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New Town Renaissance: Unlocking the potential of our New Towns

Report of the APPG on New Towns Mini-Inquiry

November 2026



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Table of Contents

1 Foreword 3

2 Summary 4

3 Introduction 5

4 The New Towns today – key statistics 7

5 The case for a new town renaissance 9

5.1 New Towns remain vital national assets 10

5.2 New Towns face a distinctive renewal challenge 11

5.3 New Towns are uniquely placed to support future growth, innovation and stewardship 18

6 Recommendations 22

7 Annex 1 Summary of Evidence 24

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The authors are grateful to the Parliamentarians who gave their time and expertise to the research, including to Andrew Lewin MP who was Chair of the Group when the project commenced, and to Bracknell Council for hosting the APPG visit in June.

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1 Foreword

As Chairs of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on New Towns, we have been struck by the pride that people have in their New Towns and the ambition they hold for their future. Through this mini-inquiry, we heard from local leaders, practitioners and parliamentarians who recognise that these communities remain some of Britain's greatest planning achievements, providing homes, jobs and opportunities for more than 2.8 million people. Some New Towns are thriving, having reinvented themselves to attract new economic investment.

At the same time, many New Towns are facing common challenges. Housing, infrastructure and town centres are ageing together, while local authorities often struggle to secure the long-term investment needed to support renewal. As Government looks to deliver a new generation of New Towns, we believe there is much to learn from the experience of the communities that have been successfully adapting and evolving for decades.

One message came through clearly during this inquiry: if we want the next generation of New Towns to succeed, we must not overlook the New Towns we have already built. This report makes the case for recognising these places as national assets and supporting their long-term renewal, so they can continue to provide a focus for innovation and contribute to Britain's housing, economic and environmental ambitions for generations to come. We are grateful to everyone who contributed their evidence, expertise and experience to this inquiry.

Katrina Murray MP

Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group on New Towns

Lord Richard Best

Co-Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group on New Towns

"The success of the next generation of New Towns will depend in part on our willingness to learn from and invest in the New Towns we have already built."

2 Summary

The Government's commitment to a new generation of New Towns has renewed interest in one of the most ambitious nation-building programmes in British history. Yet while attention has focused on future New Towns, the UK's 32 existing New Towns, home to more than 2.8 million people and over 1.1 million households, have received little strategic policy attention since the programme was wound up in the 1980s.

In this context the APPG on New Towns launched a mini-inquiry into the growth and renewal of UK New Towns. The inquiry found a strong case for a renaissance of our New Towns: a long-term programme of renewal that recognises New Towns as nationally significant places, addresses their shared challenges and supports their future growth and adaptation.

Existing New Towns should not be seen as a completed project. They remain places of ambition, innovation and opportunity, with important lessons for the next generation of New Towns.

Key conclusions from the inquiry

- Existing New Towns are vital national assets, home to more than 2.8 million people, and include some of the fastest growing cities in England.
- New Towns face a distinctive renewal challenge resulting from simultaneously aging infrastructure and the fire-sale of public assets that took place when the programme ended.
- New Towns were designed to evolve, and are uniquely placed to support future growth, innovation and stewardship.

Summary of Recommendations

This report reinforces the need for Government to see our New Towns as a distinctive urban policy question and to recognise that their potential and challenges have a very specific character.

Recommendation 1: Embed Existing New Towns within National Growth and Investment Programmes

Across the UK there is need to establish a dedicated policy and funding support for the new towns. Existing New Towns should be recognised as nationally significant places within current funding initiatives and future housing, growth and infrastructure policy and supported by long-term investment and expertise.

Recommendation 2: Establish a National New Town Renaissance Taskforce

All four governments of the UK should establish a New Towns Renaissance Taskforce to develop a long-term strategy for the future of existing New Towns. This could draw on the model used for the 2025 New Towns Taskforce.

Introduction

The Labour Government's New Towns agenda has led to a widespread interest in how strategic growth can help solve the housing crisis. The September 2025 publication of the New Towns Taskforce Report, signalled a clear recognition of the need to learn the lessons from existing New Towns.[1] While one of the twelve sites shortlisted in the Taskforce's Report, and included in the Government's latest shortlist, was the existing New Town of Milton Keynes, the initiative focuses on the creation of new New Towns, through large-scale renewal, urban extensions and new sites.[2]

In this context, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on New Towns chose to focus 2026 activity on our existing New Towns; their challenges and opportunities. Through a 'mini-inquiry' the APPG sought to draw on the latest evidence, including from its members, to:

- Raise the profile of the UK's existing New Towns;
- Understand the latest barriers to, and opportunities for, growth & renewal in existing New Towns;
- Identify specific asks for Government in relation to the growth & renewal of existing New Towns; and
- Use relevant findings to inform Government policy on a new generation of New Towns.

