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Urban Renewal Theory and Practice

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Preface

Urban renewal is of growing importance for two reasons. Firstly, as more of us live in towns and cities, urban areas become larger and older, so inevitably more and more renewal of the urban fabric has to take place. Thirty years ago it was possible to say that the vast majority of the buildings and infrastructure in British cities, outside city centres and inter-war clearance areas, had been subject to no renewal activity (replacement or refurbishment) whatsoever. Today most of the pre-1939 parts of all cities and much of the stock built in the 1950s and 1960s (especially 1960s local authority housing estates) have experienced some form of urban renewal: refurbishment, conversion or replacement. Secondly, there is growing concern about the constant expansion of towns and cities into their agricultural hinterlands, while large quantities of urban land and buildings are abandoned and left derelict. This lobby calls for resources to be directed towards the proper re-use or redevelopment of the existing urban fabric before further land is taken, usually irrevocably, into urban use.

In this field of activity, the built environment professions are increasingly taking on roles as redevelopers and 'implementation agents' in addition to their traditional advisory, design and plan-making functions, with a consequent blurring of the distinctiveness of each profession. Such developments have led to a need for all professionals, politicians and community groups involved in urban renewal to have a greater awareness of the economic and social context, as well as enhanced skills in urban design and the implementation of renewal schemes. To meet these needs we at Liverpool Polytechnic recently started a Masters degree programme in urban renewal. However, we soon discovered that while much excellent material had been written and published in the variety of fields that impinge upon urban renewal, there was a relative absence of books that sought to bring these strands together and provide an introduction to the subject.

Thus this book sets out to fill the gap and provide an introduction to the theory and practice of urban renewal. But this text is not entirely without opinions and conclusions, and a secondary aim is to put forward tentative views about some of the key issues currently facing policy makers.

Chris Couch