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The Journal of the Town and Country Planning Association
September–October 2023 Volume 92 ● Number 5

- Special Section on Healthy Homes
- Hugh Ellis on retreat from the net-zero agenda
- Mark Bramah on heat networks

information and subscriptions



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a historic win in the house of lords, but still more to do



As is often the case, ahead of the summer we saw the government publish a flurry of consultations relating to planning. Among them was one on implementing the proposed plan-making reforms¹ set out in the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill. While we will have to await the Bill receiving Royal Assent before some elements of the reform are clear, the publication of the National Development Management Policies and a corresponding, properly updated, National Planning Policy Framework will also be crucial.

Where the consultation is helpful, however, is in better understanding the proposed roll-out of, and transition to, the new system. The passage of the Bill through Parliament has already taken much longer than originally expected. But assuming the Bill does receive Royal Assent, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities confirmed its intention to make the latest date for plan-makers to submit Local Plans, Spatial Development Strategies and Minerals and Waste Plans for 'examination under the current system' 30 June 2025. This is with the expectation that those plans will need to be adopted by the end of 2026 (para. 235 of the consultation).

The new-style Local Plans will then be rolled out in parallel. Assuming that the Bill receives Royal Assent without too much further delay, the intention is to have in place the necessary regulations, policy and guidance by autumn 2024. If this is achieved, a cohort of 'front runners' could begin to prepare the first new-style Local Plans from then. A second wave of local authorities could start preparing their plans in June/July 2025, with a chance to learn from the 'front runners'. The remaining authorities would then be grouped together in sets of up to 25 and 'allocated a 6 month plan-making commencement window [...], within which plan making should start' (paras 243-45 of the consultation).

Part of the need to prevent a rush of lots of new-style plans being submitted to the Planning Inspectorate at once is the new requirement that plan-making should take 30 months in total. So, staggering the development of new plans in waves is very logical. It will, however, mean that the movement to the new system for all local planning authorities will take a substantial amount of time. The exact timing will depend on the size of the group of front runners and the second wave, but, based on groups of 25, the final group could start their plan preparation as late as the end of 2031, with new-style plans in place in 2034.

This will require the reformed planning system created by the Bill (if enacted), to survive at least two general elections, and probably three.

The other consultation published in summer that the TCPA will prioritise responding to relates to 'additional flexibilities to support housing delivery'.² It sets out various proposals to further deregulate the planning system through allowing permitted development rights (PDR) in designated landscapes and removing the safeguards on the size of buildings that can be converted. The rights would also be extended to apply to hotels and hostels. Readers who are aware of the TCPA's work in the last few years will be unsurprised to read that we are strongly opposed to the proposals in the consultation for a range of reasons, including the following:

- They remove opportunities for the public to have any meaningful voice over major areas of development.
- They continue to undermine the plan-led system because the Local Plan does not fully apply to PDR decisions.
- They will further enable extremely poor-quality development in unsuitable locations, which lack basic services and harm local high street economies.
- They will further reduce developer contributions towards affordable homes, local infrastructure and amenities through cutting local tax and Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 payments.
- The rurally focused proposals will inevitably enable fragmented, car-dependent urban sprawl.

Perhaps the only positive thing from the TCPA's point of view about this consultation is that it added

weight and urgency to our work to embed our Healthy Homes Principles in the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill. In response to debates about the healthy homes amendments throughout the Bill's passage through the House of Lords the government's position has been that the current rules and policies already address the concerns about the poor quality of new homes. This simply is not the case, and the government's continued desire to expand PDR is a clear indication that it is not taking seriously the concerns that we, and others, are raising about the quality of the homes being created through this route, and the impact that those homes are having on people's health, wellbeing, and life chances.

As the article by Rosalie Callway and Sally Roscoe in this issue highlights,³ securing the Healthy Homes amendments in the Bill at Report Stage in the House of Lords was an incredible moment for the campaign. Those who have worked to influence government legislation will hopefully understand how rare and hard-fought such victories are! Which makes it even more incredible that, in the same session, votes against the government were also won on amendments relating to planning for climate mitigation and adaptation and the process by which National Development Management Policies should be consulted on and scrutinised by Parliament.

Following its Third Reading in the House of Lords, the Bill will return to the House of Commons so that MPs can consider the Lords' amendments. This is informally known as 'ping pong'. Keeping non-government amendments in the Bill will be a challenge owing to the government's majority—but the TCPA will do all it can, including drawing on the wide range of organisations who support the campaign to try to secure legislation that supports the creation of high-quality healthy homes.

● **Fiona Howie** is Chief Executive of the TCPA.

Notes

- 1 *Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: Consultation on Implementation of Plan-Making Reforms*. Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Jul. 2023, Chap. 14. www.gov.uk/government/consultations/plan-making-reforms-consultation-on-implementation/levelling-up-and-regeneration-bill-consultation-on-implementation-of-plan-making-reforms#chapter14
- 2 *Permitted Development Rights*. Consultation. Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Jul. 2023. www.gov.uk/government/consultations/permitted-development-rights
- 3 See R Callway and S Roscoe: 'Where next for the healthy homes campaign?'. *Town & Country Planning*, 2023, Vol. 92, 320–22, introducing the Special Section on Healthy Homes in this issue

The TCPA's **vision** is for homes, places and communities in which everyone can thrive. Its **mission** is to challenge, inspire and support people to create healthy, sustainable and resilient places that are fair for everyone.

Informed by the Garden City Principles, the TCPA's strategic priorities are to:



Work to secure a good home for everyone in inclusive, resilient and prosperous communities, which support people to live healthier lives.



Empower people to have real influence over decisions about their environments and to secure social justice within and between communities.



Support new and transform existing places to be adaptable to current and future challenges, including the climate crisis.

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- Affordable housing
- Community participation in planning
- Garden Cities and New Towns
- Healthy Homes Act campaign
- Healthy place-making
- New Communities Group
- Parks and green infrastructure
- Planning reform
- Planning for climate change

David Lock and Pam Warhurst awarded the Howard medal

no mandate for betrayal



Well that about wraps it up for humanity! A tempting conclusion based on the government's recent abandonment of its net-zero agenda. There has been a great deal of commentary about the real significance of the Prime Minister's announcement, which included the bizarre abandonment of a series of policies that had never existed. The damage, however, is significant, particularly in terms of the delay in phasing out gas boilers, which is a major blow to the urgent task of decarbonising our homes.

But it is the wider politicisation of the climate crisis which is deeply dangerous. The Prime Minister has sent out a signal that climate mitigation is a matter of societal choice rather than a vital necessity for our survival. He has directly sought to undermine the credibility of the Climate Change Committee (CCC) by suggesting that it is just one of a series of advisers on government policy. This is, of course, nonsense. The CCC is a prime source of climate change authority, a body established by law with a statutory function in setting carbon budgets and adaptation pathways.

We should not, however, be surprised by the Prime Minister's U-turn on net zero, because the current government's record on climate change is woeful. We are not, as the Prime Minister alleged, 'world leaders' in tackling climate change. It is true that we have some powerful natural assets such as offshore wind, which we have imperfectly begun to exploit; but, taking a wider view on mitigation and adaptation, our towns and cities lag far behind international best practice, not least compared with our European neighbours.

It is genuinely hard to tell whether the government believes in this 'world leader' status or whether it is just a cynical PR line. In many ways the latter would be better than any delusional belief that we are somehow doing enough to reduce emissions, because that implies a level of complacency which is positively dangerous for our future.

Simon Callaghan Photography — www.simoncallaghanphotography.com/



David Lock and Pam Warhurst—recipients of the Ebenezer Howard Memorial Medal

Ebenezer Howard Memorial Medals, given to mark outstanding contributions to the promotion and public understanding of Garden City Principles, have been awarded by the TCPA to David Lock CBE and Pam Warhurst CBE.

David Lock, a former Chair of the TCPA Board of Trustees and Chief Planning Adviser to the Department of the Environment when John Gummer was Secretary of State, is now a TCPA Vice-President, and Strategic Planning Advisor to David Lock Associates, a company that he founded.

Pam Warhurst co-founded Incredible Edible, an initiative dedicated to growing food locally by planting on unused land throughout the community, in what she has called 'propaganda gardening'.

At the presentation event held in Portculis House, TCPA Chief Executive said: 'In the 20th century we came together to offer solutions to overcrowding, squalor, and disease; and the same forward-looking, practical idealism is something that David Lock and Pamela Warhurst have amply demonstrated.'

But while the public abandonment of a credible route to net zero was eye-catching, the real test of a government's commitment is the detail of the law and policy that it adopts. In our world of planning, the House of Lords inflicted a stunning defeat on the government at the Report Stage of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill, inserting a new requirement that would bind planning law to the Climate Change Act 2008. The government has signalled that it will remove this measure in the House of Commons, despite its vital importance to the effective delivery of mitigation and adaptation measures.

The recent update to the National Planning Policy Framework completely ignores years of campaigning to include stronger and more detailed policy on how to actually deliver net-zero housing through Local Plans. Standing back from the mind-boggling complexity of the Levelling-up Bill's dysfunctional structure for planning, it is sobering to think that it includes not one single new measure to deal with the climate crisis. Indeed, the last time any attempt was made to strengthen the legal requirements on planning and climate change was 15 years ago, in the 2008 Planning Act. What could have been achieved in those 15 years if our ambitions for net-zero housing had been sustained or policy on onshore wind been less draconian?

There are two striking implications to the Prime Minister's announcement on net zero. First, while the measures were sold as a way of relieving the cost on working people, no-one was asking why there wasn't an effective support package for those on low incomes. Nor was there much debate about the cost of leaving people in fuel poverty because of expensive heating systems and poorly insulated homes. Abandoning the net-zero target inevitably means abandoning climate justice, because it's those on the lowest incomes and with the least resilience that will be overwhelmed by the climate chaos which will be an inevitable result of our failure to deliver net zero.

The second striking feature was the unreality in the tone of the Prime Minister's announcement. It felt like the nation was being told that the train had been slightly delayed, and not that our government had ducked the most important public policy issue in the post-war era.

We need to be honest and clear with ourselves that people are going to die unnecessarily because of this government's failure to prepare us for climate change. We are going to lose key economic benefits in terms of the green economy and accrue unnecessary costs, not least to the insurance business. The damage will be systemic and long lasting, and those who wilfully ignored the problem

at a critical moment of intervention will need to be held to account.

Given that reality, I began to cast around for some kind of historical parallel to measure the extent of the government's failure. The surrender of Singapore in 1942? The construction of the Maginot Line in the 1930s? Both are examples of grand strategic mistakes based on what, in retrospect, were seen to be catastrophic failures of analysis. But at least in both cases there was some kind of a strategy (misguided though it was). I can think of no historic parallel for a government simply giving up on a series of vital objectives, leaving a nation critically unprepared for a catastrophic future. And let's be clear: foreseeing that future requires no imagination; it is already clearly articulated in the latest climate science.

'Whatever moral authority this government thought it had on climate change and the wider future of this nation died on the podium with the Prime Minister's cancellation of a credible pathway to net zero'

The government had no mandate for such capitulation; no-one voted for climate chaos or for the half-baked expedients designed to support internal party politics. No-one voted for the fatal delay in taking the necessary action on climate adaptation, with all the growing risks to people and property that are implied. Whatever moral authority this government thought it had on climate change and the wider future of this nation died on the podium with the Prime Minister's cancellation of a credible pathway to net zero.

In the legal and policy vacuum that the Prime Minister's announcements created, we have to work doubly hard to create new and robust interventions to deal with the climate crisis that lies ahead. The TCPA is actively working to develop a programme of strategic planning which will be fit for that purpose, creating a framework of solutions which politicians can adopt 'off the shelf'. And when will the politicians reach for such solutions? Probably in the aftermath of the inevitable climate disaster which will tip our politics towards the net-zero and resilient strategy that this nation so desperately needs.

● **Dr Hugh Ellis** is Policy Director at the TCPA. The views expressed are personal.

In making new homes fit for the future, it is vital that we appreciate the importance of the basics of good design, says **Georgie Revell**

sustainable design means getting the basics right



Earlier this year I was asked to speak about the future of housing at the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) Housing Brighton conference. Understandably, sustainability was high on the agenda, and the other panellists focused on reducing energy consumption and embodied carbon and how to test new homes' performance.

Here, I would also highlight the value of simple, good design—learning from our past successes and failures to establish the factors that make homes fit for the future. These things need not cost more and should be at the top of the agenda when we design new homes.

Space and proportions

Space is not something that we can take for granted. There was nothing to regulate space in homes until about a century ago, and it was not until 1961 that the Parker Morris Committee's *Homes for Today and Tomorrow* report became a well known benchmark for sizing homes. Originally required for publicly funded housing, the standards were so well considered and well received that they became widely adopted as a mark of quality across all tenures—and are still seen as such today.

In 2015, the government conducted a national Housing Standards Review (HSR) and released the Nationally Described Space Standard (NDSS) applicable to housing of all tenures. It sets the minimum size of a home based on the number of bedspaces and gives requirements for storage, some room areas, and widths and heights. Although the NDSS has been widely adopted, it remains optional for local authorities.

Looking to the future, London has been a forerunner in space standards since the publication of the *London Housing Design Guide* in 2010, and the latest London Plan housing guidance, *Housing Design Standards* (2023),¹ has proposed 'best practice' standards that go roughly 10% beyond the NDSS.

These standards mainly address changes to lifestyles post-Covid, so are timely and relevant.

Space standards are important because they set a minimum (which is often a target) and without them it is difficult to lock in even the most basic quality, especially in areas where land values and demand for housing are high. The standards that we have are high level enough not to limit creativity and site-specific designs.

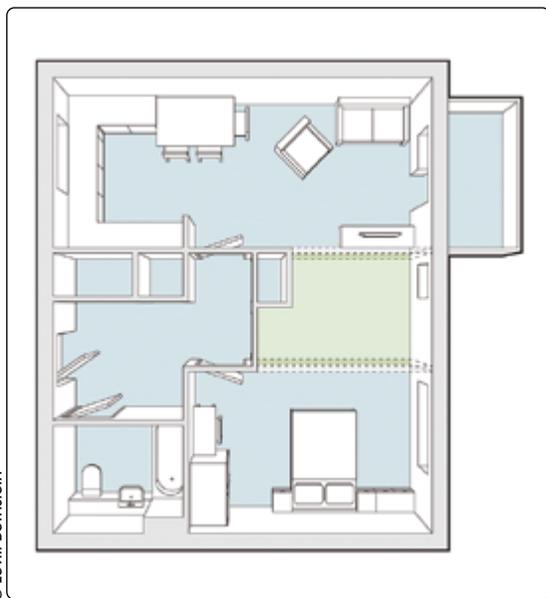
Accessibility

As part of the HSR, accessibility standards were published in Building Regulations Approved Document M: *Access to and Use of Buildings* (Volume 1: *Dwellings*). This sets out a three-tier approach to accessibility within homes—Category 1: Visitable dwellings is the minimum requirement; and Category 3 is most accessible, suitable for people in a wheelchair. It is up to the local authority to decide whether to enforce anything above Category 1.

In 2020 the government consulted on making Category 2: Accessible and adaptable dwellings the minimum for all new housing.² This proposal was widely welcomed as it levelled the playing field for developers, but sadly it has not yet been adopted. This is an issue for homes of the future because it is very likely that, during the life of a building, it will be inhabited or at least visited by someone who would benefit from the extra considerations. Frustratingly, the NDSS (which has been more widely adopted) was designed to work with Category 2, so the cost implications of the additional accessibility standards are minimal; but the benefits could be significant.

Flexibility

A flexible home can be shaped by its occupants and is more likely to be resilient to changes in lifestyles over the building's lifetime. Examples of design that allows for flexibility are non-load bearing internal walls, sliding partitions, space to add or change services, etc. These things are beneficial when situations change—temporarily or permanently—and may mean that residents can stay in their home for longer, thus helping to maintain communities. Flexibility need not cost more but, as there is no guidance or standards to



One-bedroom apartment for two people with additional 5 square metre (10%) space—the flexible central ‘room’ (highlighted in green) could be used as an occasional guest room, a hobby space, or extension of the living room or bedroom

require it, the benefits must be well communicated throughout the design process and ultimately valued by the client/developer who is invested in the building long term. It is difficult to prove this benefit to private developers who sell and move on.

Natural light

The quality of natural light is critical to the success of any home and needs to be properly considered early on in design. Low ceilings, narrow frontages and deep plans do not work and cannot be changed later. Of course, too much glazing in the wrong areas results in overheating, which is more common in modern well insulated homes. The 2021 adoption of Building Regulations Approved Document Part O to test overheating will quite rightly ensure quality of construction for this, but BRE guidance is not robust enough to protect the quality of natural light, which is critical to our health and wellbeing.

Surroundings

Homes do not start or stop at the front door; and much of what makes a house a home is the connection to the spaces beyond it. As we build at higher densities, the communal and public areas will have to work harder and must be well considered.

Communal areas offer places for people to get to know their neighbours and, if well designed, can

offer a valuable extension to a living space. Public areas are also at a premium on high-density schemes, and they need to work well. Spaces will not feel equitable, safe and welcoming if they are poorly lit and overrun with bins and cars. These areas also offer valuable areas for socialising and play.

To get the landscape and communal areas right, we need to speak to the community that they will serve.

‘We must not forget the basics of good design. Homes must bring joy, feel welcoming, and make residents feel proud’

Two hundred years ago, Georgians could not have predicted how we live today, but the homes they built have turned out to be some of our most treasured. They are well proportioned and bright, have a clear hierarchy of uses, and have proven to be surprisingly adaptable. Sadly, that cannot be said for many of the homes that we have built in the last 50 years.

It is important that we expedite our industry’s work to ensure that homes consume less energy and reduce embodied carbon, but as these are increasingly regulated we must not forget the basics of good design. Homes must bring joy, feel welcoming, and make residents feel proud, making them less likely to fall into disrepair. Well loved homes will be more fit for the future.

● **Georgie Revell** is an Architect and Associate at Levitt Bernstein, a practice of architects, landscape architects, and urban designers. She works in the specialist housing studio on a range of housing-led, mixed-use and regeneration schemes. She also specialises in housing standards and guidance. The views expressed are personal.

Notes

- 1 *London Plan Guidance: Housing Design Standards*. Mayor London. Greater London Authority, Jun. 2023. www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/planning/implementing-london-plan/london-plan-guidance/housing-design-standards-lpg
- 2 See *Raising Accessibility Standards for New Homes: Summary of Consultation Responses and Government Response*. Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Jul. 2022. www.gov.uk/government/consultations/raising-accessibility-standards-for-new-homes/outcome/raising-accessibility-standards-for-new-homes-summary-of-consultation-responses-and-government-response

further turmoil ahead



As I write this article, party conference season is upon us—probably the last before the next general election, even though it could be over a year away. If we are to believe what the polls are predicting, a new Labour government could be in charge next year, but there is always a chance that there will be some form of coalition. A year is a long time in politics, and a lot can happen, so it could even be a continuation of a Conservative government but with a very different composition and, potentially, a different Prime Minister. So what does such speculation mean for those working within the world of planning?

We have a pretty good idea of the direction in which the current government is travelling—although there have been many twists and turns along the way since the process of planning reform started over three years ago with the publication of the Planning White Paper.¹

What is less clear is whether the new system that will come out at the other end will actually provide a coherent approach to growth, let alone sustainable growth. There are still a lot of details to be sorted out, so we do not know what the new system in its totality will look like after the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill (LURB) has received Royal Assent.² However, the government has been fairly consistent on a number of things, especially on retaining the national target of delivering 300,000 new homes a year, protecting the Green Belt, seeking more community involvement in plan-making, and insisting on the need for all development to be beautiful.

The first substantive consultation on both changes to current national policy and the longer-term changes as a result of the LURB was published last December.³ This has since been followed by several further consultations on specific proposals, such as the new Infrastructure Levy, Environmental Outcomes Reports, and, most recently, plan-making.⁴ There are still some gaps, and some are very big. We still do

not know what 'tests of soundness' will be applied to Local Plans through the examination process or how the proposed new 'alignment test' will work to support strategic planning when the duty to co-operate is revoked through the LURB. We are expecting these matters to be the subject of yet more consultations, possibly before the year is out.

Alongside the changes being proposed to the statutory planning system, the government has also published its long-term plan for housing.⁵ This was announced with much fanfare just as Parliament went into summer recess, with a commitment from the government:

'to a new era of regeneration, inner-city densification and housing delivery across England, with transformational plans to supply beautiful, safe, decent homes in places with high-growth potential in partnership with local communities'.

It includes some fairly hefty proposals, with Secretary of State Michael Gove setting out plans for an urban renaissance across English cities, including 'supercharging' Cambridge as Europe's science capital, making Barrow a new powerhouse of the North (which I think was a surprise to many!), and further strategic development in East London. All will be supported by new Development Corporations and by a new 'supersquad' of expert planners.

Alongside all this, the government has also vowed to unblock the 140,000 homes that are being held up because of rules around the impact of housing on water quality and the requirements on housebuilders to deliver 'nutrient neutrality'. Although this was already being tackled to some degree through the LURB, more amendments have recently been proposed to loosen the stranglehold that this is having on housing development across the country.⁶

It is surprising that, with very little time left before the general election, it has taken this long for the government to come up with what amounts to an attempt to set out what 'levelling up' actually means spatially. This is clearly a shot across the bow of the Labour leadership, reclaiming some important territory lost earlier in the year when Sir Keir Starmer jumped into the debate about housing and the Green Belt. Following the government's shift away from what was considered mandatory housing

targets set nationally for Local Plans and firming up on protecting the Green Belt, the Labour Party set out to claim the housing-ownership crown traditionally held by the Conservative Party. In a speech to the British Chamber of Commerce in May the Labour

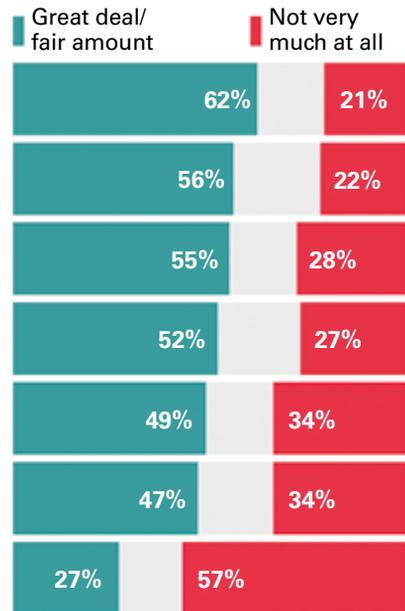
Leader promised to reform the planning system, with Labour championing development and businesses, choosing 'builders, not the blockers'.⁷

Although housing and planning have always been key battlegrounds for local council elections, since

A restrictive planning system features among reasons for under-supply, but other factors are more salient

As you may know, Britain is currently building fewer homes per year than the government has said it wants to see built. How much, if at all, do you think each of the following has contributed to this?

- The financial position of local councils preventing them building more new homes
- Lack of interest from politicians in building new homes
- Local opposition to building new homes
- The planning system, including the Green Belt, limiting where it is possible to build new homes
- The difficulties for developers in finding sites to build new homes
- The financial position of developers preventing them from building more new homes
- Lack of demand from people wanting to live in new homes



Source: Ipsos Base: 2,121 GB adults aged 18–75, 14–17 July 2023



Question 7

In England, 13% of land is classified as Green Belt, which is undeveloped land around or between large urban areas on which building is not allowed. Some people argue that this should be retained to prevent large urban areas from spreading out or merging and protect agricultural or 'greenfield' land. Others argue that it contains some 'brownfield' land suitable for building and not building on the Green Belt means we cannot meet housing needs. Please indicate whether you agree more with Statement A, or more with Statement B, if either.

STATEMENT A

We need to retain the current Green Belt, even if it restricts the country's ability to meet housing needs.

STATEMENT B

We need to place more focus on meeting the country's housing needs, even if this comes at the expense of some Green Belt land.

60% statement A

21% statement B



- % Strongly agree with statement A
- % Tend to agree with statement A
- % Agree with neither A nor B more
- % Tend to agree with statement B
- % Strongly agree with statement B
- % Don't know

Source: Ipsos Base: 1,850 adults in England aged 18–75, 14–17 July 2023



Public views on the Green Belt, as revealed in a recent Ipsos survey⁸

the 2021 Chesham and Amersham by-election, when planning was considered a key factor in the Liberal Democrats' winning strategy, planning now seems to feature in the national media on a daily basis. The debate has become much more polarised, with those defending the environment and protection of the Green Belt in one corner and those fiercely fighting to get more new homes delivered in the other.

But we all know that the issue is much more complex than this, and most people acknowledge that there is a need for both. This dilemma was captured in a recent poll undertaken by Ipsos for the *Economist*,⁸ which found that 60% of those surveyed would retain the current Green Belt 'even if it restricts the country's ability to meet housing needs', yet 52% blamed the planning system, including the Green Belt, for restrictions on housing supply.

The confusion and the passion that often comes hand in hand with arguments around housing and the Green Belt should be sufficient warning to the Labour Party to tread carefully into this debate. If it is to win over both sides, there needs to be a clear, coherent and deliverable approach set out before the next general election. Local communities absolutely have to be involved in what happens in their area—they have to live with the consequences of any planning decision. The Green Belt must continue to play its vital role in containing urban areas if we are to encourage city regeneration and have a fighting chance of meeting climate objectives, especially net zero. Much more housing, especially affordable housing, is definitely needed, but it has to be directed to the best places, not the least worst.

