# New Towns: Creating Communities

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Q in footnotes refers to a question in oral evidence.

## SUMMARY

This report concludes the second module of the Committee's inquiry into the Government's new towns programme. Our first report, *New Towns: Laying the Foundations*, looked at the legal, governance, and funding frameworks required to get the programme off the ground. This report, in contrast, focuses on the fundamentally human issues of what it takes to create thriving communities: vision, placemaking, design, and creating environments that are accessible, age-friendly and safe.

The evidence we received was remarkably consistent. There was broad support for the new towns programme across our witnesses and contributors. However, that support comes with a clear warning: without a galvanising vision, people-friendly placemaking, early social and health infrastructure, inclusive and adaptable design, and plenty of green spaces, these new towns will struggle to live up to their promise and create healthy, sustainable communities.

We see the proposed new towns as a major opportunity to learn from and build on the successes of previous new towns programmes, and we do not want this opportunity to go to waste. To that end, we make a number of recommendations, of which the following are key:

- **The programme urgently needs a compelling national vision**

This was a key recommendation of our first report and remains equally true now. The Government must set out and champion a clear, galvanising vision, rooted in opportunity and quality of life, so that the programme can sustain public, political and investor support over the decades to come.

- **Purpose must go beyond meeting numerical housing need**

New towns should drive inclusive growth, reduce spatial inequalities and act as exemplars of modern, healthy, sustainable living. The continued emphasis on delivering housing units is not enough to give the programme meaning and create thriving and successful communities.

- **Engagement must be early, meaningful and genuinely formative**

This needs to start even before any sites are formally designated and it must empower communities, especially young people, to make an active contribution to the planning process. Done well, such engagement will enhance the masterplans, reduce delays and build local pride and stewardship. Each new town should adopt a youth engagement strategy for every stage of development, using proportionate digital tools to broaden participation.

- **Masterplanning must be flexible, phased and infrastructure-first**

Each new town must be delivered in phases with regular reviews of the masterplan so that they can adapt to the changing needs and aspirations of the community. Essential social, health, active-travel and green/blue infrastructure must be in place from the day the first residents move in, with temporary 'meanwhile' spaces used to bridge early gaps. Masterplans should include diverse, SME-sized plot parcels and make routine use of open design competitions to encourage purposeful innovation while adhering to established, evidence-based design principles.

- **Placemaking should be people-centred, nature-rich and locally distinctive**

The new towns must avoid homogeneity. In addition to prioritising walkable neighbourhoods, highquality public spaces, and biodiversity, they must incorporate diverse plot sizes and reuse existing structures as much as possible, drawing on the local landscape and heritage to create distinct identities.

- **Health and inclusion must be designed in from the start, not retrofitted.**

The new towns must embed opportunities for active travel, green/blue infrastructure and social spaces that support physical and mental wellbeing and proactively support access for all. New towns should embed the principles of the NHS 10-Year Health Plan, co-locating care in community settings and enabling green and social prescribing to improve outcomes and reduce demand on acute services. We also recommend delivering at least one flagship intergenerational housing pilot within the programme. Each new town should appoint an Accessibility Champion to oversee the design and construction process and avoid costly retrofitting. There should also be a central Accessibility Champion to provide oversight across all schemes.

- **Governance must combine clear national leadership with locally rooted delivery**

We reiterate our call in *New Towns: Laying the Foundations* for the establishment of a single, autonomous central body, reporting to a dedicated Cabinet-level minister, to coordinate departments, steward quality and manage new-town assets over the long term.

- **Planning capacity is a critical risk**

Delivering any new towns at all while local planning capacity is so constrained will be an enormous challenge; delivering high quality, sustainable, and thriving communities of the kind we call for in this report will be almost impossible under such constraints. This is an issue we have raised repeatedly in recent inquiries, and it remains a fundamental concern in terms of creating communities in the new towns.

- **True value for money comes from early investment, patient capital, and "meanwhile" delivery; cutting corners will cost far more**

There must be adequate funding up front for social, health, and green infrastructure (including temporary, flexible community spaces). This requires all stakeholders to take a wholelife view of each new town: good design and stewardship reduce costs and increase value in the medium- to long-term; speculative, lowcost delivery ultimately only leads to failed communities and far higher remedial costs. The Government and delivery bodies should use digital twins and whole-life value metrics, including the Construction Innovation Hub's Value Toolkit and robust social-value measures, to track outcomes, demonstrate value for money, and share best practice.

We continue to believe that the new towns programme is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to build places that enhance lives across the life course, expand opportunity and restore public confidence in development. With a galvanising national vision, coordinated central leadership, early and sustained investment, empowered communities, inclusive design, and rigorous longterm stewardship,

this next generation of new towns truly can support thriving, healthy and enduring communities that rival the greatest successes from previous generations. We remain ready to support the Government as a constructive, critical friend to ensure that this promise is realised.

## SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Vison and innovation

1. We welcome the Government's desire to give full rein to the skills and talents of local communities, but this must not become an excuse to relinquish central Government leadership, coordination and vision. (Paragraph 33)

2. *The Government must demonstrate and articulate a clear, inspiring, long-term vision for this next generation of new towns with high quality design and placemaking at its heart.* (Paragraph 34)

3. *We continue to stress the need for a single, autonomous, extra-departmental body, analogous to the post-war New Towns Commission, to oversee and manage the operational delivery of the new towns programme. This body should report to a single, dedicated Cabinet minister with the authority to drive the programme from the centre and coordinate other Government departments to deliver the programme.* (Paragraph 35)

4. *The Government must encourage delivery bodies and planning authorities to support innovation in the delivery of the new towns and expanded settlements by including diverse plot sizes, leaving room in the masterplan for experimentation and adaptation, and using design competitions to explore a range of alternative approaches to design.* (Paragraph 42)

5. *Innovation and novel approaches must, however, be managed appropriately and must not override established, evidence-based design principles purely for the sake of novelty.* (Paragraph 43)

6. *The Government must empower delivery bodies to take a long-term approach to innovation in design and construction methods. To that end, it should avoid focusing on short-term delivery targets and the resulting need for standardised designs and templates in order to meet them.* (Paragraph 44)

7. *The Government must ensure that its design guidance for the new towns is grounded in established design principles while also allowing for community leadership and a clear sense of individual local identity. This guidance must include the requirement for new town delivery bodies to prioritise the inclusion of green and blue infrastructure in the masterplan of each scheme, to ensure every resident has access to such infrastructure from the very beginning of development.* (Paragraph 51)

8. *The Government should explore and evaluate the extent to which Secured by Design principles support or hinder effective urban design, community building, and placemaking.* (Paragraph 52)

### Place and community

9. *When setting the placemaking requirements for each new town, and for the programme as a whole, the Government must specify the criteria against which it will measure the long-term success of placemaking in the new towns, while ensuring that such criteria do not prevent new towns from adapting to changing needs over the course of the delivery process.* (Paragraph 58)

10. *Regardless of the type of site, there will always be local heritage, and this is a valuable starting point for new town delivery bodies. As such, new town delivery bodies must seek to capture and leverage the local heritage in their placemaking principles.* (Paragraph 65)

11. *Where possible, existing structures and buildings should be retained or refurbished to support heritage and imbue the new towns with an identity connected to a sense of place.* (Paragraph 66)

12. *The delivery of the next generation of new towns must include a commitment to the early provision of social and cultural infrastructure. In the early phases of development this might be in the form of temporary, flexible space that can then be adapted further as the new town develops.* (Paragraph 71)

13. *New town delivery bodies should also support the leaders of emerging interest and cultural groups by providing professional advice and training.* (Paragraph 72)

14. Effective, inclusive, and formative community engagement can support the delivery of new towns by reducing the risk of public opposition. We welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to community and resident engagement in the development of local plans to set clear parameters for new town planning and development. (Paragraph 77)

15. *The Government must ensure that the new town delivery bodies adopt an ambitious, inclusive, formative and effective public engagement strategy, in line with the Secretary of State's stated desire for community and resident involvement in the development of local plans, to ensure that the public is fully engaged without delaying individual new towns or the programme as a whole.* (Paragraph 78)

## Health and inclusion

16. *The Government must ensure that this next generation of new towns and expanded settlements proactively support the health and wellbeing of their residents through integrated, mutually reinforcing interventions, including active travel opportunities, high-quality green infrastructure, and a range of spaces for the community to meet.* (Paragraph 87)

17. *The Government must ensure that new towns are fully equipped to support the needs of an ageing population and should pursue initiatives such as the inclusion of a major intergenerational housing project.* (Paragraph 91)

18. *New town delivery bodies must capitalise on the enthusiasm of young people and their willingness to participate in consultation activities to create youth engagement strategies for each site. These strategies should seek to consult with young people at each stage of development and incorporate their perspectives into decisions.* (Paragraph 96)

19. Interventions in the built environment to support accessibility and inclusion are often low-cost, unobtrusive and mutually beneficial across diverse groups. (Paragraph 103)

20. *When setting guidance for placemaking in new towns the Government must include explicit, targeted guidance for delivery bodies to deliver accessible, inclusive design.* (Paragraph 104)

21. *Delivery bodies for new towns and expanded settlements should create ambitious accessibility strategies that include targeted engagement activities such as forming diverse design review panels. Delivery bodies for each new town should also appoint an Accessibility Champion to ensure that high inclusivity standards are incorporated into the plans for every new town. This should be supported by an Accessibility Champion within central Government, providing oversight across all schemes.* (Paragraph 105)

### Smart investment, sustainable places

22.  *The Government must ensure that the next generation of new towns receive adequate initial funding and investment to be able to deliver essential community and natural infrastructure from the start, with the explicit understanding from the outset that the return on this investment will take place on a timescale of decades, rather than years or months.* (Paragraph 115)

23.  *The Government must ensure that development corporations and community associations in each of the new towns are empowered from the start to make effective use of the fullest possible range of placemaking techniques, and to experiment with a range of approaches to find interventions that best serve their particular neighbourhoods or communities.* (Paragraph 122)

24.  *The Government must require essential community, health and social infrastructure to be in place from the date on which the first residents move into each new town or expanded settlement.* (Paragraph 123)

25.  *The Government should encourage the early deployment of temporary spaces or alternative uses for buildings in the early phases of a development as a way of providing essential community infrastructure. It should encourage and facilitate the piloting of alternative uses and configurations for such spaces in order to discover the true needs and desires of each new community.* (Paragraph 124)

26.  *Good design and effective placemaking can pay for itself, but the Government must ensure that it regulates and finances the new towns programme and individual towns in a way that supports and encourages developers, investors and delivery bodies to take a long-term approach to the realisation of these benefits. Relying on a speculative model will not deliver the Government's aspirations for the new towns.* (Paragraph 129)

27.  *This next generation of new towns must ensure that the health and wellbeing of all generations are supported from the start and that the infrastructure necessary for active, healthy lifestyles is included from the beginning.* (Paragraph 136)

28.  *The Government must ensure that delivery bodies are empowered and required to include age-appropriate housing that enables and supports older residents to retain their independence for as long as possible in each new town and expanded settlement to help reduce public expenditure on adult health and social care.* (Paragraph 137)

29.  *The Government must require all new towns and expanded settlements to include green and blue spaces from the outset, to maximise the potential savings generated by such infrastructure.* (Paragraph 138)

30.  *The Government must carefully monitor the cost effectiveness of placemaking, design and community infrastructure, using the reporting from this monitoring to disseminate best practice and improve the quality and ambition of placemaking in future developments of all sizes in England.* (Paragraph 144)

31.  *The Government must move beyond standard and short-term metrics and methodologies in monitoring and demonstrating the cost effectiveness of the new towns individually and the programme as a whole and should pilot a range of alternative methodologies to ensure a robust and well-supported evidence base for long term savings and returns.* (Paragraph 145)

32. *Delivery bodies should make proportionate use of digital planning and governance tools—where supported by evidence and community need—to improve transparency, track design quality over time, and reduce friction in engagement.* (Paragraph 146)

# New Towns: Creating Communities

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.  "I was immediately struck by the cleanliness of it and the brightness of it … I had a garden and I also had something that I didn't have in London, my own front door."[1] So said Laura Lilley in 1957, describing her experience of moving in to her home in Harlow, one of post-war new towns built across the country under the New Towns Act 1946. In 1973, describing his experience moving to Runcorn in 1971, Christopher Harrison spoke of "a real sense that we were moving to a better life … a feeling of hope, optimism and an almost holiday atmosphere"[2] and other residents clearly revelled in the pioneer spirit: "There was one big hooray went up as we come round when they see there was someone else moving in."[3] These early accounts capture the confident spirit we want the next generation of new towns to rekindle—places that offer a genuinely better life and enduring civic pride.

