# BEYOND NUMBERS

## BUILDING GREAT PLACES TO LIVE

EDITED BY IGGY WOOD, BEN COOPER AND MILES WARD

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# INTRODUCTION

BEN COOPER

In 1945, Labour pledged to "proceed with a housing programme [at] the maximum practical speed until every family in this island has a good standard of accommodation". After six years of war, many towns and cities needed to be rebuilt on a vast scale. A full half of the two million homes destroyed were in London, but many other cities suffered too. In Hull, 90 per cent of homes were damaged, and nearly half of the city was left homeless by the war's end. Britain also needed to demolish slums, alleviate overcrowding and modernise the unsuitable housing that had been largely unaffected by the blitz.

The scale of the challenge facing the new Labour government was substantial, especially considering the resource and workforce challenges. But Labour's manifesto committed to more than just building units of housing. They wanted to build the homes people wanted – and deliver good "town planning". "Pleasant surroundings, attractive lay-out[s], efficient utility services [and] … transport facilities" were all considered integral to a mass housebuilding programme and to meeting housing need.

While postwar housing is often lacking compared to modern standards, it was progress compared to the 'back to backs' that previously dominated many working-class communities. They were larger and less overcrowded, had indoor plumbing and hot water, and were built with greater access to green spaces and vital amenities. The first new towns, created in the 1940s, offered spacious, affordable and good-quality housing on former agricultural land.

Every Labour government since has been ambitious about building good quality homes and improving existing ones, situated in communities that people want to live in. In the 1960s, Labour designated some of the largest new towns, including Milton Keynes, and provided grants to improve housing quality. In the 1970s, Anthony Crosland encouraged mixed housing estates where social renters lived alongside homeowners and supported diversity in properties available to buy or rent. This mission continued in the 2000s, when the new Labour government invested in housing quality, which improved over a million social homes, while the housing

market renewal programme sought to regenerate neighbourhoods and places.

The circumstances facing the current government are different to those of the past. But it should be inspired by its predecessors. Every previous Labour government had a clear, unifying vision for housing that went beyond just building a set number of units. This government needs to articulate a vision that is broader than the individual policy choices. They need to show how they will build good quality homes that are fit for the future, in communities that people want to live in and with the green space and amenities they need.

As the party that swept away slums, built new towns, and renewed housing estates, Labour should be committed to building great places to live. This is relevant for every part of the country. It means major developments, including new towns and housing estates, but it also means building a few homes in a village to make sure it can retain the critical mass needed to keep local services. Above all, Labour must recognise how the quality of these homes, and the communities they are situated in, matter.

There is also a moral imperative to this vision, rooted in Labour values. We need to build good quality homes quickly to cut the cost of housing, alleviate overcrowding, replace dangerous accommodation, and improve access to vital amenities such as green spaces.

Ultimately, the target of 1.5m new homes is not just about this parliament. It is about improving people's lives for decades to come. What is built between now and the next election could transform the health, wellbeing, life chances and living standards of the nation. Every child could grow up in decent and stable housing conditions, and older people could live independently in their own accessible home. More young adults could finally move out of their childhood bedroom, start their own family, or move across the country to access their dream job. This is what a vision of great places to live can offer.

Such a vision will reject the idea that the only thing that matters is the number of units built, regardless of quality or size. There is no route to tackling the housing crisis without building homes that people actually want to live in and in communities that are thriving. That requires smarter regulation – not a regulatory bonfire that allows anything to be built, anywhere, to any standard.

Focusing on great places to live isn't just sensible policy. It is also good politics. At the next election, the electorate will need to hear a convincing story about housing, rooted in their values. It is all too tempting to assume that public support for more homes being built will persist, or that delivering on housing targets will help the government win the next election. However, building new homes is very disruptive for existing communities – and there is likely to be political pressure, especially when Reform and the Conservatives will be opportunistically opposed. Labour will have to go onto the doorstep and articulate exactly why this disruption is worth it.

Talking only about units and targets

will not cut it for voters – even if 1.5m new homes are built in this parliament. Without being clear and persuasive about why building more homes matters, beyond simply putting spades in the ground, there is a risk that the government's messaging will not land with the public. And if voters are not convinced that the past five years were worth it, they are unlikely to put their trust in a successive Labour government.

There is clear evidence that the idea of building great places to live is popular with the public. When Opinium asked what could increase support for new housing in their local area, the most popular argument was "build high-quality, attractive homes that fit local character," backed by 49 per cent.[1] The Home Builders Federation and Rightmove found a strong sense of community, access to local parks and public spaces, and the general environment mattered to homebuyers. As one respondent put it: "having shared spaces and local amenities makes a big difference – it's where relationships are built, and the area starts to feel like home".[2] Tapping into this clear public demand can bring significant political benefits for a party that wants to secure support for transformational change.

For the remainder of this parliament, the government needs to set out its vision on housing policy clearly and persuasively. It must tell a story about how it will build great places to live which draws on our party's history, sensible policymaking and public demand. If Labour gets this right, it can change lives – and may even persuade people to trust it with a second term.

*Ben Cooper is the research manager at the Fabian Society and the head of the Fabian Housing Centre.*

# CHAPTER 1

## PLACE TO BE

*Nicholas Boys Smith, the founder and chairman of Create Streets, details the links between urban and architectural design and wellbeing, popularity and neighbourliness*

Design, says the cliché, is in the eye of beholder. The sophisticate's preference for burnished steel is as legitimate as the petit bourgeois liking for sash windows or red brick. One's man modernism is another man's Palladianism. This is nonsense.

Over the last decade, the social enterprise that I founded, Create Streets, has read or conducted hundreds of studies into what people like and why. We have polled the public in Britain and abroad, creating a careful methodology for conducting fair visual preference surveys which is now being copied globally. We have measured house prices, studied where people walk and don't walk, examined data on mental health and neighbourly associations and asked the public from Surrey to Scotland what they favour and fear. We have heard from neuroscientists, psychologists, doctors and public health professionals from Syndey to Seattle. We have discussed and presented our findings on five continents. And I can report, without qualm or caveat, that the results are in. We know what places most people prefer most of the time, and where most of us tend to flourish. We know how to unlock public support for more homes on less land and how to create neighbourhoods where we are more likely to be friendly and less likely to be friendless.

It is not a happy finding for the fans of featureless facades or atomising brutalism in which to nourish our solitude. Most of us prefer interesting places with a strong sense of place, built with local materials, featuring coherent complexity, including variety in a pattern, with some embedded symmetries and a dash of colour. We prefer facades with detail and texture up-close which resolve themselves into a meaningful pattern as we step away. We are also drawn to patterns that mimic nature or represent humanity. We like curves, scrolls and faces. Just

think of how many historic buildings are embellished by representations of nature or of ourselves: acanthus leaves, cornucopiae of fruits, the heads of gods or demons.