Alongside the debates about housing and the Green Belt, and coming a close second in terms of polarisation, is the current focus on energy infrastructure and the impact that it has on our land, especially when competing with farmland. A recent review of how we plan for electricity supply infrastructure conducted by the Electricity Networks Commissioner on behalf of the government concluded that energy National Policy Statements are badly out of date, and that there is no long-term spatial plan to guide investment in the infrastructure needed.⁹

The Labour Party has jumped into this debate as well, promising to streamline the process for national infrastructure projects and promising to make Britain a 'clean energy superpower'.¹⁰ The problem is, there simply is no long-term spatial plan to guide any development or national investment priorities.

Since the initial claim that a Labour government would support the builders, not the blockers, there has been some hints about what this means in

practice. In a recent article in the *Times*,¹¹ details of the current thinking, leaked by 'party insiders', set out how nationally identified new towns could play an important role in meeting housing needs and how a more speedy approach to planning for national infrastructure, particularly energy infrastructure, would be a priority.

The last Labour government got many things right in its planning reforms. It recognised the need for an integrated approach to growth, with strategic spatial, transport and economic matters managed through a co-ordinated approach at the regional level. While this was not a national plan as such, the sum of the parts did add up to a national strategy, with clear investments, managed and co-ordinated through the English Regions Network (which helped to co-ordinate the work of all the Regional Assemblies) and the Government Regional Offices. Cross (regional) boundary co-operation was commonplace, and there was even a joint Sub-Regional Strategy for the Milton Keynes and South Midlands (MKSM) area which straddled three regions (see the diagram from the strategy on the next page).

Crucially, one government department—the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (which would later become the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in 2002)—had overall responsibility for spatial planning, transport and environment policy. Policies and priorities at the regional level were set within a clear national context, building on the Labour Party's legacy of the Regional Economic Planning Councils and Regional Planning Committees in the 1960s and 1970s.

During the first few years of the 1997 Labour government, several important policy documents were published: an Urban White Paper,¹² developed to implement the recommendations of Lord Richard Rogers' Urban Task Force report of 1999,¹³ a Rural White Paper,¹⁴ and the 'Sustainable Communities Plan'¹⁵—the latter initially set out a long-term growth plan for the wider South East, and had significant influence on the priorities set out in both the Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs) and Regional Economic Strategies (RESs) across the South East, the East of England and the East Midlands, and in parts of London (the Thames Gateway). This would later be joined by specific priorities set out in the 'Northern Way', which covered the North West, North East and Yorkshire and Humber regions.¹⁶

In 2009, the government shifted the dial on its approach to growth with the introduction of Integrated Regional Strategies, intended to replace RSSs and RESs.¹⁷ They would have taken the approach to growth across England to the most



Spatial diagram from the Milton Keynes & South Midlands Sub-Regional Strategy of March 2005

mature level of long-term spatial and investment planning that the country had seen since the 1960s and 1970s, but practice was short lived when the regional architecture was dismantled by the 2010 coalition government. Along with this went any hope of an integrated national approach to strategic planning to support long-term sustainable growth.

The Labour Party does not have to go back in time to develop a contemporary approach to sustainable growth, but there are very clear lessons to be learned from previous approaches both in the 1960/1970s and the 2000s—both good and bad.

First, and key to any future success of plans for growth, is a systems approach, with a clear

policy framework for housing, the economy, the environment, and how national priorities will be delivered. This needs to be integrated across government departments and their delivery agencies, but it also needs to have clear boundaries around responsibility and accountability between central and local government, and combined authorities where relevant. To be effective, there also needs to be clear spatial articulation of what this means across the country—and this requires some form of national plan. Without it, there will continue to be fragmentation of national policies and opposing priorities from different government departments, with the Treasury continuing to hold all the purse strings.

Whatever the new system looks like, we need to do much better on how decision-makers at all levels engage with local communities. There needs to be clarity around what will be decided by central government and what flexibility there is locally to influence how any central strategy plays out on the ground. Part of the problem that we have had over the last decade is that local communities have been overpromised in terms of the role they can play, both at the plan-making stage and through the development management process.

Some decisions will always be needed 'in the interests of the greater good', and this requires judgements to be made, depending on what the priorities are, both nationally and locally. That is the role of politicians, but the decision-making process is often dominated by those that shout the loudest and have the most ability to influence the democratic process. Effective local engagement has to start with a much more honest and transparent conversation at all levels if any new approach to planning is to be delivered. If this is not factored into planning reform proposals from any government, implementation will prove extremely challenging, given how well organised, vocal and driven local communities have proved to be.

'Effective local engagement has to start with a much more honest and transparent conversation at all levels if any new approach to planning is to be delivered. If this is not factored into planning reform proposals from any government, implementation will prove extremely challenging'

Other essentials for a coherent approach would be a much more effective system of strategic planning. There have been hints that this will be part of Labour's overall approach, but there are no details yet on what this might look like, especially in the absence of the legal requirements of the duty to co-operate, which will be revoked through the LURB. Strategic planning is the essential pivot between the national and local levels and, if managed at the right geographical scale, can help to articulate what national policy and priorities actually mean on the

ground. The duty to co-operate never filled the void left when regional planning was abolished in 2010, and we have effectively lost a decade of long-term planning for housing, strategic infrastructure (including energy and water), and the impacts of climate change as a result.

Of course, as I have discussed in these pages previously¹⁸, none of this can be achieved without the right skills and capacity within the development and planning industry, in both the private and public sectors.

A new government will have to move quickly to catch up, but the challenge will be to come up with an effective approach that can be implemented without throwing everything up in the air. The expansion of Spatial Development Strategies, as set out in the LURB, is one way forward, but this would have to become mandatory and not, as currently proposed, optional. At the very least, the government would have to identify areas where a strategic plan is needed and should therefore be a requirement to manage growth—which would probably be every city and large town across England.

We are beginning to understand a bit more about what the continuation of a Conservative government might mean for planning, and there is more speculation on what a Labour government might mean, but there is nothing yet about what the Liberal Democrats' priority would be for planning. The general election result will be influenced by a number of factors, including how many young people go out and vote, whether the Labour Party can release the stranglehold that the Scottish National Party has on Scotland, and whether the 'red wall' returns to its traditional home of the Labour Party.

The Lib Dems could see an increase in seats in the House of Commons, especially across the Home Counties, South West London (where the Leader resides) and the South West, all of which have seen significant swings from Conservatives at the local level. The messaging throughout the local election campaigns has been focused on protecting the environment (especially in areas where the Green Party is a political opponent) and supporting the Green Belt—especially around the cities. The Lib Dems also have a clear track record on localism, given that it was part of the government that introduced the concept in 2011.

Given their experience as part of the former coalition government, the Lib Dems are likely to make much clearer demands in any future coalition, and the focus would probably be on electoral reform, with planning a lower priority. If this happens, the opportunity for major reforms beyond what will already have been

introduced through the LURB and associated national planning policy changes is likely to be limited, at least in the early part of any new coalition administration.

Whoever wins the next general election and whatever the composition of the new government, we know we are in for more turmoil as the new system, whatever it looks like, is introduced. We should be used to this by now, given how chaotic the last three years have been—but it is time to move on and have some stability so that we can actually start maximising the benefits of a well functioning planning system and use it to help address the significant challenges that we face.

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Notes

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- 2 The Bill is currently programmed for Royal Assent before the end of 2023
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- 15 See Sections 5–30 in *Planning for Sustainable Housing and Communities: Sustainable Communities in the South East*. HC77-I. Eighth Report of Session 2002–03. ODPM: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee. House of Commons, Apr. 2003. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmselect/cm200203/cmselect/cm200203/77/77.pdf>
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& country planning?

Having spent time explaining land use planning to national government and international and local audiences, **Richard Wakeford** considers whether ChatGPT could be a useful tool

making planning palatable through storytelling and AI



In the sprawling realm of urban and rural planning, one challenge has remained consistent: translating complex policies into digestible narratives for the public. How do we in the planning and land use arena make the intricate web of planning law, policy and guidance relatable to people's daily lives? It's a conundrum further complicated by modern-day information overload.

One wet morning with the wider family holidaying at home, I was introduced to an interesting concept. It uses generative artificial intelligence, in this case ChatGPT, to help translate complex content in ways that communicate basic understanding. Given my interest in planning, we used the intersection of storytelling techniques and the innovative use of AI to communicate the relevance of new planning laws.

We produced an example drawing on scenes reminiscent of the beloved BBC radio series *The Archers*. How would the characters grasp the principles in key planning legislation and policy, such as the Town and Country Planning Act of 1990 and the National Planning Policy Framework of 2012? Imagine characters gathered at the iconic setting of the Village Hall in Ambridge in 1990:

Jill: 'So, this new Act, the Town and Country Planning Act... it's changed quite a few things, hasn't it?'

Bert: 'Aye, it has... Giving a vision makes it easier to get your head around, I suppose.'

Joe: 'Vision or not, it feels like we'll be dealing with the council even more now.'

Through such scenes, policies are morphed into stories—tales of community upheaval due to a new bypass, dreams of housing for young families, or concerns over local habitats. And new planning laws, once deemed dry and tedious, can become intimate tales of community spirit and change. The concept could be applied to any change of law or policy.

Here, AI, especially delivered through platforms such as ChatGPT, offers a unique advantage. With a vast repository of knowledge, they can swiftly comprehend policy changes and transform them into relatable narratives tailored to a particular audience. Using AI as a tool, planning authorities might find it useful to draft narratives for a public not familiar with the intricacies of our legislation and guidance, visualise potential community responses, and even anticipate questions.

Storytelling is an age-old concept and has been a primary medium of communication for ages. Situating land use planning changes within the confines of familiar narratives can make policies more approachable and understandable.

So, imagine local councils adopting a storytelling approach. Short video series or animated explainers could delve into new development plans. Fictional characters, representative of the community's diverse fabric, could navigate these policy shifts, making the implications resonate on a personal level. Creating stories, especially those crafted with the insight of AI, could foster deeper community engagement. With characters and narratives that mirror their concerns, residents could become more than passive policy recipients; they might become active participants.

The ease of dissemination via platforms such as YouTube or local streaming services means that these narratives can reach wide audiences. Moreover, councils could involve local drama troupes or schools to create the voices, ensuring a convincing reflection of the community's voice.

At the crossroads of rapid urban development and information bombardment, a synergy of storytelling and AI could offer a promising way forward. By turning intricate planning policy into compelling narratives, can we foster more understanding, engagement, and community unity? It's high time that planning and policy announcements weren't just pronounced by Ministers and local government leaders but also expressed in language that can be truly understood and felt.

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on receipt of the howard medal



Simon Callaghan Photography—www.simoncallaghanphotography.com/



David Lock at the Portcullis House reception at which he was awarded the Ebenezer Howard Memorial Medal (inset)

I was given only 'two or three minutes' to respond to the TCPA award of the prestigious and humbling Ebenezer Howard Memorial Medal in the Attlee Room of Portcullis House in Westminster on 19 June 2023.¹ But I broke this rule as I had prepared a list of points that I was determined to make. I take the opportunity of this column to write a handful of paragraphs on each, in properly considered complete sentences, for the record.

First, we should respect the planners who have worked hard for their professional qualification, and have knowledge to share about the art and science of planning. When Ebenezer Howard's *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* was published in 1898² town and country planning was an activity for

some architects, engineers, surveyors, landscape architects, and public health professionals. The Town Planning Institute did not come into being until 1914, and was bumped and jostled by the other institutions until, eventually, in the 1960s it became possible to study planning as a core degree or diploma, not just as a postgraduate extra.³

Planners commit years of their life to learning, followed by on-the-job practice to get the shape of the social, economic and environmental contest which takes place over the use of land. Everyone else gets on with their busy lives; but when we find ourselves, one way or another, drawn into a land use contest, we need planners for their knowledge about the forces at work (some wholesome, some

dark) and the best way of expressing our advice to our elected representatives.

Unthinking persons regard planning as a mechanism, operated by planners in a sort of barista mode, into which facts can be tipped and the 'right' answer will drop out. That is nonsense. Planners learn that quantifiable information has to be weighed in 'the planning balance' along with the unquantifiable hopes and ambitions, selfishness and deceptions which motivate various interested parties.

It is a fact that governments since 2010 have dismantled the bigger planning picture for regions and sub-regions, setting decision-makers adrift, and laying minefields of contradictory processes and waving false flags of what development may now be welcome. The Garden Cities and New Towns movement thumps the tub that, to help us all, planning must also deal with long-wave inter-generational issues that transcend the short-termism of politicians. The bigger planning picture is essential: wisely conceived, it will provide a degree of flexibility about speed and detailed design, but will be firm about the structuring framework of public space and corridors for movement.

Second, and another lesson proven by the Garden Cities and New Towns movement, the planning system should help us focus our major effort on doing a few big things, really well. Planning for urban growth or decline, and to enable healthier and more productive lives in a sustainable environment, is work that takes decades and will serve the needs of several generations and their large geography. Running a planning system that deals only with a myriad of little things pleases no-one. It is not what planners have been trained for.

Third is a truth about which it is hard to convince large development companies or public sector agencies. While it is tough enough to design and implement good-quality, well connected and distinctive neighbourhoods in towns and cities, that is mostly a matter of 'hardware'. The work can be drawn, measured, costed, phased, and put out to contract and checked after delivery. The more difficult and expensive—and little understood—task is the cultivation of the 'software' of place: social and economic development requires particular focus, special skills, and real commitment. People and enterprises arriving in a new place from multiple directions need help to grow their local network and institutions. What might have taken 200 years to develop in an old town or city has to be helped into being within two generations. The cultural development of place—its music and arts—needs particular encouragement.

It is not possible for housebuilders or development agencies which parachute themselves into a locality while headquartered elsewhere, and with other projects to deliver, to 'live the dream' and properly commit their people, their resources and their time to grow a successful community. Creating skimpy and rootless places only feeds any prejudice in host communities, fuels resistance to incoming development, and stokes the sarky sneers of metropolitan commentators.

Last I refer to friendships. In my life as a planner, starting work straight from college in June 1970, I have toiled in many fields: in development control in local government; in the UK's first national Planning Aid service at the TCPA; in a New Town Development Corporation; and, with the shrivelling of the public sector, in private consultancy, in due course taking the step in 1988 of founding my eponymous consultancy, which thrives today and is owned for all the staff by an Employee Benefit Trust.

I have never had to toil alone in these fields—in each episode of my career I have found fellow enthusiasts and supportive groups who have a real determination to see our lives and our environment made better.

Personally, my rock and my anchor throughout the journey through planning that has led me to receiving this precious Medal is my wife Jeanette. She has my heart-felt thanks for her total support and kind wisdom.

● **David Lock CBE** is Strategic Planning Adviser at David Lock Associates. He is a Vice-President and former Chair of the TCPA, which he joined as a student in 1968 and where he worked as the UK's first Planning Aid Officer. The views expressed are personal.

Notes

- 1 The Howard Memorial Medal is awarded 'to recognise and celebrate someone who has made an outstanding contribution to the promotion and public understanding of the Garden City Principles'
- 2 Later editions retitled this as *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*. The Garden City Association renamed itself the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association (in 1909) and then the Town and Country Planning Association (in 1941)
- 3 The Schuster Committee on Qualifications of Planners (Schuster Committee) of 1950 established the case for town planning to be a distinctive field of endeavour, and the Robbins Report (1963) and Heyworth Report (1965) enabled the educational framework for a full-time planning degree course. See G Cherry: *The Evolution of British Town Planning: A History of Town Planning in the United Kingdom during the 20th Century and of the Royal Town Planning Institute, 1914–74*. Leonard Hill Books, 1974 (Chapter 9, on education)

affordable rural housing — tackling the ‘land question’ on rural exception sites

Phoebe Stirling, Nick Gallent and **Iqbal Hamiduddin** report on research into the development of affordable homes on rural exception sites in England and the increasing complexities around cross-subsidy support and incentives for landowners, which risk inflating land price expectation and undermining this key mechanism of delivery to meet local housing needs



English Rural Housing Association

In small towns and villages just around half the number of affordable houses required are actually built

Permissible use, along with locational attributes and infrastructure connectivity, determines the price of land. Land allocated for residential use typically has a far higher value than land for industrial, commercial, institutional or community use, or for agricultural use.

The premium it commands is driven by, and also drives, the demand for housing and the creation of speculative land markets. In areas where housing is particularly expensive, as in London and much of the South East of England, the value of land allocated

in Local Plans for housing development is central to the affordability crisis, a fundamental aspect of which is a shortage of available land on which to build non-market affordable homes.

The most common model for delivering affordable housing is to do so on land allocated in Local Plans for housing development, by seeking planning gain from housing developers in the form of Section 106 contributions. Affordable housing is provided as a proportion of all new market housing being built, with housing associations and other registered affordable housing providers (RPs) brought in to develop or buy the affordable units that are required on these sites.

But developers' legal right to negotiate down the level of their Section 106 contributions—where it risks reducing profits below the 'competitive level'—often results in fewer affordable homes being built than are officially required in Local Plans. This is particularly true outside of the cities in small towns and villages, where almost half the number of affordable houses required are actually built.¹ In these rural areas, there is an additional challenge created by the fact that settlements are smaller and spread out across a large area, meaning that developers may not want to build in the places where affordable housing is most needed.

The need for affordable homes

All this means that house prices and the market value of residential land often preclude the provision of affordable housing where it is most needed in rural areas—particularly in the smallest settlements, including small villages and hamlets. Affordable housing is crucial for these areas both economically, by enabling people to live where they work and providing access to a range of local jobs, and socially, by situating people in important social networks—allowing young children to attend local schools, for instance, or allowing adult children to remain living close to their parents.

Rural RPs exist for this purpose, delivering a service that the market cannot; but even with public grant from Homes England, privately raised loans and reinvestment of their surpluses, without land value being addressed rural RPs would struggle to build homes to be let or sold at an affordable price. This is why a mechanism is required that addresses residential land value head on, enabling RPs to find low-cost sites on which to build.

Since 1991, rural exception sites (RESs) have provided a policy mechanism for releasing land for affordable housing that would not otherwise be allocated for residential use. When the policy was introduced, housebuilding would be granted on these sites only in the 'exceptional' circumstance that all the housing would be affordable. This explicitly tackled the price of land: by allowing provision on land not allocated for residential development, the policy was intended to remove the inflationary

Table 1
Local authorities with the most affordable homes on rural exception sites, 2017–2022

| Local authority | Number of affordable homes |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| Cornwall | 1,097 |
| Shropshire | 264 |
| Sedgemoor | 185 |
| North Norfolk | 101 |
| Derbyshire Dales | 93 |
| South Cambridgeshire | 89 |
| Cheshire West and Chester | 86 |
| East Hampshire | 85 |
| Winchester | 68 |
| Stroud | 65 |

Source: Local Authority Housing Statistics Data Returns—Affordable Housing Supply, 2017–2022

pressures of open-market housing delivery on these sites, reduce the cost impediment to affordable housing delivery, and make more sites in rural areas available to rural RPs.

Delivery on rural exception sites

In reality, however, the RES policy has not been widely used, and has not delivered a great number of affordable homes nationally.² While a significant proportion of all rural affordable housing has been created using this policy, showing its potential, this does not mean that, overall, delivery is particularly high (see Table 1). Illustrating this point, the policy was used to deliver affordable housing in only 66 of 144 rural local authority areas between 2017 and 2022, with almost a third of delivery occurring in Cornwall.

So why are rural exception sites not more widely used to deliver the affordable houses needed in rural areas? In investigating this question, we hypothesised that the supply of affordable sites and landowners' expectations have remained critical impediments to progressing small housing schemes on rural exception sites. However, the actual value of RES plots, and what it takes to incentivise landowners to sell them for housing development, have both remained relatively obscure.

The policy started out with an assumption that rural or agricultural land made available for RES development would be sold at a price based on, but not limited to, agricultural value.³ This kept land values low and made acquisition viable for RPs, while also meaning that landowners could negotiate a price slightly above current-use value, incentivising a sale. However, since 2012 the National Planning Policy Framework has stated that 'small numbers [A proportion' from the 2018 revision onwards] of market homes may be allowed [on the site] at the

Table 2**Case studies of rural exception site developments by English Rural Housing Association**

| Parish | Local authority area | Number of affordable homes | Number of market homes | Date completed |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------|--|-------------------|
| Burstow | Tandridge District Council | 3 affordable homes | None | 2022 |
| Chiddingstone | Sevenoaks District Council | 8 affordable homes | 3 open-market homes | Not yet completed |
| Dunsfold | Waverley Borough Council | 6 affordable homes | 2 homes for discounted market sale | 2020 |
| East Boldre | New Forest National Park Authority | 2 affordable homes | Foundations and access road for a workshop | Unsuccessful |
| Hambledon | Waverley Borough Council | 5 affordable homes | 2 open-market homes (bungalows) | Not yet completed |
| Hernhill | Swale Borough Council | 6 affordable homes | 2 open-market homes (bungalows) | 2022 |
| Leaveland near Throwley | Swale Borough Council | 6 affordable homes | 2 open-market homes (bungalows) | 2019 |
| West Kingsdown | Sevenoaks District Council | 10 affordable homes | 2 open-market homes (bungalows) | Not yet completed |

local authority's discretion, for example where essential to enable the delivery of affordable units without grant funding'. This cross-subsidy is intended to generate funds to cover the cost of the land, making it viable for RPs to purchase these sites without grant funding. But the viability of each scheme and the amount of market development required is calculated on a case-by-case basis, often by subcontracted consultants, meaning that there is room for uncertainty about how much market development landowners and RPs can expect on RES plots, and what exactly is required to cover the price of the land.

There is also a sense that the unit price of RES plots has risen since the introduction of the policy in the 1990s. While there is a common conception that RES plots cost between £10,000 and £12,000, these values may not reflect reality, particularly when accounting for the additional value generated by cross-subsidy and further incentives. This means that landowners' expectations of the value that they can achieve by selling RES plots is unclear and may be changing, and could strengthen their power to limit the supply of rural land by holding on to plots that do not achieve their expectations.

Research with English Rural Housing Association

In order to investigate this, working with English Rural Housing Association, we compiled and examined several case studies of affordable housing delivery on RES plots (see Table 2), most of which

were successful despite the challenge that land cost and site availability can pose. We focused on the role of rural RPs and the work that they do when incentivising landowners to sell their land under the RES policy, as well as on learning about their work with parish councils, local planners, and other local groups involved in RES projects.

There is a particular research gap around the more informal, relational work that goes into securing these plots of land for affordable housing. Understanding how RP staff work on the ground to secure the sale and successful development of RES plots provides us with an insight into what works in practice, and what else might be needed to broaden the success of rural exception site policy.

Crucially, our investigation suggests that the rent expectation of landowners, and the value that they receive in exchange for RES plots, have grown substantially since the policy was first introduced.

Registered providers as co-ordinators

The first thing to observe is that, when securing the sale of a rural exception site, RPs must work very closely with landowners, but this task is not limited to establishing the terms of exchange for the land. RPs, alongside the rural housing enablers that are often now embedded within local authorities, must also help landowners navigate what can be a time-consuming and complicated process, in which numerous local stakeholders come to the table with different interests, priorities, and capacity for conflict. In this sense, on top of acting as the developer,

Table 3**What does an RES project look like?**

| While no project is the same from the RP perspective, the general model can look like this: | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Housing needs surveys are used to determine the level of need for affordable housing locally. |
| 2 | Site searches are performed to identify all potential sites in the area. This could involve a 'walkabout', where the parish council and RP officers walk around the local area assessing possible sites. If a specific site has already been proposed, either by the landowner themselves or by the parish council, a site search should be performed anyway, to satisfy the planning authority that this is the most appropriate site for development. |
| 3 | At the point that the RP becomes involved, it is beneficial to secure the support of the parish council, if this has not already been established. |
| 4 | Once a site has been identified and a provisional agreement to proceed has been made between the landowner and the RP (and preferably also the parish council), a pre-application discussion can be held with the local planning authority, making sure that it is broadly happy with the site and access, making further enquiries with the statutory authorities, and making sure that the requisite services (such as highway connection, etc.) are available. |
| 5 | At this stage the RP will also look to move forward with a more formal agreement with the landowner. The first step is the Heads of Terms, which is not legally binding, but sets out in principle the terms of sale. The Heads of Terms will establish that the landowner owns the land, providing a copy of the title deed to make sure that there are no caveats or obligations that prevent development. The price is also established at this point. |
| 6 | After the Heads of Terms are agreed, a legally binding agreement will be set out in the Option Agreement to sell the land subject to gaining planning permission. |
| 7 | If pre-application discussions are positive, this provides the security to move forward with a planning application, including a public consultation to receive comments and objections from the local community. |
| 8 | If planning permission is granted, this represents a watershed moment in the project timeline. A contractor will be identified, which will usually involve a formal tender process that is managed by the housing association. A surveyor would also be engaged to look after the on-site, day-to-day aspects of the project, on behalf of the RP. |
| 9 | The interviews and case studies that we undertook for our research suggest that successful projects are those with the most transparent and open dynamics between all parties. It is therefore important to keep all parties in touch and updated on all developments throughout the project. There will be multiple back-and-forth exchanges throughout. |
| 10 | A nominations agreement will be drawn up to allocate the housing to local residents, to be included in the Section 106 agreement. This includes making sure that any buyers of discounted-sale housing are not put in a position that they cannot afford. |
| 11 | At completion, the RP's housing management team will take over from the contractor. |

buying the land from landowners and managing delivery, RPs play a central role, alongside rural housing enablers, in facilitating co-ordination and brokering relationships between landowners and the other interested parties.