2.  This sense of optimism and delight was, however, by no means universal, even among the pioneers: "When I first came, I cried for weeks, it was so lonely. It was a shock to see such a steep hill going up to the shops."[4] A resident of Hemel Hempstead complained in 1959 that there was "no imagination or planning behind the layout of the community … the community resembles a modern chicken farm, every chicken alone in its identical box."[5] The passage of time did nothing to improve matters. Even for Christopher Harrison in Runcorn, "by the 1980s, as the nearby factories closed one after the other, things started to go downhill".[6] By 2002, a journalist noted that Harlow felt "like the kind of place you want to pass quickly through on the way to somewhere else: a place that has been forgotten"[7].

3.  Despite the programme's best intentions, not all post-war new towns fulfilled their promise of sustainable communities. Our task, then, is to set out how the current new towns programme, launched in July 2024,[8] can do better, so that it delivers sustainable, thriving communities that flourish for decades to come. Many have catalogued the post-war programme's missteps, but today's context is very different. Our analysis therefore looks forward and draws only those past lessons that apply now.

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1   Municipal Dreams, *Harlow New Town: 'Are you going my way?*, 12 July 2016, citing a wall panel in the Museum of Harlow
2   Monica Furlong, "Harlow: New Town", The Spectator, 29 September 1960, as cited in Municipal Dreams, "*Runcorn New Town, Part 2: a fresh look on life*, 9 July 2024
3   Talking New Towns, *Mrs Anne Cotter talks about her experience of moving into her first home in Stevenage*, 30 December 2015
4   Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p 122
5   Letter published in The Spectator, 1959, as cited in: Mark Clapson, "The English New Towns Since 1946: What Are the Lessons of Their History for Their Future?", *Histoire Urbaine*, issue 50 (2017/3), pp 93–111, p 100: https://doi.org/10.3917/rhu.050.0093
6   The Spectator, "*Harlow: New Town*",29 September 1960, as cited in Municipal Dreams, *"Runcorn New Town, Part 2: a fresh look on life*, 9 July 2024
7   The Guardian, *Down town*, 1 August 2002
8   Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, *Policy statement on new towns*, 31 July 2024

### Our Modular Inquiry

4. Given the scale of the current new towns programme, and its enormous potential, we have adopted a modular inquiry format. Each module addresses a distinct but interconnected aspect of the new towns programme. Our first report, *New Towns: Laying the Foundations*[9], published in October 2025, examined the legal, regulatory, governance, stewardship, financial, and fiscal frameworks that must be in place before anything can be built. Our third and final substantive module, following later in 2026, will look into the concrete issues of housing and infrastructure and how these new towns will be built.

#### *Module 2—New Towns: Creating Communities*

5. This second report, in contrast, focuses on quality of life and creating sustainable communities in this next generation of new towns. For us, these are communities in which residents are able to thrive and live happy, healthy, and productive lives—in short, what matters for human flourishing.

6. We launched this module with the publication of our call for evidence on 31 October 2025 and started hearing oral evidence on 4 November. We held a total of eight evidence sessions between November 2025 and January 2026. In addition to the oral evidence, we published 90 pieces of written evidence from all sections of society, from academics, policy-makers and developers to individual citizens. In recognition of the importance of young voices in discussions about new towns, we also organised a competition for GCSE and A-Level students, asking them what new towns should look like. The winning entries are published on our website.[10] We are grateful to all who gave evidence—the number of submissions demonstrates the level of interest that exists in this new towns programme.

7. For this module, we appointed a Specialist Adviser: Matthew Carmona, Professor of Planning and Urban Design at the Bartlett School of Planning, UCL. We are grateful to him for his advice and expertise throughout this module of our inquiry.

8. In this report, Chapter 2 addresses vision and innovation; Chapter 3, place and community; Chapter 4, health and inclusion across the life course; and Chapter 5, how to deliver placemaking cost-effectively and secure value for money.

### The New Towns Programme and Taskforce—an update since our first report

9. In *New Towns: Laying the Foundations*, we set out the history of the new towns movement and the background to the current programme at some length[11]. We published that report just as the New Towns Taskforce, chaired by Sir Michael Lyons, was publishing its own report to the Government setting out the findings of its own investigation into the appropriate parameters for the current programme, along with a list of 12 sites identified as most suitable for this next generation of new towns.[12]

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9    Built Environment Committee, *New Towns Laying the Foundations*, (2nd Report of Session 2024–26 HL Paper 183)

10    Built Environment Committee, *Built Environment Committee Prize 2025 winners* 23 March 2026

11    Built Environment Committee, *New Towns Laying the Foundations* , Chapter 1 - Introduction

12    Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG), *New Towns Taskforce: Report to government*, 28 September 2025

10. Most of the sites identified by the Taskforce are urban extensions or city-centre redevelopments; only Adlington in Cheshire is a standalone settlement. Building communities in urban extensions differs from creating one from scratch and requires engagement with adjoining communities as well as future residents.

11. Upon receipt of Sir Michael's recommendations in September 2025, the Government commenced a "Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to understand the environmental implications of new towns development", pending the outcome of which there would be no "final decisions on locations". It identified Tempsford, Crews Hill and Leeds South Bank as "particularly promising ... sites that might make significant contributions to unlocking economic growth and accelerating housing delivery" but cautioned that "preferred locations could change as a result of the [SEA] process."[13]

12. At the same time, the Government committed to the establishment of a "new delivery partnership" between the Government's New Towns Unit and Homes England "to lead on discussions with places and work across government departments to stress-test spending and delivery plans for the vital economic and social infrastructure that each new town will require." This work would be overseen by the Housing Minister, "reporting directly to the Home and Economic Affairs (Infrastructure) Cabinet Committee."[14]

13. This does not go as far as we recommended in *New Towns: Laying the Foundations*. In that report, one of our most prominent recommendations was for the Government to establish a "centralised planning agency for new and expanded towns" reporting to a dedicated Cabinet-level minister. This would "oversee, support, and ensure the quality of, individual projects from a central perspective, and maintain a consistent strategic vision".[15]

14. Since this initial response, the Government has said very little. Appearing before us on 21 January 2026, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Rt Hon Steve Reed OBE MP, stated that the Government was planning to launch public consultations for the sites "in February"[16]—though Lise-Anne Boissière, Co-Director for New Towns, Infrastructure and Housing Delivery, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, subsequently cautioned that timelines were "still a little bit fluid", and would be dependent upon the outcome of the SEA.[17]

*Stakeholder reception*

15. Notwithstanding the lack of news from the Government, it is clear that there has been extensive interaction between the Government and relevant stakeholders. The evidence we received suggests that the built environment sector[18] is broadly enthusiastic about the new towns programme. However, we did hear some examples of discontent about the Government's approach to engagement with the sector. While by no means representative of all of the submissions we received, some landowners and promoters with particularly close connections to the programme told us of their concerns about the

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13  MHCLG, *Independent Report-Initial government response (September 2025)*, 28 September 2025
14  *Ibid.*
15  Built Environment Committee, *New Towns Laying the Foundations*, para 127
16  Q 84 (Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government)
17  Q 84 (Lise-Anne Boissière)
18  The public, private and civic actors involved in planning, designing, delivering and stewarding places.

level of secrecy imposed upon the process, a dearth of information from the Government, and a lack of coordination across Government departments.

16.   In the case of Adlington, for example, Niall Bolger of Belport cited the imposition of Non-Disclosure Agreements as having prevented any engagement with the local authority, stakeholders, or residents until the official announcement in September 2025.[19] This meant that Belport had not been able "to be as open and transparent as [they] wanted to be", with the result that "most residents are very upset about the proposals and the process to date".[20]

17.   Brett Leahy from Enfield Borough Council, which is promoting the Crews Hill and Chase Park sites, and is a major landowner in the area, saw a "lack of clarity around the vision and the programme for achieving delivery" as "the biggest challenge."[21] To that end, he thought that there was a need for "one voice and one point of reference to navigate the complexities but, critically, to get and maintain momentum."[22]

*Stakeholder ambition*

18.   Of equal importance to Brett Leahy and Niall Bolger's insights into their interactions with the Government are their descriptions of their ambitions for their respective developments. Both attached considerable importance to the role of nature and green space in their visions for their sites.

19.   For example, Niall Bolger described Adlington as a "parkland new town where approximately 40% of the available land will be green and blue open space."[23] Brett Leahy spoke of both the Crews Hill and Chase Park sites as having potential to be "landscape-led" settlements in which nature recovery is the "primary structuring principle", rather than an afterthought, in the creation of "a compact, walkable, mixed-use neighbourhood",[24] underpinned by "basic urban design principles of walkable blocks, strong street networks, [and] rail-anchored centres."[25] We return to environmental quality, biodiversity and green/blue infrastructure in Chapters 2 and 5.

20.   These insights into how the landowners and developers are thinking about the future of their sites provide us with a clear foundation for our discussions in the rest of this report.

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19   Q 65 (Niall Bolger)
20   Q 76 (Niall Bolger)
21   Q 81 (Brett Leahy)
22   Q 73 (Brett Leahy)
23   Q 68 (Brett Leahy)
24   Q 68 (Niall Bolger)
25   Q 74 (Niall Bolger)

## Chapter 2: Vision and Innovation

### Oversight

21.  In *New Towns: Laying the Foundations,* we highlighted the lack of a clear vision for this next generation of new towns[26] and warned that, without this, it would be very difficult to build and sustain the widespread long-term public support needed for this kind of nationwide, multi-decade programme.

22.  In the context of this module, we heard about the fundamental role of placemaking in articulating such a vision: it is critical to ensuring that "high quality design is inherent and delivered over time"[27] and needs to explain what these new towns are for and why they matter. Filling housing quotas alone will never be enough: "the vision cannot be around 10,000 homes. That is not a place. It must be a place vision that says: what are the opportunities for the young people growing up here in 30 years? What does it mean to live in this place? Why would I visit this place? What is this place?"[28] Echoing our earlier findings, Paul Augarde of Augarde and Partners added that such a vision "has still to be defined".[29]

23.  For Daisy Narayanan of the Crown Estate, a "long-term, vision-led approach" allows for the "evaluation and monitoring of success … [allowing] ongoing investment and ongoing conversations with the community as things change."[30] This, in turn, provides the opportunity for a "joined-up, integrated approach—the systems approach that we all talk about—and to be innovative."[31] She told us about the Crown Estate's ongoing development at East Hemel, where a focus on being "responsible stewards of the land" was resulting in "a different way of approaching traditional housing developments … putting nature and people first, through a nature/people-led approach."[32]

24.  In the case of Poundbury, Ben Pentreath of Ben Pentreath Ltd cited HM The King's vision as key to his being able to "look at development in a different way and set the Duchy of Cornwall on a different trajectory with its developments more broadly."[33] Even more important to the town's success had been the presence of "a single master planner for the project as a whole" who was able to give his "particular point of view as to how things should proceed" and was backed by The King.[34] This meant that there was "consistent ownership and a consistent vision through the whole duration of the project" and when there is "that sort of strong structure, it can be incredibly supportive of good long-term placemaking."[35]

25.  Both of these examples highlight, therefore, the critical importance of clear lines of ownership, accountability and vision. In *New Towns: Laying the Foundations* we identified a lack of vision, ownership, grip, and coordination as areas of deep concern. We recommended not only the creation of a body analogous to the post-war New Towns Commission to provide central

26   Built Environment Committee, *New Towns: Laying the Foundations*, paras 30–41
27   Written evidence from Places for People (NTC0030)
28   Q 3 (Paul Augarde)
29   *Ibid.*
30   Q 3 (Daisy Narayanan)
31   Q 8 (Daisy Narayanan)
32   *Ibid.*
33   Q 20 (Ben Pentreath)
34   *Ibid.*
35   *Ibid.*

operational oversight for the programme, but also the appointment of a single, dedicated, Cabinet-level minister to drive the programme from the centre and lead coordination across Government departments and reporting lines.[36]

26.    Ben Pentreath's evidence reinforced this. He contrasted Poundbury's clear ownership with today's "quite a broken" planning system, under which things that "should take eight to 12 or 13 weeks … take years. The system feels overwhelmed by paperwork, but there is very little checking of what is actually being delivered and built on sites." It is a "very rules-based system [in which you] are dealing with multiple bureaucracies and different agencies." This means that it is "very hard to take a broad strategic overview of what constitutes good placemaking."[37] In this context, clear coordination and ownership across the different levels of Government, across Government departments and agencies, and also local government, will be essential: if "it is just an aspiration from Government on top, it can very often get dissipated."[38]

27.    Issues of institutional capacity and professional skills remain critical enablers of the placemaking ambitions in this report, as a 'capacity risk' in local planning authorities that threatens to undermine delivery.[39] In the context of this inquiry, we heard that "expectations for high design standards" are already "constrained by [local authorities'] limited capacity".[40] While the Government has acknowledged this by announcing £48 million to build skills for planners,[41] we refer to the structural conclusions already made in *New Towns: Laying the Foundations*[42] rather than reopening them here.