About the mini-inquiry

Research was undertaken throughout 2026 by the Town & Country Planning Association (TCPA), which provides the secretariat role for the APPG on New Towns.

Quantitative data was collected via national censuses, UK government records of investment programmes, and data provided by local authorities. Qualitative data was collected through a desk-top review of recent published evidence on New Towns, a series of semi-structured interviews with New Town parliamentarians, insights from a Commons debate on New Towns, a study visit to Bracknell town centre, and an in-person and an online roundtable.

Analysis of census data provided by the TCPA relates to all 32 New Towns in the UK. Qualitative data was not systematically collected for all New Towns. As a result, there is more frequent reference to those New Towns where parliamentarians and others were able to give their time to input to the research or had taken part in recent Parliamentary debates.

Further detail of the evidence used in the research is outlined in Annex 1.

[1] New Towns Taskforce: Report to Government. Published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on behalf of the New Towns Taskforce (September 2025) Accessed November 2026 at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/new-towns-taskforce-report-to-government

[2] New Towns Draft Programme. Published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (March 2026) Accessed November 2026 at: https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/new-towns-draft-programme/new-towns-draft-programme

About the APPG on New Towns

The APPG on New Towns exists to celebrate the UK's New Towns, identify common challenges and make the case for investment and sustainable growth. This APPG examines how to best support the needs of the 2.8 million people already living in New Towns and consider the needs of the residents of the future, learning the lessons from past new towns in championing and supporting the creation of more new towns. The officers of the group are:

- **Chair:** Katrina Murray MP, Member for Cumbernauld and Kirkintilloch
- **Co-chair:** The Lord Best OBE DL
- **Officer:** The Rt Hon. The Lord Naseby PC
- **Officer:** Chris Curtis MP, Member for Milton Keynes North

The full list of members and officers can be seen on the APPG's webpage:
https://www.tcpa.org.uk/resources/all-party-parliamentary-group-on-new-towns/

The Legacy of the New Towns

The New Towns programme, delivered in three phases between 1946 and 1970, was the most ambitious town-building initiative in UK history. Enabled by the New Towns Act 1946 and parallel legislation in Scotland and Northern Ireland, it led to the creation of 32 New Towns across the UK, now home to over 2.83 million people. The legislation established powerful, long-term New Town Development Corporations with planning, borrowing and land assembly powers, enabling them to acquire land, coordinate development and capture value to support long-term growth.

The 1946 Act set out an ambitious vision for post-war reconstruction. Influenced by Garden City principles, the New Towns were designed not only to provide homes and jobs, but to create socially balanced communities where housing, employment, services and social life were integrated. They were places shaped by innovation, experimentation and a commitment to social progress.

The programme was effectively abandoned in the 1980s, often accompanied by a fire-sale of Development Corporation assets without a long-term stewardship strategy. This created a dual legacy of aspiration and missed opportunity, leaving many New Town communities without the powers, resources or support needed to fully realise their potential and address the unique opportunities presented and the challenges of renewal.[3]

[3] Further detail about the New Towns programme is available on the TCPA website at: https://www.tcpa.org.uk/collection/research-on-garden-cities-and-new-towns/

3 The New Towns today – key statistics

Today the UK's New Towns include some of the fastest growing cities in the UK, but also places with some of the most acute pockets of deprivation. The statistics below are drawn from Census and funding data across the four nations. Details are provided in Annex 1.

Housing tenure statistics (all New Towns combined)

- New Towns contain 1,165,315 households. This increased by approximately 15089 homes from 2011 to 2021.
- This represents 4.2% of all UK households.
- 21.7% of households in New Towns are social renters. This is 4.2 percentage points above the UK average.
- New Towns contain 5.1% of the UK's socially rented housing stock.
- Owner occupation in New Towns is 2.8 percentage points below the UK average.
- Private renting is 1.5 percentage points below the UK average.

Population statistics

- The UK's New Towns are home to over 2,831,505 people. This increased by approximately 70,233 people from 2011 to 2021.
- The English New Towns have over 2,281,992 residents (an increase of 54,365).
- The Scottish New Towns have over 273,975 residents (an increase of 5273).
- The Northern Irish New Towns have over 216,548 residents (an increase of 11,497).
- The Welsh New Towns have 58,990 residents (see note below on the growth statistic).

