



**PUBLISHED BY PLANNING MAGAZINE**

18<sup>th</sup> July 2003

**SELLING CITIES**

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These are busy times for selling cities. But, while the hard fought land and property deals continue to make headlines in the Trades, it is the clink of glasses and the click of heels - not to mention those home-counties accents - which tell us that there is a new show in town.

Take our City of Culture as a classic example. If the latest range of freebie postcards are to be believed, you would be hard pressed to find a dilapidated building in amongst the cappuccino bars and designer shops. Liverpool, it would appear is a veritable jewel in the urban crown and not some regeneration black hole which we have been pumping money into for all of these years. And, if you still doubt the power of PR check out the Olympics Bid poised to promote the joys of some of the worst parts of East London, not to mention the various proposals for the Thames Gateway which seek to do the same thing for a stretch of 200,000 acres from the Docks to the edge of the estuary.

It is therefore no great surprise that the BURA Conference which ran this week focused on the "communication industries" and their role in the development of our towns and cities. The conference title "*Shout it from the Rooftops*" had an optimistic ring to it suggesting that there is both something to shout about – which in fairness there is – *and* that someone is willing to listen – probably a bit more debatable.

Of course, it is great to have a vision but the big question is whose? At the end of the day all the research on public preferences suggests that far from signing up to some policy pundit's urban renaissance, Joe and Jane Public would still tend to opt for some sci-fi utopia more akin to Postman Patsville. And, this is where the "shouting" and the "rooftops" become a little bit more problematic. Because if we are really going to deliver on public aspiration, we are going have to reconcile blue sky visions with the reality of some pretty unpleasant trade-offs.



Talking to people about the future of their homes and neighbourhoods is emotional territory. To do it right will require more than slick brochures, postal surveys and the occasional focus group. It is time to show the average citizen a little more respect and that means providing resources for a far more informed debate. So full credit to that brave New Deal Partnership, which last week held the first Citizens' Jury to evaluate options for funding future regeneration on one of the largest estates in the country. It may not be easy, but sometimes you've just got to sit on that rooftop and let people shout at you.