What does this look like? RES projects differ from traditional housing delivery in several ways (see Table 3). One important feature is that these schemes always give priority to new residents that have a local connection to the area, as well as a need for affordable housing. This local connection ensures that residents will be found from those within or engaged with the local area, and that developments form an extension of the existing community.

Another related feature is that parish councillors and individuals from the local community have far greater capacity to influence the design and progression of rural exception site schemes than they might with open-market housing development, or with general-needs affordable housing development. This allows the housing built on rural exception sites to be specific to local requirements, and means that no two RES schemes are the same. However, it also means that securing planning permission requires intensive local governance. Levels of public opposition can make or break a scheme, so public planning consultations can be hugely important to manage the concerns of local residents, if they are



A range of additional development is often required to incentivise landowners to release land for affordable housing under the RES policy

going to feel heard and come to support the project. Each project must also be considered carefully on its own terms by local planners, which makes progressing schemes more time consuming.

These unique aspects can be a huge strength but also create uncertainty and increase the length of RES projects compared with standard residential development (the research underpinning this article revealed that between five and eight years was not uncommon)—meaning that landowners can feel that they are taking on significant risk.

Since it is the RP that purchases the land, it has become their job to manage that risk—by forging and maintaining relationships with parish councils, parishioners, local planners, ward councillors, independent community organisations, and the statutory authority; keeping in regular contact with all parties and maintaining the momentum of the project. Using a joined-up approach to communicating with these parties can create a more open environment and foster ongoing support for RES projects, but this is time consuming and requires ongoing back-and-forth exchanges to make sure that all possible factors affecting development have been considered.

When in one case, for example, a local action group formed in opposition to the scheme and three members were voted onto the parish council, the RP invited them to become part of the project's design group. This extended the length of the project, but meant that the group were really listened to, and may have given them a clearer

sense of the project's goals and constraints. While this kind of collaborative approach can be hard work, in this case the group withdrew their opposition.

It is therefore the case that rural RPs do much more than work with landowners to secure the sale of RES plots. They usually take on the role of project co-ordinators, managing the planning process and securing local buy-in. This role comes at a cost, and requires a significant amount of upfront consultation.

Negotiating with landowners

When it comes to working directly with landowners, it has become very common to build additional market housing units for cross-subsidy, which are then retained by the landowner in exchange for the land. Two of our cases can be used to illustrate this: Chiddingstone, which at the time of writing is still in progress; and East Boldre, which was eventually unsuccessful (see Table 2).

In each case, the landowners had previously applied for planning permission to build on their land, but had not been successful. One had sought to build 11 open-market homes in order to maximise the value of the unused site; the other to extend their commercial activities by building a workshop for their local manufacturing business. These individuals saw the rural exception site policy as a lever with which to make some of this additional development possible, by combining it with affordable housing. With no strict policy about additional development on rural exception sites for landowners' benefit, this means that RPs must enter into negotiation with

landowners who are not otherwise interested in selling the land at or near agricultural value.

In one of these two cases, negotiations led to eight affordable houses being built on the site, with three additional open-market houses built on land retained by the landowner, to cover the cost of the land. In the second case, the landowner requested £50,000 for enough land for two affordable houses, and an additional facility for his own business. The RP eventually agreed to pay £20,000 for each plot, to include the workshop in the planning application, and to provide a concrete foundation and an access road, but not to develop the final facility—although this project eventually stalled for other reasons.

These, and the other cases listed in Table 2, illustrate the range of additional development required to incentivise landowners to release land for affordable housing development under the RES policy. In some cases, none is necessary; in five of our cases, two open-market homes were used to subsidise land for projects ranging from five to ten affordable homes. In other cases, RPs do not provide any market housing, but do provide serviced plots or site improvements where this will incentivise landowners to sell.

This is all complicated by the fact that local planners can be reluctant to provide guidance about the nature, extent or design of additional development that will be acceptable in planning applications in each case. This is partly because, while it may be recognised as necessary to achieve the buy-in of landowners in many cases, planners prefer that exception sites are not used to open the door for further residential development down the line. They may prefer site plans that limit the potential for further development close to the site—for example the provision of access roads, fencing and foundations that can be kept to an agricultural (rather than domestic) standard.

'A lack of absolute clarity around cross-subsidy and the type or extent of additional development permitted on these sites has once more created an inflationary environment'

Some landowners may be happy with these accommodations, or other incentives such as retaining nomination rights over affordable homes, or help with managing local opposition. Others may be very upfront about the value that they expect to achieve in exchange for bringing forward their land. Some may prefer to negotiate later, once plans are

more progressed; others may not start with clear ideas about what they expect from the process. Some go into negotiations with an explicit aspiration to draw their land into being allocated for residential use in the future.

In order to get affordable housing built on rural exception sites, RP staff can have to work over protracted periods to establish how landowners feel about the different approaches and incentives available. This leaves room for landowners' very different preconceptions and expectations to guide the process; the incentives eventually agreed can be very different, and RPs are left to negotiate these on an ad hoc basis, in an unclear policy context.

Formally speaking, there is an important and clear distinction between market development for cross-subsidy to replace grant funding, and market development determined by the level that will incentivise landowners to release their land. Viability, or the value needed to enable delivery without grant funding, is established using viability testing, whereby the local authority is responsible for assessing the amount of cross-subsidy proposed against the overall viability of each project. But while viability testing should provide RPs with clarity, they are often operating in the dark, without clear guidance as to the price of plots or the level of additional development required to bring sites forward.

And, in reality, the distinction between cross-subsidy and landowner incentives may be more blurred. If landowners request development for their own personal use on top of that needed for cross-subsidy, then the level of cross-subsidy permitted by the local authority may simply not be enough to make the site available in practice. As one of our respondents phrased it:

'That is sort of a financial viability issue, that [the landowner says] 'if you want this site, this is what I'm looking for'. It's not just the viability, it's the whole delivery of a site.'

The distinction between development for cross-subsidy and that provided by the RP at the landowner's request may therefore have become a kind of mental accounting, allowing 'cross-subsidy' development to be limited, while the actual amount of open-market development taking place on rural exception sites, in order to meet landowners' expectations and make these sites available, continues to rise. Further than this, our research suggests that the line between cross-subsidy and landowner incentives may not be fully understood by planning officers or consultants. If levels of cross-subsidy are established between the RP and the landowner and only then agreed with the local authority, this leaves room for values to escalate. As another respondent said:

'The difference between two and three [properties] makes quite a big difference financially. If, to facilitate a scheme, it could be 2.5, then they can push for three, rather than two.'

Greater clarity may be needed, so that the incentives that are actually used by RPs, and how far these depart from cross-subsidy, can be properly acknowledged.

The introduction of cross-subsidy in 2012 seems to have resulted in more agricultural land coming forward for RES delivery than in previous years, because, as we were told, 'now landowners can have up to three open-market units [in this area], it's a much more desirable thing for them'. But providing landowners with a more attractive proposition than previously negotiated for rural exception sites goes beyond straightforward cross-subsidy. Commercial sensitivity may prevent RPs from discussing the true value of rural exception sites openly. Nevertheless, the value going to landowners in exchange for these sites now often exceeds the £10,000 per plot that has traditionally been associated with the policy, and by quite a long way. If landowners go into negotiations with expectations that far exceed the agricultural/non-housing value of their land, then land values will be determined by landowners' preparedness to sell.

Conclusions

There are two broad schools of thought around incentivising landowners to sell plots of land for rural exception sites. The first view is that the main incentive lies in the granting of exceptional permission for the development of affordable housing, providing greater value to landowners than for agricultural/non-housing use. According to this view, the RP should only need grant funding—or additional development for cross-subsidy—to support the cost of development.

The second school of thought is that landowners releasing land for RES development are foregoing the 'hope value' attached to their land when they release it at less than full residential value (which they might hope to achieve following a future Local Plan review, and the perhaps improbable allocation of their land for residential use). This view sees land released for RES development as being sold at a discount to RPs, even when the current best permissible use may be agricultural.

It is this sense that landowners are selling their land at a discount which makes additional incentives necessary. Our research tells us that RPs are faced with this reality. Since rural RPs are concerned primarily with getting schemes off the ground and to completion, they have no choice but to engage in negotiating additional incentives with landowners. This has the capacity to raise the value of these sites, and what landowners now expect to achieve from releasing them. Since each case is different, and different landowners come to negotiations with different expectations, this leaves RPs subject to negotiating incentives on an ad hoc, case-by-case basis. This comes at a cost to RPs, who need to manage the expectations of individual landowners

in each case, balancing them against their own financial constraints, rather than having recourse to a consistent approach.

This brings us back full circle to the centrality of land in the housing affordability crisis, where permissible use, and in particular the allocation of land for residential development (or perhaps expectations around residential development), can drive speculative behaviours. When the policy was set out in 1991, rural exception sites explicitly tackled this issue by suppressing the value of land released for housing development. But it did this by completely removing the potential for open-market housing. Rural exception sites were truly exceptional in that land was released for the sole purpose of providing affordable homes for rural communities. Once market housing development started being drawn back onto these sites, this muddied the waters.

A lack of absolute clarity around cross-subsidy and the type or extent of additional development permitted on these sites has once more created an inflationary environment. Landowners' inflated expectations of land value risk undermining rural exception sites as a key mechanism of local needs housing delivery in rural areas.

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creating public value in brownfield housing development — innovative planning in england

Stephen Hall, Hannah Hickman, Nick Croft, Louise King, Katie McClymont, Zaky Fouad and Rebecca Windemer report key findings from research on innovative local authority planning practice in brownfield development projects to date and outline future work and ongoing challenges

The redevelopment of brownfield land for housing has been a priority of English planning policy since the 1990s, when the then Labour government explored means of delivering 60% of all new homes on brownfield sites. The National Planning Policy Framework of 2021—and the latest, 2023 revision—does not specifically prioritise brownfield development, but exhorts developers to ‘make as much use as possible’ of such sites.

This ambition presents complex challenges. The costs of demolishing existing structures, decontaminating polluted land, securing planning consent and construction routinely exceed the development value. For developers, the dividend is less than for low-risk greenfield sites. For local planning authorities, the capacity to secure developer contributions for public goods is constrained.

Innovative responses are required. ‘Innovation’ in planning may be defined as the reframing of problems

and the *process* of collaborative action with the purpose of achieving an *outcome* beyond purely monetary value.¹

This article, drawing on research for the Planning Advisory Service (PAS), explores innovative practice in nine brownfield development projects through interviews with local planning practitioners. The planning authorities had, in challenging circumstances, developed innovative ways of ‘de-risking’ brownfield development by working collaboratively across organisational boundaries. They had sought, with varying degrees of success, to balance market-led provision with broader ideals of innovation ‘for the public purpose’.²

Background

The case study sites were chosen to provide a diversity of circumstances in respect of size, legacy uses, ground conditions, land ownership, and

Table 1
The case study brownfield sites

| Local authority | Site | Size, ha | Description |
|--|--|---------------|--|
| Brent Council | Northwick Park | 12.87 | Mixed-use development: 1,600 new homes, expansion of university campus. Partnership: NHS, Brent Council, University of Westminster, Network Homes Outline permission granted for the whole site, full permission for part, 2020 (subject to Section 106 and Mayoral referral) |
| Cheshire West and Chester Council | Shot Tower, Boughton | 0.35 | Regeneration of the historic Shot Tower and adjacent Shropshire Canal frontage; former leadworks site, vacated 2001; 72 dwellings, heritage centre Planning consent granted April 2018; development complete |
| Mendip District Council | Norbins Road (Glastonbury)/ North Parade (Frome) | 0.14 and 0.47 | Development: 100% affordable housing on council-owned car parks Consent for Norbins Road delayed owing to phosphate neutrality issues. North Parade application summer 2022 |
| North East Lincolnshire Council | Diana, Princess of Wales Hospital, Grimsby | 6.34 | Housing-led development on NHS land, surplus since 2011. Disposal permits reinvestment in staff accommodation Outline planning consent granted for the six-zone site 2017: zone 1 complete; delivery of zones 2-6 pending |
| Newcastle City Council | Newbiggin Hall | 1.79 | Regeneration of neighbourhood centre in a post-war social housing estate; replacement of vacant parade of shops and low-grade open space with new shops and dwellings Planning consent granted 2018. Construction of retail units complete; work due on residential uses |
| Salford City Council | Astley Road, Irlam | 0.8 | Development of 100% affordable housing on a small site with adverse grounds conditions, previously occupied by municipal offices and vacated 2013 Planning consent granted 2018; development completed |
| Stevenage Borough Council | Kenilworth Close | 3.34 | Densification and renewal of post-war housing area; reduction of under-used green space; improved landscaping; relocation of community centre Full permission granted 2018: phase 1 completed 2021; phase 2 under way |
| City of Wolverhampton Council | Bilston Urban Village | 37 | Mixed-use development – housing, school, pub, open space – on large industrial site, vacated in 1996. Post-2013 priority: housing on low-quality industrial land Multiple planning consents granted; housing, open space, school 2013–2018; all complete. Employment site under judicial review |

planning history. Brief profiles of the eight case study sites are presented in Table 1.

Obstacles to development

The most common development constraint is financial viability. This is especially acute in areas that are characterised by a history of extractive or manufacturing industry and a legacy of unfavourable ground conditions. In Wolverhampton, *‘virtually no*

part of the site is capable of beneficial use without treatment, the standard definition of derelict land’. The Chester site has been the subject of four different (unimplemented or partially implemented) planning consents (2001 to 2017) submitted by different developers, each struggling to overcome the challenge of historic lead contamination. In Newcastle, the costs of meeting Coal Authority subsidence mitigation requirements obliged the

local authority to develop the site through its own housing investment programme.

In certain sensitive river catchment areas, local planning authorities were instructed in 2022 by Natural England that development should not proceed if it increases levels of phosphate nutrients. The additional mitigation costs for sites with borderline viability may delay or prevent them from being delivered at all: *'We're not going to be able to actually get a decision until we know that there's a suitable mitigation scheme for phosphates.'* (Mendip)

Remediation requirements are not always obvious until work begins. In Grimsby, the initial site survey revealed limited contamination, but subsequent enquiry exposed extensive presence of asbestos. In Wolverhampton, unrecorded mine shafts increased development costs: *'You need a degree of perseverance not to be easily put off. We found 27 unrecorded shafts within the footprint of the building. It put over a million pounds on the bill cost of the school. That's the sort of risk any developer coming to that site is going to have to factor in.'*

The necessary costs of protecting built and natural heritage present further impediments to viability. In the case of the Shot Tower in Chester, a Grade II listed building, constructed adjacent to Roman remains, peregrine falcons were discovered nesting in the tower roof. This required special nests imported from Germany to be deployed: *'Who would have thought that ecology would be an issue on a brownfield land site in the centre of a city with no greenery whatsoever?'*

Small development sites present particular challenges. In Mendip and Salford, the difficulty of achieving economies of scale, and the absence of market housing to cross-subsidise affordable dwellings, threatened to undermine the objective of building 100% affordable housing on such sites: *'One of the problems I've had with my discussions [with] housing associations is getting them interested in the smaller sites. I think they've*

always got other opportunities that they might think are easier.' (Mendip)

Finally, development proposals often entail the demolition of existing public goods, an action frequently opposed by different stakeholders — by the strategic planning authority in Brent, which objected to the relocation of a community pavilion to designated open land; by local business in Mendip, as the loss of car parking was opposed by the local chamber of commerce; by local residents in Stevenage, where the loss of a chip shop was assuaged by the provision of a temporary facility; and by statutory consultees in Grimsby, where Sport England objected to removal of a communal cricket pitch.

The role of the local planning authority in promoting development

In most cases, the developments were not primarily 'plan led'. Proposals were, typically, assessed against plans that were out of date and/or did not allocate the sites for housing. The then-current North East Lincolnshire Local Plan (Grimsby) was adopted in 2003 and allocated the hospital site for community use. Older still was the then-current (at the beginning of the process) Newcastle Unitary Development Plan of 1998, the saved policies of which had designated the Newbiggin Hall site as a 'growth area', permitting mixed-use housing-led development. The development of a new Local Plan for Salford, to replace the 2006 document, was delayed by the stalling of the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework.

The principal means of delivering new-build housing in the case study localities has thus been the development management process. The role of planning has been one of an enabler, de-risking development and providing market certainty, including through the use of innovative working practice and planning tools: *'The planners are more involved in [...] making sure the purchasers, whatever their ideas are,*



Ollie Craig/Pexels

The role of planning in brownfield development has been one of an enabler

are implementable, whatever the proposed scheme is, is implementable, and really high-level planning before the planning application goes in.' (Salford)

The authorities each established corporate-level housing delivery teams, the purpose of which was to ensure that the application had adequately addressed all technical issues before submission. Individuals skilled in site assessment, communication, negotiation and future visioning were brought together to facilitate housing development. This involved a strategic market intelligence function and brokerage role, played by estates staff, and an enabling role played by planners—reconciling conflicts and managing stakeholder inputs, including from colleagues in conservation, environmental health and flood mitigation, other statutory agencies, developers, councillors and the general public, prior to and during the planning application process.

Most authorities deployed a masterplan (Newcastle), development framework (Grimsby) or Supplementary Planning Document (Wolverhampton), setting out the opportunities for, and expectations on, developers. These documents were multi-disciplinary efforts, incorporating interests that would ultimately be dealing with the planning application. They informed the initial marketing of the site; the appointment of a developer; and delivery, by specifying site challenges, the required mix of uses, site layout, open space provision, flood risk, ecology, and design standards. In short, *'what we wanted to try and do was see if we could maybe de-risk (the sites) through the work to create the development framework; setting out our planning expectations in a Development Framework makes it easier for developers to decide whether to invest by explaining what they need to address from the outset and [avoids] the risk of the site being developed on a piecemeal basis.'* (Grimsby)

Pre-application discussions offered an opportunity to pre-empt critical challenges: *'You have to try and mitigate those problems rather than pretend they don't exist.'* (Wolverhampton) Through early engagement, planners sought to ensure that all statutory stakeholders (for example water and highways authorities) agreed necessary measures for development to proceed (Mendip, Stevenage). Pre-application discussions with developers helped to ensure an appropriate mix of uses, good-quality design, and other material considerations, meeting developer needs in respect of viability within the decision framework imposed by site constraints and planning policy: *'It's really important that you go through the pre-application process because that makes it easier for us and for the developer further down the line. We don't want to be in a situation whereby you receive refusal notice for something that could have been resolved prior to the submission of the application.'* (Salford)

The case study authorities deployed novel approaches to the formal planning application.

Brent pursued a 'layered approach', seeking an outline consent for the whole site in tandem with full permission for part of the site—a first phase of 654 homes and its associated access road. The latter was important in unlocking £9.9million of Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) monies for 'enabling' improvements. By layering the applications, part of the development was able to proceed without being stymied by another. However, *'all these permissions have to be entirely in conformity with each other; you couldn't have a detailed permission that was different to/in conflict with the outline'*. In Stevenage, four planning applications were submitted sequentially. The first (market housing) was needed to cross-subsidise the rest of the development.

'The councils were also instrumental in leveraging gap-financing to expedite development ... However, the use of developer contributions was uneven and often problematic'

The councils were also instrumental in leveraging gap-financing to expedite development. The Land Release Fund, a government capital fund aimed at removing barriers such as land condition and other site constraints, was instrumental in bringing the Salford and Stevenage sites forward for development. In Brent, it was used to build a business case for a larger Housing Infrastructure Fund bid to finance road improvements. Wolverhampton, requiring upfront investment to reduce risk/costs, levered funding from Homes England and the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership. In Newcastle, sites were remediated with monies from the North of Tyne Combined Authority.

However, the use of developer contributions was uneven and often problematic. Monies were, indeed, secured to finance important public goods such as affordable housing, education, open space, sports facilities, libraries, youth services, and transport improvements. However, in Chester, costs entailed the deletion of any affordable housing from the final scheme (Section 106 provides for a canal bridge and a heritage centre). In Brent, the approved scheme provides for a lower proportion of affordable housing than is required by the London Plan. Contributions were sought in respect of improving access to the nearby underground station: *'Consequently, there were quite a few fairly fraught three-way discussions between [the] LPA, TfL and the applicants. The applicants were very tricky, in a sense, because the things that you*

would expect [a public body] to be very keen on, they weren't keen to provide at all. They were quite commercially minded.'

In Newcastle, planning obligations were waived completely to allow a politically important regeneration project, including retail uses, acknowledged to reduce viability, to proceed: 'No planning obligations [were] ever mentioned. There was little point in making them do any kind of viability assessment or anything like that when we knew from discussions with colleagues what the issues were, the costs were. There was a benefit there; obviously moving the retail units into new purpose-built, nicer facilities which regenerate [...] the area.'

In some areas (Salford, Wolverhampton), a Section 111 agreement was used. This acknowledges viability constraints at the time of construction, but provides for 'clawback' of developer contributions as land values increase over time.

Innovation for the public purpose?

The approaches to brownfield development of our authorities can be characterised as innovative most obviously in terms of *process*. All had developed original ways of working across organisational boundaries, within the council and with local, regional and national partners. Indeed, the key to the success has been the level of collaboration and discussion across the council (involving housing development, planning, housing, and parks and recreation) and, subsequently, with statutory consultees and private developers: 'Having that collaborative approach ensures that we are delivering for every person we can in the community; that's very important and that's what we want to achieve as planners.' (Stevenage) In all these relationships, planning has played a pivotal role as *enabler*.

A key lesson from the case studies is the importance of retaining key planning competencies in-house. Basically, this means sustaining an appropriately resourced planning service: 'We need to ensure that we [have] the resources in place. Planning is really important. We need to start building houses, etc., etc. But then when push comes to shove, you need the resources to be able to determine those planning applications.' (Newcastle)

The retention of such competencies (plus related skills in ecology, estates and urban design, and positive working relationships with key partners) confers a degree of *agency* on the local planning authority. It is not wholly dependent on private initiative to provide new housing; it can act autonomously.

There are examples of direct action across our case studies: the role of Brent as a key member of the development partnership; compulsory purchase for site assembly (Wolverhampton); highway provision (Grimsby); construction of new housing through a housing investment programme (Newcastle); and provision through local housing

companies (Salford). 'I think sometimes it's about not relying on the market itself. Sometimes you have to take the lead as the authority. If we're going to do this, we need to ensure that it is actually done and people don't just half-finish it and half-bake it, if you like. Therefore, it's about a taking leadership and actually putting our money where our mouth is type of thing and doing the scheme ourselves.' (Newcastle)

Importantly, our case studies can also be described as innovative in their pursuit of particular *outcomes*. The authorities were all actively seeking to create *public value*, through planning obligations, but also through the design and implementation of the project.

In Stevenage, the project was framed within a narrative of vulnerable communities, people in housing need, elderly people with extra-care needs, providing affordable (council) housing, and profit share opportunities for the local authority. In Grimsby, the disposal of the hospital site and associated housing-led development was crucial to the long-term viability of staff accommodation (and hence recruitment and retention) at the hospital. The rationale for intervention in post-industrial areas (Newcastle, Salford, Wolverhampton) was the regenerative impact locally, providing affordable housing and new opportunities for home-ownership and reinforcing the local retail offer. This suggests a *value-led* approach; one that transcends a mere enabling role (one of facilitating private sector investment and maximising outputs) to an *ensuring* one, based fundamentally on stewardship of place³ and seeking to make certain that the values of planning are founded on meeting community needs.

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artificial intelligence and planning

Peter Jones and **Martin Wynn** outline some of the main characteristics of—and some of the widespread concerns about the use of—AI, and associated visions for the future role of AI in planning

While some perhaps might see Graeme Bell's assertion¹ that 'Artificial Intelligence could help planning departments restore service levels of 30 years ago' as a pipe dream, or as a threat, among many local authority planners who currently feel overworked, undervalued, and under-resourced, there is certainly growing interest in the potential future role that artificial intelligence (AI) might play in the planning process.

In simple terms, IBM notes that 'AI leverages computers and machines to mimic the problem-solving and decision-making capabilities of the human mind'.² This short article outlines some of the main characteristics of—and the widespread concerns about the use of—AI, reviews the various visions for the future role of AI in planning, and offers some discursive reflections on the potential use of AI in the planning system.

Artificial intelligence

Jyoti³ has argued that 'AI is the most disruptive technology innovation of our lifetime' and that 'enterprises are embracing AI/machine learning (ML) and leveraging a variety of data types [...] in all lines of business and industries'. Further, NetApp⁴ has claimed that 'the amount of data that is generated, by both humans and machines, far outpaces humans' ability to absorb, interpret, and make complex decisions based on that data', and that 'artificial intelligence forms the basis for all computer learning and is the future of all complex decision making'. Enholm *et al.*⁵ recognised AI as a wide-ranging set of technologies, and they suggested that there were two main ways of defining AI. The first 'defines AI as a tool that solves a specific task that could be impossible or very time-consuming for a human to complete', while the second 'regards AI as a system that mimics human intelligence and cognitive processes, such as interpreting, making inferences, and learning'.