28.    The Secretary of State was keen to reassure us about the Government's leadership and oversight of the programme. He described the Government's role as that of "enablers" and stressed the need for the Government to avoid usurping the role of local communities: "If the Government try to do it, it will not be creative. We have to open it up to people in their own communities—the best of the public sector, the best of the private sector—to come together and form their own partnerships."[43] He did not want to "cap or constrain people's creativity" and expected "local areas to lead on that work … [drawing] in talent from their own localities."[44]

29.    He recognised that the planning system in this country had become "incredibly complex" and "was one of the most complex in the world and impenetrable", existing "almost to prevent development rather than to enable development." He pointed to the reforms introduced by the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 and the proposed revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework as ways to "speed up the planning process so that we can get outcomes faster", hoping that these would make it "much easier

36    Built Environment Committee, *New Towns Laying the Foundations*, paras 127–128
37    Q 18 (Ben Pentreath)
38    *Ibid.*
39    Written evidence from Hleb Buziuk (NTC0002)
40    Written evidence from Clarion Housing (NTC0080)
41    Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, *Press Release: Housing Sec pledges to 'go further than ever before' to hit 1.5 million homes*, 16 December 2025
42    Built Environment Committee, *New Towns: Laying the Foundations*
43    Q 94 (Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government)
44    Q 93 (Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government)

to navigate for people who want to come and invest their money and their futures in developments in our country, in the new towns in particular."[45]

30.  The Secretary of State said the programme is a Prime Ministerial priority overseen by the Home and Economic Affairs (Infrastructure) Cabinet Committee and stressed that it "would not be delivered" without cross-government coordination. The new towns would "need schools and education opportunities", "good public transport", as well as "hospitals and health services" requiring the Departments for Education and Transport, and the Department of Health and Social Care each to play their part.[46]

31.  Lise-Anne Boissière added that the new towns would be "master-planned from the outset … [creating] an opportunity to think holistically" and that there was a lot of energy in Government surrounding the "thinking about the join-up with the health service and with local health facilities more generally and … what new things they can do differently."[47]

32.  While he did not accept the need for a 21st century equivalent of the New Towns Commission, the Secretary of State told us that his Department's newly established new towns unit would work closely with Homes England in a new delivery partnership. It would "make sure that there is coordination" and look at how to "bring all the various parts of government together in that way."[48]

33.  **We welcome the Government's desire to give full rein to the skills and talents of local communities, but this must not become an excuse to relinquish central Government leadership, coordination and vision.**

34.  ***The Government must demonstrate and articulate a clear, inspiring, long-term vision for this next generation of new towns with high quality design and placemaking at its heart.***

35.  ***We continue to stress the need for a single, autonomous, extra-departmental body, analogous to the post-war New Towns Commission, to oversee and manage the operational delivery of the new towns programme. This body should report to a single, dedicated Cabinet minister with the authority to drive the programme from the centre and coordinate other Government departments to deliver the programme.***

### Innovation or experimentation

36.  We heard a clear tension between innovation, past missteps, and the pressure to deliver homes at pace. Although the scale and timeline for delivery lends itself to innovation,[49] witnesses cautioned against experimenting unnecessarily with widely accepted principles of good design.[50]

37.  Edwin Heathcote of the *Financial Times* questioned whether "new, exciting, innovative and experimental new towns [are] what we really want", suggesting

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45   Q 92 (Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government)

46   Q 88 (Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government)

47   Q 96 (Lise-Anne Boissière)

48   Q 90 (Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government)

49   See for example written evidence from the London Borough of Enfield (NTC0044), Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (NTC0034), and Professor Matthew Carmona (NTC0009)

50   Q 28 (Edwin Heathcote) and Q 28 (Phineas Harper)

that "people are relatively conservative".[51] We were told that previous new towns, including Milton Keynes, anticipated a Los Angeles style of urban planning favouring car dependency that has since fallen out of favour.[52] The Government was urged to "be a bit careful" with "experimental approaches to new towns", as "we more or less know what people want from cities".[53] Phineas Harper, an independent writer and critic, stressed that "the fundamentals of what makes a good home and a good community do not change very much", and if "we can get those things right, then we will be future-proofing our housing for all sorts of social change".[54]

38.   However, we also heard that new towns and expanded settlements offer an "unprecedented opportunity for purposeful innovation" due to their "scale and national significance".[55] The "long-term vision" of the projects can support innovative design choices, rather than focusing on short-term delivery.[56] Climate resilience infrastructure,[57] modern methods of construction,[58] and self-build opportunities[59] were all highlighted as opportunities for innovation.

39.   Phineas Harper was strongly in favour of small and medium-sized architects, urban planners, and property developers being given a "slightly bigger share of the overall mix of new developments".[60] Ben Pentreath, founder of Ben Pentreath Ltd, suggested that, while large housebuilders are "very good at building houses quickly and cheaply", they can "struggle with the complexity of placemaking".[61]

40.   To allow space for innovation while still building on widely accepted placemaking principles, Edwin Heathcote argued for "relatively conservative" plans, but with space "for happy accidents".[62] Ben Pentreath urged smaller-scale delivery that avoids "mega blocks, mega land ownership and mega parcels".[63] We were told that smaller plot sizes in masterplans would enable small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to bring innovation to the new towns, whilst managing risk and still delivering well-balanced neighbourhoods.[64] This was a clear echo of the findings of our first module, and particularly our experience in Copenhagen, where we saw how smaller plot sizes can provide a more "even playing field for SMEs" and encourage "human-scale development, avoiding homogeneity."[65]

41.   Another means of encouraging and driving innovation is the use of design competitions. These are competitive processes in which a client invites architects or planners to submit design proposals based on a specific brief. As well as encouraging innovation, they can provide "opportunities to younger

51    Q 31 (Edwin Heathcote)
52    Ibid.
53    Q 28 (Edwin Heathcote)
54    Q 31 (Phineas Harper)
55    Written evidence from Professor Matthew Carmona (NTC0009)
56    Written evidence from the London Borough of Enfield (NTC0044)
57    Written evidence from Dr Tariq Umar (NTC0011)
58    Ibid.
59    Written evidence from Pinsent Masons LLP (NTC0083)
60    Q 29 (Phineas Harper)
61    Q 21 (Ben Pentreath)
62    Q 28 (Edwin Heathcote)
63    Q 19 (Ben Pentreath)
64    Q 29 (Phineas Harper
65    Built Environment Committee, *New Towns: Laying the Foundations*, paras 62–63

… and international architects".[66] We heard that in Europe, where these are more common, they have resulted in innovative, popular designs.[67]

42. ***The Government must encourage delivery bodies and planning authorities to support innovation in the delivery of the new towns and expanded settlements by including diverse plot sizes, leaving room in the masterplan for experimentation and adaptation, and using design competitions to explore a range of alternative approaches to design.***

43. ***Innovation and novel approaches must, however, be managed appropriately and must not override established, evidence-based design principles purely for the sake of novelty.***

44. ***The Government must empower delivery bodies to take a long-term approach to innovation in design and construction methods. To that end, it should avoid focusing on short-term delivery targets and the resulting need for standardised designs and templates in order to meet them.***

### Principles of good design

45. In calling for innovative design, we recognise that aesthetic considerations are subjective and contested. Accordingly, we focus here on the principles of good design, rather than any single aesthetic. In this regard, the evidence emphasised human-scale design,[68] crafted elements,[69] natural materials,[70] and a robust landscape strategy[71] as the foundations of successful places.

46. Strong community-focused design can support cohesion, encouraging residents to engage with their neighbours and feel secure in their local area.[72] However, misjudged programmes can do the opposite. Phineas Harper was sharply critical of Secured by Design (SBD) principles. Secured by Design seeks to reduce opportunities for crime through design standards such as individual seats instead of benches, fewer footpaths, and well-equipped communal areas in housing blocks.[73] Phineas Harper argued that the programme's recommendations had the effect of creating "more isolated and fragmented communities and neighbours who do not know or trust each other".[74]

47. Indeed, much of the evidence we received recommends placemaking principles that would be diametrically opposed to the guidance in SBD. This raises questions about the extent to which the programme interferes with effective placemaking and even whether it might ultimately be doing more harm than good. Additionally, the Shaping the Future London Plan report, published by the Planning and Regeneration Committee of the Greater London Authority, noted a limited evidence base for the efficacy

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66    Q 29 (Edwin Heathcote)
67    Q 29 (Edwin Heathcote), written evidence from Professor Matthew Carmona (NTC0009), Dr Manuela Madeddu (NTC0039)
68    Q 19 (Ben Pentreath)
69    *Ibid.*
70    Q 29 (Phineas Harper)
71    *Ibid.*
72    Written evidence from Dr Inci Toral, Dr Sarah Montano, Dr Gaye Bebek, Dr Fatos Ozkan Erciyas (NTC0059), and AR Urbanism (NTC0065)
73    *Ibid.*
74    Q 28 (Phineas Harper)

and consequences of SBD principles, and called on the London Mayor to commission a new research initiative into the programme.[75]

48. Alongside community-focused design, the evidence we received consistently called for high-quality green space and biodiversity to be core design features in the next generation of new towns.[76] This kind of green and blue infrastructure[77] is "vital" and needs to be "incorporated in spatial planning from the outset".[78]

49. Getting the fundamentals of good quality design right, with attention to detail, ample green space, and a community focus, does not mean that there should not also be room "for a little bit of flair",[79] for going beyond usual expectations: "identity emerges when a settlement has a focus", something that "lifts it above the routine estate template",[80] even something as simple as a green, a square, or an interesting train station.[81]

50. The Secretary of State recognised the importance of community-led design that allows "new towns in various parts of the country … to focus on different things", noting that it would be "quite odd if they all came up with the same proposals because the needs in various parts of the country will be different from each other."[82] To that end, "local communities and the people who want to live in these places [should] have a much bigger say about how they are designed and created."[83]

51. ***The Government must ensure that its design guidance for the new towns is grounded in established design principles while also allowing for community leadership and a clear sense of individual local identity. This guidance must include the requirement for new town delivery bodies to prioritise the inclusion of green and blue infrastructure in the masterplan of each scheme, to ensure every resident has access to such infrastructure from the very beginning of development.***

52. ***The Government should explore and evaluate the extent to which Secured by Design principles support or hinder effective urban design, community building, and placemaking.***

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75  Greater London Authority, *Shaping the Future London Plan*, 18 March 2024
76  See for example written evidence from Natural England (NTC0024), the Royal Town Planning Institute (NTC0037), Dr Jack Benton (NTC0055), The Edge (NTC0061), Horticultural Trades Association (NTC0087), and the Building Research Establishment (NTC0091)
77  'Green and blue infrastructure' is a broad term that includes parks, gardens, allotments, and canals.
78  Written evidence from the Horticultural Trades Association (NTC0037)
79  Q 59 (Phineas Harper)
80  Written evidence from Dr Lucy Montague, Ben Derbyshire, and Andrew Beharrell (NTC0031)
81  Q 59 (Phineas Harper), written evidence from Dr Lucy Montague, Ben Derbyshire, and Andrew Beharrell (NTC0031), and Pupils 2 Parliament (NTC0073)
82  Q 94 (Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government)
83  Q 99 (Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government)

## CHAPTER 3: PLACE AND COMMUNITY

### Defining placemaking

53.  There is no universally agreed definition of 'placemaking'.[84] However, from the evidence, the unifying principles include a focus on the needs of the community during development[85] and responding carefully to the specific qualities of the local site and wider context.[86] For its part, the New Towns Taskforce Report emphasises place-led growth and nature-positive, walkable settlements.[87] We use those aims as a starting point and test them against the evidence on placemaking in this chapter.

