

**RTPI**

mediation of space · making of place

Royal Town Planning Institute  
41 Botolph Lane  
London EC3R 8DL  
Tel +44(0)20 7929 9494  
Fax +44(0)20 7929 9490

Email [online@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:online@rtpi.org.uk)  
Website: [www.rtpi.org.uk](http://www.rtpi.org.uk)

Registered Charity Numbers  
England 262865  
Scotland SC 037841

Patron HRH The Prince of Wales KG KT PC GCB

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### **Are the purpose and priorities of the Homes and Communities Agency clear to you and correct for the future?**

The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) has broad powers as listed in the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008. The HCA can become a Local Planning Authority (LPA) if so designated by the Secretary of State – it could then operate as an LPA (for development management purpose not policy making) and therefore is subject to the same controls the LPAs are. It can also acquire land and issue CPOs.<sup>1</sup>

The emphasis being placed on city regions to take their economic destiny into their own hands must call into question the purpose and priorities of the HCA. The HCA has become a catch all space for the Government's land and development initiatives. It would be better to give the responsibility for the Government's land assets to city regions that would have responsibility for their development, and place the funds available through the HCA with directly elected mayors. This would need to be part of a suite of devolution which would include health, education, and all of the policy areas that interact with the built environment. In order to address major challenges it is essential to align policy objectives and allow decisions to be made on the basis of the actual places where policies interact, rather than on the basis of individual policy objectives.

Other cities could be encouraged to follow the London Land Commission model (LLC) in this context. The LLC is working to identify brownfield land for development in public ownership. It is based at the GLA and chaired by the Mayor. It provides a potentially useful model of other cities and city regions to have all public sector assets in one body at the local level.

### **How effectively does the Homes and Communities Agency carry out its functions and how could it do so more effectively to meet future challenges?**

Investment by the HCA is responsible for building around half of all new homes built in England each year. It also helps increase local growth by creating jobs and supporting businesses. The HCA has a key role in increasing the supply of public land and speeding up the rate that it can be built on helping to stimulate local economic growth by using our land and investment, and attracting private sector investment in local areas. For example The Space Project in Manchester opened in October 2014 and was funded from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the HCA and Manchester City Council. Ambitious plans to create hundreds of hi-tech jobs in creative industries to further strengthen the city's regeneration.

While the work carried out by the HCA is valuable, in this era of decentralisation, more devolved levels of governance could be more suitable for carrying out some of its functions. The RTPI has long argued that

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://rtpi.org.uk/media/630969/RTPI%20large%20scale%20housing%20report.pdf>

decisions, particularly those related to planning, need to be made at the correct spatial scale.<sup>2</sup> The raft of recently announced devolution deals provides the opportunity to consider which roles currently carried out by the HCA could be carried out by local government.

**How effectively does the Homes and Communities Agency work with customers and partners?**

The HCA has been very effective in bringing together challenging sites and complex projects in partnership with local planning authorities and developers. These spaces require a range of stakeholders: city councils, land owners, infrastructure providers. The chartered town planners employed by the HCA have played a key role in mediating between these groups in order to deliver sustainable development.

This partnership working has been particularly evident in the work of the Advisory Team for Large Applications (ATLAS) supporting Local Authorities in dealing with complex large scale housing led projects hosted and delivered through the HCA. ATLAS has been instrumental in improving the speed and quality of outcome in bringing forward major housing led planning & regeneration projects, and the RTPI referenced the work done by ATLAS at Holland Park, Spalding by South Holland District Council and ATLAS in its housing policy research.<sup>3</sup>

The main challenges to the 2,250-dwelling Holland Park site in Lincolnshire were determining a good place-making response to an awkwardly shaped site and the necessity for partnership with key stakeholders. With limited public resources, the Council worked with planners in ATLAS to ensure all parties were involved from the start. Workshops between the Council and the developer were held so the vision for the site was shared, key issues were highlighted and a timeline for specific tasks was agreed. A memorandum of Understanding between the developer and Council was agreed and regular project meetings with expert advisory groups were held to iron out specific issues around infrastructure, community engagement, design and overall site vision. The pre-application process meant all issues were tackled early and the priorities of the Council were communicated.

**What skills does the Homes and Communities Agency require for the future and, from your experience, does it have these?**

Given the remit of the HCA to lead on areas of strategic importance such as housing and employment land, it seems sensible that it should have a substantial skills base of planners working within it. Housing and employment spill across administrative boundaries and therefore need to be planned in a strategic way. A substantial quota of planners would buttress the important work the HCA already does in this context.

**What is your view of how efficient the Homes and Communities Agency is in delivering its objective and can you suggest ways this could improve?**

The price of land is a real hindrance to the HCA playing a proactive role in making more homes and business premises available to the residents and businesses that need them. It is difficult for the HCA to carry out this strategic remit when the price of land is prohibitively high.

In order to facilitate the HCA's work it would be helpful to establish an approach to land value based on existing use values with a sensible premium to encourage release of the site but where planning requirements are recognised as a pre-requisite to securing the consent from which any additional value is derived.

**Is there any other feedback on the HCA that you would like to provide to the Review Team?**

No

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<sup>2</sup> See

[http://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/1151450/rtpi\\_planning\\_horizons\\_5\\_making\\_better\\_decisions\\_for\\_places\\_november\\_2014.pdf](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/1151450/rtpi_planning_horizons_5_making_better_decisions_for_places_november_2014.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> See <http://rtpi.org.uk/media/630969/RTPI%20large%20scale%20housing%20report.pdf>

Evidence prepared by

**Joe Kilroy MSc**  
**Policy Officer**

Royal Town Planning Institute

41 Botolph Lane, London EC3R 8DL

+44 (0)20 7929 9469 | [joseph.kilroy@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:joseph.kilroy@rtpi.org.uk) | [@JosephPKilroy](https://www.instagram.com/JosephPKilroy)