research questions identified in the previous section. Community housing is a model of social housing management that has frequently claimed strengths in creating community sustainability. However, there have been few structured attempts to examine the validity of these claims. This project hopes to fill this gap.

The project will undertake a series of workshops with a range of stakeholders.

The first of these workshops has already been held and provides the background to the proposed project. It was a preliminary national workshop on housing and sustainable communities. The workshop was comprised of 25 participants drawn from state and national community housing peak bodies, state community housing government administrators, representatives of the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services and researchers[54].

(Workshop 1) Practitioners workshop – community strengthening successes. Up to 15 practitioners currently active in pursuing initiatives in the areas identified in the framework derived from the preliminary workshop. Participants to be drawn from respondents to a targeted call for expressions of interest after consultation with state peaks and administrators.

Outcomes – identification of the factors leading to 'successes' or acting as barriers from the point of view of the objectives of the providers. Such 'successes' will be explored both from the point of view of practitioner objectives and their perceptions of the key needs for community strengthening. A short report of these initiatives will be prepared along with a reference/contact list for further information.

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[54] The findings of this workshop are used to inform the framework which is described in the previous section.

(Workshop 2) Tenant and community workshop – community impacts of housing initiatives. This workshop will be comprised of a mix of tenants from approximately half the housing organisations represented in the previous workshop and a number of other community stakeholders engaged with such initiatives. These could include community workers and health workers.

Outcomes – evaluation from community members' points of view of the impact of the initiatives identified in the previous workshop. Identification of the outcomes and limitations of these initiatives from the community members perspective. A short report summarising and categorising these responses will be prepared.

(Workshop 3) Policy makers' workshop – policy options and implications. This workshop will consider the initiatives, objectives, outcomes and barriers identified in the previous two workshops. Again the workshop would involve approximately 15 participants. These would be drawn from:

- The Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services at a senior level across housing and the stronger communities areas;
- Social housing policy managers in each of the four states/territories;
- Community housing policy managers and/or central agency representatives from these states/territories; and
- Non-government national policy bodies such as ACOSS, National Shelter and the Community Housing Federation of Australia.

Outcomes – identification of the desirability of and options for expanding the initiatives from the previous workshops that are identified as furthering public policy initiatives. A short summary report of this workshop will be prepared.

All workshops will be held in Sydney.

The workshops will be run using a focus group approach. Focus groups combine the strengths of in-depth group interviewing and observation in a group context[55] . The focus group approach will reveal the issues and attitudes of a variety of stakeholders but it will also show how various people will respond to each others positions. The other major advantage of the focus group approach is that it drives down the costs of the research by interviewing a number of people at the one location.

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[55] See, for example, St John, W. (1999). Focus group interviews. In V. Minichiello, R. Axford, K. Greenwood & G. Sullivan (Eds.), *Handbook for Research Methods in Health Sciences* (pp. 419-430). Sydney, Addison Wesley.

5. CONCLUSION

The new policy interest in focusing on communities has a broad sweep – building more resilient communities (both economically and socially), renewing excluded communities and creating the community supports needed for participation.

There have been a number of claims that community housing has an important role to play in strengthening communities – most recently in the Report on Welfare Reform. However, there is little evidence of the role of community housing in community strengthening, and much of the evidence is based on UK studies where the context and scale of community housing are much different than Australia.

This project attempts to explore this question through a series of workshops. Is it possible back up these claims with evidence from CHOs across Australia. What might be examples of best practice of community strengthening by community housing organisations in Australia.

If governments are trying to assist in strengthening communities and participation, they too should be looking at ways that they can support housing associations to work as partners in sustaining communities. A first step may be to understand in more detail the process of community strengthening by CHOs, what opportunities and barriers exist and what governments can do to help community organisations to achieve/overcome them. This project will provide some guidance for Government to undertake this important task.

APPENDIX 1

Housing Plus - Summary

What is Housing Plus?

The Housing Plus approach to managing and developing social housing has been promoted by the UK Housing Corporation since 1995. It is based on the objective of 'creating sustainable social housing by ensuring that it contributes positively to the community in which it is located and is developed and managed in partnership with residents and service providers' (URBED, 1998).

The Housing Corporation has described the 'philosophical basis' of the program as 'the fundamental importance of establishing effective partnerships between service providers, tenants and residents in the drive to make communities sustainable'[56]

What was the impetus for Housing Plus?

Housing Plus: An agenda for social landlords (1996) says there are three reasons why Housing Plus is an important component of the Housing Corporation's agenda. In summary they are:

- managing the impact of social housing development that has, in some cases, created serious social and financial problems for providers, their residents, partners, funders, support services and neighbourhoods;
- the inherent focus of social housing on 'people problems' not just bricks and mortar; and
- growing social and economic polarisation and the capacity for social housing providers to be involved in responses to the resultant 'extreme need'.