54.  We heard of various methods for measuring the success of placemaking principles and were cautioned that decisions about placemaking need to be "based on understanding and evidence",[88] taken from a wide range of sources, and respond to community feedback and experiences.[89] Catherine Williams, Planning Director for the Home Builders Federation, and Kevin McGeough, Head of Strategy and Placemaking for the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation, suggested a range of practical metrics, such as the number of businesses opening in commercial spaces, dwell time in public spaces,[90] and resident satisfaction surveys.[91]

55.  Paul Augarde argued that the "measurement of place impact and placemaking is much debated", and that long-term monitoring "must be tailored to the place".[92] Catherine Williams commented that measuring the success of new towns must be connected to the "original vision" for each site, giving something to "look back on over time" to check progress.[93] Daisy Narayanan, Director of Public Realm at the Crown Estate, also stressed that you "cannot measure success in the short term".[94] Establishing long-term measurable indicators, rooted in local context and the original vision, allows targeted ongoing investment and more meaningful engagement with communities.[95]

56.  At the same time, need and demand will evolve over the decades; new towns must be able to adapt accordingly. In the words of Brett Leahy, "good growth and development need flexibility. You cannot fix everything down to the ground. You need that flex, particularly when you have a development cycle of 15 to 20 years."[96] In his written evidence on behalf of Enfield Council, he described the Council's policies and masterplans as being "consciously written to be principles-led," allowing "new housing typologies" and "formats that can adapt to changing retail and employment patterns".[97]

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84   Q 2 (Daisy Narayanan, Paul Augarde)
85   See for example Q 2 (Catherine Williams, Daisy Naranyanan) and Q 28 (Phineas Harper).
86   See for example Q 5 (Dairy Narayanan), Q 29 (Edwin Heathcote), Q 22 (Ben Pentreath), and written evidence from the Heritage Alliance (NTC0093), and the University of Southampton (NTC0095).
87   MHCLG, *New Towns Taskforce Report*, Chapter 3
88   Written evidence from the University of Southampton (NTC0095)
89   *Ibid.*
90   Q 2 (Catherine Williams)
91   Q 34 (Kevin McGeough)
92   Q 3 (Paul Augarde)
93   Q 3 (Catherine Williams)
94   Q 3 (Daisy Narayanan)
95   *Ibid.*
96   Q 74 (Brett Leahy)
97   Written evidence from the London Borough of Enfield (NTC0044)

57. In June 2025, a delegation from the Committee visited Copenhagen to understand that city's experiences with its development of two substantial new towns (both, incidentally, urban expansions) and the lessons they have learned. On that visit, we saw this phased, adaptive, principles-led approach in practice in the redevelopment of the former port of Nordhavn: masterplanning and delivery was being rolled out in carefully controlled phases that were constantly adapting to changing circumstances on the ground. In Ørestad, we heard that after some initial missteps in this regard, the development corporation now reviews the masterplan every four to five years to ensure that it continues to meet contemporaneous demand.

58. ***When setting the placemaking requirements for each new town, and for the programme as a whole, the Government must specify the criteria against which it will measure the long-term success of placemaking in the new towns, while ensuring that such criteria do not prevent new towns from adapting to changing needs over the course of the delivery process.***

### Location, landscape and heritage

59. The majority of the 12 sites selected by the New Towns Taskforce are either significant urban extensions or densification programmes in existing urban areas. The few sites that are mostly greenfield are largely based upon the footprint of existing small settlements, such as the Adlington site, based around an existing settlement of that name.[98] Location and landscape shape identity, movement and character; heritage, in this sense, reaches beyond the built fabric to the meanings embedded in place.

60. In light of this, much of the evidence we received urged placemaking principles to be rooted in the local heritage, culture, and vernacular.[99] Even for sites that are ostensibly entirely new, Lucy Musgrave, Founder of Publica, stressed that "there is always connectivity to land. There is always understanding and meaning in landscape".[100] Daisy Narayanan from the Crown Estate told us that, while "some placemaking principles have universal relevance", "their application must always be rooted in local context, culture and landscape".[101]

61. In this regard, we heard that connection to local heritage "supports people's pride in place",[102] and that heritage is "a key driver for leveraging place identity and social connectedness".[103] Witnesses therefore called for new towns to utilise local heritage and connection to place identity in their placemaking principles to support the growth of new communities and develop a greater sense of civic pride.[104]

62. We heard that existing heritage can also be a powerful way for emerging communities to develop a connection to place.[105] Paula Bond, Director of

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98    Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, *Independent Report - New Towns Taskforce: Report to government*, 28 September 2025
99    See for example Q 5 (Daisy Narayanan), Q 23 (Lucy Musgrave), Q 29 (Edwin Heathcote), and written evidence from the National Trust (NTC0063), Jenny Elliott (NTC0076), the Heritage Alliance (NTC0093), and the University of Southampton (NTC0095)
100    Q 24 (Lucy Musgrave)
101    Q 5 (Daisy Narayanan)
102    Written evidence from the Heritage Alliance (NTC0093)
103    Written evidence from the University of Southampton (NTC0095)
104    Q 24 (Lucy Musgrave), and written evidence from the Heritage Alliance (NTC0093), and the University of Southampton (NTC0095)
105    Q 35 (Paula Bond), Q 40 (Kevin McGeough)

Northstowe Arts, told us how she has used heritage and local history in community events to "give a sense of identity and pride".[106] Similarly, Kevin McGeough spoke of how, in Ebbsfleet, 'section 106 money'[107] was earmarked for local heritage activities, encouraging young people to engage with local history and feed into design decisions.[108]

63. For sites with existing heritage assets, witnesses called for the reuse of existing structures to tie new settlements to local heritage and vernacular.[109] Edwin Heathcote from the Financial Times told us that "we have been bad at retaining interesting structures" and presented examples of major regeneration schemes that have successfully incorporated existing structures into design, including the Tate Modern in London and the Ruhr Valley in Germany, stressing "there is no *tabula rasa*. Everything has structures on it".[110] Phineas Harper, an independent writer and critic, argued that the built environment sector is "addicted to demolition" and that, instead, buildings "could, with a bit of love and care, be transformed into something really useful and beautiful".[111]

64. On our visit to Copenhagen, we saw how, in Nordhavn, historic industrial and administrative buildings had been retained and refurbished into mixed-use structures, incorporating homes and commercial space.[112]

65. ***Regardless of the type of site, there will always be local heritage, and this is a valuable starting point for new town delivery bodies. As such, new town delivery bodies must seek to capture and leverage the local heritage in their placemaking principles.***

66. ***Where possible, existing structures and buildings should be retained or refurbished to support heritage and imbue the new towns with an identity connected to a sense of place.***

### Social and cultural infrastructure

67. Social and cultural infrastructure refers to physical spaces and organisations that seek to foster community cohesion and wellbeing. It can include community centres, meeting spaces, cafes and cultural venues, as well as playgrounds and parks as free places to meet. Much of the evidence we received over the course of the inquiry stressed the importance of providing such infrastructure as early as possible.[113]

68. We heard of the importance of promoting a sense of community and bringing new residents together,[114] which many witnesses argued was

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106  Q 35 (Paula Bond)

107  Under *Town and Country Planning Act 1990*, s 106, as a condition of the grant of planning permission, developers enter into legally binding agreements with local planning authorities to mitigate the impact of the development, including by paying money.

108  Q 36 (Kevin McGeough)

109  Q 29 (Edwin Heathcote), Q 29 (Phineas Harper), and written evidence from Historic England (NTC0085)

110  Q 29 (Edwin Heathcote)

111  Q 29 (Phineas Harper)

112  Built Environment Committee, *New Towns: Laying the Foundations*, Appendix 4: Copenhagen Visit

113  See for example Q 7 (Paul Augarde), Q 34 (Rhiannon Corcoran), Q 42 (Paula Bond), written evidence from Mr Oskar Walker (NTC0010), Dr James Laurence (NTC0014), and Dr Keetie Roelen (NTC0064).

114  See for example Q 36 (Rhiannon Corcoran), Q 34 (Kevin McGeough), written evidence from Liz Edwards (NTC0075), and Social Life (NTC0071).

intrinsically linked to the provision of physical space.[115] In both historic post-war New Towns such as Milton Keynes[116] and in more contemporary examples like Northstowe,[117] a lack of social and cultural infrastructure led to resident frustration and poorer social outcomes. Developers, planners, and local authority teams were urged to remember the "current reality for early residents", and that the experiences of the first people to move into a development, the so-called 'pioneer communities', can impact a "development's long-term success".[118]

69.   The evidence we received advised new town delivery bodies to focus on providing flexible, mixed-use facilities that can accommodate a variety of uses and diverse groups.[119] Community space "becomes very quickly contested",[120] so keeping it "flexible and adaptable" helps to ensure "future readiness" and enables it to respond to changing populations.[121] In addition, Paula Bond, Director of Northstowe Arts CIC, argued that temporary community spaces during the early stages of development helped give developers greater clarity about the needs that the subsequent permanent spaces would need to fulfil: "They know what the community want because the community have already been doing all the things that they are doing in those spaces".[122]

70.   Beyond the provision of physical spaces, Kevin McGeough urged the developers of new towns to provide the "tools to allow people to come together and share … common interest[s]".[123] Paula Bond explained that funding was "not the only thing we need", but that they also needed "the networks and the professional knowledge … to support and build … capacity".[124] We heard that tools such as access to professional training and business networks build capacity in the community and empower residents to become much more involved in local governance, ultimately supporting the long-term stewardship of the development.[125]

71.   ***The delivery of the next generation of new towns must include a commitment to the early provision of social and cultural infrastructure. In the early phases of development this might be in the form of temporary, flexible space that can then be adapted further as the new town develops.***

72.   ***New town delivery bodies should also support the leaders of emerging interest and cultural groups by providing professional advice and training.***

### Engagement and co-production

73.   Our previous report, *New Towns: Laying the Foundations,* recommended that the Government should "set out a framework for meaningful community

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115  See for example Q 7 (Paul Augarde), Q 34 (Rhiannon Corcoran), Q 42 (Paula Bond), written evidence from Mr Oskar Walker (NTC0010), Dr James Laurence (NTC0014), and Dr Keetie Roelen (NTC0064).
116  Written evidence from Dr Keetie Roelen (NTC0064)
117  Q 42 (Paula Bond), and written evidence from Mari O'Neill (NTC0018)
118  Written evidence from Mari O'Neill (NTC0018)
119  Written evidence from Dr James Laurence (NTC0014) and Local Trust (NTC0021)
120  Q 42 (Rhiannon Corcoran)
121  *Ibid.*
122  Q 42 (Paula Bond)
123  Q 35 (Kevin McGeough)
124  Q 36 (Paula Bond)
125  Q 34 (Rhiannon Corcoran), Q 34 (Paula Bond), written evidence from Mari O'Neill (NTC0018)

engagement and consultation for both the programme as a whole and for each individual project".[126] We have revisited the topic in this module with a particular focus on co-production and community empowerment, based on inclusive, formative, and productive consultation, involving people early, shaping design, and generating workable outcomes.

74. Daisy Narayanan, told us that consultation for new towns must "go beyond the transactional", expressing that "there is power … when it is done well".[127] Witnesses stressed the difference between consultation and engagement, the latter focusing on working alongside the community rather than a top-down approach.[128] Paul Augarde told us that effective engagement "not only creates agency in the process but builds capacity within the people you are engaging".[129] We heard many examples of best practice from the sector, including training programmes for residents[130] and co-production design sessions,[131] aiming to empower local residents and design developments in collaboration with them.

75. Beyond empowering communities, Paul Augarde told us that engagement "makes good business sense", as there is "less reaction and less pushback" to proposals.[132] Indeed, we heard from Dinah Bornat, Director at ZCD Architects, that it was the use of effective, empowering engagement activities at Earls Court that led in part to unanimous planning approval for the scheme.[133]

76. The Secretary of State set out a plan-led model of engagement:

> "local areas will be asked to develop local plans in consultation with local residents. That will set parameters for what can be built where, what it can look like, how big it can be, and the standards that will apply to it. If a development application comes forward in line with that, local people have already given their consent through their engagement with the local plan. If it does not meet those criteria, it will have to go through a different process and can be rejected."[134]

77. **Effective, inclusive, and formative community engagement can support the delivery of new towns by reducing the risk of public opposition. We welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to community and resident engagement in the development of local plans to set clear parameters for new town planning and development.**

78. *The Government must ensure that the new town delivery bodies adopt an ambitious, inclusive, formative and effective public engagement strategy, in line with the Secretary of State's stated desire for community and resident involvement in the development of local plans, to ensure that the public is fully engaged without delaying individual new towns or the programme as a whole.*

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126 Built Environment Committee, *New Towns: Laying the Foundations*, para 80
127 Q 7 (Daisy Narayanan)
128 See for example Q 24 (Lucy Musgrave), Q 7 (Daisy Narayanan), Q 57 (Dinah Bornat).
129 Q 7 (Paul Augarde)
130 See for example Q 18 (Lucy Musgrave) and written evidence from the University of Southampton (NTC0095)
131 See for example Q 39 (Professor Rhiannon) and written evidence from LLDC (NTC0026).
132 Q 7 (Paul Augarde)
133 Q 57 (Dinah Bornat)
134 Q 93 (Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government); see also Q 99 re shifting to a "can-do culture".