Health and deprivation

- Residents who self-assessed their health were more likely to say they were in 'very good' (2.8% above) or 'very bad' (1% below) health than the UK average. This shows there is slightly more variation in health in the New Towns.
- The average percentages of households deprived in 1, 2, 3 or 4 dimensions in the New Towns were comparable to the UK averages, within 1% for each.
- Many New Towns have substantial internal variation between wards, with differences in deprivation and health outcomes often greater than 20 percentage points.
- Households not deprived in any dimension varied between 52.9% and 37.1% and households deprived in two dimensions varied between 37% and 14.6% in the New Towns. Residents in very good health varied between 53.0% and 40.2% and bad or very bad varied between 10.1% and 3.4% in the New Towns.

- This shows that some New Towns face far greater deprivation and health issues, reiterating qualitative findings that there are pockets of these developments that require greater support.

- The greater proportion of those in 'very good' health despite similar deprivation dimensions could suggest that some of the original New Town characteristics, such as plentiful green spaces and carefully planned neighbourhoods, continue to provide benefits.

Overall deprivation and health are broadly in line with UK-wide patterns of regional disparity. However, health and deprivation within the wards of many New Towns varies greatly. This reiterates qualitative findings that New Towns often contain pockets of deprivation.

Funding

- 12 of the 32 New Towns received funding from the Town Fund, 37.5% of the towns that received funding. This was only available to towns in England.

- 4% of the projects awarded Levelling Up Funding were in New Towns.

- 8% of Phase 1 of the Pride in Place Fund was awarded to New Towns.

- 11% of the neighbourhoods selected for Phase 2 of the Pride in Place Fund were in New Towns. This included multiple neighbourhoods selected in 4 of the New Towns.

- 12.5% of the Pride in Place Impact Fund expansion of Phase 2 was then awarded to neighbourhoods in the New Towns.

- Funding approaches increasingly reflect devolved regeneration policy frameworks, limiting direct UK-wide quantitative comparison.

New Towns were especially overrepresented in the Town Fund, Pride in Place and the Impact Fund. So New Towns are overrepresented in funds that target place-based renewal and deprived neighbourhoods.



Milton Keynes New Town, designated in 1967 and now home to over 250,000 people, was identified in the 2025 New Towns Taskforce Report's shortlist of potential locations for future New Towns.

4 The case for a new town renaissance

For decades, the UK's 32 New Towns have occupied an uncertain position in national policy. Created through the most ambitious town-building programme in British history, they are now home to more than 2.83 million people, contain over 1.16 million households and continue to accommodate substantial growth. Yet since the New Towns programme was wound up in the 1980s there has been no coherent national policy for their future. Existing New Towns often find themselves viewed as ordinary towns competing for mainstream regeneration funding, despite sharing a common history, distinctive characteristics and a unique set of opportunities and challenges. As Government embarks on a new generation of New Towns, the APPG's inquiry found a clear consensus that existing New Towns should not be viewed as a completed project, nor their legacy overlooked. Rather, they represent a national asset with untapped potential.

"The ability of new towns to reinvent themselves is one of their key strengths."

Online roundtable, 27 April 2026

Evidence gathered through this inquiry suggests that this approach undervalues both the contribution and potential of the New Towns. Participants consistently highlighted the ambition, optimism and growth mindset that remain embedded within many New Town communities. The case for a New Town renaissance was clear from the evidence: a long-term programme of renewal that recognises New Towns as nationally significant places, addresses their common renewal challenges and unlocks their potential to support future growth and innovation.

The need for New Town renaissance was based on three principles:

1. New Towns remain nationally important places that continue to accommodate growth and provide homes for millions of people.

2. New Towns face a distinctive renewal challenge resulting from the simultaneous ageing of homes, infrastructure and public assets, and the fire-sale of public assets that took place when the programme ended.

3. New Towns possess unique strengths that position them to support future growth, innovation and community renewal, including through new models of long-term stewardship.

These are explored in more detail, below.

"[Harlow New Town]: an organism which would go on changing and being rebuilt as the needs of the people altered"

Sir Frederick Gibberd, Harlow Landscape Architect, (date unknown – Visible at Harlow Watergardens)

4.1 New Towns remain vital national assets

Today our New Towns are not historic planning experiments. They include major urban centres and economic hubs that continue to be the location of major urban expansion, making a significant contribution to national prosperity. In the past ten years alone, the New Town populations have grown by around 70,000 people, demonstrating that many continue to grow and evolve.

The New Towns also vary significantly in their scale and distinctiveness. They range from 5000 homes in Newtown, Wales, to over 100,000 homes in Milton Keynes, which has now secured city status and was identified as a potential location in the Government's current New Towns Programme. Several New Towns have become important regional economic centres and continue to support substantial housing and commercial development. Many are already accommodating major urban extensions and population growth, demonstrating that they remain important locations for future investment.