In one of our recent national polls, which presented a classical façade against a bland and repetitive modernist façade, 79 per cent of the public preferred the traditional option. This preference has held true in study after study, and can unlock support for higher density development in polling and in practice, in town and country. This preference is shared by voters of all parties, by rich and poor, by old and young, and in every region. In an age of division, architecture unites us. It is even true in more divided societies. An American poll found that 72 per cent preferred classical to modernist federal buildings, a preference likewise replicated across all demographics. Dutch and Swedish preferences are identical. So clear is the evidence that large language models, when fed questions such as 'which place will people find more friendly' confidently predict human preferences.

Pricing research agrees. A Dutch study of 60,000 property transactions across 86 comparable housing developments found that, everything else controlled for, more traditionally styled new houses sold at a 15 per cent premium over non-traditional houses. The King's beautiful urban extension of Poundbury now sells at a 55 per cent value premium relative to the comparable local market. It cost only 18 per cent more to build – and has more affordable housing than comparable developments.

Behavioural studies agree. In a Danish study, 25 per cent of pedestrians stopped in front of complex facades. Only 1 per cent did in front of sterile facades. Five times as many passers-by offered to help lost tourists in front of an attractive versus a featureless building in one American study.

I could cite hundreds more studies. We are also starting to understand why humans have such consistent preferences. It is hardly rocket science. We like to be interested, and blank walls just bore us, however "honest". As Professor Colin Ellard, author of Places of the Heart explains: "facades devoid of complexity don't make us happy". Natural shapes and curves reassure. Our brains process symmetrical shapes more rapidly than non-symmetrical shapes. We need stimulation, but not too much. The pioneering work of Cleo Valantine reveals different physical forms that reassure, alarm or bore us, eliciting consistently different neurophysiological stress responses.

It is not just a question of what buildings look like – though that really matters. Our study Move Free showed that, the easier it is to move about from any one point in a town to any other point, and the more we can limit the polluting downsides of movement to others, the more prosperity citizens can generate. More movement, more pleasingly conducted – between more places – generates more value for more of us and makes for more prosperous places and economies. This can be measured though land values: walkable neighbourhoods are typically worth between 10 and 55 per cent more in

controlled studies. In towns, cars are just not very good at moving lots of people around. The same street lane can move 21 per cent as many people by car as it can move by bike. American and British studies both show how streets with more traffic are associated with fewer neighbourly friendships.

In our book, Of Streets and Squares, we suggested seven golden rules for prosperous and popular places. Critically important is 'gentle density', the sweet spot between towers and sprawl, providing an ideal balance between privacy and proximity. This Goldilocks urbanism, typically requiring building heights of three to seven storeys, is incredibly efficient. Urban greenery also matters, as hundreds of studies show. However, it should be 'little and often,' so that we are exposed to greenery more frequently in our daily lives.

Architecture and urbanism is a public art. It shapes our common home and can turn isolated groups of individuals into communities. How people feel about it is important. If we are to build one and a half million new homes, let us empower public preferences, accept our common humanity, and create new places (and steward old ones) to make our souls sing and our bodies thrive. Our hearts and our happiness will be better for it.

# CHAPTER 2

## IT AIN'T BROKE

*Lizzie Glithero-West, the chief executive of the Heritage Alliance, explains how to integrate the homes of the future with the buildings of the past*

It is estimated that England is home to more than 6m buildings over a hundred years old: a third of our built environment. These are buildings which have stood the test of time, often regionally unique and built using local materials and skills. They attract a premium in the market and are well-serviced by amenities that developed around them. But a paradox exists: hundreds of thousands of these are standing vacant, underused or uncared for, while this country is in desperate need of housing.

Heritage is on the doorstep of every community, ready to play a part in the government's housing mission and central to achieving pride in place. It can unlock thousands of skilled green jobs, rejuvenate communities and drive local growth through the creation of new homes, businesses and community assets. Heritage is not just about preservation: it is an untapped resource for creating distinctive, sustainable places to live.

### WHY HERITAGE MATTERS

There is substantial evidence that heritage makes places better for residents. Recent research by Public First for the National Trust shows that local heritage is a fundamental part of how people feel about themselves and where they live, with 79 per cent saying it is key to making the places they live better. Engaging with historic places fosters people's sense of belonging and improves wellbeing. Heritage gives places rootedness and identity; it is at the heart of what makes us belong.

Beyond this, heritage attracts innovation and creates growth. Since the National Lottery Heritage Fund's 2013 report, New Ideas Need Old Buildings, significant evidence has accrued showing how historic buildings support the most innovative and productive businesses to succeed. In 2024, Historic England found a tangible link between historic places and increased creativity and economic activity, and in 2025, our own Heritage

Creates report drew together the myriad ways that heritage acts as a host, a muse, and an expression of creativity all over the country.

This economic vitality, combined with the quality and popularity of historic housing, makes heritage neighbourhoods particularly resilient and attractive places to live. Against a backdrop of homogeneous developments that erode local distinctiveness, heritage regeneration delivers the amenity, culture and character everyone deserves in their neighbourhoods.

## UNDERSTANDING THE POTENTIAL

New research has shown that repairing and repurposing vacant and underused historic buildings could provide up to 670,000 new homes in England. This represents enormous potential at a time when the government has pledged to build 1.5m homes by 2029.

Not only is this an opportunity to provide characterful housing which contributes to a sense of shared identity and social cohesion, but reusing buildings is a fundamentally more sustainable option than new build. Heritage Counts 2019 calculated that approximately one third of a building's lifetime carbon emissions are embodied in its construction, and that refurbishing a historic house produces less than 8 per cent of the carbon required to build a new one. We also know that carbon emissions of historic buildings can be reduced by over 60 per cent by 2050 through sympathetic and responsible refurbishment and retrofit. This makes heritage conversion not just about housing delivery, but fundamental to sustainable development.

We now have a real moment of opportunity: current government priorities align perfectly with what heritage delivers. Homes England's 2023-28 Strategic Plan explicitly prioritises community wellbeing over isolated unit delivery, and the new Pride in Place strategy recognises that people value tangible improvements to how their areas look and feel. The Treasury's Green Book review further encourages place-based growth: exactly what heritage-led housing delivers.