## CHAPTER 4: HEALTH AND INCLUSION

### Prioritising health

79. The new towns programme can fulfil a clear demand and provides a real opportunity to create healthy towns[135]—urban environments that encourage residents to live healthier lives both through their physical attributes and through the provision of conventional health and care services.[136] While we received a large volume of evidence urging the new towns to be developed with health in mind, a relatively small number of specific interventions were proposed repeatedly: innovative healthcare solutions, maximising active travel opportunities,[137] the provision of community cultural meeting spaces[138] and high-quality green space.[139] We explore each of these in more detail below.

#### *Healthy towns*

80. The concept of healthy towns is not a novel idea, and it is important to recognise that there has already been much work in this area. The *Healthy New Towns*[140] programme was launched in 2015 across ten sites in England. It aimed to explore how the development of new settlements could create communities that were both physically and mentally healthier.[141] We heard of positive health outcomes in existing new towns such as Ebbsfleet, and contributors called for the programme's principles to be embedded within this next generation of new towns and expanded settlements.[142] In particular, Julia Thrift, Director of Healthier Placemaking at the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA), highlighted the programme's efforts to embed care provision within the community rather than in hospital settings.[143]

81. Healthy towns can go further, with more innovative healthcare solutions,[144] including the implementation of elements of the *NHS 10 Year Plan for England: fit for the future*. This Plan was published in July 2025 by the Labour Government. It sets out ambitious proposals for a new model of care, emphasising the greater integration of technology into services, moving healthcare from hospitals into the community, and sickness prevention. It seeks to "bring care into local communities", prioritising the delivery of services as locally as possible, even inside patients' homes, and only within a hospital if necessary. The evidence suggested that this next generation of new towns could be an opportunity to demonstrate how the 10 Year Plan could support moving away from the traditional hospital-based model.[145]

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135 Q 48 (Julia Thrift)
136 Examples of those calling for development with health in mind.
137 See for example Q 49 (Julia Thrift), and written evidence from Cycling UK (NTC0029), Healthy and Sustainable Places Data Service (NTC0038), and the TCPA (NTC0042).
138 See for example written evidence from the University of Southampton (NTC0095), the Heritage Alliance (NTC0093), Professor Susan Parham (NTC0088).
139 See for example Q 48 (Julia Thrift), Q 52 (Professor Rachel Sara), Q 53 (Susan Parham), and written evidence from the Canal and River Trust (NTC0043), Dr Alexandra Gomes (NTC0052), and Dr Jonathan Stokes, Ms Reese Green, Ms Phoebe Somervail, Dr Jonathan Olsen on behalf of the Optima project (NTC0053).
140 NHS England, *Healthy New Towns,* 2 November 2021
141 Q 48 (Julia Thrift)
142 See for example written evidence from Hleb Buziuk (NTC0002) and Dr Saravanan Thangarajan (NTC0005), NHS Property Services (NTC0045), and Professor Georgia Watson (NTC0060)
143 Q 52 (Julia Thrift)
144 Written evidence from Population Health Improvement UK (NTC0054)
145 Department of Health and *Social Care, Fit for the future: 10 Year Health Plan for England*, CP 1350, Updated 30 July 2025

82. Julia Thrift stressed the particular importance of active travel (walking and cycling, for example), in light of transport's "enormous implications for health [given that] two of the biggest causes of ill health are lack of physical activity and air pollution". She called for strong cycling connections,[146] and said that new towns should be dense enough to promote walkability,[147] encouraging residents to be more active and take fewer car journeys. In this regard, we heard that appropriate residential and employment densities—tailored to local context rather than a one-size-fits-all target—can support walkability and active travel, reinforcing the health aims set out in this chapter.[148]

83. Health support must include mental health[149]—especially as an antidote to loneliness. We heard that community wellbeing was linked to the "generosity of … communal facilities and public spaces".[150] New towns must therefore provide spaces to "bring people together"[151] and create opportunities for casual social interactions on a regular basis.[152]

84. Among all health interventions highlighted to us over the course of the inquiry, the provision of high-quality green space was the most prominent and the most frequently cited.[153] We were told repeatedly that access to green space improves mental health, reduces recovery times, and encourages active lives, as well as improving local biodiversity and climate resilience.[154] Provision of green space also featured heavily in the *Healthy New Towns* programme, largely to support active travel, with acknowledgement of its mental health benefits.[155]

85. Delivery is hindered by diffuse responsibilities across Government departments and sectors.[156] Creating healthy urban environments will therefore require "leadership, both at a national and local level", aligning diverse policy areas to give "clarity".[157] The Government was urged to support a vision for healthy new towns, and draw together organisations and departments, including the NHS.[158] The Government was also encouraged to develop holistic, health-focused settlements.[159]

86. The Secretary of State appeared to endorse the integration of the *NHS 10 Year Health Plan* into the planning and development of the next generation of new towns: "The principle is already there in the 10-year plan for health … I hope that the new town programme will seize that opportunity." In doing so,

146  Q 49 (Julia Thrift)
147  Q 50 (Julia Thrift)
148  See, for example written evidence from Prof Matthew Carmona (NTC0009), Places for People (NTC0030), Dr Alexandra Gomes (NTC0052), Population-Health Improvement UK (NTC0054), and Urban Design Group (NTC0077).
149  Q 52 (Professor Rachel Sara), Q 28 (Phineas Harper)
150  Q 28 (Phineas Harper)
151  Q 52 (Professor Rachel Sara)
152  Q 60 (Dinah Bornat), and written evidence from The Association of Directors of Public Health (NTC0092)
153  See for example Q 68 (Brett Leahy), Q 48 (Julia Thrift), Q 48 (Professor Rachel Sara), and written evidence from Healthy and Sustainable Places Data Services (NTC0038), the Canal and River Trust (NTC0043), and Dr Inci Toral, Dr Sarah Montano, Dr Gaye Bebek, Dr Fatos Ozkan Erciyas (NTC0059).
154  See for examples Q 52 (Professor Rachel Sara), Q 49 (Julia Thrift), written evidence from Dr Jack Benton (NTC0055).
155  NHS England, *Healthy New Towns*, 2 November 2021
156  Q 49 (Julia Thrift)
157  *Ibid.*
158  Written evidence from Primary Health Properties plc (NTC0020)
159  Q 49 (Julia Thrift)

he explicitly tied it to principles of localism and "public service reform based around place-based delivery, place-based integration, place-based design, and place-based budgets".[160]

87. ***The Government must ensure that this next generation of new towns and expanded settlements proactively support the health and wellbeing of their residents through integrated, mutually reinforcing interventions, including active travel opportunities, high-quality green infrastructure, and a range of spaces for the community to meet.***

### Design for older people

88. In the context of a rapidly ageing society, new towns present a unique "opportunity to design places that can support people across the life course and reduce widening inequalities".[161] Indeed, Julia Thrift told us that, "it is absolutely vital that the new generation of new towns are deliberately designed, marketed and promoted as places that welcome older people as well as young families".[162]

89. To this end, the Government was urged to explore innovative solutions to supporting older people's wellbeing, such as the inclusion of intergenerational housing in new towns,[163] ensuring homes are built to higher accessibility standards,[164] and involving older people in design decisions early in the process.[165] Homes must also be able to "adapt across a life course so that they work for a full and active life but also if people's needs change as they age."[166] While there have been small pilots of intergenerational housing with positive results, the next generation of new towns could provide an opportunity for larger trials.[167] In addition, interventions such as including green infrastructure that encourages walking also support healthier ageing[168] as much as they support general wellbeing.

90. The Secretary of State enthusiastically recognised the fundamental importance of creating places to age well, stating that:

> "we need to be thinking about how the way that we live can better accommodate people with different accessibility needs, different leisure needs, and different ways of wanting to contribute to society instead of being locked up and isolated in a flat on their own somewhere … how wonderful if we could incorporate that into some of these new towns as new exemplars of how that could be."[169]

91. ***The Government must ensure that new towns are fully equipped to support the needs of an ageing population and should pursue***

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160  Q 95 (Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government)

161  Written evidence from Urban Research Group (NTC0086)

162  Q 53 (Julia Thrift)

163  See for example Q 60 (Councillor Holly Bruce), written evidence from the London Borough of Enfield (NTC0044), Population Health Improvement UK (NTC0054), and Professor Georgia Watson (NTC0060).

164  Written evidence from Age UK (NTC0089)

165  Q 57 (Dinah Bornat)

166  Written evidence from Age UK (NTC0089); see also Okana (NTC0049), Manchester Urban Ageing Research Group (NTC0086), Hawkins\Brown (NTC0041), Places for People (NTC0030), and Mr Daniel May (NTC0046).

167  Q 60 (Councillor Holly Bruce)

168  Q 53 (Julia Thrift)

169  Q 92 (Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government)

*initiatives such as the inclusion of a major intergenerational housing project.*

### Design for younger people

92. While planning and design for older people has been well established in the built environment sector for some time, witnesses also urged us to consider the needs of children and young people, who have traditionally been less engaged in the planning process.[170] This lack of engagement is despite the fact that, according to MATT + FIONA, children are more altruistic and less likely to oppose development in their area.[171] In addition, we were told that many children and young people would like the opportunity to engage with the future of their neighbourhood, but have not had the chance to do so.[172]

93. Where, however, efforts are made to involve young people in the process and engage with them, the outcomes can be remarkable[173]. Lucy Musgrave OBE, Founding Director of Publica, spoke of the "appetite and civic pride"[174] that such efforts can generate. Dinah Bornat cited the "transformational" impact of her work creating an intergenerational panel at the Earls Court Development Company, which she viewed as pivotal to securing unanimous planning support for the development.[175]

94. Recognising the need to engage young people, especially given the decades-long timescale of the new towns programme, we took the initiative of organising a competition for those studying for GCSEs and A-Levels in schools across the country. The Built Environment Prize 2025 invited students to answer the fundamental question: "What should the next generation of new towns look like?".[176] We were delighted to welcome the three winning students to the Palace of Westminster in December 2025, when they had the opportunity to discuss a range of questions about the new towns programme and the built environment more generally.

95. The entries showed the depth and breadth of the interest in every aspect of this question among young people, which they answered with imagination, ingenuity, and a healthy dose of very real common sense. One winner called for the inclusion of modular housing units to enable houses to adapt to the needs of residents over their lifetimes, explicitly recognising the importance of diverse, mixed-income streets for community cohesion.[177] Another drew on a number of international precedents to establish core principles around layout, housing and transport.[178] The third winner recognised the complexity of the programme, promoting a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches to planning and engagement. She also saw value in encouraging multi-generational living and increased housing density.[179]

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170  See for example Q 42 (Professor Rhiannon Corcoran), Q 61 (Dinah Bornat), Q 63 (Dinah Bornat), written evidence from MATT + FIONA (NTC0036), and Dream Networks (NTC0097).
171  Written evidence from MATT + FIONA (NTC0036)
172  *Ibid.*
173  See for example Q 57 (Dinah Bornat), Q 18 (Lucy Musgrave), and written evidence from MATT + FIONA (NTC0036), and Clarion Housing Group (NTC0080)
174  Q 18 (Lucy Musgrave)
175  Q 57 (Dinah Bornat)
176  Built Environment Committee, *Built Environment Committee Prize 2025*, 6 June 2025
177  Gedalya White.
178  Teoman Karagoz.
179  Committee competition prize winner 3.