The inquiry also highlighted the significant contribution the New Towns continue to play in meeting housing needs. Collectively, they contain a notably higher proportion of social housing than the UK average. This is currently at 21.7%, and has consistently been 4.2 percentage points higher than the UK average over the past ten years. But the proportion of social housing provision has continued to reduce across the UK. And the social housing provision within the New Towns hugely varies, with smaller towns often having a proportion as high as 30%. As higher social housing provision often requires greater ongoing support for the homes and their communities, it is important to protect New Towns and their valuable housing stock.

Evidence gathered through the inquiry also revealed a strong sense of local pride and identity. Participants frequently described New Towns as places with a distinctive culture, confidence and ambition. Many argued that New Towns continue to see themselves as places with a mindset of 'going for growth' rather than places in managed decline. It is evident from the research that New Towns retain a unique space in the built fabric of the United Kingdom and for decades have been overlooked. There is appetite for this to change.



The New Towns are no longer 'new' but distinct places that reflect their regional economies. In 2026 Stevenage celebrated its 80th anniversary – having been the first new town designated on 11th September 1946. In 2027, Milton Keynes - the last to be designated and built - will be 60 years old.

New Towns face a distinctive renewal challenge

While every New Town is a distinct place with its own identity, there are some common challenges and opportunities which have been continuous themes throughout recent research on the subject. These challenges are not simply typical regeneration problems but relate to the way the New Towns were originally planned, financed and delivered.

Previous research by the TCPA identified five common themes affecting the New Towns:[4]

- **the renewal of town centres and land ownership;** Many New Town centres face declining retail performance, limited night-time economies and competition from online shopping. Their often single-owner, monolithic design has made adaptation difficult, with some councils, such as Stevenage, acquiring key sites to enable comprehensive town centre renewal.
- **movement, infrastructure, and accessibility;** A key legacy of the New Towns is their integrated planning of transport, local centres and green infrastructure, with many retaining strong walking and cycling networks. However, car dependency has increased due to weak public transport, poor pedestrian links and constrained transport networks, despite many New Towns benefiting from strategic rail and road connections.
- **built heritage and cultural regeneration;** The New Towns' distinctive architecture, public art and cultural assets helped create a strong sense of place and identity. Today, while these heritage assets face increasing pressures, they also offer significant opportunities for culture-led regeneration and town centre renewal.
- **housing tenure and resilience;** Housing in the New Towns reflects a legacy of architectural innovation and experimentation, with outcomes ranging from poor-quality estates to nationally recognised modern heritage. Increasing conversion of offices to housing can support town centre renewal, but concerns remain about the quality of homes delivered through permitted development.
- **stewardship of green spaces and the public realm.** The New Towns' extensive green infrastructure remains one of their greatest assets, supporting quality of life, regeneration and climate resilience. However, inadequate long-term stewardship and funding have left many councils struggling to maintain these assets, although models such as Milton Keynes's endowed Parks Trust demonstrate a successful alternative, albeit one which is facing its own commercial challenges.

[4] A New Future for New Towns. Published by Town and Country Planning Association (August 2021) Accessed November 2026 at: https://www.tcpa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/nfnt_final004-1.pdf

The inquiry highlighted that these issues remain important, with particular concern from MPs and local authority officers around: long-term stewardship failures; community building and retaining New Town pride between generations; the ongoing renewal needed for aging infrastructure; sustainable transport infrastructure; struggling town centres; and a need for new sustainable social housing provision.

Why the New Town challenge is unique

A defining feature of the New Town challenge is that of simultaneously ageing infrastructure. Housing, transport, community and other infrastructure delivered at speed in relatively short periods, and in the earliest New Towns, often using cheap materials. The result is places which are experiencing the simultaneous ageing of whole estates, roads, public spaces, leisure facilities and town centres. The issue of aging leisure facilities alongside other infrastructure was of particular concern to many participants in the inquiry. This simultaneous ageing requires simultaneous renewal, an expensive prospect for 'host' local authorities with challenging finances. For places with a high proportion of social housing, this process of whole-estate renewal has been made even more challenging by decades of the 'Right-to Buy' policy, as authorities are not easily able to co-ordinate renewal across multiple tenures.

The fire-sale of New Town assets to the private sector that occurred when the New Towns programme was wound up in the 1980s, combined with the transfer of both 'assets' and 'liabilities' to local authorities in balancing agreements, has led to significant fragmentation of land ownership in the New Towns. From monolithic town centres often owned by distant investors, to a patchwork of smaller ownership, the responsibilities for management and maintenance can be unclear, posing a challenge for local authorities seeking holistic renewal.

The disposal of New Town Development Corporation assets at a time when most of them had not finished their task of delivery, deprived the new towns, and their successor 'host' local authorities of the opportunity to generate the resources to look after their high quality and extensive public assets in the long-term. The failure to put in place requirements for the long-term stewardship of Development Corporation assets when the programme wound-up was a key failure, and betrayal of the original New Towns vision.