## WHAT WORKS

Multiple types of historic buildings lend themselves to repurposing as regionally distinctive homes. Historic England has identified vacant 19th and 20th century industrial and institutional properties in particular: redundant textile mills in Yorkshire and Lancashire alone could provide 42,000 new homes. Success stories range from the regeneration of historic neighbourhoods, like the Jewellery Quarter in Birmingham, to the individual restoration of major buildings like Park Hill Estate for new housing in Sheffield.

Blending the old with the new is an effective way to integrate heritage into new towns and neighbourhoods. At King's Cross, the area's industrial and transport heritage has been woven into a dynamic mixed-use development. It combines commercial, educational and leisure spaces with homes (40 per cent of which are affordable), and now generates £5.78 in social value for every £1 invested. This challenges a persistent misconception that historic buildings

are inherently exclusive: they have always housed working people and must continue to deliver mixed-tenure housing, including social and affordable homes. We cannot repeat the 20th century mistake of wholesale demolition of northern industrial buildings and terraces, which not only destroyed viable housing stock but erased the stories of working communities who lived in them.

Heritage-led housing will be only one part of the solution to meet our housing needs – but most of the 12 planned new town sites are brownfield, with existing heritage assets that can provide inspiration. South Bank in Leeds is a promising example: its vibrant industrial heritage is already serving to shape a new chapter for this district as a unique and desirable neighbourhood. Urban and town centre housing schemes like this bring forward a host of additional benefits, creating homes which are close to existing infrastructure, contributing to high street renewal, and improving social cohesion in formerly 'left behind' areas.

## OVERCOMING THE BARRIERS

Despite this potential, cost remains a significant barrier, and the evidence base for the role of heritage in delivering affordable housing is still emerging. The conservation deficit is arguably the biggest constraint to scaling up housing delivery from heritage buildings, exacerbated by uneven VAT rules which perversely incentivise demolition over retrofit and rebuild by zero-rating the former and charging 20 per cent tax on the latter. This fiscal framework encourages waste over adaptation, despite the carbon cost. Current planning policy also allows the demolition of buildings under permitted development, without the need to consider alternative uses first.

Additionally, we must ensure historic homes are suitably adapted for 21st-century living. Historic buildings are by no means incompatible with retrofit, but inappropriate measures can cause damp and mould while failing to improve energy performance. A national retrofit strategy to redress the skills gap, a whole-house approach for energy efficiency assessments, and bringing forward National Listed Building Consent Orders (LBCOs) for simple repair and retrofit works would all help to reduce the scale of this very necessary challenge.

Finally, investing in regeneration could address longstanding skills shortages alongside decarbonisation goals. The UK currently lacks the skilled workforce needed to retrofit our historic building stock, without which we cannot achieve net zero. The 2023 Heritage and Carbon report estimated that a retrofit skills strategy would generate a £35bn stimulus each year and support 290,000 regional jobs.

## THE WAY FORWARD

Heritage is an asset to every community across Britain. If we are serious about a housing strategy that is sustainable, responds to local needs and strengthens pride in place, we must embed a reuse-first principle across planning policy. An NPPF amendment to include a presumption against demolition, a

reappraisal of the Permitted Development regime, better use of LBCOs, a reassessment of the VAT regime for construction, and investment in retrofit skills would all be steps in the right direction.

Our historic buildings have housed generations before us. In a climate emergency and housing crisis, the most sustainable solution is to use what we already have. With the right policy framework, heritage can continue to provide distinctive, affordable homes for generations to come.

# CHAPTER 3

## MORE THAN A FACADE

*Chris Williamson, the president of the Royal Institute of British Architects, discusses the social and economic benefits of good architecture*

The Labour government's commitment to delivering 1.5m homes during the course of this parliament has brought the subject of housing, and of development more widely, into mainstream public discourse.

While its aims are laudable, the prospect of a significant increase in development highlights the importance of what is being developed and how it is designed. Until I went to Leicester Polytechnic to study architecture, I lived in an unremarkable, but safe and comfortable, council house in a South Derbyshire village called Stanley. It was built in 1953, the year of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation, so our street was called Coronation Road. My dad died when I was three, and without that council house I have no idea where my brother, mum and I would have lived. Today, all the houses on Coronation Road are privately owned and we are building too few to replace them. I know, both from this experience and from my decades in practice, how important it is that quality is at the heart of every home.

The consequences of neglecting this principle are stark: the 2020 update to the Marmot review notes that "the unequal distribution of poor-quality built environments contributes to health inequalities in England" on a variety of levels.

Our starting point requires some clear improvement: research from 2023 concluded that 45 per cent of survey respondents felt a low level of trust, or no trust at all, in developers to deliver new-build homes to a high standard.

There's another potential problem: a British Social Attitudes survey showed that only 41 per cent of respondents supported more houses being built in their local area. Against a backdrop of widespread opposition to development, prioritising quality design as a means of tackling this mistrust is paramount.

It wasn't always like this. Many

major public sector housebuilding programmes in the postwar period saw an unprecedented improvement in housing quality across the country, with most spearheaded by architects installed in both national and local government.

The establishment of the Parker Morris committee, of which several members were architects, and the publication of its seminal 1961 report, Homes for Today and Tomorrow, is one example. The vastly improved standards that arose from the recommendations in its report became known as the Parker Morris standards, which became mandatory for all council housing from 1969. Though these have now been abolished, their establishment illustrates how architects' involvement in setting design standards can transform the quality of our homes.

Equally as vital was the impact of architects on housing design at a local level, as evidenced by the legacy left by those working throughout local government in much of the 20th century.

Sydney Cook used his role as Camden borough architect from 1965 to 1973 to empower the architects in his department to create innovative and design-led social housing characterised by a high-density, low-rise approach. One of these architects was Neave Brown, whose commitment to excellence in social housing lives on in RIBA's Neave Brown Award. Its 2025 winner, the thoughtful, accessible Appleby Blue almshouse in Southwark, also won the RIBA 2025 Stirling Prize, and is representative of the ingenuity and care on display in many architect-designed schemes.

The approach taken by Ted Hollamby in his role as director of architecture, planning and development for the London Borough of Lambeth created a number of thoughtful, well-designed social housing estates comprised of spacious, light and high-density homes. Showcasing the importance of embedding homes into the places they are in, his design drew inspiration from, and aimed to complement, the topography of its surroundings while facilitating easy access to amenities and green space.

In the intervening years, this focus on creating good places has come on in leaps and bounds. Creating cohesive environments which positively impact health and wellbeing has become as integral as ensuring we deliver homes. One example is the work of award-winning architect Peter Barber, whose focus on streets as a way of promoting integration and community places his imaginative, people-first approach to delivering exemplary social housing within a broader context.