At the same time, there is growing public interest in, and increasing concerns about, the impact of AI on economies and societies. Elliot *et al.*,⁶ for example, suggested that 'such concerns are revealed in public perceptions and uncertainty surrounding AI's future in society from technology executives overseeing the development and implementation of AI to the general public'. More specifically, in March 2023 a call, supported by Elon Musk, one of the founders of the Open AI Research Laboratory, for a six-month moratorium on research into AI received massive public attention. Furthermore, Raja Chatila, Professor Emeritus at the Sorbonne and a member of the working group of the French National Pilot Committee for Digital Ethics, observed 'everything that is currently happening in AI is taking place with no real ethical or legal controls. Companies are deploying tools on the web that have harmful effects'.⁷

AI and planning

Although the results of Batty and Wang's online survey, published in 2022,⁸ revealed that the majority of the 34 local planning authorities in the UK who responded reported never using AI or machine learning, a variety of visions for the role of AI in planning can be identified. In reviewing some of these visions, the aim is to provide some insights into the potential range and flavour of the role of AI, and not to offer a definitive picture of the ways in which AI might be introduced into the planning system.

Robin Barber,⁹ Product Owner of Built Environment at Arcus Global, a UK-based software service company that looks to enable public sector organisations to transform their service delivery, explored how AI can play a role in town planning. He argued that the prospect of becoming involved in copious administration and data entry, at the expense of project work or complex planning issues, was not why planners were attracted into the profession. With that in mind, Barber argued that AI can lift

administrative duties off a planner's shoulders, thus freeing up time and harnessing planners' intellectual capabilities. He suggested, for example, that if planners are able to devote more time to stimulating planning challenges, this would reduce stress and provide higher levels of job satisfaction and personal development.

More generally, Barber argued that automation is essential both for local authorities themselves and for the public, not least in that it will streamline the customer journey from initial queries, through to planning applications, consultations, responses, and final agreements. For Barber, the benefits of automating the planning system are obvious, in that:

*'AI helps deliver insight by gathering data over time, giving us answers, guidance and reducing the need for planning officers to deal with the mundane. If all of the information they need is to hand and made available through AI, the entire process runs more smoothly.'*⁹

Moon¹⁰, writing under the banner of Place Changers, a digital planning consultancy, recognised that town planning is complex, not least because it is process-driven and is reliant on an ever-increasing number of stakeholders and substantial amounts of data and evidence, but claimed that 'artificial intelligence in town planning can be hugely transformative', and looked at 'some of the key areas of focus in the coming years'. These areas included creating project inspiration, more responsive and personalised consultations, improving public consultation summaries, better risk analysis, summarising planning documents, and quicker planning documents.

In addressing creating project inspiration, for example, Moon suggested that:

*'applying better automation to create new content, including audio, code, images, text, simulations, and videos, generative AI can enable town planners to more readily produce tailored content, visual inspirations, or photomontages of potential changes. This can enhance interactions with stakeholders and create unique insights for projects.'*¹⁰

In focusing on more responsive/personalised consultations, Moon claimed that:

*'Town planners could generate chatbots and virtual assistants to help engage stakeholders, answering frequently asked questions and providing information about a town planning project, ensuring stakeholders access relevant information at their convenience, including diverse, disadvantaged, disengaged residents.'*¹⁰

By way of summarising the vision of the future role of AI in town planning, Moon argued that:

'The planning application process is often slowed down by the time [needed] to run community

*engagement consultations and quick geospatial analytics on communities [and] the capacity of local social infrastructure assets [...] Adding AI tools to existing platforms provides levels of efficiency that most town planners could only dream of a couple of years ago.'*¹⁰

However, Moon offered a note of qualified caution, in that:

*'While AI can improve project delivery and recurring tasks, town planners' input will always remain. However, combining machine learning with human expertise can unlock better experiences for residents, councils, and developers across different touchpoints while ensuring faster planning applications.'*¹⁰

Lawrence Turner,¹¹ a Director of Boyer, the planning and design consultants, noted that in recent years the impact of AI had been increasingly felt across many industries, and that the use of AI in town planning was 'an exciting development that could potentially revolutionise the way we plan and build our urban areas'. More specifically it was suggested that as the need to deliver more homes within the UK became ever more pressing, the use of AI in planning could be 'a game changer', and that 'AI can not only help speed up the planning process but also improve the accuracy and efficiency of the decisions made'.¹¹

Here, Turner claimed that AI was well suited to predicting and measuring the demand for new housing development, in that it could analyse historic data and help planners to make informed decisions about the types of development needed in different areas, and about how the release of land from the Green Belt could play its part in contributing to that process.

Megan Forbes,¹² Planning Associate at law firm Dentons, argued that 'AI is undoubtedly going to take over time-consuming administration tasks and improve the planning system for the better'. More specifically, she identified seven areas where she believed AI could challenge planning processes and procedures—namely, planning application validation, data analysis, modelling, decision-making, legal agreements, Local Plan examination, and resourcing issues. In addressing modelling, for example, she claimed that 'AI will improve the way we assess the impact of proposed developments on the environment' and can, 'if properly trained, provide instant feedback on how a scheme will affect everything from air quality, to traffic, to wildlife habitats'.¹²

Under the banner 'Can we automate the UK's planning system using AI?', the Alan Turing Institute¹³ reported on a case study challenge in which machine learning models were trained on UK planning application documents to classify and detect floorplans in applications, with the aim of speeding



Revels/Pixabay

AI may offer benefits, but it also comes with challenges and responsibilities that must be addressed

up the process of validating submitted planning applications, using deep learning. The results showed that the model provided a successful method for the digitisation of planning applications and that the detection of discrete elements such as individual drawings could speed up the planning application process. In conclusion, on the basis of the case study the Alan Turing Institute argued that AI can speed up the evaluation of planning applications, and more generally that it offers a way to create a three-dimensional database of the UK's building stock, which could be seen as a step in the move to a centralised planning system in the UK.

Academic publications also offer some insights into the potential role of AI in the planning process, as illustrated by the following two examples. Drawing on a literature review of 91 publications, Son *et al.*¹⁴ presented 'a comprehensive review of the areas of urban planning in which AI technologies are contemplated or applied', and 'analysed how AI technologies support or could potentially support smart and sustainable development'.

The review suggested that the relevant publications were clustered into four categories—namely, AI for urban data analytics and planning decision support, AI for urban monitoring and development control, AI for urban environmental and disaster management, and AI for urban and

infrastructure management. However, the review revealed a heavy dominance of AI applications in the first of these two categories.

In focusing on urban monitoring and development control, for example, the authors reported that AI had been used to assist in the monitoring and analysis of land use and urban sprawl, to monitor and identify where road improvements were needed, and to monitor and predict crime hotspots in cities.

Elsewhere, Sanchez¹⁵ argued that:

'Advances in artificial intelligence present planners with a ripe opportunity to critically assess their approaches and explore how new data collection, analysis, and methods can augment the understanding of places as they seek to anticipate futures with improved quality of life. AI can offer access to more and better information about travel patterns, energy consumption, land utilization, and environmental impacts, while also helping to better integrate these systems, which is what planners do. The adoption process will likely be gradual and involve significant time and resources.'

In conclusion, Sanchez claimed that AI holds transformative potential for planners, and that the integration of AI into the planning process can lead to smart, responsive and sustainable cities.

Discussion

This article has outlined some visions for the future role of AI in planning. While it remains to be seen how this role will be played out in local authority planning departments within the UK, the pressures to introduce AI into a wide variety of planning tasks may prove impossible to resist. However, local authority planning departments face a number of challenges in looking to harness the potential power of AI in their activities, and five sets of issues merit brief reflective discussion.

First, a move to introduce AI into the planning system, and to increase its role within that system over time, has a number of implications for local authorities, and here both the financial and professional resource implications loom large. On the one hand, savings in staff time and resources are part of the underlying rationale for the introduction of AI, but this would itself come at a cost. Such costs would include the financial investment in AI systems and tools, and in staff training to employ those systems and tools effectively; but it may also very possibly include reductions in the number of local authority planners.

'As financial constraints continue to bite into local planning authority budgets, planners may feel that they have little alternative but to use data and information supplied by developers as part of the planning application process, and to feed it into AI models'

At the same time, local planning authorities may look to contract out their AI operations to planning consultancies, and this would, in turn, effectively take resources away from the local authority's in-house planning operations and further fuel the commercialisation of the planning system.¹⁶

Secondly, another challenge in using AI in the planning system relates to the information and data employed to inform the AI tools, and to questions asked of this data. The planning process is complex, it often has to incorporate a range of competing perspectives, and it is political in that it can involve decisions about how land is used. The information and data which informs the planning process, and which, in the future, might well inform AI within that process, is increasingly generated by a range of stakeholders, including proposed developers. Here, as financial constraints continue to bite into local planning authority budgets, planners may feel that

they have little alternative but to use data and information supplied by developers as part of the planning application process, and to feed it into AI models. The insights generated by AI might thus provide biased outcomes which favour developers.

Thirdly, and in a similar vein, there are general concerns that the 'risks and benefits of AI innovations are unevenly distributed across society'.¹⁷ Such concerns might be seen to be highlighted in the role of the planning system in helping to meet demands for new housing development.

In his foreword to the Planning White Paper of 2020¹⁸ Boris Johnson, then the Prime Minister, argued that 'thanks to our planning system, we have nowhere near enough homes in the right places', and three years later Samuel Watling and Anthony Breach,¹⁹ writing for the Centre for Cities, claimed that 'planning reform is the key to ending the housing shortage'. Reforming the planning system has consistently proved to be a slow and thorny problem, but, formal reforms aside, AI may offer the politically powerful large housebuilding companies opportunities to successfully bring large-scale housing developments to market. While such companies have faced problems in the wake of the financial crisis and the rise in interest rates, they may well be better placed than most local planning authorities to harness AI to their own benefit, and this would effectively see AI serving the interests of the housebuilding industry more than those of the general public.

Fourthly, embedding AI into the planning process has major implications for planning courses in higher education. In the pre-digital era, a number of innovative formats and techniques were used in the education of planners, including case studies, games, and full-blown simulations of the planning and development processes. With the increasing pace of technology evolution, new approaches are now required to equip planners with the necessary skills to deal with the implications of AI, as well as digital twins, big data, and the metaverse, which will inevitably feature, sooner or later, in the town planning process. As Batty²⁰ recently noted with respect to the need for changes in planning education, today's planning challenges 'might be approached using new data sets, models and design methods that grapple with the evident complexity that most now recognise as characteristic of the modern urban world'.

Finally, if local planning authorities look to introduce AI into their work, they should also look to address a number of responsibilities, not least the issues of the privacy and security of information provided by, and about, planning applicants. Here it is important that local planning authorities design confidentiality and security into their AI systems and tools, and ensure that the data on planning applicants is collected, used, managed and stored both safely

and responsibly. At the same time, in deploying AI, local planning authorities will need to be mindful of a range of environmental responsibilities, including increasing greenhouse gas emissions and the large volumes of water used for cooling in data centres.

Conclusion

AI is playing an increasingly important, although often unseen, role in society and the economy, and, while it offers a wide range of opportunities and benefits to societies and economies, it also brings risks and responsibilities. This article reviews a number of visions for the future role of AI within planning; and these visions suggest that AI may bring a number of potential benefits, including, for example, freeing up planners from a range of time-consuming bureaucratic administrative duties, thus enabling them to work on more complex issues, streamlining the planning process for the public, improving the consultation process, and, perhaps most crucially, improving the accuracy and the efficiency of planning decision-making.

However, if local authority planning authorities are to adopt AI, they will also need to address the challenges and responsibilities that come with it. AI has been described as the most disruptive technology innovation of our lifetime, but it remains to be seen if it will disrupt planning as we have come to know it for over 75 years. In truth, however, parallels in other professions suggest that it may not be a question of if, but rather of when and how.

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where next for the healthy homes campaign?

Rosalie Callway and **Sally Roscoe** open the Special Section on Healthy Homes by reviewing the TCPA-led Healthy Homes campaign's successes to date and outlining future work and ongoing challenges

On 4 September peers voted in favour of the Healthy Homes amendment to the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill. This is an amazing achievement for the Healthy Homes campaign, which—now in its fourth year—has both experienced successes and faced ongoing challenges. Challenges include continual governmental flux and change—there have been no fewer than six Housing Ministers in the last year, raising the question 'How can we help to ensure better housing standards in the face of so much uncertainty?'

The continued pressure to 'cut the red tape' in the current deregulatory environment has left an indelible mark across the planning sector. The government is now proposing to further expand permitted development rights (PDR)¹ and reduce the scope of Local Plans, which only serves to highlight the continuing importance of campaigning to ensure that health is set as a central aim of housing provision and in planning and place-shaping more generally.

Progress to date

In March of this year the TCPA published the *These Are Homes* photobook,² using photographs taken by Rob Clayton, who was commissioned as part of the campaign. It presents some of the worst examples of the homes created through the current PDR policy. The book illustrates a core message of the campaign: deregulation is creating places that are making people sick. This is an immoral situation that we should not be facing in the 21st century. The photobook enabled the Healthy Homes campaign to reach a wider audience, by focusing on the first-hand experiences of those most directly affected by

poor-quality homes. Flats hastily created by converting buildings in isolated office parks and industrial estates through PDR are symptomatic of a broken and fragmented system in which quick profit and delivery have been prioritised above all else.

The TCPA recognises the pressing need for more new homes, but they should not come at the cost of people's health and wellbeing, and new PDR 'homes' should not reduce developer contributions towards affordable housing, infrastructure and community amenities.³

With the considerable support of Lord Nigel Crisp and a wide coalition of organisations and individuals, the TCPA has been tenaciously advocating for the Healthy Homes standards to apply to all new homes, whether created through PDR or newly built, placing human health as a central aim.

The campaign's Healthy Homes Private Members' Bill⁴ received its Third Reading in the House of Lords in May. Furthermore, three All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs), for Healthy Homes and Buildings, for Ending Homelessness and for Housing Market and Housing Delivery, representing parliamentarians from across the political spectrum, have endorsed the TCPA's Healthy Homes Principles⁵ for all new homes and called for them to be made mandatory. The APPG for Housing Market and Housing Delivery and the APPG for Ending Homelessness's joint report on rethinking commercial-to-residential conversions states:

*'We support the Healthy Homes Principles and their inclusion within the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill... If introduced, these standards would also level the playing field in terms of costs, as currently developers can and do lower standards in order to save on costs.'*⁶



Rob Clayton

An office-to-residential conversion in North London

Further policy changes

With the government so focused on deregulation to increase the supply of housing, the quality of our homes is often relegated to a secondary concern, if it is considered at all. Despite the overwhelming evidence that housing quality and health outcomes are intrinsically linked, there are still numerous proposed policy changes that disregard this relationship.

The concessions regarding PDR made by the government in 2021, which impose natural light and space standards on PDR conversions, were a step in the right direction, but were nevertheless insufficient and failed to address many of the other Healthy Homes Principles and outstanding concerns—including the lack of strategic planning oversight of the implications of PDR conversions in high streets and isolated industrial estates.

Furthermore, there is an increased potential fire risk in PDR homes, owing to the lack of ‘gateway one’ requirements on developers for access for fire and emergency services, as well as reduced stairwell fire escape requirements. The implications for older people and those with disabilities, in terms of the lack of access, adaptation and inclusion measures under PDR, are equally dire.

With the latest PDR consultation released in July,⁷ Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, announced his desire to further expand PDR to make conversions to residential use even ‘easier’. The consultation proposes the removal of safeguards on size, protected landscapes and vacancy tests, as well as expanding the scope to hotels and farms. While the TCPA is not against the conversion of existing buildings to create new homes in principle, such conversions must take place under the strategic oversight of local planning authorities and ensure adequate

provision for affordable homes and local amenities, as well as meeting the Healthy Homes Principles.

However, there have been a few small glimmers of hope. The Renters (Reform) Bill which is still going through Parliament includes a commitment to drop landlords’ ability to apply Section 21 ‘no fault’ evictions, create a private rental sector ombudsman, and limit rental price rises.⁸

A government policy paper, *A Fairer Private Rented Sector*,⁹ has also set out an intention to extend the Decent Homes standard to the private rented sector in England—the standard currently only covers social housing landlords. This would help to ensure that all homes in the sector are free of any ‘category 1’ hazards that pose an imminent risk to health, such as damp and mould growth, excess cold, and risk of falls.¹⁰ However, the standard is still not mandatory for all homes, including those created through PDR, and it refers only to these most severe household hazards. Developers can and should do better than the Decent Homes standard—not only to protect people from harm, but also to create homes that actively promote health. As such, the TCPA will continue to campaign for primary legislation which ensures that new all homes are legally bound to meet the Healthy Homes Principles.

Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill—embedding the healthy homes amendments

As noted above, on 4 September peers debated the Healthy Homes amendments to the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill (LURB) during its Report Stage in the House of Lords.¹¹ Lord Crisp opened the debate with a powerful outline:

‘I recognise that this is a substantial strategic change in the approach to planning and regulation which, if adopted, will have a positive impact on

*the quality of housing and neighbourhoods, should reduce the likelihood of new slums being created and truly help to level up.*¹²

Members from across the political spectrum displayed their support. As Lord Young of Cookham (Conservative) explained:

*'The amendment brings all those provisions together under one overarching umbrella and provides what is currently missing: namely, a clear statement of government policy on healthy homes all in one place, breaking down the silos between all the government departments involved.'*¹²

Baroness Hayman of Ullock (Labour) stated: *'While the Government have acknowledged that housing and health are key to the levelling-up agenda, the Bill currently contains no clear provisions for how we are to achieve that objective.'*¹²

Despite governmental opposition, the amendment was passed by a margin of nine votes— 158 'content' to 149 'not content'. This means that the Healthy Homes amendment to the LURB will return to the House of Commons for further scrutiny before the Bill receives Royal Assent.

The Lords vote is a real achievement and signifies continued hope that change in the quality of new and converted homes is possible. The TCPA will continue pressing for the amendment to be retained as the Bill returns to the House of Commons. We will be working with all the Healthy Homes campaign supporters and encouraging the public to contact their MPs, urging them to retain the new Healthy Homes clause and schedule, and oppose any government amendment to remove them. If successful, the amendment will offer a once-in-a-generation opportunity to ensure the provision of healthy homes for all.

The 2024 general election and future work— from principles to practice

Even if the government removes the Healthy Homes amendments to the LURB, the TCPA will keep pushing for the creation of mandatory standards for our nation's homes. It will campaign for all the political parties to reflect the Healthy Homes Principles within their manifestos in the run-up to the next general election. Our work to support local authorities in adopting the principles in their corporate strategies will also continue. Furthermore, the next phase of the Healthy Homes campaign will look to move from principles into practice, working with local authorities and coalition partners to enable the transition from high-level principles into a practical and deliverable framework for practitioners.

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- 12 See 'Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill'. *Hansard*, Vol. 832: 4 Sept. 2023. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2023-09-04/debates/308D0408-2A3B-48EB-9EAE-C64A562084C0/Levelling-UpAndRegenerationBill>

healthy homes— who wouldn't vote for that?

Lord Nigel Crisp and **Hugh Ellis** discuss the heightened relevance of the Healthy Homes Principles given the current housing crisis and wider societal issues—and the enormous improvements that a statutory requirement for healthy homes could bring to the quality of life for generations to come



Lord Nigel Crisp is an independent crossbench Member of the House of Lords in the UK Parliament, where he co-chairs the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Global Health. He was Chief Executive of the NHS in England from 2000 to 2006, as well as being a Permanent Secretary at the Department of Health. He has also worked and written extensively on global health—his book, *Health is Made at Home, Hospitals Are for Repairs: Building a Healthy and Health-Creating Society*, is published by SALUS (2020).



Hugh Ellis is the TCPA's Policy Director, leading on policy development, briefings and engagement with central government and politicians. He has led on TCPA campaign work on planning out poverty and planning for people, and he is a strong critic of policies such as expanded permitted development rights.

Lord Nigel Crisp: Coming from a health background and perspective, I, like many of my colleagues in the sector, have been acutely aware of the close relationship between housing and health for a long time. That is why I decided to participate so actively in the Healthy Homes campaign. It was initially

conceived by the TCPA, and I got involved a little after it began. There are two things that stood out as being very important aspects that really resonated with me—the links that it made both between health and housing and between health and planning, in a way that simply hadn't been made for some years.

In the past, health and housing were fundamentally part of the same Ministry in government, but that has not been the case for a very long time now.

Health is so important to housing, and housing is so important to health. The two are totally interlinked. One can look at healthy and decent homes as the foundation for our lives. But the country is nevertheless currently building some terrible homes—'slums for the future' is what they are being called. The Healthy Homes Private Members' Bill that has now been debated in the House of Lords is simply setting out some minimum standards for all new homes to adhere to. I sometimes refer to an MOT analogy: just as we don't allow unsafe cars on our roads, so we shouldn't allow unsafe homes on our streets.

These are the two big things that really stand out to me in the campaign: a set of minimum standards for the homes that are being built so that they are suitable and fit for purpose; and also clarity over the fact that health and housing are intimately linked. It would be fascinating to hear from you about the TCPA's initial motivations behind launching the Healthy Homes campaign.

Hugh Ellis: Indeed, all the issues that you have just highlighted fed directly into our understanding of the need for and the creation of the Healthy Homes Principles and the setting up of the campaign—but aside from that the TCPA had two key motivations. First, we were really shocked about the deregulation of planning in general and the way that it had created, in particular, this new form of slum housing through expanded permitted development rights (PDR). It was morally shocking that any government could consciously allow such poor housing conditions for some of our most vulnerable people. The second reason is actually more positive and relates back to the fact you just discussed—that a decent home is critical to people's health and wellbeing.

'This is the message behind the campaign: it is about tackling the illness that can come from bad homes but also about creating the opportunities that come from decent and healthy homes'

Between those two motivations, the TCPA saw the need for a campaign that echoed back to the heart of why the organisation came into being—the imperatives of social justice and a decent home for all. We have been campaigning with these values for over 100 years, and, interestingly, over that time any

arguments against why we should have a decent home have always remained essentially the same: it is not economically efficient; and people do not need space or access to green space. Neither holds water. The TCPA has always shared your understanding of a 'home' and of its integral importance to our lives. We believe that a decent home is critical to the whole arc of someone's life, and if a civilised society cannot produce this, it needs to think seriously about its shortcomings.

Lord Nigel Crisp: It is interesting that you mention that as I have had similar experiences. Coming from a health background, I often get asked why I care about housing in my line of work. This is about slum clearance and creating decent homes to enable people to have a decent foundation for their lives. In part, it is about tackling the dangers of poor housing—physical dangers such as falling down the stairs and so on—but it is also about putting a stop to things in homes that can contribute to ill-health and disease, such as cold, excessive heat, and damp and mould. We have seen terrible cases recently, such as a small child dying through air pollution in her own home, or another small child dying from the effects of mould in the home. There are some real dangers that come with poorly constructed, poorly maintained and poorly ventilated homes that could and should be prevented.

However, there is also a positive to be found here, because, in the same way that not having a decent home is a great cause of insecurity and damages mental health, actually having a good home provides a foundation from which people can do other beneficial things—for example children doing their homework or people relaxing and feeling safe. It is clear that a home really is a reflection of our lives. If we can get things right on homes, we can get it right on health; and if we can get it right on both we will also get it right in wider society and have a healthier population. This is the message behind the campaign: it is about tackling the illness that can come from bad homes but also about creating the opportunities that come from decent and healthy homes.

Hugh Ellis: I completely agree. The Healthy Homes Principles have never been more relevant than they are today—all you need to do is look at the appalling living conditions that many people are being forced to endure to realise that something has to change. And this is such an important moment for the Healthy Homes campaign because an extraordinary thing has just happened—in debating the Healthy Homes Bill the House of Lords has made clear that it supports the healthy homes agenda, through a detailed and fantastic debate around the importance of health and wellbeing, planning, and housing. And the Lords have inserted into the Levelling-up and

Clifford Harper



Regeneration Bill amendments that would make a fundamental change to how we regulate the built environment.

The issue now, of course, is that the House of Commons has a choice about whether to remove those amendments, and the Secretary of State has a fundamentally important decision to take for the future of this country. They can decide to remove the healthy homes legislation, which is modest, proportionate, effective and, perhaps above all, incredibly reasonable. But if they do, it will condemn a new generation to slum housing. Alternatively, they can adopt the Healthy Homes Principles, as we earnestly hope that they will, and give people a new start in the reconstruction of this country. That is the choice in front of the Secretary of State and the House of Commons when the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill comes back to them.

Lord Nigel Crisp: As you say, it is a really significant time. As I understand it, the government is dead against the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill amendments, and it has a majority in the House of Commons, so if it decided to reject the amendments it may well win. But the task for us now is to try to persuade as many government MPs as possible to vote in favour of these amendments.

I know some people will say this is more regulation and will cost money and will therefore reduce the number of homes built. How would you respond to that?

Hugh Ellis: Well, I would disagree that this would happen; not if regulation is implemented in the way that the Healthy Homes Bill suggests. The starting point for the future is to ensure that we create decent homes. The Healthy Homes Bill would create a minimum standard to avoid homes actively harming people, and, as you mentioned earlier, we hope that this will then actively promote their health and wellbeing. We have been able to do this very effectively for much of the last 100 years, and it is

really only in the last 15 years that we have started to walk away from the agenda around health and homes. So there is no reason at all why we cannot solve the standards issue.