As such, the Government has a responsibility to enable those managing the New Towns today to address these issues of renewal and stewardship, and to invest in their futures.

Stewardship of green infrastructure and public assets was a recurring theme in the research. One of the defining strengths of the New Town model was its integration of parks, open spaces and green networks into everyday life. These assets continue to support health, biodiversity and climate resilience, yet many local authorities face significant challenges in maintaining them. This is in direct contrast to places such as Milton Keynes, where the Parks Trust has helped protect long-term investment in green infrastructure.



Arts and cultural activities such as the MK International Festival can facilitate town centre revitalisation through investment and increased footfall.

The Town Centre challenge today

The challenges facing New Town centres emerged as an area of particular concern amongst participants. New Towns are especially impacted by town centre decline. They were often planned around a single dominant centre, making closures particularly visible. And some New Town centres are particularly criticised for dated designs. The simultaneous ageing of post-war buildings includes infrastructure and leisure spaces.

The issues of leisure and the night-time economy were recurring themes in the research. Many New Towns are experiencing the closure of multiple leisure facilities, in particular youth spaces and elements of their nighttime economy, leading to residents travelling to neighbouring towns and cities. This includes cinemas, swimming pools, ice rinks and pubs. These amenities are highly valued by local communities - they are particularly important to support community vitality as shops continue to close. Most are requiring significant funding to support these amenities and to progress significant town centre regeneration.

Bracknell town centre, visited as part of the research, is a successful example of how community vitality can be encouraged through New Town centre regeneration. Multiple leisure facilities have been lost in recent years, including a cinema, bowling alley and ice rink. Its new centre, The Lexicon, on the other hand, is bustling with people. The Lexicon, owned by Realty Income, intentionally provides a range of retail to attract a broader audience, alongside cafes, restaurants, a cinema, arcade and live music venue. Further leisure facilities will also be opening in its later phase, which were eagerly anticipated by some residents. Arts, charity and festival programmes also regularly take place in flexible public spaces. Challenges were highlighted however, between the shopping centre and local authority, regarding management and uses of public realm areas. Beyond the new shopping centre, re-use of council owned property – the fire station and former council offices – demonstrated the opportunity for creative re-use of New Town buildings. Of these, Easthampstead Works included much-needed affordable workspaces for small companies, startups, charities and communities. While the Lexicon has brought welcome investment to the town, the issue of fragmented ownership and management was clear; with the juxtaposition of public, private and semi-private spaces providing a challenge for holistic management and maintenance.

New Towns are attempting to reinvent their centres around a broader mix of activity and measuring success on social and community outcomes. But as facilities continue to close, there is an increasing risk of activity reducing or moving to other areas. Town centre regeneration funding remains urgently needed.

"New towns were never meant to just be housing schemes. They were meant to be places: planned communities, where jobs, homes and services developed together."

Katrina Murray MP for Cumbernauld, New Towns debate, House of Commons, 15 January 2026



The regenerated Bracknell town centre is bustling with activity in the midweek.



Some centres such as Cwmbran have managed to retain activity, but New Towns suffer from ageing facilities.



An art project for children in Bracknell helps them connect to the new shopping centre, while previous sculptures and art are retained for heritage.

Existing funding programmes do not go far enough

With some recent funding initiatives in England including a selection of New Towns in their list of recipients, the inquiry sought to better understand the funding landscape for New Towns and why the benefit of this has not been felt.

Research found that since there is no dedicated New Town regeneration funding system, New Towns are largely competing within mainstream regeneration programmes. Central government support is delivered primarily through broad place-based funding programmes. Funding appears concentrated among a subset of New Towns that have repeatedly secured support across multiple programmes. Many places accumulate multiple smaller funding streams. For example, Peterborough received funding from: the Towns Fund, Levelling Up Fund, UKSPF, Community Renewal Fund and Pride in Place. This suggests regeneration increasingly depends on assembling packages of funding rather than accessing a single comprehensive programme.

The evidence suggests that central government funding for New Town regeneration has been highly uneven. While some New Towns have secured substantial support through programmes such as the Towns Fund and Levelling Up Fund, funding through other schemes is inconsistent in both scale and purpose. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all operate through different regeneration architectures, such as:

- Scotland: Growth Deals, PBIP, RCGF, VDLF
- Wales: Transforming Towns, Growth Deals.
- Northern Ireland: DfC regeneration funding, City Deals, LUF.

While direct UK-wide quantitative comparison is limited, due to funding approaches increasingly reflecting devolved regeneration policy frameworks, qualitative research highlighted that Scottish New Towns noticed a gap in funding due to not being eligible for the Towns Fund.