But as the prevalence of architects working in the public sector declined over the latter half of the 20th century, so too did the opportunities to create transformative spaces and places on the macro scale. It would be remiss not to acknowledge the significant deterioration in local government spending power over recent decades, falling 26 per cent between 2010/11 and 2020/21.

Without access to specialist expertise, enacting the social, economic and health benefits that good design brings becomes more of a challenge. Knowledge of design principles and their application in practice, and the ability to utilise innovative solutions for

challenging sites, are vital for the places we live and work in to be shaped in a way that will serve us both now and in future decades.

At present, this is lacking. Data from the local planning authority capacity and skills survey carried out by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in 2023 reported that 54 per cent of local authorities surveyed faced skills gaps in urban design and architecture.

The government's flagship new towns programme provides a chance to place design-led development at the heart of the political agenda, with architects once again embedded in the delivery of homes and the public realm at scale. Initial signs are positive: the government has communicated its recognition of the role of design, the importance of creating places that contribute to people's wellbeing, and the provision of much-needed social housing. To take this forward, architects must be involved from the outset of all projects.

And we must not stop there. We need to take a transformative approach to placemaking, one that acknowledges the role that the built environment plays in uplifting people's living standards, creating community, and promoting dignity. This should be accompanied by long-term funding to embed design expertise into the public sector once more – funding which is commensurate with the social and economic benefit that good design brings.

As Britain faces unprecedented challenges, and with the government setting ambitious, transformational missions for growth, history shows us that architects are a crucial part of reshaping the landscape of the country. This is real opportunity for us to be at the forefront of a future that is sustainable, inclusive, and inspiring.

# CHAPTER 4

## BREAKING GROUND

*Cllr Jack Shaw, the director of Groundwork Research and chair of the Labour Housing Group, sets out how to empower local leaders with a new toolkit to build healthy communities*

In the 19th century, the novelist Wilkie Collins described the hod, the trowel, and the brick-kiln as "the greatest conquerors of all," capturing the change that had taken root in Victorian England amid industrial and residential development. He was not alone in this observation. Sir Walter Besant, husband of the famous Fabian Annie Besant, wrote of houses that "sprang up in a single night; streets in a month; churches and chapels in a quarter."[3] This was an age of municipal socialism that witnessed the rise of not just industry and housebuilding but infrastructure that inspired civic pride: public houses, town halls and more. It continued until the mid-20th century, when politicians such as T Dan Smith, the leader of Newcastle, sought to turn the city into the 'Brasilia of the North'. Fast forward to the 21st century, and England has not only failed to build housing at the scale required, but also failed to provide the infrastructure to accompany it, including the social and cultural assets that bind communities together.

I know this from experience. The London Borough of Barking & Dagenham, which I am fortunate enough to represent, has overseen housing-led regeneration at scale not seen almost anywhere else in England. It has changed thousands of lives for the better. However, it has lost more pubs than anywhere else over the same period: 67 per cent closed their doors between 2001 and 2019.[4] This is, in part, the result of demographic change – but not entirely. Despite frenetic building, the shop fronts on the ground floor of new developments sit empty, as do new community venues which have not found owners willing to invest in kitting them out.

Labour has inherited this twin challenge of housebuilding and community-building. It has responded

by announcing a raft of policy changes, including the New Towns programme modelled on the postwar new towns of Stevenage, Crawley and Basildon; the largest ever social and affordable housing programme, with a budget of £39bn; and a new National Housing Bank, which is expected to unlock £53bn in private investment. The government has also greenlit reservoirs and transport infrastructure. But there remains a lack of symbiosis between housebuilding and infrastructure, and contributions from developers alone are insufficient.

Instead, what 'UK plc' requires is a new set of tools to build the houses and communities that we need. The experience of the Milton Keynes Development Corporation (MKDC) is instructive in this respect. The New Towns Act endowed MKDC with the ability to acquire, develop, service and sell plots of land ready for development. As a result, it bought agricultural land at its existing use value, and sold it at a higher value once it remediated and secured planning permission. Crucially, the profit MKDC made was reinvested into infrastructure and place-making. For example, when it closed its doors in 1992, it transferred the ownership of green spaces to the Milton Keynes Parks Trust under the condition that it would maintain them in perpetuity. This principle of long-term stewardship has been revived by the New Towns Taskforce, which has recommended that New Towns need to go beyond building homes and instead finance, build and maintain community assets.[5]

In 1974, landowner Bernard Myers' legal challenge put an end to this approach to financing development. He challenged the decision to acquire hundreds of acres from his estate on the grounds that, if he had sold it on the open market, he would have fetched a higher price. The Court of Appeal agreed and since then 'hope' value has been baked into the calculations of land acquisitions. Both Labour and the Conservatives have sought to reverse this half-a-century-old decision. They have attempted to do this through the Levelling Up & Regeneration Act and the planning and infrastructure bill, with their sights clearly set on making development more viable.

The purpose of land value capture is to address the current imbalance: while the cost of infrastructure investment is public, the economic benefits are often private.[6] This is not about penalising landowners or housebuilders; but the 'value' has to be captured from somewhere. Much of it will be captured from landowners, while developers might absorb some of the cost should land markets readjust. Both will also share the reward insofar as this change will make new development more viable. And they will not be the only actors affected. Homeowners who receive a windfall in the form of higher property valuations resulting from public investment should also pay their share, as should property owners that can charge higher business rates. This is a price worth paying to build housing and infrastructure at scale.

Special purpose vehicles are one institution that can be deployed to help finance infrastructure. They can borrow against anticipated receipts,

facilitating development without relying on subsidies from the government. But if democratically unaccountable institutions should be empowered, so too should our politicians. Mayors, for their part, should be endowed with further fiscal devolution, as the housing secretary, Steve Reed, has mooted.[7] Politicians outside of the 'Westminster bubble' have rightly railed against the 'cap in hand' or 'begging bowl' culture that the current centralised state requires them to take. Take London, for example. The Greater London Authority has been making the case — not very successfully — for a Bakerloo line extension since 2014. Yet local leaders need to be more curious about how we build cities without resorting to the attractive but corrosive vice of simply asking for investment. One commentator cautioned that regional politicians are at risk of being seen as 'grant junkies' by those in Westminster.

Instead, local authorities must make the case for a quid-pro-quo. Let us take London as an example. Alongside tools to capture more value from land, London now has the ability to raise a tourist levy – long available to local authorities in Wales and Scotland. But that is not sufficient. London should be allowed the discretion to create special pan-London taxes in return for the infrastructure its population needs. This would require the mayor of London to take political risk, but it is not unprecedented. In 2006, then-mayor Ken Livingstone levied a £20 annual charge on council tax – dubbed the Olympic precept – which raised £600m over the following decade.