96. ***New town delivery bodies must capitalise on the enthusiasm of young people and their willingness to participate in consultation activities to create youth engagement strategies for each site. These strategies should seek to consult with young people at each stage of development and incorporate their perspectives into decisions.***

### Accessibility and inclusion

97. Recent years have seen an increased focus on accessibility and inclusion[180] in the built environment sector, with stakeholders taking a more considered approach to the question of how people with diverse needs and those from marginalised groups interact with the urban environment. Throughout the course of this inquiry, we have seen the optimism and ambition of groups involved in accessible, inclusive urban design, and heard about many projects all over the country supporting diverse groups.[181]

98. Amanprit Arnold, Founder of Disability Urbanism, told us that new towns offer an "unparalleled opportunity to embed accessibility and inclusivity from the outset", a "blank slate" for the UK to showcase how to build an inclusive settlement.[182]We heard about successful small scale projects that could be emulated in the next generation of new towns, including policies to protect women and girls' safety in the public realm,[183] and better street lighting to promote a sense of safety for vulnerable groups.[184] Councillor Holly Bruce, a Scottish Green Party member of Glasgow City Council, emphasised that accessible urban design policies that encourage women and girls to spend more time in the public realm, travel safely, and feel safe at night, promote stronger economic activity and more vibrant street life.[185] Amanprit Arnold stressed that the same is true for disabled people and their households, who can feel isolated from inaccessible urban environments, creating a missed economic opportunity.[186]

99. Low-cost, unobtrusive measures—step-free access, public toilets, adequate lighting—help marginalised groups use urban spaces with confidence.[187] Moreover, many features of accessible design can support multiple groups at once. For example, level-access public transport not only helps disabled people but also those with caring responsibilities,[188] creating public spaces for "the broadest range of people".[189]

100. Witnesses also stressed the cost-effectiveness, over time, of embedding accessible design principles at the outset of development. Councillor Holly Bruce told us that embedding inclusivity at the procurement stage ensures that all stakeholders are on the same page and avoids the need for the subsequent retrofitting of completed developments.[190] Avoiding retrofitting

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180  By accessible, inclusive design we mean places, buildings and streets that can be used confidently and independently by the widest range of people, including disabled people, women and girls, and older and younger residents.

181  See for example Q 57 (Dinah Bornat, Councillor Holly Bruce, written evidence from Make Space for Girls (NTC0032), Dream Network (NTC0097), and Habinteg Housing Association (NTC0070)

182  Written evidence from Amanprit Arnold (NTC0006)

183  Q 22 (Lucy Musgrave)

184  Q 59 (Councillor Holly Bruce)

185  Q 57 (Councillor Holly Bruce)

186  Q 57 (Amanprit Arnold

187  Q 56 (Councillor Holly Bruce), and written evidence from Amanprit Arnold (NTC0006)

188  See for example Q 60 (Councillor Holly Bruce), Q 56 (Amanprit Arnold).

189  Q 56 (Amanprit Arnold)

190  Q 57 (Councillor Holly Bruce)

is vital: Amanprit Arnold estimated that retrofitting for inclusivity could be 10,000 times more expensive than early incorporation. It cannot, therefore, be an afterthought.[191]

101. In terms of how to achieve inclusive design in practice, Amanprit Arnold argued that developments should "follow an inclusive design framework" to set "the tone and expectation" for accessible new towns.[192] Witnesses proposed a variety of design tools to support such frameworks, including ensuring diverse representation on design review panels. Dinah Bornat, Director of ZCD Architects, told us that such diversity demonstrated a proactive approach to the community, and lowered the risk of strong opposition and expensive delays.[193] Amanprit Arnold, Founder of Disability Urbanism, added that access panels, where diverse representatives contribute to development decisions, could provide the opportunity for stakeholders to gain skills and provide "critical input into design briefs".[194] She also recommended the deployment of a 'Chief Accessibility Officer', either within Homes England or in each of the new town delivery bodies, to oversee development and provide expertise and knowledge.[195]

102. Notwithstanding strong ambition within the sector, and successful contemporary examples, effective implementation of inclusive design still requires strong leadership and coordination.[196] Dinah Bornat said that the National Planning Policy Framework needed to be clearer about inclusivity, and to be explicit about the need for leadership to ensure that inclusive design principles run "through every level" of the development process.[197]

103. **Interventions in the built environment to support accessibility and inclusion are often low-cost, unobtrusive and mutually beneficial across diverse groups.**

104. *When setting guidance for placemaking in new towns the Government must include explicit, targeted guidance for delivery bodies to deliver accessible, inclusive design.*

105. *Delivery bodies for new towns and expanded settlements should create ambitious accessibility strategies that include targeted engagement activities such as forming diverse design review panels. Delivery bodies for each new town should also appoint an Accessibility Champion to ensure that high inclusivity standards are incorporated into the plans for every new town. This should be supported by an Accessibility Champion within central Government, providing oversight across all schemes.*

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191 Q 56 (Amanprit Arnold), written evidence from Amanprit Arnold (NTC0006)
192 Q 61 (Amanprit Arnold)
193 Q57 (Dinah Bornat), Q 61 (Dinah Bornat)
194 Q 58 (Amanprit Arnold)
195 Q 61 (Amanprit Arnold), written evidence from Amanprit Arnold (NTC0006); see also written evidence from the London Legacy Development Corporation (NTC0026).
196 Q 58 (Dinah Bornat), written evidence from Amanprit Arnold (NTC0006)
197 Q 58 (Dinah Bornat)

## CHAPTER 5: SMART INVESTMENT, SUSTAINABLE PLACES

106. However good the placemaking principles, the community-building interventions, and the support for health and wellbeing, this next generation of new towns and expanded settlements will never be delivered if the cost of doing so is too high. Throughout this module, we have balanced idealism against current fiscal realities.

107. Earlier failures—perceived or actual—often stemmed from cost-cutting at delivery and in long-term maintenance. Failing to "provide essential social and community infrastructure at the early stages of development entrenches inequalities. It imposes economic, social, and emotional costs on low-income residents, leading to those who arguably need community the most also facing the largest barriers to being part of it."[198]

108. A particularly striking example of this came from Kevin McGeough, now Head of Strategy and Placemaking for Ebbsfleet Development Corporation, who grew up in Craigavon new town, which "was designated under the European Poverty 3 programme as among the most socially excluded developments in Europe. If you abandon a new town, as they did, with the development corporation closing very early, it can create very poor conditions for communities to grow." He described the almost inevitable outcome of this process as "new town blues", leading to "depression [and] … poor health outcomes. Leaving new towns without any foundations for community development is a problem."[199]

109. In our first report we emphasised the importance of patient investment, rather than a reliance on financing options that demand a rapid return on investment.[200] It is clear that this type of investment will be fundamental to creating communities effectively—communities that embed all of the principles we have discussed in the foregoing chapters.

### False economies and cutting corners

110. Good design does not need to cost more: in reality, "poor design is far more expensive—socially, environmentally, economically and in terms of public health."[201] A key reason for this is the disproportionate cost of adding necessary elements to a completed installation after the fact. As we heard from Amanprit Arnold in Chapter 4, retrofitting for inclusivity—such as adding step-free access, accessible toilets or safe lighting—frequently leads to an overall increase in cost of several orders of magnitude.[202]

111. Cost cutting at the design and delivery phases comes in many forms. Kevin McGeough, Head of Strategy and Placemaking for Ebbsfleet Development Corporation, described two examples from his own, very recent, new town, both involving the inclusion of a neighbourhood community centre. He said: "Most mainstream developers do not want to retain … community space." In the first case, having built such a space, the developer was "looking for the first person who would take it from them." To that end, the developer "did a deal … with a local evangelical church … [that] was able to invest more money in that infrastructure and create what is commercially quite

198 Written evidence from Dr Keetie Roelen(NTC0064)
199 Q 34 Kevin McGeough
200 Built Environment Committee, *New Towns: Laying the Foundations*, Chapter 5.
201 Written evidence Professor Matthew Carmona (NTC0009)
202 (Chapter 4) para 96, quoting Amanprit Arnold (NTC0006)

a successful community centre". However, the involvement of the church meant that residents saw it as part of the church rather than "as their community centre", with the result that they continue to ask "when they are getting their community centre".[203]

112. In the second case, the developer entered into a s. 106 agreement[204] to provide a community centre of a certain size. In delivering this centre, the developer complied with the size requirements but failed to include essential facilities such as a commercial kitchen and storage. This meant that the centre "does not function … [and] is a huge liability to the people who live there and it is going to be for ever a service charge anchor around their neck."[205]

113. In both cases, we can see that the developer has successfully minimised cost and ostensibly provided the infrastructure demanded of them. In both cases, however, the outcome for the community is a facility that does not meet local needs.

114. We also heard of how the default standard for construction may be much less cost effective than alternatives that prioritise placemaking, aesthetics, and the environment. In this regard, we were urged to look at the experiences of other countries. The British Red Cross wrote about the specific example of 'sponge cities'—urban areas "with an abundance of natural or 'green' features that, in the event of flooding, can absorb water."[206] From their origins in China, "sponge city principles have been adopted and adapted around the world." The approach "has been shown to be more cost-effective compared to conventional concrete-based underground drainage systems— almost £450 million cheaper in the case of the Chinese city of Wuhan, for example", while delivering additional benefits "from water resources to biodiversity gains to amenity value".[207]

115. ***The Government must ensure that the next generation of new towns receive adequate initial funding and investment to be able to deliver essential community and natural infrastructure from the start, with the explicit understanding from the outset that the return on this investment will take place on a timescale of decades, rather than years or months.***

### Cost-effective placemaking

116. Cutting corners or seeking a rapid return on investment is also counterproductive: good placemaking does not necessarily require high levels of capital infrastructure. Paul Augarde, Director at Augarde & Partners, told us that, "rather than being about more money, [good placemaking] is about more time and more collaboration"[208]. Indeed, good placemaking is, in itself, so valuable that it can materially affect the viability of a site. Paul Augarde told us that, in the case of King's Cross, "which was non-viable to start with, [we] did a range of placemaking and [it] became viable." There was a "genuine uplift, not just on sales but in terms of place perception."[209] In the words of Daisy Narayanan, Public Realm Director for the Crown Estate,

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203  Q 42 (Kevin McGeough)
204  Q 28 (Edwin Heathcote, Phineas Harper)
205  Q 42 (Kevin McGeough)
206  University of the Built Environment, *What on earth are sponge cities?*, 5 June 2024
207  Written evidence from the British Red Cross (NTC0040)
208  Q 9 (Paul Augarde)
209  *Ibid.*

well-designed places "tend to retain value, attract investment and reduce the social costs associated with isolation or poor health."[210]

117. Placemaking of this kind does not have to be expensive. It can be delivered through partnerships, "with cultural organisations and the community, where you are building those things at low or no cost at all"[211]. As Daisy Narayanan pointed out, "it is the small things that matter … Start with the petunias. Start by planting some flowers, planting trees."[212] In a similar vein, Professor Rachel Sara cited the "big impact" of 'pocket parks'[213], "entirely run by the local community with very small pockets of money".[214]

118. Even where there are up-front costs, as Daisy Narayanan told us, "most placemaking interventions can be … cost saving in the long run." For example, not only is designing for active travel good for health and wellbeing, as we saw in Chapter 4, but "designing streets for walking and cycling reduces the infrastructure and maintenance costs over time." Similarly, "green roofs and sustainable drainage systems … benefit through lower energy and maintenance costs over time", while community leadership can "mobilise local resources and stewardship and reduce reliance on top-down investment".[215]

119. In the case of more substantial community infrastructure, it is not always necessary to deliver the final product from the beginning. The key is to activate the space as quickly as possible, and this is often best achieved through temporary or "meanwhile" uses. The Edge wrote about how "temporary buildings and shared spaces can reduce initial costs", citing the example of "the Community Living Room temporary community centre at Springstead Park in Cambridge, knocking together two houses and run by the local church" which will "later be split and sold."[216] Likewise, at Kidbrooke Village in London, temporary portable units were initially used to create "a temporary hub offering medical, retail and social facilities during its early phases."[217]

120. Temporary spaces provide early, low-cost community infrastructure and a way to "pilot activities for which a permanent need or approach has not yet been established"[218], before committing to permanent provision, further helping to derisk the initial capital expenditure.