Funding increasingly targets place-based regeneration and long-term programmes. The UK government has put large funding into regeneration, cultural facilities, town centres and active travel in recent years via the Town Fund, Levelling up Funds, and Pride in Place Funds, showing the government's focus on these areas, which are especially priorities for the New Towns. These programmes also represent a shift towards longer, multi-year funding. Contributors repeatedly highlighted that there was a need for sustained programmes and predictable investment rather than short-term competitive funding rounds, and noted that this had been key in New Towns, such as Milton Keynes and Bracknell, which had experienced successful growth and regeneration.

By government measures, New Towns both need and are well-placed for regeneration funding. As the Town Fund is for England only, this means that New Towns in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales risk missing out on specific regeneration funds of this nature, as also reflected in interviews. The rationale for receiving this funding contrasts the original New Town programme, which explicitly recognised them as a distinct settlement type.

While some new towns have benefited from recent investment rounds, many existing funding pots are insufficient for the broad renewal required in New Towns for

simultaneously ageing infrastructures and ageing town centres. And the work required to apply for funding from small pots of money is challenging amid broader planning staff capacity issues. Additionally, the premature winding up of the development corporations led to an associated loss of skills, delivery capability and institutional knowledge that is still felt today by New Town local authorities.

There was also a strong ask for more flexibility and control over local funding available. The strong vision, ambition and leadership in New Town authorities was highlighted. This strong long-term civic leadership and shared growth visions were seen as critical to historic New Town success.

A targeted New Towns fund would allow more reliable strategic support that recognises the unique regeneration challenges these towns face and particularly for the unique problem of their infrastructure all needing renewal at the same time. New Towns retain their growth ambitions, and this could still be harnessed to make them the focus of innovation, arts, culture and resilience once more.

"They [the New Towns] are not new anymore. They need investment."

Richard Baker MP for Glenrothes and Mid Fife, New Towns debate, House of Commons, 15 January 2026

4.2 New Towns are uniquely placed to support future growth, innovation and stewardship

Narratives on the future of New Towns often focus on decline. A recurring theme throughout the research was the ability of New Towns to accommodate change. This flexibility was in the DNA of the New Towns model. As Sir Frederick Gibberd said of Harlow 'New Towns were intended to be "organisms" that continued changing as the needs of the people altered. Participants repeatedly identified this capacity for reinvention as one of the defining strengths of New Towns.

This was particularly clear in the context of economic reinvention. New Towns are often referred to in terms of housing, but employment was central to the New Towns concept and must remain central to future policy. New Towns were not intended to be housing-led dormitory settlements but places where homes, jobs and services developed together. As Chris Hinchliff MP argued, New Towns require a purpose, not simply housing targets.

A legacy of economic reinvention

The most successful New have had a strong employment offer, combined with the flexibility to evolve their economies. The foundational importance of employment opportunities reflects the original New Towns model, where the New Towns were planned around jobs, homes and services together. Some New Towns have faced severe decline following the shrinking or closure of their founding industries. However, others have shown that they can be revitalised through the establishment of new foundational industries. Flexibility and adaptability remain vital in an era defined by changing technology.

An example of this flexibility shared in the inquiry was in Glenrothes, a New Town designated in Scotland in 1948 to support the Rothes Colliery. Glenrothes experienced significant challenges when the colliery closed in 1962. But local leadership and the development corporation attracted electronics manufacturers instead, leading to the establishment of Scotland's "Silicon Glen". There are growing renewable energy industries in the area, indicating that there is a continuing process of economic adaptation. Corby similarly had to respond after the decline of its steelworks; participants felt that future opportunities in renewable energy and net-zero industries required more attention. Industrial reinvention was also highlighted in Basildon. While it remains a strong advanced manufacturing base, employment initiatives are also being used to address skills mismatches with emerging logistics and digital-sector industries. Stevenage, now sitting strategically within the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, has become a national focus for biosciences and related emerging technologies.

"new towns have to reinvent themselves, because they are soon not new and have to look towards the future."

Richard Baker MP for Glenrothes and Mid Fife, New Towns debate, House of Commons, 15 January 2026

Adaptation was identified as one of the strengths of New Towns. Support for economic and employment reinvention is required to leverage future growth and expansion opportunities.

New Towns as national growth hubs

The location of most of the New Towns was the result of sub-regional studies exploring the options for accommodating dispersal from major conurbations as part of a national strategy for growth and renewal. As such, many New Towns are strategically well-located, with a culture of 'going for growth', meaning many have continued to accommodate future growth and expansion. Many are already the sites of extensive urban extensions beyond their initial planning, such as Corby, which began with a population of 18,000 and is now home to over 70,000 people.