Furthermore, London should also be able to borrow against these revenue streams, and tools such as 'tax increment finance' – which financed the Northern line extension – should be codified. Transport investment should also be aligned more closely with housebuilding so that there is a clear understanding how new connectivity can unlock housebuilding.

None of these tools should be off-limits to strategic authorities outside of London, but their viability will be different across England, as will the capacity and capability to establish them. A suite of powers such as these would make it easier for the strategic and local authorities to drive regeneration.

If England is to recover from this malaise — where housebuilding has slowed, infrastructure does not get off the ground and homelessness has mushroomed — the task ahead is to equip leaders with the tools and autonomy to build not only new homes, but finance (and build) new infrastructure too. Land must work harder for the public good; strategic authorities must be trusted to invest boldly and take risks when given the power to do so; and communities might be more supportive of development as a result.[8]

# CHAPTER 5

## KEY PLAYERS

*Catherine Ryder, the chief executive of PlaceShapers, lays out how housing associations are shaping the built environment*

Housing associations play a vital role in creating great places to live. Their primary mission is to provide good-quality, affordable social housing and to act as responsible landlords for the millions of people who rely on them. But their impact extends far beyond bricks and mortar. Across the country, housing associations are investing in people, neighbourhoods, and partnerships to build stronger, more sustainable communities.

### RAISING STANDARDS AND BUILDING COMMUNITIES

Social housing is often of higher quality than the private rented sector, and housing associations help raise the overall standard of homes in the areas where they operate. They are not only committed to maintaining and regenerating existing homes and estates, but also to building new homes that meet local needs. This responsiveness helps create mixed, inclusive communities and ensures developments are rooted in the realities of place.

Increasingly, housing associations who are building or rebuilding homes and estates are prioritising community infrastructure and inclusive design, meaning public spaces become well maintained and welcoming, fostering pride and connection among residents.

Poplar Harca's regeneration work in east London offers a compelling example of what this looks like in practice. The Aberfeldy New Village development has delivered high-quality homes and beautifully landscaped spaces alongside a new workspace centre, plans for a health hub and local co-op, and even a much-needed pedestrian crossing that reconnects residents with the nearby DLR station. This is community-led regeneration at its best – rooted in local priorities and focused on long-term transformation.

Housing associations stand ready to make the most of the opportunities

provided by the £39bn investment in new social housing through the Social and Affordable Homes Programme. In particular, the focus on social rent in the new programme is welcome, and will ensure the homes the sector builds are genuinely affordable for people in housing need.

### HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS AS COMMUNITY ANCHORS

The true measure of a great place lies not only in its buildings, but in the lives of those who live there. Acting as trusted local anchors, housing associations drive positive change that transforms how people feel about their communities. They provide services that strengthen resilience and wellbeing – tackling antisocial behaviour, supporting residents through financial advice, and helping people into employment.

In Manchester, Southway Housing's Westcroft community centre has become a vital local resource. By responding to community needs, creating a women's group, running a food club, and launching an anti-poverty network that connects local partners, Southway demonstrates how housing associations can step in where other services have withdrawn, helping residents not only to live well, but to feel part of something much larger.

### NATURE, HEALTH, AND WELLBEING

Many housing associations are also taking an active role in revitalising the local environment. They are working to improve biodiversity, restore green spaces, and provide access to nature, all of which can help support residents' mental and physical health.

The Grow Speke project in south Liverpool, developed by South Liverpool Homes in partnership with Groundwork, local schools and the police, is a powerful example. What was once derelict land attracting antisocial behaviour is now a thriving community garden where nature and biodiversity are prioritised. It is a space where people learn new skills, grow food, and connect with neighbours. For many volunteers, the project has become a source of pride and wellbeing as well as a way to give back.

### SUPPORTING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Housing associations also contribute to local economies, working with businesses and employers to improve opportunities for residents and communities.

Ongo, a housing association operating in Greater Lincolnshire and South Yorkshire, runs a skills and employment centre in Scunthorpe that offers training, career advice, and even a recruitment agency to help residents move directly into work. Their free, open-door mental health counselling service ensures that support is available to anyone who needs it, without stigma or bureaucracy.

### CULTURE, IDENTITY, AND BELONGING

Great places are not defined by infrastructure alone: they are sustained by culture and connection. Peabody's regeneration of the Thamesmead estate in London demonstrates how cultural investment can restore pride and

belonging. By supporting local events and creative projects, such as staging the play Beautiful Thing in a partially demolished building, Peabody reconnected residents with their shared story and showcased the area's potential.

### WORKING WITH RESIDENTS TO SHAPE CHANGE

Successful regeneration depends on local ownership. Castle Vale in Birmingham is a powerful reminder of what can happen when residents lead change. Once one of the most deprived estates in the UK, a 12-year regeneration programme transformed it into a thriving neighbourhood. Crucially, residents were not passive recipients. They helped shape the plans and continue to influence how their community works today through local institutions and partnerships.

### THE WAY FORWARD

Housing associations see themselves as more than landlords and builders. As not-for-profit organisations, every penny they collect is reinvested in homes, services, and communities. They are long-term custodians of place, committed to ensuring that neighbourhoods remain vibrant and resilient for generations.

Recent government measures, including the spending review and rent settlement, have provided greater certainty for housing associations, helping them to invest in both new and existing homes. However, significant challenges remain.

A decade of limited funding for regeneration and social housing has slowed progress, and rising costs – alongside the need to meet new safety and energy efficiency standards – continue to stretch business plans. For some associations, these pressures are acute, even threatening their viability.

Our recent report 'Realising the potential of housing associations in place and communities' looks at how housing association can sustain and expand their vital contribution to support a decade of national renewal.

Continued government support is critical. Beyond the Social and Affordable Homes Programme, we need to explore how else large regeneration can be delivered and backing for additional Decent Homes Standard requirements will be essential.

With the right investment and policy environment, housing associations can go further – creating not just homes, but stronger, fairer, and more resilient communities. They have already shown what is possible. With sustained support, they can help deliver a future where everyone has not just a home, but a truly great place to live.

# CHAPTER 6

## BACK TO THE FUTURE

*Andrew Lewin MP, who sits on the housing, communities, and local government select committee, argues we must build houses and communities that endure for the next generation of new towns to be successful*

Out of the ashes of the second world war, Clement Attlee's Labour government got to work rebuilding Britain. The new towns programme, which ran from 1946-1970, was arguably the most transformative placemaking programme that has ever taken place in the UK. Your author is eternally grateful: both as someone born in Welwyn Garden City, and now as Welwyn Hatfield's MP.