121. The Secretary of State highlighted available Government levers to support earlyphase viability, including the £39 billion Social and Affordable Homes Programme[219] and siteenabling transport commitments (for example, the

210  Q 9 (Daisy Narayanan)
211  Q 9 (Paul Augarde)
212  Q 6 (Daisy Narayanan)
213  "a piece of land of up to 0.4 hectares (although many are around 0.02 hectares, the size of a tennis court) which may already be under grass, but which is unused, undeveloped or derelict". Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, *Pocket Parks - Frequently Asked Questions*, October 2019 (accessed on 13 February 2026)
214  Q 48 (Rachel Sara)
215  Q 9 (Daisy Narayanan)
216  Written evidence from The Edge (NTC0061)
217  Written evidence from Professor Matthew Carmona (NTC0009)
218  Written evidence from Mari O'Neill (NTC0018)
219  Homes England, *Social and Affordable Homes Programme (SAHP) 2026 to 2036*, 7 November 2025 (accessed 4 March, 2026)

Docklands Light Railway extension supporting Thamesmead[220] and the initial £1.1 billion for Northern Powerhouse Rail[221]).[222] He further noted that, where appropriate, Government can consider underwriting major infrastructure to unlock development, citing the Vauxhall Nine Elms model as a UK precedent. In that example, "the Treasury underwrote rather than funded the major infrastructure project that was going ahead. The government funding was never called on because the scheme worked well, but that certainly gave private investors the confidence they needed".[223]

122. ***The Government must ensure that development corporations and community associations in each of the new towns are empowered from the start to make effective use of the fullest possible range of placemaking techniques, and to experiment with a range of approaches to find interventions that best serve their particular neighbourhoods or communities.***

123. ***The Government must require essential community, health and social infrastructure to be in place from the date on which the first residents move into each new town or expanded settlement.***

124. ***The Government should encourage the early deployment of temporary spaces or alternative uses for buildings in the early phases of a development as a way of providing essential community infrastructure. It should encourage and facilitate the piloting of alternative uses and configurations for such spaces in order to discover the true needs and desires of each new community.***

### The design dividend

125. Good placemaking is cost-effective in the medium to long term—and can ultimately save money. Just as retrofitting for inclusivity is vastly more expensive than building it in from the start,[224] "prevention-oriented design is cheaper and more effective than retrofitting" and "new towns succeed when health, nature, social infrastructure, affordability, and long-term stewardship are embedded from the outset, not added later."[225]

126. For Catherine Williams, Planning Director at the Home Builders Federation, while good placemaking and design "might cost more, there is evidence to suggest that you reap the returns. Some [Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors] research was done back in 2016 that demonstrated that your sales revenues are higher if you invest in high-quality architecture … and good quality placemaking."[226]

127. These cost benefits and increased sales revenues can, however, only be realised if Government and delivery bodies have the patience to take "a whole lifecycle approach to placemaking … both in terms of the delivery of a place but also in the longer-term, particularly when it comes to maintenance

220 Homes England, *Homes England awards £23 million infrastructure grant in latest step towards unlocking wide-scale regeneration and thousands of new homes in London*, 1 December 2025
221 HM Treasury and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, *Northern Powerhouse Rail to drive biggest travel upgrade in the North in a generation,* 14 January 2026
222 Q 90 (Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government)
223 Q 91 (Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government)
224 *Op cit* FN 202 written evidence from Amanprit Arnold (NTC0006)
225 Written evidence from Dr Saravanan Thangarajan (NTC0005)
226 Q 4 (Catherine Williams); see also written evidence from Natural England (NTC0024).

and management costs which need not only consideration but active management."[227]

128. The London Legacy Development Corporation said:

> "After all, high-quality design creates future-proofed places that respond to people's changing needs and which create and maintain value over the long term. Therefore, if it isn't a core part of delivery, then there is a significant risk that the homes being built now will not be fit for the future and instead require significant retrofit or even replacement."[228]

129. ***Good design and effective placemaking can pay for itself, but the Government must ensure that it regulates and finances the new towns programme and individual towns in a way that supports and encourages developers, investors and delivery bodies to take a long-term approach to the realisation of these benefits. Relying on a speculative model will not deliver the Government's aspirations for the new towns.***

### Green and pleasant land, quiet and healthy towns

130. Green infrastructure and design support health and reduce NHS spending in a range of ways. In direct physiological and physical terms, the "removal of harmful pollutants by urban vegetation generated £800.5 million in avoided negative health impacts in the UK in 2021" and trees can also act as a "buffer against noise pollution, particularly from road traffic."[229]

131. There are also wider potential savings beyond these very direct impacts. For example, Natural England cited the outcomes of the NHS Green Social Prescribing programme, which ran for two years from April 2021. This supported people to "engage in nature-based interventions and activities to improve their mental and physical health."[230] According to Natural England, the programme "reported a 42% reduction in GP appointments" and a 2023 National Academy for Social Prescribing rapid evidence review found that social prescribing could save money, "with a social and economic value of between £2.14 and £8.56 for every £1 invested."[231]

132. On the basis of similar considerations, Pinsent Masons LLP further urged the colocation of "GP surgeries with woodland/naturalised areas useful for green/social prescribing activities" with wellness and leisure activities close by, due to the financial benefits to the NHS. The company highlighted the "Health Connections Mendip scheme, which has a well-developed social prescribing network, led from a central health centre. There it is reported that NHS costs fell by 21% over a 6-year period", as a result of reductions in primary care attendances and unplanned/emergency hospital care. This was in contrast to a 20% increase in such costs in the rest of the county.[232]

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227 Written evidence from the London Legacy Development Corporation (NTC0026)
228 *Ibid.*
229 Written evidence from Natural England (NTC0024), citing ONS, *Urban natural capital accounts, UK: 2023*
230 NHS England, *Green social prescribing*
231 Written evidence from Natural England (NTC0024), citing NASP, *Building the economic case for social prescribing report*
232 Pinsent Masons LLP(NTC0083), citing Julian Abel et al 'Reducing emergency hospital admissions: a population health complex intervention of an enhanced model of primary care and compassionate communities', *British Journal of General Practice*, 68 (676) October 2018: https://doi.org/10.3399/bjgp18x699437

133. Also, according to the firm, the cost to the NHS can be tackled equally effectively at a much earlier stage by building age-appropriate housing. It argued that the benefits of building in this way include "prolonged independence, [thereby] reducing impacts on oversubscribed care and nursing homes [and] … on emergency, hospital and GP care".[233]

134. Encouraging active travel, discussed in Chapter 4, is similarly likely to lead to savings for the NHS. As Julia Thrift, Director of Healthier Placemaking at the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA), told us:

> "A couple of weeks ago, the Chief Medical Officer, Sir Chris Whitty, gave evidence at a committee and pointed out that helping older people be a little more active … would save the NHS an enormous amount of money, because keeping active is one of the best things that people can do for their health."[234]

> In her analysis, the key impediments to activity among older people are poor and poorly maintained infrastructure: not just a "lack of public loos and perhaps a poorly maintained local park" but, most significantly "uneven pavements … they just want pavements". These are questions of "maintenance and stewardship", and this next generation of new towns provides an opportunity to get this "stewardship right from the start".[235]

135. In addition to the health benefits and savings to the NHS of well-designed green and blue infrastructure, there are also significant potential operational cost reductions. More active travel, for example, means less wear and tear from vehicles. Where buildings are designed well, "green roofs and sustainable drainage systems … lower energy and maintenance costs over time."[236] Furthermore, good availability of green and blue spaces in the new towns will assist their effective cooling in the summer. Natural England told us that the cooling effect of such spaces "in urban environments improved labour productivity and cost savings from air conditioning to the tune of £233 million in 2021."[237]

136. *This next generation of new towns must ensure that the health and wellbeing of all generations are supported from the start and that the infrastructure necessary for active, healthy lifestyles is included from the beginning.*

137. *The Government must ensure that delivery bodies are empowered and required to include age-appropriate housing that enables and supports older residents to retain their independence for as long as possible in each new town and expanded settlement to help reduce public expenditure on adult health and social care.*

138. *The Government must require all new towns and expanded settlements to include green and blue spaces from the outset, to maximise the potential savings generated by such infrastructure.*

233 Pinsent Masons LLP (NTC0083), citing Housing LIN, *The health and social care cost-benefits of housing for older people , June 2019*
234 Q 53 (Julia Thrift)
235 *Ibid.*
236 Q 9 (Daisy Narayanan)
237 Written evidence from Natural England, citing the Office for National Statistics (NTC0024)

### Monitoring cost and value for money

139. Cost savings and value must, however, be evidenced through robust monitoring and reporting. A longer-term approach will require more varied and sophisticated methods than those currently employed for monitoring housing construction, because any uplift in value and social returns will take time to materialise. At the moment, despite a "growing literature and generally increased uptake of social value practices[238] in the UK ever since the Social Value Act 2012, there is no national guidance or incentive for community-informed social value", and current standard approaches, while useful, tend towards a "partial and … superficial understanding of places and their communities."[239]

140. The Building Research Establishment sees it as "critical that procurement and specification consider the long-term social, environmental and economic value of high-quality design." To that end, it suggested that the:

> "Value Toolkit, developed by the Construction Innovation Hub and now managed by Constructing Excellence, helps shift procurement away from lowest-cost approaches toward a holistic assessment of long-term value … By embedding whole-life cost analysis and outcome-based metrics, the toolkit ensures affordability without compromising quality or sustainability … For new towns, this means procurement decisions can deliver high-quality, future-proofed places while maintaining financial viability."[240]

141. For Intergenerational England, high-quality design could be made possible through "long-term cost savings in health, social care, and operational efficiency." The organisation argued that this could be robustly quantified by the organisation's Intergenerational Social Value Metric, developed with HACT, Clarion Futures and SNG ((Sovereign Network Group).[241]

### *Digital planning and governance*

142. Delivery bodies should use proportionate digital tools to broaden participation, improve transparency and enable continuous assurance. As Catherine Williams told us, "with new technologies, apps and QR codes … you can engage people far more easily … You may well also get a different response because … they are not perhaps being influenced by the loudest voices in the room". [242] Brett Leahy described the use of 3D modelling with young people as "an invaluable tool … to engage … in co-designing buildings and spaces".[243] For Urban Symbiotics, such innovation, "does not always mean advanced technology": they gave the example of map-based platforms helping create an independent community panel that "continues to meet, secure funding and shape projects".[244]

143. On delivery and stewardship, stakeholders argued for site-wide digital twins "from the start of the design phase throughout construction … [and the] stewardship lifetime of the new town" to support evolution and data-driven

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238  Approaches that assess social, environmental and economic outcomes alongside cost.
239  Written evidence from AR Urbanism (NTC0065)
240  Written evidence from the Building Research Establishment (NTC0091)
241  Written evidence from Intergenerational England (NTC0017)
242  Q 7 (Catherine Williams)
243  Q 66 (Brett Leahy)
244  Written evidence from Urban Symbiotics (NTC0081)

monitoring.[245] These tools must complement, not replace in-person engagement and should sit alongside independent design review as "an independent layer of expert scrutiny over the quality of design, placemaking, and architectural ambition".[246]

144. ***The Government must carefully monitor the cost effectiveness of placemaking, design and community infrastructure, using the reporting from this monitoring to disseminate best practice and improve the quality and ambition of placemaking in future developments of all sizes in England.***

145. ***The Government must move beyond standard and short-term metrics and methodologies in monitoring and demonstrating the cost effectiveness of the new towns individually and the programme as a whole and should pilot a range of alternative methodologies to ensure a robust and well-supported evidence base for long term savings and returns.***

146. ***Delivery bodies should make proportionate use of digital planning and governance tools—where supported by evidence and community need—to improve transparency, track design quality over time, and reduce friction in engagement.***

245  Written evidence from Pinsent Masons LLP (NTC0083)
246  Written evidence from the Building Research Establishment (NTC0091)

# APPENDIX 1: LIST OF MEMBERS AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

## Members

Baroness Andrews
Lord Bailey of Paddington
Lord Bassam of Brighton *(from 27 January 2026)*
Lord Cameron of Dillington
Lord Faulkner of Worcester *(until 27 January 2026)*
Lord Gascoigne (Chair)
Baroness Griffin of Princethorpe *(from 27 January 2026)*
Viscount Hanworth
Baroness Janke
Lord Mawson *(until 27 January 2026)*
Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer
Lord Ravensdale *(from 27 January 2026)*
Lord Porter of Spalding
The Viscount Younger of Leckie
Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe *(until 27 January 2026)*

## Declarations of interest

Baroness Andrews
> *No relevant interests declared*

Lord Bailey of Paddington
> *Chair, Faraday Ventures*
> *Committee Member, Greater London Assembly*

Lord Bassam of Brighton
> *No relevant interests declared*

Lord Cameron of Dillington
> *Farming and landowning interests involving agriculture and domestic & commercial property lets*

Lord Faulkner of Worcester *(until 27 January 2026)*
> *No relevant interests declared*

Lord Gascoigne (Chair)
> *No relevant interests declared*

Baroness Griffin of Princethorpe *(from 27 January 2026)*
> *No relevant interests declared*

Viscount Hanworth
> *No relevant interest declared*

Baroness Janke
> *No relevant interests declared*

Lord Mawson *(until 27 January 2026)*
> *Consultant, Barratt Redrow*
> *Consultant, Kier*
> *Consultant, Morgan Sindall*
> *Consultant, HCM Architects*
> *Consultant, Northwest Surrey Alliance*

Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer
> *Shareholder, Bradford and Sons*

Lord Ravensdale *(from 27 January 2026)*
> *Chief Engineer, AtkinsRéalis*

Lord Porter of Spalding
*Non-executive Director, Norse Group*
*Non-executive Director, Rentplus Homes*
*Director and Beneficial Owner, Porter and Verrells*
*Non-executive Director, Elixr Earth*
*Strategic Adviser, Prodo*
*Strategic Adviser, Officio*
*Strategic Adviser, Inspire Solutions*
*Strategic Advisory Board Member, Kinscape*
Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe *(until 27 January 2026)*
*No relevant interests declared*
Viscount Younger of Leckie
*No relevant interests declared*

## Specialist Advisor

Prof Matthew Carmona, Professor of Planning & Urban Design at the Bartlett School of Planning, UCL
*No relevant interests declared*

## APPENDIX 2: LIST OF EVIDENCE AND COMMITTEE ACTIVITY

Evidence is published online at https://committees.parliament.uk/work/9410/new-towns-creating-communities/.