"The questions of how to resume growth of existing New Towns and how to successfully deliver the next generation of New Towns are one and the same."

Shaun Davies MP: New Towns, 2025[5]

New Towns also have strong infrastructure bases for future growth. This includes strategic transport infrastructure links, employment and local services. The most successful function as economic hubs and are often well placed for regional growth. However, some of the New Towns have suffered from less well-planned expansion with estates that are less well integrated. This has resulted in growth without infrastructure, car dependency, and insufficient social rented homes to meet local needs. In some cases, such as in Livingston, it has also reduced economic self-containment and led to the New Town increasingly becoming a commuter town. Contributors highlighted a need to strengthen the New Town ethos of whole-planned communities, including their economic purpose, in future growth.

"New towns were never meant to just be housing schemes. They were meant to be places: planned communities, where jobs, homes and services developed together."

Katrina Murray MP for Cumbernauld, New Towns debate January 2026

The identification of Milton Keynes as a potential future New Town location illustrates its ongoing expansion. It's been the fastest growing city over the past 30 years, achieved city status in 2022, and its Local Plan plans for 60,000 more homes by 2050. Infrastructure-first delivery, a resilient economy providing employment, and stewardship and placemaking by Milton Keynes Development Partnership (MKDP) are key contributors to its sustainable growth. This is supported by long-term programming with consistent commitments, where security and certainty of funding is key. This has allowed MKDP to capitalise on their experience in using tariffs to forward fund facilities.

[5] Davies, S. (2025) 'Shaun Davies MP: New Towns', Redbrick Blog. Available at: https://redbrickblog.co.uk/2025/06/shaun-davies-mp-new-towns/ (Accessed: 14 November 2026).

New Towns were repeatedly identified as strong locations for housing and economic growth, harnessing the programme's original ambition. But it was also argued that future expansion should build on the original New Town principles towards complete, economically and socially self-sufficient new neighbourhoods, rather than simply increasing housing numbers. Government coordination is needed to drive the ambition of New Towns, so that rather than seeing the New Towns programme as something historic, the New Towns can be supported to continue to pursue the growth vision set out at their designation.

"There's optimism, there's ambition, but I think support is needed with government to kind of realise those ambitions."

Online roundtable, 27 April 2026



MKDP funded new public art by Yinka Ilori MBE outside Milton Keynes' railway station, which simultaneously offsets the maintenance budget for repairing paving slabs.

Conclusion

While the evidence gathered provides a snapshot of the current challenges and opportunities facing UK New Towns, some key points are clear: New Towns remain nationally important assets that continue to accommodate growth, provide housing and support local economies. They face a distinctive set of renewal challenges resulting from their shared history and the simultaneous ageing of homes, infrastructure and community assets; and they possess unique strengths, including a culture of innovation, strong civic identities, extensive green infrastructure and a proven ability to adapt and reinvent themselves.

A New Town renaissance is therefore not simply a regeneration programme. It is an opportunity to renew some of the UK's most significant planned communities, reinstate the long-term stewardship that characterised the movement that inspired them, and harness their continuing ambition as places of growth and innovation. Doing so would not only benefit the 2.8 million people who live in New Towns today but would also provide essential lessons for the successful delivery of the next generation of New Towns.



The Water Gardens, Hemel Hempstead. Successful renewal of New Town infrastructure for renewal.

5 Recommendations

This report reinforces the need for Government to see our new towns as a distinctive urban policy question and to recognise that their potential and challenges have a very specific character. Developing comprehensive policy to both capitalise on this growth potential and address regeneration will take time and needs to be part of a four-nation approach to policy development. At the same time our new towns need action now to deal with immediate challenges around regeneration and heritage loss and the recommendations begin by addressing these urgent needs.

Recommendation 1: Embed Existing New Towns within National Growth and Investment Programmes

Across the UK there is need to establish a dedicated policy and funding support for the new towns. Existing New Towns should be recognised as nationally significant places within future housing, growth and infrastructure policy.

The four governments of the UK should:

- recognise the role of New Towns within long-term infrastructure, growth and investment strategies, with multi-year funding settlements with greater flexibility to reflect the needs of the New Towns. This includes clearly identifying the role of the 32 New Towns in the Westminster Government's forthcoming Ten-Year investment plan;
- provide dedicated policy support and technical expertise for renewal projects, including support for land assembly and town centre regeneration. In England this could be via Homes England which can provide technical advice and exercises extensive compulsory purchase powers where this might be key to town centre renewal;
- establish a government-supported New Towns Network to share learning and best practice on regeneration, stewardship and community engagement; and
- support the identification, protection, celebration and adaptive reuse of New Town heritage assets and cultural identities as part of wider place renewal.