Nearly 80 years since this programme began, new towns are home to 2.8 million people. With higher proportions of social housing and home ownership, these communities all have their own history and identities, but are collectively a success story of a visionary Labour government.

In the 2024 general election, all but one of the new towns across England elected a Labour MP. We are the guardians of the movement – as representatives of our communities, but also as MPs elected on a manifesto commitment to build the next generation of places like Bracknell, Livingston and Stevenage.

The New Towns Taskforce quickly got to work, identifying 12 potential sites. Draft proposals from the government are expected in spring 2026. Given the scale of our housing crisis, it is understandable that many people will focus only on the sheer number of homes the programme could deliver. That would be a mistake. Of course we need to build at scale, but we must build communities that endure and succeed for the long term. This makes planning and social infrastructure all the more essential.

You do not have to look too far in modern Britain to see homes erected that lack any sense of community or civic space. Northstowe, in Cambridge, is one notorious example. In 2023, this housing development stood at 1,200

homes but lacked a single shop, cafe or doctor's surgery. You can 'Build Baby Build', but if you don't plan, then you prepare to fail. (No more cliches from hereon in, I promise.)

Local Development Corporations were crucial to the success of the first and second waves of new towns, and they need to play a central role this time, too.

To build a mixed community, development must also be tenure blind. In the most successful and balanced communities, you do not know whether you are walking into a council or housing association home or one that is privately owned. In the most egregious examples, there are literally 'poor doors' and playgrounds that are off limits to children in a social home.

The housing, communities and local government select committee recently recommended that development corporations should be mandated to prioritise homes for social rent within the 40 per cent affordable homes requirement. That would mean that social housing would have to be a feature in the first phase of development of these new places. It is the right thing to do to help combat the housing crisis, but it would also be a symbol that these 21st-century new towns are places for everyone.

These new communities must also be exemplars of good quality housing. Poor insulation and cold homes in winter must become a relic of the past. We are also seeing a rise in temperatures over the summer, with many homes and areas becoming stifling. We need to ensure we are future-proofing homes and communities so that they are cool in summer and warm in winter. One simple and aesthetically pleasing solution is building tree-lined streets, which recent research has shown reduces summer heat and increases biodiversity.

We must also ensure access to green spaces and sporting areas is core to any development. I count myself as one of many MPs who is sick of seeing a developer promise to build a playground and being left with one swing and a climbing frame. We need real green space, with multiple uses, at the heart of our new towns. Those with greater access to green space even have a greater life expectancy: three years more for men and two and a half years more for women.

We also have a moral obligation to build homes suitable for those with disabilities. Renovations needed to make homes accessible are extortionate, especially given the existing costs of living with a disability. We have an opportunity with new towns to set a universal standard for accessible homes: the M4(3) standard, which ensures accommodation can meet the needs of a household that includes a wheelchair user.

Earlier this year I met with my constituent, Jan, who moved her family to Welwyn Garden City in 1984 to raise her daughter. Drawn by the tree-lined streets, Jan has remained a resident to this day and is immensely proud of the area that she calls home. Jan offered her own reflections on what the government should do for the next generation of new towns: she spoke about the need

for regular transport, walkable areas, rows of independent shops and access to green spaces.

Most of all, she wanted to stress how important it was to have a sense of community. We need no better advertisement for new towns than people like Jan – now we must deliver.

# CHAPTER 7

## ON THE GROUND

*Cllr Bella Sankey, the leader of Brighton and Hove city council, lays out the crucial role played by local government*

How can we create great places to live? It is a question central to our politics and achieving the good life for all. I was born and bred in Brighton, and the city runs through me like a stick of – well, you get the picture. Leading the Labour party to majority control of the city council for the first time in 20 years in May 2023 was one of the proudest moments of my life. We won our landslide majority because we managed to unite the left and defeat the right, overturning decades of stagnation in our local politics that saw the Greens lead the council twice. Far from making Brighton a great place to live, they made the city a worse place to live.

Our approach has been holistic and far-reaching. We have cleaned up the city (the Greens allowed street cleanliness to deteriorate and pavements to be rewilded by weeds), made our school admissions system more progressive, and prioritised community cohesion and ensuring minority communities feel safe and supported. But one of things that has interested me is how the physical architecture of the city – and where the council directs its placemaking resources – can have a unifying and regenerating impact.

The first rule is ensuring that the key teams are functioning well. Each year, planning authorities across the UK are ranked on their performance by Planning Resource, the sector's leading publication. In the latest rankings, our planning team has been listed among the top local authorities and given a gold standard classification – improving from bronze in 2024.

Local planning authorities have a central role in ensuring that a place is planned, built and developed in a way that is sympathetic to residents' aspirations and strategic goals. Sometimes this is about unblocking regeneration – one of our early achievements was ensuring the privately-backed multi million-pound refurbishment of

our iconic Hippodrome was given the green light. And sometimes it is about assembling the evidence and designs to make bold and brave decisions about council investment. One of our early decisions was to commence the restoration of Madeira Terrace, an 865-metre-long stretch of seafront cast iron arches built in the late 1800s which frames our eastern seafront. While phase 1 will restore only 28 of 151 arches, it has signalled the start of Brighton's renaissance. The decline of the structure (boarded up, covered in graffiti tags and more synonymous with dangerous parkour attempts than promenading) had become emblematic of the city's decline. Our commitment prompted further investment from Historic England, and this project has now led to the creation of a new Seafront Development Board, chaired by my trailblazing predecessor, Lord Steve Bassam, who is working with place-making experts from a range of disciplines to find the ideas and funding our iconic seafront deserves.

The impact of 'place' on health and wellbeing is increasingly being understood. Historically, housing in Brighton has been socially stratified: the historic Georgian terraces of central Brighton can feel a million miles away from the postwar council estates of Whitehawk and Moulsecoomb. We are changing that by building and buying council homes across the city, including in the quaint village of Rottingdean – an endeavour that led the Daily Mail to accuse us of wokeness, a badge of honour for me. I could not be prouder that we are building social homes everywhere and anywhere; all evidence supports the fact that mixed communities make everyone better off. The over 300 new council and affordable homes we've just approved on Sackville Road will have large windows to let the light in and places to grow food. And we are not shying away from wholescale regeneration of our eight council-owned 'large panel system' high rises. These were built in the 1960s without the greenery, access to nature, employment opportunities or community spaces that other locales have historically benefitted from.