Evidence received by the committee is listed below in alphabetical order.

### Evidence in alphabetical order

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Age UK | NTC0089 | |
| Andy von Bradsky, Director, von Bradsky Enterprises | NTC0031 | |
| AR Urbanism | NTC0065 | |
| ARISE | NTC0090 | |
| The Association of Directors of Public Health (ADPH) | NTC0092 | |
| Augarde & Partners | | QQ 1–16, Paul Augarde, Director |
| Dr Gaye Bebek, Assistant Professor, University of Birmingham, Business School | NTC0059 | |
| Andrew Beharrell, Senior Advisor, Pollard Thomas Edwards | NTC0031 | |
| Belport Ltd | | QQ 65–82, Niall Bolger, consultant and non-exec director |
| Dr Jack Benton, Research Fellow, The University of Manchester | NTC0055 | |
| Better Homes Enfield | NTC0033 | |
| British Geological Survey | NTC0094 | |
| British Red Cross | NTC0040 | |
| Building Research Establishment (BRE) | NTC0091 | |
| BU UK Infrastructure | NTC0022 | |
| Hleb Buziuk, Independent policy researcher and human-rights advocate at FairGo CIC | NTC0002 | |
| Canal & River Trust | NTC0043 | |
| Prof. Matthew Carmona, Professor of Planning & Urban Design at The Bartlett, UCL) | NTC0009 | |

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|---|---|---|
| Centre for Young Lives | NTC0023 | |
| Chartered Institute of Housing | NTC0027 | |
| Professor Paul Chatterton, Professor of Urban Futures, University of Leeds | NTC0062 | |
| Clarion Housing Group | NTC0080 | |
| Professor Doug Clelland, Architect and Writer, Self-employed) | NTC0058 | |
| The Crown Estate | | QQ 1–16, Daisy Narayanan MBE, Public Realm Director |
| Cycling UK | NTC0029 | |
| Ben Derbyshire , Chair, HTA Design | NTC0031 | |
| Ben Pentreath Ltd | | QQ 17–26, Ben Pentreath, Founder |
| Disability Urbanism | NTC0006 | QQ 55–64,Amanprit Arnold, Founding Director |
| Dream Networks | NTC0097 | |
| Ebbsfleet Development Corporation | | QQ 33–46, Kevin McGeough, Head of Strategy and Placemaking |
| The Edge | NTC0061 | |
| Liz Edwards, Postgraduate Researcher & As-sociate Lecturer, Liverpool John Moores University | NTC0075 | |
| Ms Jenny Elliott, Urban Designer (CMLI), and PhD Researcher at Jenny Elliott Design, and University of Edinburgh | NTC0076 | |
| Enfield Council | | QQ 65–82, Brett Leahy, Executive Director for Environment and Communities |
| Dr Fatos Ozkan Erciyas (Assistant Professor at University of Birmingham, Business School) | NTC0059 | |

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|---|---|---|
| Financial Times | | QQ 27–32, Edwin Heathcote, Architecture and Design Critic |
| Dr Alexandra Gomes, Research Fellow, LSE Cities, London School of Economics and Political Science | NTC0052 | |
| Ms Reese Green, Research Assistant, University of Glasgow | NTC0053 | |
| Dr Lucrezia Gigante, Research Associate AHRC Place Programme, University of Glasgow | NTC0067 | |
| Groundswell | NTC0015 | |
| Matthew Goulcher, Managing Director, Levitt Bernstein | NTC0031 | |
| Phineas Harper | | QQ 27–32, Phineas Harper, Independent Architecture Critic |
| Habinteg Housing Association | NTC0070 | |
| Hackney Wick & Fish Island CIC (t/a Creative Wick | NTC0050 | |
| Harrow Monitoring Group | NTC0003 | |
| Harlow and Gilston Garden Town | NTC0034 | |
| Hawkins\Brown | NTC0041 | |
| Healthy and Sustainable Places Data Service, University of Leeds | NTC0038 | |
| The Heritage Alliance | NTC0093 | |
| Historic England | NTC0085 | |
| Ms Jasmine Hoffman | NTC0074 | |
| The Home Builders Federation (HBF) | | QQ 1–16, Catherine Williams, Planning Director |
| The Horticultural Trades Association (HTA) | NTC0087 | |
| Intergenerational England | NTC0017 | |

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|---|---|---|
| Mr Timothy James Kemp, Architectural Consultant, Tim Kemp, Self-Employed Free-lance | NTC0078 | |
| Mrs Esther Kurland, Director, Urban Design Learning (UDL) | NTC0019 | |
| Lewis Hubbard Engineering | NTC0028 | |
| Dr James Laurence, Principal Research Fellow, University College London | NTC0014 | |
| Local Trust | NTC0021 | |
| London Borough of Enfield | NTC0044 | |
| London Legacy Development Corporation | NTC0026 | |
| Dr Manuela Madeddu, Senior Lecturer in Urban Design, University of Liverpool | NTC0039 | |
| Professor Rebecca Madgin , Professor of Ur-ban Studies and Arts and Humanities Re-search Council Place Programme Director, University of Glasgow | NTC0067 | |
| Make Space for Girls | NTC0032 | |
| Manchester Urban Ageing Research Group's (MUARG) | NTC0086 | |
| MATTER SPACE SOUL | NTC0066 | |
| MATT+FIONA | NTC0036 | |
| Mr Daniel May, Chair and Founder, Belong | NTC0046 | |
| Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government | | QQ 83–100, The Rt Hon Steve Reed OBE MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government |
| | | QQ 83–100, Lise-Anne Boissiere, Co-Director for New Towns, Infrastructure and Housing Delivery |
| MOLA | NTC0056 | |
| Dr Sarah Montano, Professor of Retailing, University of Birmingham, Business School | NTC0059 | |

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|---|---|---|
| Dr Lucy Montague, Senior Lecturer, Manchester School of Architecture, Manchester Metropolitan University | NTC0031 | |
| Dr Nigel Moor, Self-Employed Town Planner | NTC0058 | |
| National Association of Local Councils (NALC) | NTC0079 | |
| National Trust | NTC0063 | |
| Natural England | NTC0024 | |
| NHS Property Services | NTC0045 | |
| Northstowe Arts | | QQ 33–46, Paula Bond, Head of Northstowe Arts |
| Okana | NTC0049 | |
| Dr Jonathan Olsen, Associate Professor, University of Queensland | NTC0053 | |
| Mari O'Neill, Former Director, Northstowe Arts | NTC0018 | |
| Professor Susan Parham, Director at University of Hertfordshire Urbanism Unit | NTC0088 | QQ 47–54, Professor Susan Parham, Director at University of Hertfordshire Urbanism Unit |
| Peabody | NTC0099 | |
| Pinsent Masons LLP | NTC0083 | |
| Places for People | NTC0030 | |
| Primary Health Properties PLC | NTC0020 | |
| Pooleyville | | QQ 17–26,Will Cousins, Partner |
| Population Health Improvement UK (PHI UK) | NTC0054 | |
| Publica | NTC0098 | QQ 17–26, Lucy Musgrave OBE, Founding Directo |
| Pupils 2 Parliament | NTC0073 | |
| Quality of Life Foundation | NTC0016 | |

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| Dr Keetie Roelen, Senior Research Fellow, The Open University | NTC0064 | |
| Royal Institute of British Architects | NTC0100 | |
| Royal Town Planning Institute | NTC0037 | |
| | | QQ 47–54, Professor Rachel Sara, Oscar Naddermier Professor of Architecture, Birmingham School of Architecture |
| Scottish Green Party | | QQ 55–64, Councillor Holly Bruce, Councillor for Langside Ward at Glasgow City Council |
| Mr Graham Smith, Consultant Urban Designer at Graham Paul Smith, Urban Design | NTC0068 | |
| Social Life | NTC0071 | |
| Ms Phoebe Somervail, Research Assistant, University of Glasgow | NTC0053 | |
| STIPO | NTC0004 | |
| Dr Jonathan Stokes, Senior Research Fellow, University of Glasgow | NTC0053 | |
| Dr Saravanan Thangarajan, Visiting Scientist & Academic Appointment, Ariadne Labs, Brigham and Women's Hospital, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health | NTC0005 | |
| Dr Inci Toral (Associate Professor at Universi-ty of Birmingham, Business School) | NTC0059 | |
| The Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) | NTC0042 | QQ 47–54, Julia Thrift, Director of Healthier Placemaking |
| Mr Stuart Turner, principal at Stuart Turner. Architect & Urbanist | NTC0013 | |
| University of Edinburgh | NTC0012 | |
| University of Lancashire | NTC0048 | |
| University of Liverpool | | QQ 33–46, Rhiannon Corcoran, Professor of Psychology and Public Mental Health |

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|---|---|---|
| University of Reading | NTC0025 | |
| University of Southampton, Southampton Institute of Arts and Humanities | NTC0095 | |
| Dr Umar Tariq, Senior Lecturer at University of the West of England, UK | NTC0011 | |
| Urban Design Group | NTC0035 NTC0077 | |
| Urban Symbiotics | NTC0081 | |
| Vistry Group | NTC0008 | |
| Mr Oskar Walker | NTC0010 | |
| Professor Georgia Watson , Professor of Urban Design, School of Built environment, Oxford Brookes University | NTC0060 | |
| The Young Foundation | NTC0072 | |
| ZCD Architects | NTC0096 | QQ 55–64, Dinah Bornat, Director |

# APPENDIX 3:  CALL FOR EVIDENCE

The House of Lords Built Environment Committee has launched the second module of its inquiry into new towns and expanded settlements.

The modular format allows us to explore the topic of new towns in depth, looking at the full breadth of issues involved in delivering attractive, economically viable new towns where people will actually want to live, both now and in the decades ahead. The first module looked at the fundamental legal, financial, fiscal, and governance frameworks that need to be in place before any construction of new towns can begin. Our report for that module was published on 25 October 2025.

We are now inviting interested individuals and organisations to submit written evidence for our second module, Creating Communities. The Committee intends to take oral evidence in November and December 2025 and will publish its report on this module early in 2026.

## Background

Almost as soon as it was elected in July 2024, the Government announced its ambition to start building multiple new towns and expanded settlements during this Parliament. It established a New Towns Taskforce, chaired by Sir Michael Lyons, to investigate and recommend potential sites for these initial new towns or expanded settlements. In October 2025, having received over 100 submissions of potential sites, the Taskforce published its recommendations for 12 sites, three of which the Government has now committed to take forward for further investigation.

## Focus of the inquiry

This second module, entitled New Towns: Creating Communities, will focus on how to ensure that each of the new towns and expanded settlements can become thriving, successful communities where families want to live and set down roots. It will consider the fundamentals of placemaking and design, and examine how the built environment can support happy, healthy, and fulfilling lives for residents, answering the basic question: how can you build a sustainable community?

### *Questions*

The committee is seeking answers to the following questions:

1.   If new towns are to be built in i) inner urban, ii) edge of urban, and iii) rural locations:

     (a)   How should the principles of good placemaking adapt in order to build viable places with a positive character and identity?

     (b)   What are the current barriers to good placemaking in these different locations, and how can they be overcome?

2.   Should new towns be seen as an opportunity to encourage innovative urban design and architecture?

     (a)   If so, what does this mean?

     (b)   What lessons can we learn from the experience of other countries?

3.   How can high quality urban design be afforded?

4.   How can new towns be future-proofed, responding to changing working and lifestyle patterns, emerging economies and new technologies?

5.   How should nature and biodiversity be incorporated in the development of new towns?

6.   What social and community infrastructure should be prioritised in the early development of new towns and what at a later stage?

   (a)   If developing such infrastructure is financially unviable, how can this be overcome?

7.   How can new towns use the built environment to support health and encourage healthy lifestyles, including mental health?

8.   How can new towns be designed to ensure they are inclusive and accessible to all groups throughout their lives?

9.   What are the critical tools of design governance that should be used to deliver high quality design throughout the development journey of new towns?

Closing date: on Monday 1 December 2025