‘What is not to like about this agenda? Who could possibly object to minimum housing standards? In the three years of the Healthy Homes campaign, we have never been presented with a compelling argument on why we shouldn’t be doing this’

The reason we are not delivering enough homes in this country has nothing to do with housing standards and everything to do with a government that cannot get control of housing delivery—and this is something that the TCPA is keen to see happen; it is a pro-housing organisation, and its proposed healthy homes legislation enacts a pro-housing agenda. There is nothing in the healthy homes proposals that can get in the way of delivering a decent home. It is something that should be on all our agendas, and we must have faith and be optimistic about winning the vote in the House of Commons on healthy homes.

Really, what is not to like about this agenda? Who could possibly object to minimum housing standards? In the three years of the Healthy Homes campaign, and in the debates and committee that you have led, Nigel, we have never been presented with a compelling argument on why we shouldn’t be doing this. And so I am hopeful that MPs in the House of Commons of all parties will unite on this, because it is critical for our future.

Can we, the sixth-largest economy on Earth, really reject housing standards that will deliver the homes that people deserve, condemning a generation to live in homes which damage their health, are too small, harm the environment, are built in the wrong places at the wrong prices, and ultimately will not deliver on the wider goals that the government has on economic productivity and health and wellbeing. Of course, in the end homes that are inadequate will also create huge costs for the NHS and social care budgets.

Lord Nigel Crisp: Absolutely, and I cannot stress enough the need to continue the momentum and support for the campaign in its next stages. If members of the public do want to help, the best way to do that now is by lobbying their MP, whatever their political persuasion, because they all have a vote and it is important that everyone turns out. But practically, of course, make a particular attempt to persuade Conservative MPs, who are likely to be asked by the government to vote against these amendments.

'As far as local authorities are concerned... they can help by just applying the Healthy Homes Principles themselves... People can get on and do something about it if they believe in these principles'

Of course, we need support not only from the public, but from local authorities, investors, and any other key actors. As far as local authorities are concerned, I think they can do two things to support this agenda. One is to join in the campaign and help make some noise. I think the public get it; we have a lot of people offering their support from all different parts of the economy; we have had a number of parliamentary groups offering their support. The other and perhaps most important way that they can help is by just applying the Healthy Homes Principles themselves, because they can do that—I believe that it is something that they are entitled to do within their purview, particularly planning authorities. People can get on and do something about it if they believe in these principles.

Hugh Ellis: Exactly. The weight and support of the public, local authorities and other key stakeholders is so important in making this a reality. As we just discussed, we have been focusing on Westminster in trying to get new law to promote healthy homes

requirements, and we hope we will be successful in that; but of course local authorities have a huge role to play, and the new planning system that the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill will introduce offers an opportunity for English local government to embed the healthy homes agenda by adopting standards within their Local Plans that can secure people's health and wellbeing.

As for the private sector, they have an even greater responsibility, because ultimately the vast majority of the housing that is delivered in this country is private sector led. They need to rapidly modernise their business model; they need to understand the importance of the value created by decent-quality homes; and they need to make sure that the housing development industry can be leaders.

If the industry won't lead, then it should not be surprised about being regulated. If it wants to avoid what it often considers to be undue regulation, then it should start building decent homes that meet people's needs throughout their entire life, and stop focusing on speculation and poor-quality development in the wrong place. I do not want to hear from the industry that it has a problem with regulation—not so so long as it goes on building car-dependent homes which will ultimately create costs to the taxpayer in making them fit for people's needs.

My message is that this is an extraordinary moment, and everything hangs on a vote in the House of Commons. Normally I would say that we 'respectfully request', but I will use any language at the moment, from we plead, beg, cajole... We work in hope that the House of Commons and the government will do the right thing. But anything that people reading this can do—such as talking to their MP to persuade them of the critical importance of this campaign—we would ask them to do; and, most importantly, we would ask them to do it right now because time is short.

● *The views expressed above are personal.*

from poor housing to decent homes

Amy Gray outlines key landmarks and the findings of recent research in BRE's campaign to make every home a decent home



Karl Bossom on Unsplash

Remedying the failings of poor-quality homes can yield enormous savings for the NHS and wider society— but, as in so many areas, in housing, prevention is usually preferable to cure

Poor housing has a profound impact on the health of occupants and wider society. Instances of substandard housing can range from excess cold to damp and mould and hazards that cause falls, such as unsafe staircases. Whether it's a young family living with cold, damp and mould, or an older person at risk of falls on their unsafe stairs, nobody should live in a home that is unsafe.

For over 10 years, we at the Building Research Establishment (BRE) have sought to underline the scale of this issue to policy-makers through our analysis of the economic, environmental and health implications of unsafe and unhealthy homes.

The launch of our latest research,¹ in conjunction with the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Healthy Homes and Buildings, represented a significant milestone on this journey, with the Chair of the House of Commons Health and Social Care Select Committee, Steve Brine MP, addressing parliamentarians and other stakeholders in the week of the 75th anniversary of the NHS—a service which continues to bear the brunt of the impact of poor housing.

Although this campaign is far from over, we are encouraged by growing cross-party consensus on both the importance of tackling poor housing head on

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Excessive cold, damp and mould, along with disrepair hazards that can cause falls, are major sources of cost burdens on the NHS

and the compelling economic rationale for investing in solutions sooner rather than later. As Steve Brine said, prevention is often better than the cure.

BRE's work so far

BRE has produced a number of research papers on the cost of poor housing to health and the NHS in England since 2010:

- In 2010, we sought to quantify the cost of people living in poor housing to the NHS for the first time, highlighting a £600 million annual cost for first-year treatment alone.
- In 2016, we published *The Full Cost of Poor Housing*, which provided an updated estimate of the cost to society of the hazards that we had identified following the availability of new English Housing Survey data, the findings of a literature review of similar injury-based cost-to-society analyses, and a new cost of poor housing model. Using this model, we estimated that the cost to society (including medical costs, lost education, and employment opportunities) of leaving England's poor housing unimproved was £18.6 billion. The annual NHS costs arising from illness and injury among those in the same homes were £1.4 billion.
- In 2021, our updated research² outlined that it was still costing the NHS £1.4 billion per annum to treat those affected by poor housing, with this figure reaching £18.5 billion when wider societal costs were included. Given these findings, the report recommended that further research be undertaken to inform a full 30-year cost-benefit analysis of the economic impact of improving poor housing in England.
- Earlier in 2023, we updated these figures to show that excess cold is placing the biggest cost

burden on the NHS—£540 million a year.³ Given the increase in energy bills and the cost of living crisis, the figure for excess cold is likely to be an underestimate, as there are many people who, even though they have more energy-efficient homes, can no longer afford to heat them adequately.

- We also published analysis of the cost of poor housing by tenure.³ Excess cold is most prevalent among properties that are owner-occupied or privately rented. Partly because of its younger housing stock and partly due to the long-running Decent Homes Standard and investment in the social housing sector, a comparatively small number of socially rented homes (just over 20,000) are excessively cold. Those living in owner-occupied properties are most at risk of ill-health caused by excess cold given their age—an average of 58.

The cost of ignoring poor housing

Following the recommendations of our 2021 report, we published our latest research in July 2023, which revealed that remedial work to England's poor-quality housing could save the NHS and wider society £135.5 billion over the next 30 years.¹ These benefits include a reduced cost burden to the NHS, lower energy bills and carbon emissions, and more local job opportunities. Up until now, no serious attempt has been made to examine and quantify the longer-term costs and benefits if the worst health and safety hazards were to be removed from England's substandard housing.

For the 2.4 million homes in England which BRE identified as having a 'category 1' hazard (a hazard which poses a serious and immediate risk to a person's health and safety), remedial works would cost £9 billion—and all of those works could in theory be undertaken now.

BRE has designed a cost-benefit model that can be used to target improvements in the worst-affected homes. This can be used by both national and local government to inform housing decisions. We firmly believe that our analysis provides the clearest signal yet that policy-makers need to get housing right from the outset, and that proper upfront investment provides the most fiscally sensible route to save on health and wider economic costs in the long run. For instance, our research shows that simple safety measures such as installing handrails on dangerous stairs are relatively inexpensive but very cost effective.

Costs aside, what does the legislative picture look like?

Alongside research, BRE has outlined a number of policy recommendations to set a clear framework for improved housing standards—in both the private and social sectors.

The best way to do that is through an enhanced Decent Homes Standard—something that the government has said it will deliver. This should set a minimum standard of decency that is consistent and clear for landlords, tenants and owner-occupiers, and should be at the centre of wider governmental efforts to improve the population's health and reduce health inequalities through housing improvements. This would be mandatory for all forms of rented properties, and a useful benchmark for owner-occupiers to assess their homes against.

'An enhanced Decent Homes Standard should set a minimum standard of decency...and should be at the centre of wider governmental efforts to improve the population's health and reduce health inequalities through housing improvements'

We were disappointed by the Prime Minister's announcement that energy efficiency targets for landlords were being scrapped, and we will continue to stress importance of Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) 2030 as a tool for improving the quality of our housing stock.

When it comes to monitoring progress, local authorities will be crucial. However, they need to be adequately resourced so that they can fulfil their duty under the 2004 Housing Act to monitor poor-quality homes accurately in their community. With modern data technology and improved data-sharing capabilities, national government could help local

authorities to access targeted data on the worst-affected homes across the private rented and owner-occupied sectors.

The road ahead

At BRE we will continue to inform local and national government on the issue of poor housing and work with like-minded organisations, such as the TCPA, to provide a foundation for dedicating strategic resources to improve the long-term outcomes of individuals, the national economy, and wider society. Most of all, we urge the government to set a clear trajectory for housing standards in the form of an enhanced Decent Homes Standard. This would ensure the delivery of safe and healthy homes, reflect the modern aspirations of householders, tenants and landlords, and ensure that the UK's buildings reach net-zero carbon emissions. As there is debate about public appetite for holding to the UK's net-zero targets, it is worth reminding voters that energy efficiency is a public health imperative as well as a climate change issue.

Our work on the cost of poor housing has informed the standards that we offer for ensuring that new homes are built to the highest possible quality. For example, one of the key indicators in BRE's Home Quality Mark⁴—a benchmarking scheme for new-build homes which goes well beyond the DHS—is health and wellbeing, because we know that there is a direct link between housing and health.

With a range of stakeholders such as those involved in the Healthy Homes campaign undertaking valuable work to ensure that everyone can live in a decent home, the capacity for mobilising cross-party support towards evidence-based policy-making in the built environment is growing stronger.

● **Amy Gray** is Head of Public Affairs, Policy and Press at BRE. The views expressed are personal.

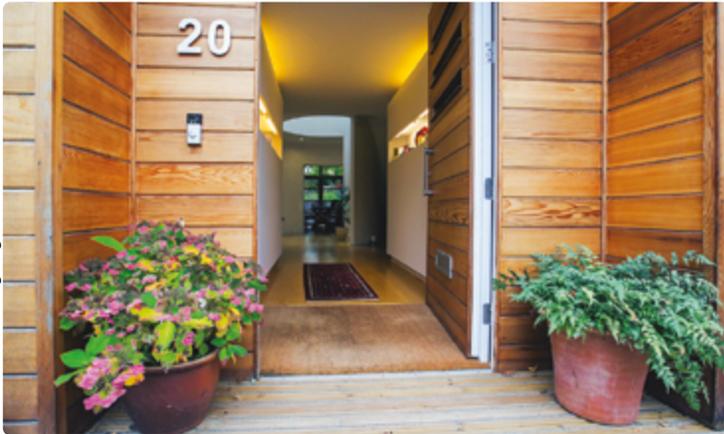
Notes

- 1 H Garrett, M Mackay, S Margoles and S Nicol: *The Cost of Ignoring Poor Housing*. BRE, Jul. 2023. <https://tinyurl.com/j4k2rbpz>
- 2 H Garrett, M Mackay, S Nicol, J Piddington and M Roys: *The Cost of Poor Housing in England*. Briefing Paper. BRE, Nov. 2021. <https://bregroup.com/press-releases/bre-report-finds-poor-housing-is-costing-nhs-1-4bn-a-year/>
- 3 H Garrett, S Margoles, M Mackay and S Nicol: *The Cost of Poor Housing in England by Tenure*. Briefing Paper. BRE, Mar. 2023. https://files.bregroup.com/corporate/BRE_cost%20of%20poor%20housing%20tenure%20analysis%202023.pdf
- 4 See BRE's 'Home Quality Mark' webpages, at <https://bregroup.com/products/home-quality-mark/>

everyone deserves a healthy home

Poor-quality homes are an enormous driver of inequality and ill-health, not least among older people and disabled people—so we must make homes more accessible and adaptable as a matter of equality and social justice, says the Centre for Ageing Better's **Holly Holder**

Photos: Centre for Ageing Better



The need to build inclusive, accessible and adaptable homes becomes ever more pressing as our population ages

Everyone deserves a healthy home. And yet one in 10 people in the UK—that's almost 10 million people—are still living in poor-quality homes. In 2022, 4 million homes failed to meet the basic standards of decency set by the government, with the people living in those poor-quality homes twice as likely to have poor general health than those who do not.

While the issue is complex, there are many expert organisations and coalitions who are working hard to develop solutions, and there are actions that we can take now to help create the homes that we need to thrive, both now and in the future. One such action, as outlined in the TCPA's Healthy Homes Principles,¹ is to ensure that all new homes and their surroundings are designed to be inclusive, accessible, and adaptable to suit the needs of all.²

Everyone deserves to live in a safe and healthy home that supports their independence, but far too many older and disabled people are currently living in homes that are directly damaging to their health

and limiting their daily lives. By 2050, around one in four of the UK population will be aged 65 or over—around 17 million people. A study published by the Health Foundation in July 2023³ found that by 2040 around 9.1 million people in England will have a major illness—an increase of 37% compared with 2019. The study found that four-fifths of the jump in major illnesses will be driven by an ageing population: people living longer means that they are more likely to encounter (and live with) ill-health.

But the numbers outlined in the report are a worst-case scenario that could be avoided if we were to adopt policies that take a much more rounded view of healthy ageing across society. Currently, poor-quality homes are an enormous driver of inequality and ill-health, and yet too little is done to ensure that everyone can live in a home that is warm, safe, and accessible. That is why the Centre for Ageing Better is supporting the TCPA-led Healthy Homes campaign and co-chairs

the Housing Made for Everyone (HoME) coalition.⁴ The HoME coalition has long been calling for urgent action to tackle the UK's acute and growing shortage of accessible homes, by raising the minimum standard of accessibility for all new-build homes. This would mean that all new homes would be built to be 'accessible and adaptable' as a minimum standard.

What are accessible and adaptable homes?

Accessible housing means homes and neighbourhoods that are suitable for almost everyone but are especially beneficial to older people and disabled people. In practice, this means things like not having steps up to a front door, slightly wider doorways, bathrooms at entry level, more space to move around, easily reachable switches and sockets, etc.

Building homes to be adaptable means that extra features such as grab rails, wet rooms and stair lifts can be more quickly installed at a lower cost if and when they are needed, producing homes that are future-proofed and suitable for any owner over the lifetime of the home.

This does not mean that all accessible homes are developed to meet complex needs; rather, the standard ensures that the house can accommodate simple and most commonly needed adaptations—for example stronger bathroom walls so that grab rails can be easily installed without reinforcement, straight-run stairs that will easily accommodate a stairlift, or a gully existing under the bathroom floor so that the bathroom can become a wetroom much more easily and cheaply.

Most older people (over 90%) choose to remain in ordinary housing rather than in specialist housing such as sheltered accommodation or retirement communities. Therefore building inaccessible homes is a false economy given our ageing population, creating an accessibility debt that will increase future social care costs, impact on NHS capacity, and, in many cases, require significant adaptation at the taxpayer's expense.

Why do we need accessible and adaptable homes?

We must make homes more inclusive as a matter of equality and social justice. Evidence from the last two decades has shown how a significant and increasing number of older and disabled people are living in homes that are directly damaging to their health and their daily lives.

In addition to the untold personal costs for those living in unsuitable homes, building homes that do not meet society's needs unnecessarily costs our health and social care systems millions of pounds each year. Poor housing in England is estimated to cost the NHS over £1.4 billion a year in treatment bills—while more than half of this is attributed to

excess cold, the second biggest cost comes from hazards which cause people to fall and injure themselves.

Not only do we need to cater to the needs of our ageing population, we also need to consider intersectionality and the diverse needs of different people within our society. We know from the government's own Disability Survey⁵ that nearly half (47%) of disabled respondents reported that getting in and out of where they live required at least 'some effort'. And while the full after-effects of the Covid-19 pandemic are not yet known, the data so far appears to suggest that disability prevalence has risen, and may rise further, owing to long-term conditions such as Long Covid affecting almost 2 million people as of January this year.

And this is before we consider building our homes in the context of climate change. If we are to meet carbon reduction targets, we must build new homes with the future in mind and ensure that they can flex to our needs as they change—rather than relying on costly carbon-emitting retrofit and adaptation programmes.

What can we do?

So what can we do? First, we can all support the incredibly important Healthy Homes Principles and aim to have healthier homes enshrined in law so that the rights they promote are protected. We can continue to campaign for all new homes to be accessible and adaptable as standard, as a huge step forward in how we think about providing inclusive housing. And we can ask the government for a national strategy to improve our existing and new homes, in order to create a more equitable and just society for all.

● **Holly Holder** is Deputy Director for Homes with the Centre for Ageing Better. The views expressed are personal.

Notes

- 1 See the TCPA's 'Campaign for Healthy Homes' webpages, at www.tcpa.org.uk/collection/campaign-for-healthy-homes/
- 2 See the Centre for Ageing Better's 'Homes for all ages' YouTube video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=jFAGr4UPJ88
- 3 '2.5 million more people in England projected to be living with major illness by 2040'. Press Release. Health Foundation, 25 Jul. 2023. [www.health.org.uk/news-and-comment/news/25-million-more-people-in-england-projected-to-be-living-with-major-illness-by-2040#:~:text=9.1%20million%20people%20in%20England,the%20same%20period%20\(4%25\)](https://www.health.org.uk/news-and-comment/news/25-million-more-people-in-england-projected-to-be-living-with-major-illness-by-2040#:~:text=9.1%20million%20people%20in%20England,the%20same%20period%20(4%25))
- 4 See 'Homes for all ages' and 'Housing Made for Everyone (HoME) coalition'. Webpages. Centre for Ageing Better. <https://ageing-better.org.uk/homes-for-all-ages>
- 5 *UK Disability Survey Research Report*. Cabinet Office Disability Unit, Jun. 2021. www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-disability-survey-research-report-june-2021/uk-disability-survey-research-report-june-2021

the overheating risk to health in homes

There is already a significant overheating risk in much of the existing UK housing stock, and these risks will increase in frequency and affect more homes as the climate warms, says **Mike Edwards**



Kristijan Ansoy on Unsplash

It is important to consider future warming impacts in assessing how best to mitigate overheating and support the delivery of a healthy home

Millions of people in the UK will have experienced overheating in their homes as a result of the record-breaking high temperatures experienced in the summer of 2022. Overheating negatively impacts people's lives—one example is the sleep disruption that affects our health and productivity. It can also cause illness, and significantly more deaths will likely result as a direct consequence of increased temperatures in the 2050s. Within parts of the existing UK housing stock there is already a significant overheating risk. These risks will increase in frequency and impact larger parts of the housing stock as our climate warms.

A healthy home is, among other things, one in which the risks of overheating have been assessed and mitigated. The recently released Building Regulations Approved Document O (2021)¹ introduces a provision to require design teams to limit solar gains and provide a means to remove heat from indoor spaces in new-build homes. The scope of the requirements covers new homes (dwellings) and buildings where people sleep, such as university halls of residences or care homes.

The most rigorous method of testing overheating risk, referenced in Part O, is currently the TM59 methodology published by the Chartered Institution

of Building Services Engineers (CIBSE).² This requires designers to build representative computer models of their designs and simulate specific scenarios to test compliance with two specific criteria for living spaces and for bedrooms. The standardised nature of the test makes the results comparable between different buildings.

Applying this methodology to new and existing homes provides insights into the homes which are most at risk of overheating.³ Such homes usually have one or more of the following characteristics:

- a location within large cities subject to an urban heat island effect;⁴
- houses and flats with a small floor area;
- homes with smaller bedrooms and loft rooms, particularly those without loft insulation; and
- homes with poor ventilation, such as those where external openings are limited or where there are external environmental factors (such as noise or air pollution) which limit the practicality of opening windows.

There are a number of practical measures that can be implemented to reduce overheating risk to within reasonable limits. It should be noted that as the climate in the UK warms, more of these measures will need to be applied across a greater proportion of homes and more parts of the country. It is therefore important to consider future warming impacts in assessing how best to mitigate overheating and support the delivery of a healthy home. Appropriate responses include the following:

- Reducing the amount of solar heat gain into homes is the most effective measure, particularly for

flats. This might include designing for appropriately sized windows, shading systems, and suitably selected glass specification.

- High levels of insulation that are intended to reduce heating energy consumption are complementary with mitigating overheating risk, provided that good ventilation is also available.
- External shutters or external blinds are effective in reducing or blocking the entry of heat from the sun into homes.
- Blinds, curtains and internal shutters can play a role in mitigating overheating but are less effective than external shading.
- Good-sized openable areas of windows or other opening devices in homes are critical to providing the means to ventilate living spaces and bedrooms.
- Ceiling fans are an effective mitigation measure and have a reasonably low installation cost. They do not reduce space temperatures, but the increased air speed that they create provides improved comfort.

A further potential solution is to provide air-conditioning within homes. Although air-conditioning provides a consistent and precise level of temperature control, it adds capital costs to developments and increases energy costs for residents, and its installation and operation adds further operational and embodied carbon emissions which negatively impact the environment. Air-conditioning systems also add complexity and maintenance requirements, and their use is generally not required for most sites where a comprehensive suite of the passive measures have been properly considered. In the



Nick Fewings on Unsplash

Feasibility considerations and cultural challenges—as may be posed by the use of external shutters in the UK—will have a bearing on the successful implementation of measures to counter overheating in homes

limited circumstances that cooling is required to mitigate overheating, the most low-carbon solutions are usually ground source heat pumps, in which cooler ground water is circulated to underfloor heating systems or other suitable devices such as fan coil units or radiant panels in summer.

The feasibility and appropriateness of the above measures should be considered in parallel with the other Healthy Homes Principles.⁵ For example, on taller buildings, shading devices must not introduce additional fire safety risk. Similarly, openable windows need to be secure so that they do not introduce additional security risks to a home. Measures to minimise solar gain can also conflict with achieving good levels of daylight within homes, meaning that a good balance needs to be found.

‘Planners can also have influence over design responses at a neighbourhood or city region level in order to support reduced temperatures and more comfortable conditions around buildings and so minimise overheating risk’

There are a number of things that planners should consider when assessing new developments and overheating risk. There are already good examples of policy and best practice guidance within the 2021 edition of the London Plan.⁶ Policy SI 4 concerns the management of heat risk and requires design teams to follow a ‘cooling hierarchy’ and major developments to carry out assessments based on CIBSE requirements. This guidance drives design responses, and while Greater London has a higher overheating risk than many other parts of the UK the principles within the London Plan are relevant to other urban centres which have similar urban heat island effects.⁷

Planners can also have influence over design responses at a neighbourhood or city region level in order to support reduced temperatures and more comfortable conditions around buildings and so minimise overheating risk. More greenery around new homes can help to provide a cooler microclimate. A major research programme led by University College London (UCL)⁸ is currently assessing the health and economic impacts of urban-scale interventions, acknowledging the important role that green infrastructure plays in cities and further assessing the benefits and impacts for people. Similarly, cool roofs can help to reduce urban heat island impacts. A recent report for the GLA, *Roofs Designed to Cool*,⁹

provides insight into the benefits of ‘cool roofs’ in helping to reduce urban heat island effects and therefore overheating risk in homes. Planners may find these documents relevant when considering how masterplans or city-scale proposals address overheating in their proposals.

Measures which help to reduce external noise and improve air quality can also help to provide suitable conditions for windows to be opened and natural ventilation to be maximised. Some solutions, such as external shutters, may be visually different from traditional architecture within the UK; but they are already common in warmer climates and are often part of the fabric of homes. This is not the case in the UK, which historically has had a cooler climate and where some measures could encounter cultural challenges, given the need to change the appearance of homes as well as occupants’ behaviour. The nature of the changes and the planning considerations that might govern their implementation are important considerations.

● **Mike Edwards** is a Director at Arup. The views expressed are personal.

Notes

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- 8 See UCL’s ‘HEROIC: Health and Economic impacts of Reducing Overheating in Cities’ webpage, at www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/environmental-design/research-projects/2023/jul/heroic-health-and-economic-impacts-reducing-overheating-cities
- 9 *Roofs Designed to Cool Report: A Review of Reflective Solar PV Roofs*. Arup, for Mayor of London. Greater London Authority, Jun. 2023. www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/environment-and-climate-change/environment-and-climate-change-publications/roofs-designed-cool-report

the value of community-led housing

Hannah Emery-Wright and **Robert Read** explain how London CLT and Guy's and St Thomas' Foundation are exploring the health benefits of housing delivered by community land trusts



London CLT

Residents and community leaders at the official opening of Citizens House

On 23 April 2023, residents of Citizens House in Lewisham—London Community Land Trust's latest project and first direct community-led development¹—hosted a celebration to officially open their new homes. After 10 years campaigning through Lewisham Citizens (the local chapter of the community organising charity Citizens UK), 11 genuinely and permanently affordable homes have replaced an estate's neglected garage site. Community leaders who made key decisions on

land, design, build and allocations joined the celebrations.

