

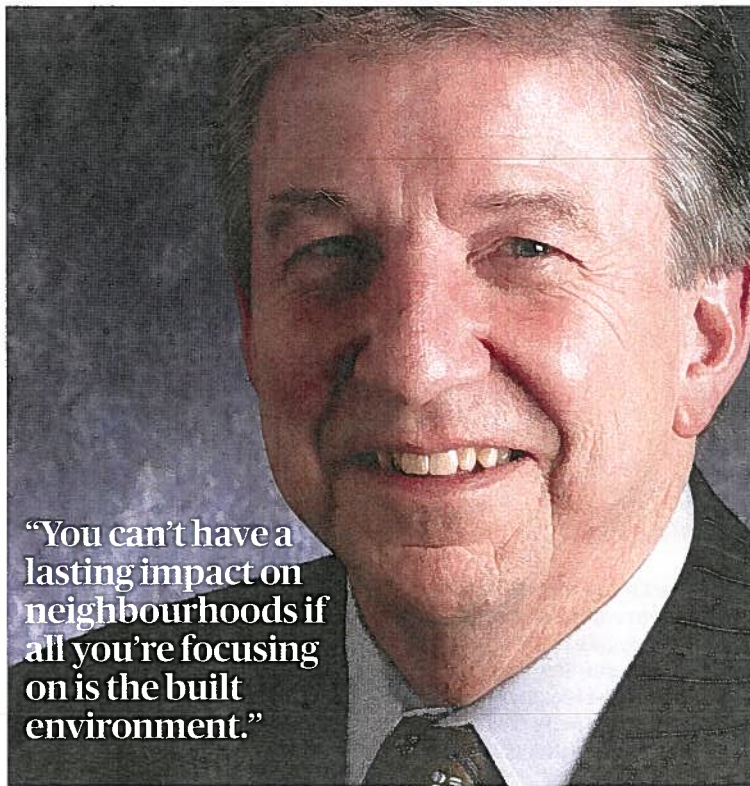
Ask not what your **community** can do for you...

Car, bus, van, or bicycle - Michael Rubinger isn't fussy about the mode of transport you use. The important thing when welcoming a new government, he says, is to get fresh-faced ministers on tour. Put them on a moped if you like, but make sure they get out into communities to see the work that's being done first-hand - it's the only reliable way to ensure their support.

'One of the advantages of what we do - of community development - is that you can see it,' says Mr Rubinger, president and CEO of the US-based Local Initiatives Support Corporation. 'You don't have to take anybody's word for it.' His non-profit organisation is in the business of engaging local people in the revitalisation of their impoverished neighbourhoods and, once engaged, providing them with the means to see that transformation through and sustain it long-term.

Not yet two months into a new Whitehall regime, delegates attending Mr Rubinger's session in Harrogate today would do well to listen to his advice on how to win the backing of a fledgling administration. US President Barack Obama has been in office less than a year and a half, but Mr Rubinger is already confident that his community-focused cause has some 'very sympathetic and supportive officials at the federal level, including the president himself'.

Of course the LISC has been around for much longer than 18 months - it was established in 1979 by Mr Rubinger himself and five oth-



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ers - and enjoyed financial support from the White House long before Obama moved in. Nevertheless, the fact that the movement has 'a lot of friends' in the current administration is surely thanks in part to its innovative method of fundraising.

For every dollar the LISC collects locally - it has offices in 30 cities across the US - another \$20 is levered in at a national level through a unique mix of government grants and tax credit programmes, corporate equity

investments and philanthropy.

The results are impressive: last year the LISC invested \$607 million in communities, which leveraged \$1.2 billion in total development. That led to the creation of 8,800 affordable homes across its 30 locations.

But new homes are not the only thing the corporation spends its hard-earned cash on, explains Mr Rubinger. And that will be his key message in Harrogate.

'You can't have a lasting impact on

neighbourhoods if all you're focusing on is the built environment,' he says. 'You really have to deal with the other issues that face these communities - jobs, safety, access to quality education, opportunities for arts, culture and recreational activities. All of the things that make for a desirable community for any of us.'

The LISC achieves real support from local residents by asking them to consider the bigger picture too, and to create a 'quality of life' plan covering everything they think their deprived neighbourhood needs. 'It's just a better, more practical way to go about development - to truly involve people at the local level,' Mr Rubinger enthuses. 'Because they will really rally around and make sure the projects get done and that they're maintained in a useful way.'

He describes being part of an idea 'that has grown into an institution the size and longevity and impact of LISC' as both inspiring and the proudest achievement of a career that has spanned 40 years. That inspiration comes through getting things done though, rather than via the implementation of a particular set of principles.

'We believe in community engagement and involvement not out of some sense of ideology,' Mr Rubinger confirms, 'but rather as a very practical matter.'

→ Michael Rubinger speaks in the engaging and empowering communities session at 10.30am today in the International Conference Centre