Brighton and Hove is one of the most active and healthy places in the country. This is by design, not default. Health and wellbeing runs throughout our approach. It is the reason we are well on the way to delivering a new flagship leisure centre on Hove seafront and why we are building the first new swimming pool in the city in 40 years at Withdean – a modular and sustainable pool to boot! It is also one reason why we are fully supportive of Brighton & Hove Albion FC's plans to build the first purpose-built women's football stadium in the country in the city – showing our girls that they deserve facilities and investment in sport just as much as boys. And it is why – in contrast to the Greens – we have developed active travel schemes that are both high quality and command public support. We believe it is possible to have well-designed cycle lanes that also support pedestrian access, and do not remove crucial vehicle lanes from the few major roads in the city that run east to west. We also believe in joined-up spatial planning, including doing a deal

with Royal Mail to move their central sorting office to the outskirts of the city, meaning their trucks no longer need to come into central Brighton or central Hove; in the process, the council acquired their Hove site, which will provide more council and affordable home development in a location where infrastructure and jobs already exist.

The symbol of our city is the Royal Pavilion, an Indian and Chinese-inspired palace built by King George IV and now owned by the city council. I still pinch myself when I see it. To me this extravagant, fantastical building sums up Brighton's spirit: there should be no limits on creativity, flair and ambition. We must dream big for all our residents and put pleasure and the good life at the heart of our places.

# CHAPTER 8

## AROUND THE HOUSES

*Cecilia Wong, professor of spatial planning and codirector of policy, and Mark Baker, professor of urban and regional planning – both at the University of Manchester – warn that spatial inequalities are here to stay without the right infrastructure*

The Labour government has pinned its high hopes on the forthcoming planning and infrastructure bill to overhaul the planning system and to unleash massive housebuilding forces – including the development of new towns – to address the chronic housing shortage and to drive economic growth. However, place-making is not just about housing. It is also crucially concerned with the provision of physical and social infrastructure to support communities in an accessible and sustainable manner.

### CHANGING POST-COVID TRAVEL PATTERNS AND SPATIAL INEQUALITIES

The release of the latest 2025 indices of deprivation[9] (IMD) reminds us of the entrenched spatial inequalities we face. The 10 per cent most deprived neighbourhoods in England have persistently been concentrated in parts of many urban areas, especially in northern England (eg Middlesbrough, Hartlepool and Manchester) and in coastal locations (eg Blackpool, Tendring and Hastings). This raises questions about the spatial connectivity of these deprived local communities and their access to employment and urban services.

A good grasp of travel patterns is critical for successful planning. Changing social norms and the Covid-19 lockdowns have drastically shifted how we utilise the internet to conduct our daily lives, creating a rapid increase in home and hybrid working as well as online shopping. A recent Office for National Statistics study[10] highlights that hybrid working has become routine for 28 per cent of workers. Despite wishful thinking that more working from home, and therefore less daily commuting, would mean significantly less cars on the road and lower carbon emissions, the data from the 2024 National Travel Survey[11] actually shows

that motor vehicle traffic was only 0.7 per cent lower than 2019 pre-pandemic levels, and 59 per cent of all trips were by car (a drop of only 2 percentage points from 2019). Due to the nature of different types of employment, it is not surprising that professionals with higher education qualifications are also much more likely to benefit from such flexible work practices. This results in social and spatial inequalities, since hybrid working is much less common in deprived areas, as evident in a recent Economic and Social Research Council-funded study[12].

A 2021 report by the Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion[13] for the all-party parliamentary group for 'left behind' neighbourhoods showed that a higher proportion of people in 'deprived' neighbourhoods travel to work by public transport. Despite low levels of car ownership, workers in these 'left behind' neighbourhoods ironically often need to travel by car because their bus services have suffered from significant cutbacks since the mid-2010s. The transport select committee's recent 2025 report[14] highlights that bus services have decreased by an average of 18 per cent in areas covered by county and unitary councils. Outside London, most of our metropolitan areas do not enjoy a web-like, connected public transport system.

## THE ACCESSIBILITY CHALLENGE FOR NEW TOWNS

The challenge is how to address such socio-spatial inequalities in any new housing development. The New Town Task Force Report[15] proposes an ambitious programme of building communities of 10,000-40,000 new homes, 40 per cent of which must be affordable – and of those, half social housing.

To improve spatial connectivity, digital infrastructure is a must for any large-scale development, especially in the light of the trend towards home and hybrid working. Variable access to high quality and reliable telecommunication infrastructure has resulted in differential locational advantages and socioeconomic outcomes.

The Task Force's proposals differ from earlier waves of British new towns by broadening their remit to include large scale urban extensions and urban renewal, as well as highlighting economic growth objectives alongside the supply of affordable housing. Given the high proportion of social housing proposed in the new towns, many residents are likely to be engaged in employment that requires physical attendance. The sites selected by the New Towns Task Force tend to have good access to a rail station. This is likely to serve service sector workers commuting to major employment centres. However, as shown in our commuting analysis,[16] blue collar workers have a higher propensity to travel to work by foot, bike or bus, as many need to travel out-of-centre to work in factories and warehouses. It is likely to be even more problematic to provide a fully integrated public transport system, beyond rail, for those new towns located in green field sites.

How to strike the balance between equitable accessibility to socioeconomic

opportunities and non-car dependent communities therefore remains a critical challenge to the development of new towns. We have tested the performance of the 20 previous new towns in England by comparing their deprivation scores with their immediate neighbouring areas using the 2025 indices of deprivation (IMD). It is encouraging to find that new towns are significantly less deprived in terms of 'barriers to housing and services' and 'living environment'. Unfortunately, such positive messages are overshadowed by the fact that the new towns are more deprived in the 'income', 'employment', 'health and disability' and 'education, skills and training' domains.

The IMD analysis reinforces the message that place-making is about joined-up thinking. New towns cannot exist in isolation and need to be integrated into the wider spatial structures. This will require new forms of governance arrangements and partnership working that can foster strategic spatial thinking and planning across the wider functional geography to meet different transport demands and the needs of different social groups. A comprehensive transport strategy, with high permeability and mixed travel modes, will be vital. In this respect, the Transport Committee's proposal of setting standards for a minimum level of public transport connectivity (both physical and financial) is very welcome.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF STRATEGIC SPATIAL PLANNING

It is understandable that the government has determined to focus on new towns and planning reforms to shift up the gears of housing provision. Nevertheless, our towns and cities are nested in complex and evolving spatial systems and it is important to recognise the inevitability of conflicts between economic development, environmental protection and social equity in any planning decisions. The conundrum of strategic spatial planning is to understand the interrelationship between the short-term, project-based approach of urban development and the more holistic, long-term vision of economic, social and environmental sustainability by reconfiguring spatial development to manage the ongoing conflicts arising in the planning process.