People with long-standing connections to Lewisham, who faced being squeezed out, unable to afford somewhere to call home, are now first-time homeowners at Citizens House. These local teachers, healthcare professionals, artists and civil servants, as well as employees in the private sector, all embedded in their communities, now control their homes through a residents' management company.

'Moving into the CLT has been completely transformative... We've never had such stability to rely on, to depend on, to have as a basis for our plans and dreams.'

Citizens House resident

Affordability is key if housing is to contribute to good health and wellbeing. Community land trusts (CLTs) are non-profit, member-led organisations that own and develop land for community benefit, providing stewardship to ensure that homes remain affordable in perpetuity. London CLT's homes are sold and re-sold at prices related to earnings, not skewed market forces—their buyers are investing in a *home*, not an asset.

Beyond affordability, people-centred approaches can have long-term benefits for health through the quality of the build and strengthening the wider community. Neighbours of Citizens House selected the architects, and the successful firm, Archio, ran co-design workshops. Connectivity and community were prioritised—an existing pedestrian route now opens into shared public space.

Design innovations are challenging, and achieving build costs to allow sales at what turned out to be 65% of market value requires keen budgeting. Nevertheless, London CLT's members have agreed ambitious principles for future schemes—addressing climate impact and promoting sustainability, autonomy and inclusion, health and wellbeing, economic wellbeing and prosperity, community and connectivity, safety and security, and beautiful homes for living.

London CLT is working with Guy's and St Thomas' Foundation, which provided an urban health grant to support research. An advisory panel of academics and practitioners, including the TCPA, is looking at how design principles for healthy homes align with members' priorities. Research streams are exploring how to achieve sustainability, quality, and social impact, while maximising health and ensuring long-term affordability for residents.

Assessing impact

The Citizens House project began by retrospectively assessing London CLT's first 23 homes, acquired in 2017 through a Section 106 agreement at the former St Clements Hospital site in Mile End. Although the developer-led conversion and new-build project at a former workhouse and psychiatric hospital allowed London CLT limited input, research highlights tangible differences made by the homes.

Residents' stories illustrate the depth of the housing crisis, not only impacting London's least well-off but increasingly those with average incomes. Shared-ownership schemes trapped growing families in overcrowded flats as rising property values increased costs and made moving unaffordable. One family faced eviction from keyworker accommodation when their housing association landlord decided to sell,

while another keyworker's rent rose to unaffordable levels when their block was sold to a housing association. Disrepair, damp and mould afflicted private and social rentals, while one couple wondered if they could ever start a family when their only affordable option was property guardianship on an estate awaiting regeneration.

Interviewees felt the pressures of many trying to get by in London—the only option seemed to involve leaving. But living, working and raising families in the city was a key part of their sense of identity. Some were born near St Clements, while others had lived there for many years, contributing to community life and culture, and insecurity and anxiety threatened their health and wellbeing.

Selection criteria for the homes prioritised housing need, local connection, financial circumstances, and community contribution. Successful applicants were brought together, getting to know one another as they awaited completion of their homes. Social events and a campaign for community space helped build capacity for the responsibilities of resident management. Research shows that connectivity contributes to health and wellbeing, as does control, both over one's own circumstances and over the physical and social environment.

After moving in, residents reported reduced anxiety and a feeling of security, a burden lifted. Pressures had become ever-present, only really becoming fully apparent once they had gone—life felt lighter. They spoke of better standards of living and work/life balance, improved employment opportunities, a chance to study, or just being able to focus on what is most important. They remain in the neighbourhood where they had established roots, built valuable networks, and enjoyed the culture of city life. Green space is valued—many spoke of the importance of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, a nature reserve at the back of St Clements. Others have appropriated green space between buildings for community gatherings, sharing food and drink, and for children to play and even have camp-outs.

Some previously in parental homes, desperately saving for mortgages, gained independence, and life-changing decisions have been made. Flexible policy-making allowed allocation of two-bedroom properties to couples wanting children—ten babies have been born among CLT residents in the six years since moving in! For most, St Clements has brought privacy to balance connectivity—enough bedrooms, and space for people to be themselves and for children to study.

'This to me is a space which is home... a place where I can retreat and have my own space and recharge and rest. And it is my space... somewhere where I feel safe, and I feel happy.'

St Clements resident



London CLT

'After moving in, residents reported reduced anxiety and a feeling of security, a burden lifted. Pressures had become ever-present, only really becoming fully apparent once they had gone'

There are challenges—nine years on, developers remain on site and residents are yet to take control, adding to frustrations about refuse disposal, door-entry systems, and lifts not working properly. Anticipated community space remains uncertain. In future schemes, London CLT will look for partners who share its ethos and support resident management. Despite this, shared experiences among CLT residents provide a base for social interaction and an atmosphere of conviviality, neighbourliness, and collaboration.

These benefits could be met through other housing types, but the compelling case is that most other options do not currently combine them. Often people become displaced in search of affordability or have a sense of belonging but lack quality of build or security of tenure. So perhaps working to provide this combination is where CLTs add greatest value in improving health and wellbeing.

Looking forward

Research connecting CLTs to health is limited, and St Clements alone will not make the case for systemic change. Pre-occupancy information from Citizens House residents is being followed up by post-occupancy questionnaires and interviews, while the impact of community involvement in getting homes built is also being researched.

Healthy design principles will provide a framework for new projects, allowing intentions to be set early and maximising opportunities. London CLT is planning new homes in Greenwich and Redbridge, with other potential sites in Ealing, Lambeth, and Southwark. The political and economic environment, though, is uncertain. The Community Housing Fund, which has subsidised many projects, is due to expire in April 2024, and CLTs have an ambiguous

place in councils' housing strategies. London CLT's urban health aims to promote learning via lobbying and campaigning—for inclusion of CLTs in policy across London, particularly in the run-up to the 2024 mayoral and council elections.

Hopes and challenges

As building costs increase and climate change considerations become a necessity, balancing quality and affordability is challenging. Significant grant funding is needed just to make ends meet—with sustainable standards such as Passivhaus dropped to keep homes affordable. As development complexity increases costs, keeping prices pegged to local incomes gets progressively harder. CLTs are often given the most difficult infill sites, rejected by more established builders, and are expected to make them work with significantly fewer resources. When things go wrong, or take time, it feeds narratives about CLTs being too difficult, when the odds were already imbalanced. Local authorities being curious and solution oriented could tip the balance.

We hope that this research builds better understanding of where CLTs add unique value, and supports innovations to maintain approaches combining community, sustainability, quality, and affordability. We also hope that it helps to persuade government at all levels that such approaches are worth investing in.

● **Hannah Emery-Wright** is a communities consultant at London CLT. **Robert Read** is a postgraduate researcher at Anglia Ruskin University. The views expressed are personal.

Note

1 See the London CLT website, at www.londonclt.org/

a community-led model for urban infill sites

Athlyn Cathcart-Keays outlines community land trust WeCanMake's people- and place-led approach to creating affordable new homes in a 100-year old council-built estate in Knowle West, Bristol, and suggests that the model can be adopted and adapted elsewhere to unarguable advantage



WeCanMake

View of the new home (centre left) built in the garden of the resident's parents

When our neighbourhood of Knowle West, in Bristol, was first conceived almost 100 years ago to provide council-built homes 'fit for heroes', it was seen by many as the future of housing: built to Garden City principles, with each solid semi-detached red-brick

home set within a generous garden. Nearly a century later, Knowle West may once again represent the future of housing, but this time telling a new story about how a creative community-led approach can help to re-imagine how we do housing to better



Reuben Armstrong



WeCanMake



Ibolya Feher/WeCanMake

Clockwise from top left: WeCanMake resident Toni in the garden where her home was later built; inside Toni's finished home; and Toni with the build crew during construction

meet the needs of people and the planet, through a process of gentle, context-dependent densification as an alternative to greenfield sprawl and high-rise towers.

Today, two of those generous gardens now host a community-led, low-carbon, locally made 'living rent' home, with the land and homes held in a community land trust in perpetuity.

But first, rewind to 2015, when WeCanMake—a community land trust that creates affordable homes using micro-sites in big or neglected back gardens and in left-over spaces between buildings¹—began with an artist in residence going door-to-door in Knowle West with a mobile cyanotype unit on the back of a bike trailer, making wallpaper while chatting to local people about what makes a home. With the residency and wallpaper hangings complete, a question was raised: 'If we can make wallpaper together with the community, maybe we can make homes together?'

And so began the story of what happens when the power and resources to create good homes are put into the hands of the community. The path from wallpaper to physical homes wasn't exactly linear, but the thread that runs throughout is that the Knowle West community is at the heart of each step in the process.

Community-led, not just community engaged

WeCanMake's design code provides a good example of its community-led approach.

Design codes are usually quite technical documents designed by and for built environment professionals

to set the rules for what gets built. WeCanMake puts the Knowle West community at the heart of making the rules, setting out a positive framework for the kinds of homes that the community would welcome in the neighbourhood, including aspects such as number, location, size, building materials, and overall look. The code, which was designed by a crew of local people, artists, architects and Bristol City Council's Design Group, makes it easier for people to navigate a complicated design and planning process, while ensuring that homes are of high quality and add character to the neighbourhood. And when it comes to getting planning permission, the answer is more likely to be 'yes'.

From the internal layout to the final fit-out and decoration, each home is co-designed with its future residents. When it's time to build, we use a 'modern method of construction' (MMC)—a timber cassette system which is cut and assembled in our community micro-factory, transported to site in an electric van, and then put together a bit like LEGO. MMC democratises construction, bringing local people into the process of building homes in their neighbourhood.

While the value of most new housing developments typically tends to wash through local communities as profits flow to large commercial developers, building in this way makes the value of new development 'sticky'—local people are employed, they learn new skills, and they play a role in shaping the places in which they live, one home at a time.

Measuring value

Community ownership and leadership have been linked to improvements in the quality and sense of place, benefiting longer-term mental and physical health outcomes.² Measuring the value of new development must mean more than just looking at the number of units delivered—we want to know how new homes quantifiably contribute to creating local jobs, reducing loneliness, fostering pride of place, and tackling the climate emergency.

The 2012 Public Services (Social Value) Act has helped to drive interest in value beyond just costs, but its application to housing development tends to focus on narrow outputs and compensatory benefits. We wanted to measure what matters for local people, so we have taken a broader outcome-driven approach, building on the frameworks that the council uses—TOMs (Themes, Outcomes and Measures) and HACT's social value metrics—which are industry-accepted methodologies for assigning financial values to social value indicators.

Through a series of creative co-design sessions with future residents and community members, we identified a rich array of additional measures—from a sense of belonging to knowing their neighbours. The result is our 'Good Home' social value framework,³ which tracks value within four themes ('Good for me', 'Good dwelling', 'Good for the neighbourhood',

and 'Good for the planet') over time, using a mix of construction data, surveys undertaken among the residents every six months, and data from the 'smart citizen sensors' that are installed in the homes. The framework provides a way for our community to measure what matters most when new development happens and communicate the findings in a way that is recognised by the wider development industry and public sector. The next challenge is to convert the substantial social value that this kind of place-led innovation can generate into upfront capital investment to sustain and scale that innovation.

Overall, the social value generated by the first two homes worked out at £375,171. If we break this down a bit, we know that a huge amount of this—£206,701—relates to the 'Good for me' theme of the framework. This includes factors such as security of housing, feeling in control, having confidence, and improved physical health. Other factors that created value in our framework include no longer having issues with mould, and a sense of neighbourhood belonging.

Positively re-wiring the housing system

WeCanMake's success shows that when motivated communities and local authorities work together it is possible to positively seed radical



Photos: Ibolya Feher/WeCanMake

Clockwise from above: The pioneering WeCanMake residents, Bill, Liam and John; John's home in the garden of Bill's council house; and inside John's home



change and re-wire the existing housing system to better meet people's housing needs.

Nothing we have done has required new policy or regulation. Within existing frameworks we have created a new supply of land, charted a new route through the planning system, and developed a new way to diversify and localise the production of new homes and put them precisely where people want and need them most.

'Our model meets specific national policy goals on land use, public land disposal, housing supply, neighbourhood planning, design coding, MMC, local economic development, and affordable housing. It also supports broader policy agendas on levelling up, social value, social care, and climate change'

While we achieved all this, it certainly wasn't a straightforward path—many steps are unnecessarily slow and difficult. We are pleased that community-led housing is gaining recognition for its role in boosting the supply of homes and giving local people control over their future,⁴ but the sector needs a firm commitment of support to succeed. We offer several policy recommendations that aim to simplify and standardise the process, making it easier for more local communities to adopt the approach:

- a new community-led urban exception site policy (CLUES);
- a Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities policy circular endorsing the principle of community-led infill development;
- local or combined authority support for community-led urban infill projects;
- local or combined authority internal processes for supporting community-led infill development;
- materials, tools and processes to help local authorities and communities create their own design codes; and
- appropriate funding and support for community-led organisations that are not registered providers of social housing.

Further detail on these policy recommendations can be found on the WeCanMake website.⁵

Our model meets specific national policy goals on land use, public land disposal, housing supply, neighbourhood planning, design coding, MMC, local economic development, and affordable housing.

It also supports broader policy agendas on levelling up, social value, social care, and climate change. Few housing projects can claim to achieve so many policy objectives at once: scaling up community-led urban infill development should be a natural priority for national and local government policy, practice, and funding.

Now we want to show local authorities that they can support and facilitate communities shaping and delivering development on their own terms. As we continue to deliver homes in Knowle West, we are also working with several local communities across the UK to adapt and adopt our tools to suit their own local context. The model exists as a cumulative approach to make an impact, with scale achieved through multiple, distributed and diverse neighbourhoods using a common set of tools; and we encourage other communities and local authorities to get in touch if they think this is something that might work locally.

In the words of John, one of our trailblazing WeCanMake residents:

'We are the pioneers. No-one's ever tried to do this before. Hopefully, what we've done is make it easier for everyone else who comes after. We've made it happen in Knowle West, but this could be the future for a lot more people like me.'

● **Athlyn Cathcart-Keays** is communications lead for WeCanMake. The views expressed are personal.

Notes

- 1 See the WeCanMake website at <https://wecanmake.org/>
- 2 R Callway, A Le Gouais, EL Bird, M Chang and J Kidger: 'Integrating health into local plans: a comparative review of health requirements for urban development in seven local planning authorities in England'. *International Journal of Environmental Research & Public Health*, 2023, Vol. 20(5), 4079. www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/20/5/4079
- 3 See the *WeCanMake Playbook*, at https://wecanmake.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/wecanmake_playbook.pdf
- 4 M Gove: 'Long-term plan for housing'. Speech by the Secretary of State. Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 24 Jul. 2023. www.gov.uk/government/speeches/long-term-plan-for-housing-secretary-of-states-speech
- 5 See WeCanMake's 'Scaling WeCanMake through changes in policy and practice' webpage, at <https://wecanmake.org/fieldnotes/toolshed/scaling-wecanmake-through-changes-in-policy-and-practice/>

healthy policies for healthy places— how to better integrate health into local plans?

Rosalie Callway and **Anna Le Gouais** report the findings of a study that examined seven Local Plans in England to identify ways to strengthen health requirements in planning policies

In 2021, a team of researchers from five universities (Bristol, Bath, Manchester, Reading, and the West England) embarked on a series of interviews with over 130 practitioners involved in urban development—from property developers, real estate investors and consultants, to local government planning and public health officers and national government civil servants. We sought to map out how urban development decisions consider public health impacts and inclusivity.

The work recognises that the built environment can directly and indirectly influence physical and mental health outcomes in a variety of ways. For example, places with accessible walking and cycling infrastructure are associated with higher levels of active travel and physical activity; access to good-quality green spaces can support mental health and reduce overheating; and housing design quality can influence social interactions, safety, indoor air quality, and thermal comfort, as well as mental health and wellbeing. However, without clear policies, new homes and neighbourhoods may be designed

and built in a way that negatively affects people's health.

The practitioners identified Local Plans a key barrier to creating healthier places (see Box 1): interviewees said that they felt Local Plans were too often inconsistent or weak with regard to how policies defined health requirements for developers when making planning applications. Developers who were interviewed also pointed to what they saw as weak regulatory incentives for them to take health into account when formulating and implementing development proposals. Some developers and investors also reported uncertainty about how different built environment forms and arrangements contribute to delivering specific health outcomes. They asked for finer-grain detail about factors that help to address particular aspects of health, including particular mental health issues such as depression or anxiety, and more specific details about features that help to reduce preventable non-communicable (non-infectious) diseases, such as respiratory and heart diseases.

Box 1

Reported problems with Local Plans regarding health

- Health is not sufficiently prioritised in Local Plans.
- Local Plans lack incentives for developers to prioritise health outcomes.
- Developers lack sufficient understanding about the form that healthy urban development should take.
- Local Plans lack strong requirements to improve implementation by developers.

In response to these findings, a small team of researchers embarked on creating an evaluation framework to review how health is addressed in Local Plans and clarify where improvements could be made. We engaged with Bristol City Council to apply the framework to the city’s draft Local Plan. We also evaluated a sample of six other Local Plans that were recently updated (five adopted, one draft, and all dated between 2019 and 2022) and were recommended as potential sources of learning: Brighton & Hove, Cornwall, London Borough of Havering, Liverpool, Plymouth and South West Devon (joint plan), and Wakefield.

Integrating health in Local Plans review

A health in Local Plans review framework was developed, based on a review of literature, the interview findings, and dialogue with practitioners. It is organised under three areas:

- **Definitions of health:** How is health broadly defined in the Local Plan, including in terms of local strategic priorities and evidence?
- **Health requirements for developers:** What health-related requirements and determinants of health are developers expected to address?
- **Implementation of health requirements:** How does the plan support delivery of the developer requirements?

Definitions of health

Across the Local Plans included in the review we found that the most significant gap was in relation to transparency about how strategic priorities and policies were shaped and informed by local health

and wellbeing strategies, as well as health evidence. These priorities can be outlined in Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs) and elsewhere, such as the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IDM).

As identified in the interviews, there was a lack of specific detail about local non-communicable diseases and mental health issues at the spatial level which could be used to highlight ward- and neighbourhood-level health inequalities and concerns.

Two of the Local Plans did involve a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) of the plan itself. There were references to standards promoting healthy urban development and sustainability, such as the Building for a Healthy Life standard,¹ as well as some limited references to guidance, such as from Sport England and Public Health England, about planning in ways to promote health outcomes.²⁻⁵

Requirements for developers

The second part of the review looked at specific policy requirements for developers and considered whether there were specific healthy development policies in the Local Plan, requirements for HIAs as part of planning applications, and inclusion of HIAs in the validation checklist. It also undertook a detailed evaluation of whether policies addressed wider determinants of health. Determinants of health covered five themes (see Fig. 2 on the next page):

- neighbourhood design;
- healthy housing;
- healthier food environments;
- natural and sustainable environments; and
- healthy transport.

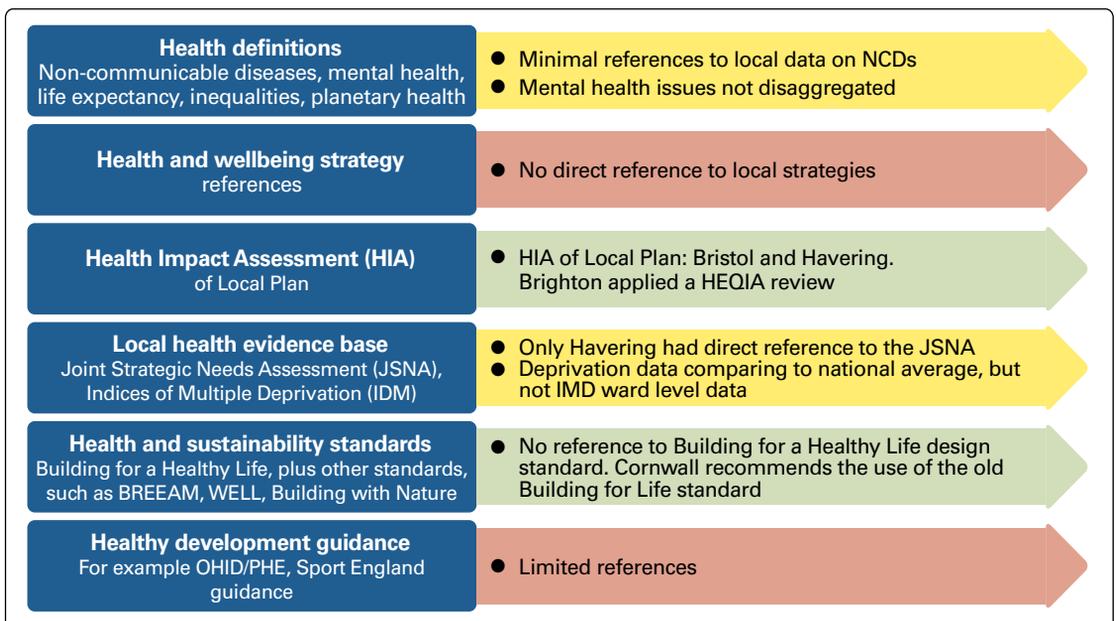


Fig. 1 Definitions of health assessment, and a summary of review findings

■ Clearly defined
 ■ Partially defined
 ■ Absent

| Theme | Principles |
|--|---|
| <p>1 Healthy neighbourhood design</p> | <p>1 Neighbourhood walkability and cycling</p> <p>2 Complete and compact neighbourhoods</p> <p>3 Connectivity, with safe and efficient infrastructure</p> |
| <p>2 Healthy homes</p> | <p>1 Improve the quality of housing</p> <p>2 Increase the provision of affordable, diverse and secure housing</p> <p>3 Increase the provision of affordable housing for groups with specific needs</p> |
| <p>3 Healthier food environments</p> | <p>1 Healthy, affordable food for the general population</p> <p>2 Enhance community food infrastructure</p> |
| <p>4 Natural and sustainable environments</p> | <p>1 Reduce exposure to environmental hazards</p> <p>2 Access to and engagement with the natural environment</p> <p>3 Adaptation to climate change</p> |
| <p>5 Healthy transport</p> | <p>1 Provision of active travel infrastructure</p> <p>2 Prioritise public transport</p> <p>3 Prioritise connectivity with safe and efficient infrastructure</p> <p>4 Enable mobility for all ages and activities (including monitoring of travel plans)</p> |

Fig. 2 Headline review themes and principles linked to the determinants of health

Sources: *Spatial Planning for Health: An Evidence Resource for Planning and Designing Healthier Places*³ and EL Bird *et al.*: 'Built and natural environment planning principles for promoting health: an umbrella review'⁶

Across these themes we assessed 39 built environment attributes that are known to support health and wellbeing, as reported by Bird *et al.*⁶ and Public Health England.³

Four of the seven Local Plans included a definite healthy development policy, and all had requirements regarding developers completing an HIA for large developments. However, only two of the local planning validation checklists actually referred to this HIA requirement. All the Local Plans contained policies that promoted better-quality development and sought the amelioration of negative impacts and risks to health such that posed by pollution.

All seven Local Plans scored well across all five determinants of health themes (see Fig. 3 on the next page), and especially the neighbourhood design theme, which includes promotion of

character and distinctiveness, active travel, inclusion, mixed-use typologies, compactness, optimal densities, and connectivity.

The main two determinant of health themes which could be strengthened in the seven plans were healthy homes and food environments. Regarding homes, local policies should clarify health requirements, particularly regarding indoor air quality, refurbishment of properties, security of tenure, and provision of affordable housing for homeless people. For example, Wakefield's 'Build to Rent housing' policy⁷ actively promotes tenure security: *'Build to Rent Schemes will require a legal agreement setting out that:*

1 The whole development is and remains under common ownership and management control for a minimum of 20 years;

- 2 Operators must offer tenancies of three years to all tenants, with tenants having the option to terminate at one month's notice, after the first six months, without a break fee being payable. Where a tenant requests a shorter tenancy this should be accommodated;
- 3 Operators must offer rent certainty for the period of the tenancy, the basis of which should be made clear to the tenant before a tenancy agreement is signed, including any annual increases which should always be formula-linked;
- 4 On-site management will be provided with a daily presence;
- 5 Operators must have a complaints procedure in place and be a member of a recognised ombudsman scheme and a member of the Council's Responsible Landlord Scheme;
- 6 An annual statement must be submitted to the Council setting out the approach being used to let affordable units, their ongoing status and demonstrating how the scheme is meeting the overall affordable housing level required by the planning permission.
- 7 All the homes must remain as Build to Rent under a covenant for at least 20 years;
- 8 All the units must be self-contained, let separately and not sublet.'

On promoting healthy food environments, Local Plan policies could be improved in terms of

increased support for access to healthy food via schools and retail outlets. For example, Part One of Brighton and Hove's City plan⁸ states the following:

'Parts A1 and A2 of the strategy seek to secure investment in local parades/centres and ensure a healthy mix of uses is maintained. These centres should allow local communities and neighbourhoods to access fresh, locally produced food and key services.' (Para. 3.179)

'Recognise, safeguard and encourage the role of allotments; garden plots within developments; small scale agriculture and farmers markets in providing access to healthy, affordable locally produced food options.' (CP18 'Healthy City').

Under the natural and sustainable environments theme, most of the Local Plans referred to the need to assess and plan for increased flood risk in relation to climate adaptation, but they did not recognise the need for built environment resilience and adaptation in relation to the potential variety of extreme weather events that will be associated with climate change, including droughts, storms, and excess cold.