On this analysis, Housing Plus was initiated both as a response to the problems created by housing development that took place without due consideration of the impact on the local area and in recognition that social housing deals with people in need and the communities in which they are located. This implies a capacity to contribute positively – the value added – to a community through the provision of sustainable social housing.

How does Housing Plus operate?

As part of its commitment to Housing Plus, the Housing Corporation decided that value added activity should have an influence on the allocation of capital resources (URBED, 1998). The 1997/98 bidding round was the first to formally consider Housing Plus as one of a number of tie break issues to decide between Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) that are equal in all other respects.

This did raise a number of issues (what is the level of commitment from organisations? how should various initiatives be compared? how can value for money be assessed?) and URBED has noted that if Housing Plus 'really is an activity over and above core housing functions, what role does it have at all in the capital allocation process?' (1998).

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[56] Cited in Lawson (1998)

Despite these initial difficulties however, Housing Plus is an important attempt to recognise the contribution that social housing can make to local communities and building that value adding into program funding arrangements.

The Housing Corporation has provided guidance about the way RSLs implement Housing Plus. RSLs are encouraged to apply Housing Plus principles via:
- Community action plans and community-based strategies;
- Management information systems;
- Social audits;
- Consideration of factors which affect sustainability of housing developments and communities; and
- Strategic partnerships with local government and community agencies[57]

What types of activities are being undertaken?

A number of evaluations (URBED 1998, Evans 1997) have attempted to categorise the range of Housing Plus activities being undertaken by RSLs.

In the 1997/98 capital bidding round, 18% of units were in bids including a Housing Plus component. In their assessment of these bids, URBED found that: 28% related to community cohesiveness, 25% to training and employment and 20% to crime. In addition, 9% of schemes indicated that additional finance was being levered in by Housing Plus (1998).

URBED also undertook a survey of leading RSLs to gauge the most popular Housing Plus activities. The survey illustrated the definition of Housing Plus is very wide and interpreted in different ways by different RSLs. However, the main activities were grouped as:
- increased tenant participation;
- employment creation and training; and
- economic development.

Whilst most RSLs considered their Housing Plus work to be successful, the main successes tended to be in areas that did not involve non-housing funding or venture into areas where the RSL did not have experience. Often Housing Plus activity involved investment in facilities such as shops or community centres rather than measures to address the economic and social issues (URBED, 1998).

Judging from the available literature on Housing Plus, the types of activities RSLs are doing under this banner can be broadly grouped as:
- Community cohesiveness;
- Increased tenant participation (presumably in the community);
- Community facilities/social infrastructure;
- Training and employment;
- Crime; and
- Economic development.

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[57] Cited in Lawson (1998)

What is the assessment of Housing Plus?

Along with trying to understand the type of Housing Plus activities RSLs are undertaking, various projects have tried to assess how successful they have been in their contribution to the sustainability of local communities.

For instance, a survey of 1,500 residents in six case study areas asked tenants to evaluate the personal and community impact of Housing Plus in the following areas: economic infrastructure, social infrastructure, crime, transport, environment and housing-related improvements. The evaluation report developed some criteria for assessing the success of Housing Plus projects but concluded that they are difficult to measure. Cuts to public services and extensive social and economic problems faced by residents (and local areas) also undermined Housing Plus achievements and made it more difficult to compare the successes of different projects .

URBED have summarised that to be effective Housing Plus activities must be based on an analysis of a wide range of issues that go into creating sustainable communities rather than a loose assortment of 'good works' bolted onto a traditional housing scheme. Achieving a strategic and systematic approach of this type is perhaps the biggest challenge, particularly for small organisations or where future funding arrangements are uncertain.

URBED summarised that if the aim of the Housing Plus approach is to create sustainable communities, then it must include a definition of what is meant by this term (and this work has taken place subsequently – see below). They concluded that the best way forward would be a benchmarking system by which Housing Plus is linked to a set of standards for creating sustainable communities set out by the Housing Corporation (URBED, 1998).

How does Housing Plus link with other policies and programs?

There has been considerable work on sustainable communities, at a whole-of-government level and by the Housing Corporation, since the introduction of Housing Plus. For instance, the recently released Neighbourhood Strategy is a whole-of-government agenda for renewing neighbourhoods and housing is one of the main vehicles for achieving the goals of the Strategy.

The Housing Corporation has also commissioned further work on sustainable communities including:
- a paper titled Key issues for sustainable communities (by Derek Long of the European Institute of Urban Affairs at Liverpool John Moore University);
- the development of a Sustainability Toolkit, designed for RSL staff, on how to assess the sustainability of communities where social housing exists or might be developed; and
- the Big Picture title, which is a series of papers designed to promote and disseminate the outputs of the Corporation's Innovation and Good Practice program (including a number of papers on sustainable communities).

Building on the Housing Plus approach, RSLs and the Housing Corporation appear to be spear heading a broader commitment to understanding and promoting sustainable communities. A program like Housing Plus, which focussed on the value added by housing providers in a local area, is inextricably tied up with larger questions of how to define and promote sustainable communities that need to be taken up across government.

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