# CHAPTER 9

## NOT JUST UNITS

*Rose Sandell, group communities director at Taylor Wimpey, explores the role of developers in creating communities – and sets out five promises*

Housebuilding plays a vital role in the UK's social and economic fabric, providing much needed homes while supporting jobs, infrastructure and growth. Placemaking is the art that ensures what we do is more than just building houses. It puts people at the heart of our developments, fostering community cohesion and promoting health and wellbeing while being good for nature and ensuring safe and inclusive spaces. Placemaking requires expertise across design, planning, engineering and construction, and local input; all with a single purpose – shaping sustainable, connected neighbourhoods.

To guide us through this delicate balancing act, Taylor Wimpey has produced a 'placemaking charter', which sets out our commitment to design places well for all our customers and the communities we build in. Importantly, it explains how critical all our colleagues' roles are in the placemaking process, whether in land, design, engineering, procurement, production, or sales. It calls for collective responsibility and thinking outside of the redline of a site plan.

We have built our placemaking charter around five principles that reflect what matters to our customers and communities. These principles guide every stage of design and delivery. Fundamentally, they are nothing new; they reframe, from a customer's viewpoint, national design policy, good practice, and evidence from Taylor Wimpey and the wider sector drawing on post occupancy customer research. A guidance framework outlines our responsibilities for delivering on the principles.

### PROMISE 1: WE WILL BUILD CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

Our customers want to be able to access local facilities by walking or cycling as well as by car.

Setting an appropriate movement

framework that reflects access and desire lines across a site is one of the first and most important design tasks. Where land availability allows, we will always build close to existing facilities, schools, healthcare, shops, accessible green spaces and entertainment. When, as is often the case, this is not available, we prioritise safe, direct links to off-site facilities. We work with local authorities and communities to provide the appropriate sustainable on-site amenities for the size and location of sites.

Enabling people to use active travel rather than cars requires appropriate infrastructure: safe and well-connected routes for walking and wheeling and, where possible, links to external routes. By planning movement networks early, reflecting desire lines for active travel, we are helping to reduce car dependency and to encourage healthier, more sustainable lifestyles.

### PROMISE 2: WE WILL BUILD PLACES WHERE LIFE HAPPENS

Our customers need space for recreation, relaxation and community. They want to live in vibrant, safe places. Opportunities vary hugely with site size and type, but we must explore all opportunities for how our sites can support recreation, relaxation and social interaction, from a community centre or sports pavilion to a bench for a rest or chat with neighbours. While policy sets requirements for play, it often misses the placemaking opportunity of play. We can be more creative and inclusive with play solutions, including by using natural materials instead of bright plastic and establishing 'play on the way' along green footpath links rather than just fenced-in play areas. Equipment accommodating differing levels of accessibility, and designing to the guidance of organisations such as Make Space for Girls, improves inclusivity and accessibility. These features create living neighbourhoods that enrich lives, where people meet, connect and build a sense of belonging.

### PROMISE 3: WE WILL BUILD ATTRACTIVE AND WELCOMING PLACES

Public spaces, streets, buildings and landscapes all contribute to places where our customers want to live.

When we take on a new development, one of the first things our team does is to walk the local area and the site, helping us to understand it and the surroundings. We use our analysis to guide what is retained and how new features are integrated with the development. From a masterplan, we focus down to the detail of the street, planting, trees, street furniture, boundary treatments and the integration of cars within the street scene. Every element contributes to character and identity.

Well-proportioned buildings are important, serving a variety of purposes. Some will mark gateways or junctions, helping wayfinding. Some will sit back, forming the walls that enclose our streets. All will create character, referencing local vernacular or creating a new distinctive place. By respecting the existing context and enhancing it with well-considered design and materials, we create developments rooted in their surroundings and offer lasting appeal for

generations rather than merely aping the architecture of the past.

### PROMISE 4: WE WILL BUILD SAFE PLACES

Our customers want to feel safe where they live; they want to feel that their families, children and visitors are safe.

By embedding safety into the design process, we create places where families feel secure and confident, and where communities can flourish. In the design of the streets, we follow the most recent policy and guidance to promote active travel and prioritise and protect vulnerable road users.

The design and location of active travel routes, particularly those away from streets, across open space, must factor in good visibility, natural surveillance and lighting. Finally, we avoid leftover or hidden spaces that are without clear purpose, and which may attract antisocial behaviour.

### PROMISE 5: WE WILL BUILD PLACES DESIGNED WITH NATURE

Our customers want to be close to nature and for us to design with nature in mind.

Nature enriches lives and strengthens communities. There is an increasing wealth of knowledge about the positive effects of living near nature, and we understand the need to contribute to nature's recovery. Well-designed green spaces are also more attractive to our customers. We integrate green spaces, trees and biodiversity into our designs, creating environments that support wellbeing and ecological resilience. Sustainable drainage features such as swales and ponds not only manage water but are opportunities to enhance landscapes and provide habitats. By designing with nature, we help communities thrive, improve mental health and contribute to nature's recovery.

We believe the five principles of our Placemaking Charter, and the supporting guidance framework, help create places that endure, where people feel connected, safe and proud to live. They require collaboration across disciplines and a commitment to design that balances social, economic and environmental priorities. When we get placemaking right, we create social value – supporting wellbeing, strengthening local economies and fostering inclusivity – alongside meeting the urgent need for new homes of different tenures our country needs. For a business like ours, delivering thousands of homes every year, good placemaking is fundamental to the success of what we do.

With care, we can deliver the places that people deserve: sustainable, connected neighbourhoods that foster links between homes, nature and the wider environment.

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## ABOUT THE SOCIETY

The Fabian Society is an independent left-leaning think tank and a democratic membership society with over 6,000 members. We influence political and public thinking and provide a space for broad and open-minded debate. We publish insight, analysis and opinion; conduct research and undertake major policy inquiries; convene conferences, speaker meetings and roundtables; and facilitate member debate and activism across the UK.

## ABOUT THE FABIAN HOUSING CENTRE

The Fabian Housing Centre is a major research and policy programme to help shape the implementation of the government's housing strategy and the broader housing debate across the UK.

We are developing practical but ambitious ideas to build 1.5m homes, tackle the housing crisis, and create great places to live.

FABIAN SOCIETY

FABIAN HOUSING CENTRE

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EDITED BY IGGY WOOD, BEN COOPER AND MILES WARD

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