Finally, all the Local Plans scored well in relation to healthy transport—however, improvements could be made regarding public transport access to recreational spaces.

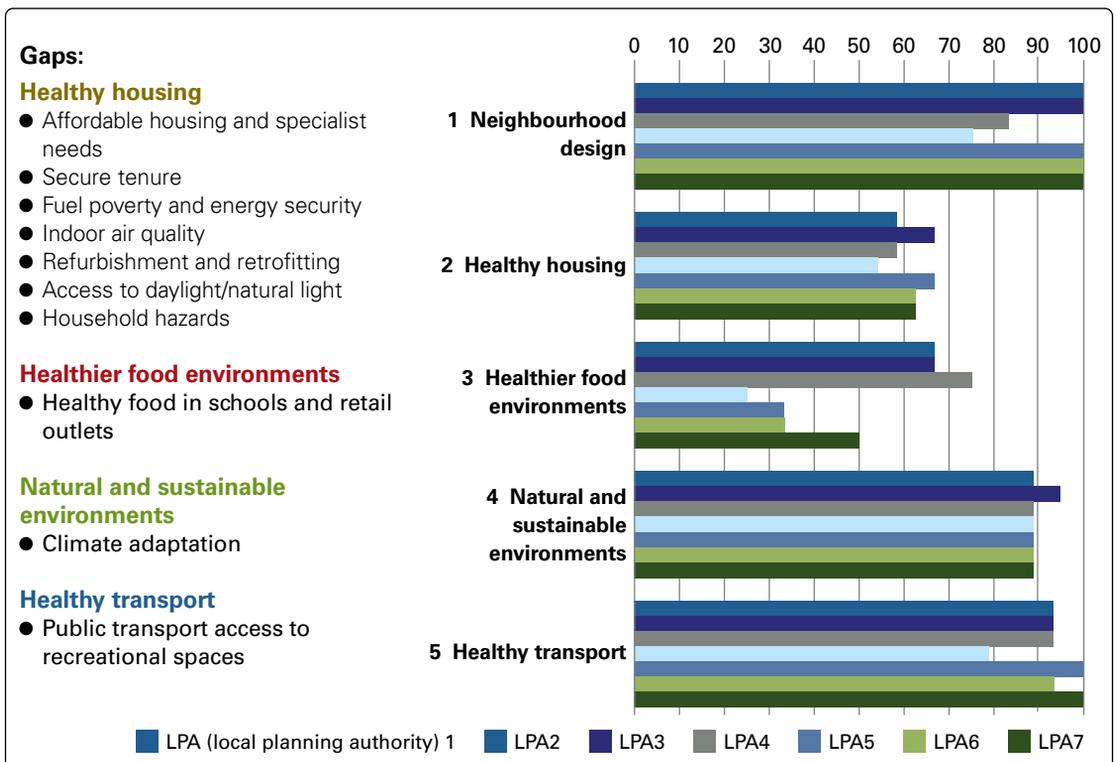


Fig. 3 Determinants of health framework scores

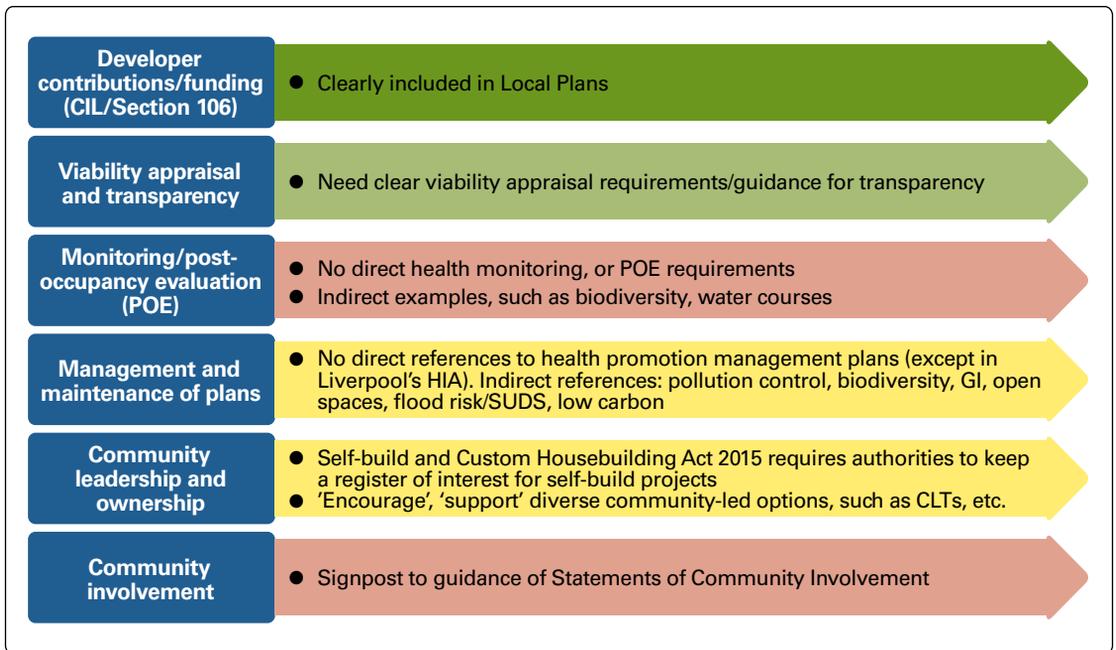


Fig. 4 Implementation of health requirements by developers

■ Clearly defined
 ■ Partially defined
 ■ Absent

Implementation of health requirements

The final part of the review focused on promoting the implementation of health requirements by developers (see Fig.4). It addressed the potential ‘implementation gap’ between urban design policy and practice, recognising the risk that developers can compromise on policies and planning conditions after planning consent is granted. Here we evaluated how Local Plans could be written to encourage developers to implement policy requirements, including those relating to health.

‘A key opportunity to strengthen Local Plans lies with policies that establish developer requirements to create health management plans, and include some form of post-occupancy evaluation as a part of that process’

We found that a key opportunity to strengthen Local Plans lies with policies that establish developer requirements to create health management plans, and include some form of post-occupancy evaluation as a part of that process. For example, Liverpool’s Local Plan calls for management plans to be developed based on the findings of Health

Impact Assessments that are required for major development proposals. Another opportunity lies with signposting developers towards guidance in Statements of Community Involvement, to strengthen how developers work with local communities and stakeholders when preparing a planning application. This is important, particularly in relation to how developers involve communities in more deprived areas, because engagement is often limited and may be seen as a ‘tick box’ exercise.

An issue that was not addressed in detail in our review but also affects implementation of policy requirements by developers is the use of language that waters down the strength of policies. We observed this kind of language in all seven Local Plans—for example, wording such as developers must deliver policy requirement x ‘where possible’ or ‘where viable’. Such language may give developers an opportunity to negotiate a way out of some requirements. Planning officers indicated that they try to avoid such wording. However, some said that, when draft plans were submitted to the Planning Inspectorate, the inspector may require the insertion of this type of weaker language. This watering down of policy requirements appears to signal a tension between local powers to require better-quality development and national pressures to prioritise the quantity of dwellings that are delivered.

Review recommendations

The review identified the need for greater coherence regarding health requirements in the

seven Local Plans, as well as in national planning policy and guidance. It highlighted key gaps, as well as policy language that has been successfully adopted in other Local Plans. Recommendations to strengthen the consideration of health in Local Plan policies include:

- Ensure that local policies are informed by and signpost local health priorities and evidence.
- Signpost developers towards national guidance and standards that promote healthy development principles.
- Strengthen health-related requirements for developers, including policies involving indoor air quality, access to daylight, fuel poverty, and security of tenure.
- Improve implementation requirements for developers, through measures such as obligations relating to health management plans, monitoring, and community engagement.

Further work is proposed to follow up the study in order to appraise the impact of this process for Bristol City Council and its emerging Local Plan, as well as working with other local authorities to develop the framework for wider application elsewhere in England.

It is hoped that this small-scale study will prove a valuable starting point to improve the systematic integration of health in Local Plan policies in the future.

● **Dr Rosalie Callway** is a Projects and Policy Manager at the TCPA, and **Dr Anna Le Gouais** is a Research Fellow at the University of Bristol. Anyone interested in trialling the health in Local Plans framework on an emerging Local Plan is very welcome to contact Rosalie Callway at the TCPA (rosalie.callway@tcpa.org.uk) and/or Anna Le Gouais at the University of Bristol (anna.legouais@bristol.ac.uk). The views expressed are personal.

Notes

- 1 R Callway, A Le Gouais, EL Bird, M Chang and J Kidger: 'Integrating health into local plans: a comparative review of health requirements for urban development in seven local planning authorities in England'. *International Journal of Environmental Research & Public Health*, 2023, Vol. 20(5), 4079. www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/20/5/4079/html
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- 3 *Spatial Planning for Health: An Evidence Resource for Planning and Designing Healthier Places*. Public Health England, Jun. 2017. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/729727/spatial_planning_for_health.pdf
- 4 *Spatial Planning and Health. Getting Research into Practice (GRIP): Study Report*. Public Health England, Oct. 2019. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/842840/Spatial_Planning_and_Health.pdf

- 5 *Active Design: Creating Active Environments through Planning and Design*. Sport England, May 2023. www.sportengland.org/guidance-and-support/facilities-and-planning/design-and-cost-guidance/active-design (the 2015 guidance was the current version at the time of the study)
- 6 EL Bird, JO Ige, P Pilkington, A Pinto, C Petrokofsky and J Burgess-Allen: 'Built and natural environment planning principles for promoting health: an umbrella review'. *BMC Public Health*, 2018, Vol. 18, 930. <https://bmcpublihealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-018-5870-2>
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social democracy, market liberalism, and milton keynes

Thatcher's Progress: From Social Democracy to Market Liberalism through an English New Town

By Guy Ortolano

Cambridge University Press, 2019,
ISBN 978-1-108-42866-0, 316pp., £31.99

There are three reasons why you should read this book. First, with the prospect of a Labour government on the horizon, Ortolano provides a timely reminder of the potential value of a genuinely social democratic approach to housing and planning. His study of Milton Keynes illustrates what a Labour government could do when it wanted to—and then what happened when Margaret Thatcher and Michael Heseltine took over responsibility for the project.

Second, the book offers a powerful examination of the New Towns programme and Milton Keynes in the broader context of modern British history. In so doing, Ortolano adds to our understanding of how political and economic forces shape urban development. This book should be required reading for all undergraduate and postgraduate students of planning.

And third, the book examines how Milton Keynes came about. Ortolano sympathetically explores Fred Pooley's efforts to promote the North Bucks New City for 250,000 people. Then he looks in some detail at the efforts to prepare the *Plan for Milton Keynes* and to create some parts of the city. Page after page, he brings the efforts of the Milton Keynes Development Corporation to life.

Serious scholars and 'Milton Keynes geeks' have a fourth reason—the footnotes. Although a Professor at New York University, Ortolano worked for weeks at a time over several years in the Buckinghamshire Archives, deep in the basement of County Hall in Aylesbury. It shows. His notes and references provide a rich guide to relevant academic literature and demonstrate the rigour of his research.

This is an unusual book. Ortolano combines an easy-to-read exposition of significant features of 20th-century Britain's political economy with thorough empirical research. He brings an understanding of social democracy and market liberalism to life and tells stories about some key players and a few of the places that they built in Milton Keynes. He focuses mainly on the period between the mid-1960s and

the mid-1980s, including the challenges from both Labour and Conservative governments.

Ortolano does not promise a comprehensive narrative about the project over 50 years. Nor does he look in any detail about how the Corporation invested over £250 million a year (at 2023 prices) and the risks that had to be taken. However, in every chapter he offers new insights into how a social democratic government can use powers and resources to build and create new places. Those who have been involved with Milton Keynes might challenge some of his interpretations and the odd fact. These could be healthy debates. Of more importance, as we prepare for a Labour government, this book will help to rebuild our confidence in British town and country planning.

If you buy one book about planning in 2023, buy this one. As a bonus, it includes 'Mahood's Map of Milton Friedman New Town' from *Punch*.

Lee Shostak

● **Lee Shostak** is a former Chair of the TCPA. He was a member of the independent Milton Keynes 2050 Futures Commission. He is now completing *Milton Keynes: Promise Delivered?* for publication in late 2024.

tinkers bubble — out of the box



When I went to university in 1977, I was too young to be a hippie but too old to be a yuppie. The writer Antonia Byatt, who set one of her novels during this particular moment in recent history, said that my generation suffered as a result. I don't think she was right (much as I might like her to be), but that is what I blame my continuing hippy opinions on. The world seems to be hurtling away in the opposite direction, so it isn't always easy to see the wood for the trees.

In particular, I have always retained an interest in communal living and intentional communities. Yet because I stepped down from the editor's chair of this august journal at the end of 1988, I was unable to bring my editorials to bear in support of planning permission for the new settlement known as Tinkers Bubble, when it was first turned down for permission in 1994. But amazingly, nearly three decades later, their temporary permission has been made permanent—which means that those living in the small settlement in South Somerset woodland (near Norton-sub-Hamden, famous as the village that was once home to Paddy Ashdown) can stay there. I also missed all the writing and lobbying by Simon Fairlie and the publication of his—in retrospect now important—book *Low Impact Development*.

Despite being turned down flat by South Somerset Council in 1994, the residents avoided a Johnny 'Rooster' Byron style confrontation by persuading the planning inspectors to give them a series of temporary permissions—in 1998, 2004, and 2015. The last of these was for ten years, and would have expired in 2026.

Full planning permission follows a long series of discussions with council planning officers, and more than 30 supportive letters to the council from neighbours. Permission is for up to 16 adults to live on site (there are now just six permanent residents) and their rights over a 40-acre area, as long as they are working in accordance with their own policies;

making cider and wood products, scything down the hay by hand—and crucially using no fossil fuels on site.

That kind of low-impact development may not be for everyone, but that doesn't mean it is somehow illegitimate. I'm very happy not to be living there myself, a bit like a medieval monk, but I am so glad that somebody does—almost on my behalf.

I have always understood that the loophole that originally allowed them to stay on site had been opened by Nicholas Ridley, a Thatcher-era Environment Secretary, who had been worried that tight planning control would not allow for buildings of 'unusual architectural merit'—by which he meant new stately homes and country houses. It is strange to think that what was intended to allow for new posh places has in the end allowed the still temporary structures at Tinkers Bubble. That story isn't confirmed by the article by Alex Toogood that celebrates permanent permission in *The Land* magazine¹—Simon Fairlie's later project and a brilliant read, subtitled 'an occasional magazine about land rights'. But I believe it to be true.

Toogood did include five key lessons from the process:

- Temporary permission gave them time to demonstrate their commitment and the positive impact that they were having.
- Building positive relationships with the local community, including the parish council and local South Somerset District Council employees, provided a lot of support for the application.
- Ownership by a community benefit society, with an asset lock in place, can safeguard the project from profiteering.
- Their structures are still considered temporary: the permanent permission refers to the policies they have in place and their right to reside and work there.
- Finally, let me quote the last of these in full, because it may please some of the readers of this column:

*'Planning officers are more human when engaged with in person rather than through the edifice of the government's planning portal—especially for a project like this which doesn't fit into any of the conventional boxes. Personal contact makes some things a lot easier, from both sides.'*¹

What is interesting is how much the permission relies on the pioneering work of the One Planet Development policy, in place in Wales since 2010, which has led to 55 planning applications and 39 approvals for low-impact development in open countryside.

The latest edition of *The Land* also includes articles by Brett Sanders, who has been studying the One Planet Development policy since 2016, and Pete Linnell of the One Planet Council, set up after all the applications were refused until 2012. Linnell says that the first new policies along similar lines in England—in Cornwall and in the Dartmoor National Park—are both ‘framed in terms which offer nothing to potential practitioners and seem designed to do everything possible to deter applicants’.²

The real question is how planning authorities in England will respond, especially those that have declared a climate emergency. In the Tinkers Bubble application, Toogood wrote:

‘As well as having demonstrated its long-term viability, Tinkers Bubble also has an important ongoing role in meeting the changing needs of our time. With many Councils declaring a Climate Emergency, shortages of affordable housing, and intensifying economic pressures on conventional farming, Tinkers Bubble explores an alternative approach to living, working and resource production, which is more socially and ecologically viable than many other options available...’³

Even *The Guardian* has now covered the Tinkers Bubble community in a feature.⁴ And let me finish by quoting the words of a local taxi driver used in that article:

‘We used to think they were dopeheads and dogs-on-a-string sort of people,’ he says. ‘But I see them these days with their bikes and horses, selling cider and apple juice in the village and—you know what?—I think they have got life about right.’

● **David Boyle** is the author of *Tickbox* (Little, Brown), *Oppenheimer* (Sharpe) and, with Lesley Yarranton, *Edge City UK* (the Real Press). The views expressed are personal.

Notes

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- 4 S Howard: ‘The rise of woodland off-gridders: ‘It makes more sense than a nine-to-five’’. *The Guardian*, 3 Jul. 2023. <https://tinyurl.com/2hdbf72s>

need for speed?



In the wake of the threatened backbench rebellion that would have scuppered its 300,000-a-year target for new homes, the government has been more circumspect when it comes to target-setting. However, consultation proposals to implement the Local Plan reforms set out in the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill (LURB)¹ are predicated on hitting a particularly challenging figure resurrected from the Planning White Paper—namely to rattle through the Local Plan process in 30 months.

The consultation document suggests a number of ways to achieve this timescale, including the introduction of three gateway assessments at the beginning, middle and end of the plan-making process, with the final assessment taking place shortly before the examination of the draft plan. At gateway 1 the assessor is required to cast an eye over the scope of the plan and consider whether the supporting evidence is proportionate. The gateway 2 assessment focuses on resolving issues that could compromise the soundness of the plan. The third is a ‘stop-go’ assessment. At this point the plan-making authority will not be able to proceed to examination unless and until the assessor is satisfied that prescribed legal and procedural requirements have been met.

This system of health checks at key stages in plan production is a welcome innovation. It should reduce the prospect of authorities committing valuable time and resources to plan proposals that are doomed to failure from the outset, and could also help to get plans that are in danger of veering off course back on track.

The consultation also signposts the government’s intention to adopt a more interventionist approach when it comes to Local Plan formulation. Templates are to be introduced, incorporating standard clauses for parts of the plan. The consultation also makes reference to the anticipated suite of ‘national development management policies’ and reminds authorities that there will be no need to replicate

them in local policy. While a degree of standardisation will undoubtedly save time, there is an inherent contradiction in an approach to plan-making which aims to reflect the uniqueness of places by offering tailored responses while also being tied to prescribed plan content. Hopefully, any mandatory elements will be kept to a minimum.

Perhaps the most significant change to policy formulation at local authority level is the introduction of 'supplementary plans'. These will have a key role to play as they will eventually replace Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs), which are currently employed extensively by local authorities to flesh out and provide guidance on development plan policies.

However, despite the fact that supplementary plans are likely to be in particular demand as a policy tool, the consultation urges restraint when it comes to their use. They are to be limited in scope, both geographically and in terms of their subject matter. They should be prepared only in 'exceptional or unforeseen circumstances'—for example where an unexpected regeneration opportunity arises and there is a need to proceed quickly to establish a planning policy framework. In contrast to SPD production, where authorities essentially mark their own homework, supplementary plans will be subject to an external examination. While the details of this process are to be set out in regulations which have yet to be drafted, it is expected that the approach will reflect Neighbourhood Plan production.

Turning to a more esoteric LURB concept, the consultation also asks for views on proposals to introduce 'Community Land Auctions' (CLAs). These are a (rather elaborate) tool to secure land value capture. In summary, plan-making authorities can invite landowners to put development sites forward for a CLA, specifying a price at which they would be willing to sell them. The authority is then able to take out options to purchase the sites at the specified price. In the event that a site is allocated in the Local Plan, the authority can either auction off the option, retaining any profit to fund infrastructure that would be necessary to support development, or purchase the land and develop it itself.

It is fair to say that these proposals were greeted with a degree of scepticism when they were debated at the LURB Report Stage in the House of Lords. Particular concerns were expressed about the probity of a process which involves authorities making decisions on allocating land in circumstances in which they have a clear financial interest. Following the Lords debate, amendments were made to the LURB providing that authorities cannot be forced to pilot CLAs and will have to 'actively volunteer' to participate. It remains to be seen whether there will be any real

enthusiasm among local authorities to embark on such a novel and potentially controversial process.

In common with the parent legislation, the consultation proposals are a mixed bag. When it comes to the new-style Local Plans the concern is that local responsiveness will be sacrificed for speed of production. Also, while the stated ambition for simpler, shorter and more visual plans is laudable, on occasions there will be a need to provide more fine-grained policy guidance in order to properly guide development proposals. The SPD process will no longer be available to provide this exposition.

'When it comes to the new-style Local Plans the concern is that local responsiveness will be sacrificed for speed of production'

The new system of supplementary plans should end the legal uncertainty over what SPDs can legitimately deal with and what policies should be reserved for the development plan (a difficult issue, compounded by some particularly opaque drafting in the development plan regulations). However, the process for supplementary plan production will be more involved, and investment will be required in the examination process to ensure a smooth progression from SPDs to supplementary plans. If the system is not properly resourced, there is a risk that the current delays associated with the Local Plan regime will be replicated in supplementary plan production.

While the gateway system for Local Plans will offer considerable benefits, it will also require additional investment to ensure that the assessment process runs efficiently.

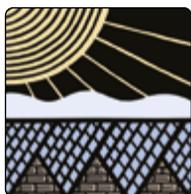
Finally, while the consultation goes some way to providing clarity on the reforms, there is still a good deal of detail to follow. The content of this is critical to assessing whether there is any real prospect of achieving the 30-month target for Local Plans.

● **Bob Pritchard** is Head of Knowledge in the Planning Team at Shoosmiths. The views expressed are personal.

Note

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a crucial role for heat networks



It is widely recognised that district heat networks can make a major contribution to decarbonising heat in the built environment. The government's Heat and Buildings Strategy, published in October 2021,¹ states that:

'Heat networks have the advantage of being compatible with a range of heat sources, including heat pumps and hydrogen. Particularly when electrifying heat, networks have benefits over individual building-scale solutions, including:

- *unlocking heat sources which result in higher performance compared to individual solutions (for example by using larger water source heat pumps operating at higher efficiencies)*
- *reducing peak energy loads by using thermal energy storage'*

The Climate Change Committee estimates that the UK has more than 28.5 million homes, and another 1.9 million other buildings—offices, hospitals, shops, warehouses, and more. The majority of these are heated by gas boilers, which also provide hot water—the bulk of the rest use petroleum for the same end.² Around 37% of all carbon dioxide emissions derive from heating buildings.

District heating and cooling are seen by government as being one of the main ways in which the UK can meet its target to become net zero by 2050, but there are huge challenges in scaling up the delivery of new heat networks.

There are over 14,000 heat networks in the UK, providing heating and hot water to approximately 480,000 consumers. The Climate Change Committee estimates that around 18% of UK heat could come from heat networks by 2050. But only 2% of the current heat demand being met is met in this way.³

The Energy Security Bill introduced into Parliament in July 2022 (now known as the Energy Bill)⁴ contains provisions both for regulating heat networks and for heat network zoning (HNZ) so that buildings and

building owners within such zones can be required to connect to a heat network where it is deemed the lowest-cost solution for decarbonising heat. Certain buildings within zones would be required to connect to the heat network:

*'The heat network zoning proposals are expected to deliver an additional 31 terawatt-hours of deployment in the period to 2050 (equivalent to around 7% of total UK heat demand) and save 13.1 million tonnes of CO₂e over carbon budgets 4 to 6 (2023 to 2037).'*³

The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero is currently piloting HNZ to develop zones where they provide lowest-cost, low-carbon heat to the consumer through regulation, mandating powers, and market support. HNZ would potentially give local authorities new powers to ensure that building owners and landlords have to connect to heat networks, improving the performance and economic viability of low-carbon heat networks.

The role of local authorities in district heat networks

Local authorities already have powers under Section 11 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 to generate and sell heat and electricity.⁵ A number of local authorities in the UK have operated district heat networks for many years. For instance, Nottingham City Council set up its own district heating network in the mid-1970s. Now a council department, 'EnviroEnergy', operates a 14.5 megawatt condensing turbine and 80 kilometres of piping. It supplies:

*'heating and power to around 4,700 homes [...] and 100 businesses across Nottingham including the Victoria centre, the National Ice Centre Arena, Nottingham Trent University, BioCity, The Royal Centre and various other large local developments.'*⁶

It is therefore not uncommon for local authorities to operate heat networks, and there are excellent examples, including Southampton City Council, which set up its geothermal combined heating, cooling and power network in 1986, ThamesWey (Woking Council) in 1999, Aberdeen Heat & Power, set up in 2002, and Gateshead District Energy Scheme, which began operating in 2017.

District heating in Europe

The use of district heating and cooling is much more prevalent in many European countries than in the UK—approximately 60 million EU citizens are served by district heating (DH), with an additional 140 million people living in cities which have at least one DH system. 11% of the EU space-heating demand is supplied by district heating networks.⁷

For instance, HOFOR (Greater Copenhagen Utility Company) provides drinking water, district heating, district cooling, town gas, and disposal of wastewater for 1.1 million customers in the municipality of Copenhagen. Its district heat network covers 98% of heating demand in Copenhagen. There is massive investment in converting the steam-based district heating network to more energy-efficient, water-based district heating as part of the city's ambition to become the first carbon-neutral city by 2025.⁸

The city of Heerlen in the Netherlands has constructed a district heating and cooling system using warm water in an abandoned and flooded local coal mine as a sustainable source. It established a company, Mijwater BV, with the municipality of Heerlen as a 100% shareholder: 70% of heating and cooling will be zero carbon and by 2020, with 1,250 tonnes of carbon dioxide being saved annually.⁹

A number of English local authorities, including Nottingham City Council and Oldham Council, have been looking at developing district heating networks using old mine workings similar to that used in Heerlen.

