

## **5 Recovery and Change: Glasgow's Housing 1991–2001**

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### **5.1 Long Decline, Grand Design**

Glasgow is the UK's fourth largest city and is home to 650,000 (12.5 per cent) of Scotland's people and is the largest Scottish employment centre, generating 16 per cent of Scotland's GDP. It sits at the heart of a city-region, Scotland's only conurbation, of 2.2 million people. Glasgow's importance as a centre of wealth creation, innovation, retailing and culture is inarguable; however it is also beset with social problems associated with high concentrations of severe deprivation and population decline.

By European city and city-region standards, it has modest scale, quality and low growth, but given the experience of the last half century these parameters are in themselves remarkable. In 1951, after a century of early, fast growth of a heavy industrial economic base and dense residential environments, Glasgow had a population almost double the present level and some 350,000 manufacturing jobs, ten times the present number, were located within the city. Hardly had the city begun to cope with the socio-economic and physical issues of being a protracted 'boom in space' when rapid decentralisation and then de-industrialisation set in train a protracted downward spiral in the economic and population base of the city.

But it was not just exogenous or economic change that produced a dramatic backcloth for the evolution of the city. Politics, governance and policy played a major, and not always beneficial, role in the process. At least four major phases of housing and city policy, each layered upon each other, shaped the present landscape.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See MacLennan, Meen and Gibb (1997) and MacLennan (2002) for more detailed discussion of the long term policy changes and their consequences.

After 1915, UK rent controls, partly a response to tenant rent strikes in Glasgow, remained deep and in place well into the 1970s. Combined with the growing significance of home-owner tax breaks after 1950, housing market policy had a strong anti-city/pro-suburb emphasis. Welfare state expansion (after 1950) and then urban slum clearance (after 1960) were proportionately more significant than in any other UK city. Throughout the post war period until 1980 there was not a single year when more than 200 units were built for the market sector, yet the public sector constructed more than 100,000 homes in the same period.

Both these phases were also decentralising. Much of the older city was demolished by 1974; 80,000 city residents (often more skilled workers) were moved to new and over-spill towns away from the city. And close to 100,000 poorer people were moved to large scale municipal housing estates lying on the edge of the city. This triumph of social commitment and hope over careful choice of sustainable housing system is more evident in Glasgow than in any other West European city.

The decentralising thrust of housing policies contributed to neighbourhood decline and dereliction in core areas, and some 10 per cent of the city still comprises vacant and derelict brown-field land and reinforced market shifts away from the city. However, since 1974 and the start of what are now globally known regeneration programmes, housing policies have increasingly re-favoured city locations and there have been neighbourhoods in renaissance in Glasgow for more than 20 years.

In effect, early concentration of public renovation grants in the hands of not for profit, community-led housing associations created regeneration growth poles. As they improved areas for the less affluent, more residential developers initiated construction for the market and over time this investment has moved up the relative price distribution. In contrast to the period to 1980, the subsequent decades have seen an average of more than 1,000 new market dwellings each year since then. And grant-aided upgrading by home owners increased sharply until it was curtailed by local authority funding decisions.

However as Glasgow's older neighbourhoods began to show signs of policy-led recovery the rising unemployment of 1980s Britain, and associated deep cuts in public spending programmes, exacerbated the already incipient difficulties of the municipal sector. Tenants in the municipal sector were ageing. Unskilled manual workers, a key client group in peripheral council housing, had major job search and commuting problems, and many were trapped into benefit dependency as steeply means tested benefits came to replace bricks and mortar subsidies. In extensive parts of the city male unemployment rates exceeded 20 per cent and by 1990 only one in three households in the council sector had anyone in the labour market. And this was a housing sector (see Table 5.1) supplying half the homes of Glaswegians.

Within the sector property quality was low and falling; low rents had always been a political priority ahead of adequate maintenance; local state planning of housing had, after the 1950s, built homes fast and without community involvement and with little regard to consumer preferences. In Glasgow vacant council housing has been a problem since the 1970s; in 1978 there were 8,000 vacant dwellings. By 2005 it is likely that close to 30,000 municipal homes, most built