Developing low-carbon heat networks for the future

As part of the work in Greater Manchester on developing a local energy market, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority commissioned the Energy Systems Catapult to develop Local Area Energy Plans (LAEPs)¹⁰ for each of the 10 Greater Manchester districts.¹¹ The LAEPs identify future trends and the technologies to be considered with a view to meeting Greater Manchester's carbon neutrality targets, including thermal insulation, heat pumps, *district heating*, electric resistive heating, hydrogen boilers, solar photovoltaics (PV), wind turbines, hydropower, electric vehicles, demand flexibility, and energy storage.

In Rochdale, for instance, the creation of district heating networks in targeted areas could see up to 22,000 homes connected to a heat network in 2038.¹² Potential opportunity areas for district heat would give an approximate network length of 26 kilometres, for an investment of £187 million. Across Greater Manchester as a whole, the cost estimates for delivering heat networks is a cool £4.5 billion.¹³

Currently five of the district councils in Greater Manchester are looking to develop civic quarter/town centre heat networks using grant funding from the government's Heat Networks Delivery Unit for feasibility and business case development. As mentioned, Oldham Council is considering a low-carbon heat network using coal mine water as a heat source. Rochdale Borough Council has just completed an economic and technical feasibility study for a town centre heat network based on sewer-sourced heat.

'It is clear that local planning authorities will play a crucial role in the development, implementation and regulation of district heat networks. Powers under the Planning and Energy Act 2008 can permit an area-based approach to heat networks'

The outcome of these projects will determine both the viability of low-carbon heat networks across the city region and the scale of potential development for the future. If these projects can be commercialised, then they can benefit from the Green Heat Network Fund, which is a three-year, £288 million capital grant fund that will support the commercialisation and construction of new low- and zero-carbon heat networks (including the supply of cooling).¹⁴

In addition, GMCA is both co-ordinating and supporting this work and is carrying out a pilot (in partnership with the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero) on heat network zoning. This is a very exciting opportunity to develop heat networks across the city region and contribute to achieving the target for Greater Manchester to achieve carbon neutrality by 2038.

What can local planning authorities do to support low-carbon heat network development?

It is clear that local planning authorities will play a crucial role in the development, implementation and regulation of district heat networks. Powers under the Planning and Energy Act 2008¹⁵ can permit an area-based approach to heat networks.

The guidance published jointly by the Town and Country Planning Association and Royal Town Planning Institute, *The Climate Crisis—A Guide for*

Local Authorities on Planning for Climate Change,¹⁶ updated in January 2023, sets out good practice for planning authorities in terms of setting requirements for using decentralised energy and district heating networks in new developments. It recommends that:

'Local planning authorities should consider requiring developers to submit energy strategies to demonstrate how green energy requirements have been considered. For large-scale development, energy masterplans can be required, to demonstrate that expectations for district heating have been considered in masterplanning and scheme design from the earliest stage.'

Local requirements and targets can include:

- a percentage reduction in carbon dioxide emissions to be achieved; and
- an amount of expected energy generation, expressed in megawatt-hours per year.

Local planning authorities should therefore look for opportunities to secure both the supply of heat through district heating networks and the use of renewable and low-carbon energy in public buildings, which can act as a critical mass for district heating systems.

The evidence base and data available through Local Area Energy Plans should also inform the development of Local Plans. So where opportunity areas are identified for heat networks, they should be an integral part of Local Plan policies.

When the new Energy Bill currently progressing through its parliamentary stages is passed into law, it is likely that planning authorities will have greater powers to determine heat network zones and mandate connections within those areas.

The growth of heat networks in our towns and cities will play a critical role in efforts to decarbonise heat in the built environment and contribute to our net-zero targets. Planning is one of the main enablers in heat network development, as recognised by the TCPA and the RTPi. The economics of heat networks make them one of the most effective ways of implementing low-carbon heat for multiple users. Local authorities will need to take an active role in the design, planning, delivery and regulation of heat networks. It is a great opportunity to shape the future of our built environment and a more sustainable energy future for residents, businesses, and the wider public sector.

● **Mark Bramah** is *Climate Change & Sustainability Project Manager with Rochdale Borough Council. The views expressed are personal.*

Notes

- 1 *Heat and Buildings Strategy*. CP 388. HM Government, Oct. 2021. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1036227/E02666137_CP_388_Heat_and_Buildings_Elay.pdf
- 2 *Taking Stock of the UK Government's Heat and Buildings Strategy*. Climate Change Committee, Mar. 2022. www.theccc.org.uk/2022/03/09/taking-stock-of-the-uk-governments-heat-and-buildings-strategy/
- 3 *Energy Security Bill Factsheet: Heat Networks Regulation and Zoning*. Energy and Industrial Strategy/Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, Sept. 2023. www.gov.uk/government/publications/energy-security-bill-factsheets/energy-security-bill-factsheet-heat-networks-regulation-and-zoning
- 4 Energy Bill [HL]. <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3311>
- 5 Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976. www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1976/57/part/I/crossheading/heating-etc/data.pdf
- 6 See the EnviroEnergy website, at <https://enviroenergy.co.uk/about-us/>
- 7 *Renewable Energy Sources in District Heating and Cooling: EU Level Survey*. Euroheat & Power/Hamburg Institut, Mar. 2012. <https://tinyurl.com/3p2nxy6f>
- 8 See HOFOR's 'District heating' webpage, at www.hofor.dk/english/hofor-utilities/district-heating/
- 9 See HeatNet NEW's 'Heerlen pilot case study' webpage, at <https://guidetodistrictheating.eu/heerlen/>
- 10 See the Energy Systems Catapult's Local Area Energy Planning webpages, at <https://es.catapult.org.uk/tools-and-labs/local-area-energy-planning/>
- 11 See Greater Manchester Combined Authority's 'Energy' webpage, at https://gmgreencity.com/tag/energy/?post_type=resource_library
- 12 *Local Area Energy Plan. Rochdale, Greater Manchester*. Energy Systems Catapult, for Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Jun. 2022. https://gmgreencity.com/resource_library/rochdale-local-area-energy-plan/
- 13 *Greater Manchester Combined Authority Net Zero 2038: Strategic Outline Business Case*. Ernst & Young, for Greater Manchester Combined Authority, 2023. https://gmgreencity.com/resource_library/_trashed/
- 14 See the Green Heat Network Fund webpage, at www.find-government-grants.service.gov.uk/grants/green-heat-network-fund
- 15 Planning and Energy Act 2008. www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/21/pdfs/ukpga_20080021_en.pdf
- 16 *The Climate Crisis – A Guide for Local Authorities on Planning for Climate Change*. TCPA/RTPi. TCPA, Jan. 2023 (Fourth Edition). www.tcpa.org.uk/resources/the-climate-crisis-a-guide-for-local-authorities-on-planning-for-climate-change/

international planning studies — defining and exploring an evolving field



According to the United Nations (UN), 'Over half of the global population currently resides in urban areas, a rate projected to reach 70 per cent by 2050'.¹ The reality of our 'urban century' has brought renewed attention to urbanisation and the development of cities and regions across the globe. Although cities and urban regions are seen as being key sites of development and economic and social progress, they also face many challenges surrounding their environmental impacts and social equity.²

For example, 'Approximately 1.1 billion people currently live in slums or slum-like conditions in cities, with 2 billion more expected in the next 30 years'.¹ In 2015, the UN adopted its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (see Fig. 1 on page 359), among which featured SDG 11, which committed the signatories to making 'cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable'. The SDGs are reflected in other UN initiatives such as the *International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning*, adopted in 2015, which are intended to be 'a framework for improving global policies, plans, designs and implementation processes, which will lead to more compact, socially inclusive, better integrated and connected cities and territories that foster sustainable urban development and are resilient to climate change'.³

Meanwhile, in 2016 the New Urban Agenda (NUA) was adopted by nearly 170 countries, committing the global community to action in the face of the challenges of urbanisation. Coupled with agreements and issues arising from other global challenges and

policy agendas (notably the climate and nature/biodiversity emergencies and increasingly attention paid to heritage and cultural conservation), such agreements and 'statements of intent' constitute a global context for planning. Exploring the interaction of these 'macro-level' settings and dynamics at scales 'above and beyond' the nation state with the internal historical, economic, demographic, environmental, spatial and social structures and external connections of different countries is one theme of contemporary international planning studies. The goal is to understand how such interactions can mould and influence the development of particular forms of planning and development outcomes across a range of spatial scales.

Although arguably given new salience by the contexts alluded to above, international studies of planning are not new. There is a strong tradition of work which has explored planning from an international perspective, focusing, for example, on comparisons between planning systems, the historical emergence of planning in different places, and contemporary planning challenges in different parts of the world. However, much of this has been fragmented across a range of academic papers, book chapters, or reports from international or supranational bodies such as the UN and the European Union (EU), professional planning or other associations, and private and civil society organisations.

Recognising this, our recent book, *International Planning Studies: An Introduction*,⁴ seeks to provide a comprehensive introduction to, or 'take' on, international planning studies, outlining key components and themes of this dynamic field of planning enquiry.

An international context for planning yesterday and today

The book situates planning as an international discipline and practice with an important role to play

in delivering sustainable development across different scales in diverse global contexts. It also emphasises the historical dimension of planning as an international discipline, noting that in many ways planning has always striven to pursue such goals, even if the language used has evolved. For example, the arguments of social reformers and planners who promoted Garden Cities or the City Beautiful movement at the turn of the 20th century find an echo in contemporary calls in international agreements such as the UN's 2030 SDGs and the NUA for more attention and priority to be given to planning as a means of promoting sustainable and resilient communities.

Mindful of the importance of historical awareness in international planning studies, the book explores episodes in the history of planning as an international discipline and practice—including the legacies and enduring impacts of colonialism, the emergence of modern planning from the 19th century onwards, and the international circulation of planning models during the 20th century.

The book also notes that the way cities and urbanisation are planned and managed (or not) is today seen as being fundamental in wider multi-scale and cross-boundary agendas such as the climate and biodiversity emergencies. This places great attention and responsibility on planning and comes with significant opportunities—but also challenges, given the scale of the issues that planning is being called upon to address.

Contemporary themes of enquiry which can frame the investigation of planning from an international perspective are then covered. The book stresses that there is no 'set menu' of themes and theories and that there are strong and arguably growing synergies and overlaps between 'general' planning studies and international planning studies. It does, however, identify certain themes which we argue have particular salience for international planning studies—including globalisation, territorialism, concepts related to different state types and political legitimacies, and work around policy transfer and mobilities.

Characterising and comparing planning in different places—methodological considerations and approaches

Because studying something involves thinking about the approaches one will take, the book discusses research design and methodology in international planning studies. It is noted that, while such studies often employ a range of quantitative, qualitative and mixed research designs and methods of data collection and analysis similar to those used

in general planning studies, their use in international planning research can raise specific issues to consider.⁵ The importance of generating valid analysis which accounts for context, culture and language when studying planning internationally is stressed. It is also noted that, while international planning studies can be methodologically quite challenging, they also have the potential to generate valuable insights, not just on how things work in 'other' places and around the globe but, through comparison, on how and why planning operates as it does in one's own 'home' context.

Ways to characterise planning systems are discussed next, with an emphasis being placed on the context-dependency that conditions how planning is organised and operates in different political, cultural, economic and geographical settings. This shapes the different planning systems that exist internationally to regulate land use and development, protect and enhance places, and manage spatial interactions engendered by societal, economic and public policy claims on space. Eight 'themes of enquiry' to guide explorations and comparisons of planning systems are considered:

- legal and administrative contexts;
- the scope of planning and the planning system;
- the balance of competences between different levels of government;
- the extent and type of planning at national, regional and local levels;
- the role of different stakeholders in the planning system;
- the nature of 'regulatory', 'discretionary' or 'hybrid' planning systems;
- the capacity of planning systems and their effectiveness in meeting expressed objectives; and
- the degree of formal and informal practices in planning.

Mind the 'GAP'—planning above and beyond the state

Today, as well as 'traditional' comparative studies of two or more planning contexts, international planning studies can involve a focus on new scales and forms of what the book terms 'planning above and beyond the state'. Two chapters address this.

The first, 'Planning above and beyond the state (1)', explores the emergence of a global agenda for planning ('GAP') under the auspices of the UN and its agencies, other international organisations and agreements, and professional and civil society networks and initiatives. The resulting opportunities and challenges for planning in acting as a positive and influential agent of sustainable, resilient and

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS | 1 NO POVERTY | 2 ZERO HUNGER | 3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELLBEING | 4 QUALITY EDUCATION | 5 GENDER EQUALITY |
| 6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION | 7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY | 8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH | 9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE | 10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES | 11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES |
| 12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION | 13 CLIMATE ACTION | 14 LIFE BELOW WATER | 15 LIFE ON LAND | 16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS | 17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS |

Fig. 1 The UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals

inclusive development are discussed. Key questions explored include the extent to which it is possible or desirable to try to define 'universal' concepts, models and standards for planning in a diverse world; whether statements of intent such as SDG11, the IGUTP and the New Urban Agenda will have a material impact on planning 'on the ground'; and how any application of their principles can be monitored.

As the *International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning Handbook*⁶ notes, 'cities are affected by the entire 2030 Agenda as the bulk of SDG action (e.g. Goals 3, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13) tends to be located in urban areas, which in the end, host the majority of the global population'. It also points to another dimension of the SDGs which creates a potential role for planning in that 'When applied to a specific geographical area or territory, most of these goals are relevant and hence overlap'.⁶ This is notable given that co-ordinating policy goals as they relate to places, and interact, in territorial terms, is an aspiration of more expansive views of planning (for example some versions of spatial planning). Planning's role as a facilitator of deliberation on policy decisions which affect spatial development may also prove to be valuable, as delivery of the SDGs is seen as requiring broad stakeholder ownership of the goals (accepting that the extent to which planning might effectively perform this role will vary in different contexts).

The following chapter, 'Planning above and beyond the state (2)', explores the influence of transnational and cross-border contexts on planning in different global regions, including the impacts of supranational regional co-operation initiatives and transnational development visions and corridors promoted by partnerships between states, or individual states. It first considers planning for cross-border regions, nodes and urban areas, with

contrasting examples from different global regions being considered (for example the USA-Mexico border, internal EU borders, and the island of Ireland).

Secondly, the influence of different forms of transnational regionalism on planning, including the effects of regional supranationalism, is considered with reference to examples such as the EU and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Transnational development visions promoted by individual states, such as China's Belt and Road Initiative and initiatives promoting transnational corridors and gateways, and their implications for planning are also explored. The chapter reflects on the relevance of such transnational scales, institutions and initiatives to planning.

Planning as an international discipline—key debates and future prospects

The nature of planning as an international discipline across its practice, educational and research domains and the future prospects for planning and international planning studies are then explored. Three key themes are considered.

The first, 'A world of planning practice', explores the diversity of ways in which the planning profession is organised and operates internationally, and related issues such as how professional standards might be defined, applied and upheld internationally.

The second, 'A world of planning education', explores the education, training and international accreditation of planners as 'world professionals', and issues such as the balance between context-specific and universal planning education.

The third, 'A world of planning scholarship', considers aspects of planning as an international academic discipline, and issues such as the degree

of genuine internationalism in planning scholarship and the appropriation and definitional control of the term ‘international’ by some interests, global regions, and institutions.

The final chapter summarises and reviews the main themes and arguments of the book and reflects on the future prospects for planning and international planning studies. Four overarching questions are reviewed:

- Why undertake international planning studies?
- What are the opportunities and challenges of international planning studies?
- Are there any universal general or transferable lessons that can be derived from international planning studies?
- Is there a theory-practice gap in international planning studies?

The chapter then takes a ‘step back’ and places international planning studies into their contemporary context. It is noted that the present is an often challenging time for internationalism and those with an internationalist view of the world. In many countries the past decade has seen a backlash against the perceived effects of internationalisation

on economies and societies, with politicians promoting inward-looking and insular political visions and policies. Sadly, many parts of the world are still marked, too, by geopolitical tensions, armed conflict, and other forms of violence.

The summer of 2023 has been marked by a near constant ticker tape of disasters, notably fires and floods in different regions of the world. The impacts of these events have often been exacerbated by their interactions with human settlement patterns and infrastructures which have been inadequately planned and/or maintained, or simply overwhelmed by weather events emerging from new climatic conditions. The result is tragic losses of human life, displacement of peoples, and severe damage to built and natural environments, with vast cultural, ecological and economic impacts. Planners in some parts of the globe must therefore increasingly anticipate and plan for post-disaster and post-conflict reconstruction, often in very challenging circumstances.

Also over the summer the UN’s *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023: Special Edition* was published, reflecting on progress towards meeting the SDGs and noting soberly that ‘At the midpoint on our way to 2030, the Sustainable Development Goals are in deep trouble’.⁷ In announcing the report’s publication, the UN noted that ‘the impacts of the climate crisis, the war in Ukraine, a weak global economy, and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have revealed the weaknesses and hindered progress towards the Goals’.⁸ The report also indicates that it seems to be Goal 11, on sustainable and resilient cities and human settlements (Fig. 2), on which there is the greatest insufficiency of data to monitor progress (see Fig. 3).

Commentators have noted that this reflects the ‘intersectoral’ nature of SDG 11 (i.e. its achievement is dependent on progress in diverse policy areas) and the challenges of gathering relevant data about the urban scale, given that subnational government (whose responsibility this often is) has not traditionally been strongly integrated into the ‘inter-state’ UN system. The report concludes that: ‘To achieve Goal 11, efforts must focus on implementing inclusive, resilient and sustainable urban development policies and practices that prioritize access to basic services, affordable housing, efficient transportation and green spaces for all.’¹

These are all issues whose exploration can form the basis of rich international studies of planning in the coming years. Our hope is that the book might

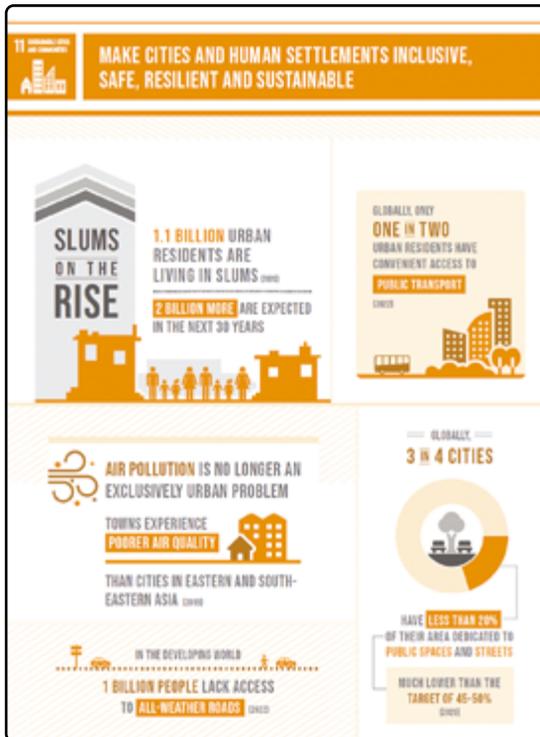


Fig. 2 Summary of progress on SDG 11
 Source: *The Sustainable Development Goals Report, Special Edition*. United Nations, 2023

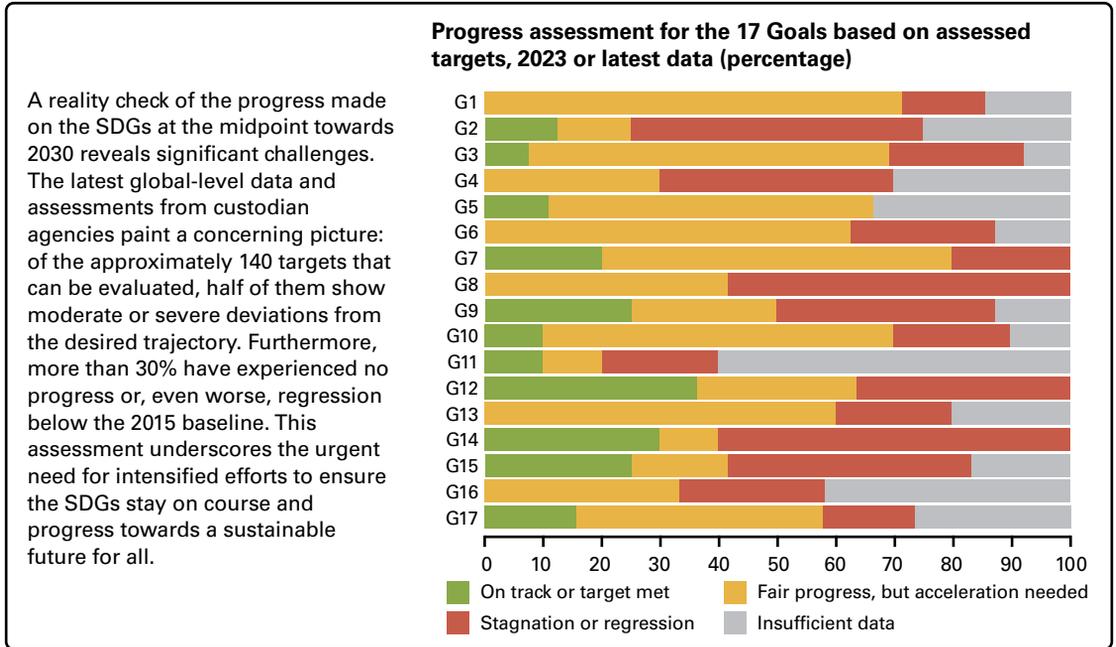


Fig. 3 Taking stock of SDG progress at the midpoint

Source: *The Sustainable Development Goals Report. Special Edition.* United Nations, 2023

serve as a starting point for some of them and prove useful to students, scholars and practitioners of planning who find international planning studies to be a valuable way of gaining knowledge about, and critical insight into, planning.

There is a whole world of planning ‘out there’ and a rich diversity of planning experiences and stories in different contexts. International planning studies are about exploring and sharing them to help develop the knowledge base and effectiveness of planning as it seeks to deliver across different scales and in diverse settings around the globe.

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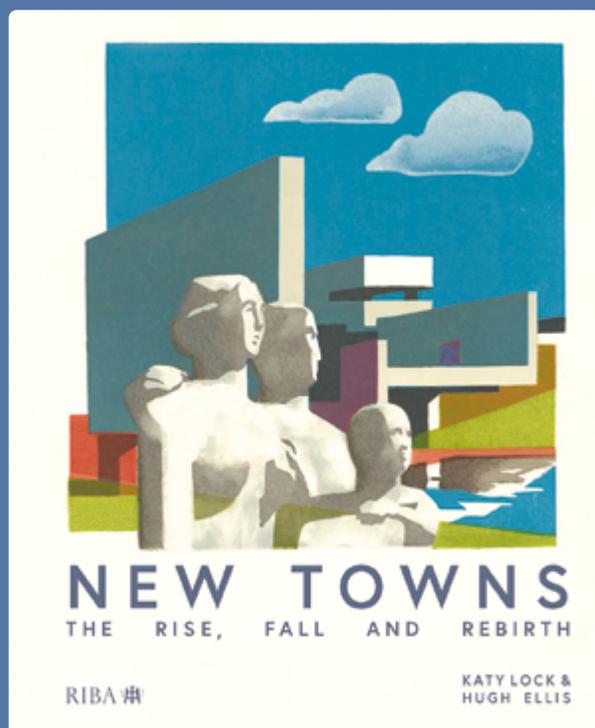
Notes

- 1 *The Sustainable Development Goals Report. Special Edition.* United Nations, 2023, p.34. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2023.pdf>
- 2 Furthermore, it should be remembered that even as the world’s population becomes more urbanised, there are significant communities that will remain rural, and their needs, and urban-rural relationships, are also matters of concern for planning

- 3 *International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning.* UN-Habitat, 2015, p.1. https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/download-manager-files/IG-UTP_English.pdf
- 4 O Sykes, D Shaw and B Webb: *International Planning Studies: An Introduction.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2023
- 5 See also O Sykes and S Dembski: ‘Cross-national comparative research in planning – some things to consider’. *Town & Country Planning*, 2019, Vol. 88, Jul., 312–19
- 6 *International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning Handbook.* UN-Habitat, 2018, p.4. https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/2019-05/international_guidelines_on_urban_and_territorial_planning_-_handbook.pdf
- 7 *The Sustainable Development Goals Report. Special Edition* (see note 1), p.4; see also ‘The world’s goals to save humanity are hugely ambitious – but they are still the best option’. *Nature*, 12 Sept. 2023. www.nature.com/articles/d41586-023-02844-7 for a reflection on progress with the SDGs, including their impacts so far, how interlinkages between goals can be monitored, their influence on policy-makers, why they are worth persisting with, and how they may be adjusted in a post-2030 perspective
- 8 Webpage, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Statistics. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/>

designing new communities for the 21st century

new towns: the rise, fall and rebirth



New Towns: The Rise, Fall and Rebirth
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