Recommendation 2: Establish a National New Town Renaissance Taskforce

All four governments of the UK should establish a New Towns Renaissance Taskforce to develop a long-term strategy for the future of existing New Towns. This could draw on the model used for the 2025 New Towns Taskforce. The Taskforce should:

- identify the investment, policy and governance changes required to support renewal and future growth;
- consider new approaches to stewardship and delivery, including the potential role of Development Corporations and community-led management models, helping to empower communities to better control their own future;
- develop proposals for housing renewal, retrofit and the protection of affordable and social rented homes;
- address the future of town centres, green infrastructure and community assets; and
- address the long-term future of the rich legacy of new towns' built heritage with a view to securing its unique place in UK culture.

6 Annex 1 Summary of Evidence

Evidence gathered

Research was undertaken throughout 2026 by the Town & Country Planning Association, who provide the secretariat role for the APPG on New Towns.

Quantitative data was collected via national censuses, UK government records of investment programmes, and data provided by local authorities. Qualitative data was collected through a series of semi-structured interviews, insights from a Commons debate on New Towns in January 2026, a study visit to Bracknell town centre, and an online roundtable.

- Unpublished analysis of census data provided by the Town & Country Planning Association: The TCPA has been updating its analysis of census data for the New Towns. Initial outputs of this work were shared for this Inquiry. For England and Wales, and Northern Ireland, 2021 census data was used. For Scotland, 2022 census data was used. Please see the methodology note in the appendix for more details.
- Investment and funding programmes: Desk-based research was conducted by the TCPA using public records of UK investment and funding programmes.
- In-person roundtable discussion: A roundtable discussion was hosted by Andrew Lewin MP in Parliament following the 2025 AGM for the APPG on New Towns, on the 3 December 2025.
- January Parliamentary debate on New Towns: A Commons debate on New Towns was hosted by Katrina Murray MP, the APPG Chair, on the 14 January 2026.
- Interviews: Interviews were conducted by the TCPA with UK Members of Parliament about their constituent New Towns. Questions for these were on recent regeneration, supported by desk-based research by the TCPA and insights from MP's speeches at the January debate.
- Study visit: A study visit to Bracknell New Town was hosted by Peter Swallow MP on the 11 June 2026. This included visiting the town's new Lexicon centre as well as Bracknell Forest Council's town centre sites, such as Easthampstead Works.
- Online roundtable: An online roundtable was held on the 27 April 2026 that brought together parliamentarians, local authority officers and those involved in the ownership and regeneration of New Town centres.
- Existing literature: The report draws on lessons from existing literature and TCPA research, including the following publications:
    - **A New Future for New Towns, Town and Country Planning Association**, 2021
    - New Towns: The Rise, Fall and Rebirth (Lock and Ellis, 2020)

- **New Towns and Garden Cities: Lessons for Tomorrow – Stage One: An Introduction to the UK's New Towns and Garden Cities** (TCPA, 2014)
- **New Towns: Laying the Foundations, Built Environment Committee report 2024-2026**
- **New Towns: Commit and Build, Built Environment Committee report 2024-2026**
- **Debate on new towns pack, House of Commons Library, 2026**

Analysis of census data

2021 Census data was collected for each of the New Towns. The following 2021 Census datasets were used:

- Tenure – *TS054* (England and Wales), *Tenure - 4 Categories* (Northern Ireland), *Household tenure* (Scotland)
- General health (and usual resident population) – *TS037* (England and Wales), *Tenure - 4 Categories by Household Deprivation* (Northern Ireland), *General health* (Scotland)
- Households by deprivation dimensions – *TS011* (England and Wales) *Health in General* (Northern Ireland), *Household deprived in multiple dimensions - 3 groups* (Scotland)

Data was collected using the following levels, selected to represent as closely as possible the current urban area of each New Town. This was based on the areas in the previous 2021 TCPA 'A New Future for New Towns', report, where the decision on which geographical data areas to use was made in consultation with the local authority where possible. Please contact the TCPA for details of the ward and regional boundaries used for this data collection.

The following area types were used:

- ward level (used in most cases – a number of wards were selected that represent the urban area)
- local authority level area, including borough, parish, district or city council area (used in some cases where the authority boundary was close to the urban area boundary)
- Middle Layer Super Output Areas
- parish (used for Newton Aycliffe and Newtown on the advice of the relevant local authorities)
- Locality 2010 (Scotland only) – Locality data is part of the 2021 Census, providing data from accurate boundaries of individual settlements in Scotland
- NOMIS Built-Up Areas (BUAs)

Note on boundary changes:

- Census boundary changes mean that some historic New Town boundaries cannot be matched perfectly between the 2011 and latest census datasets. Where necessary, best-fit ward and settlement geographies have been used to ensure consistency. The figures presented use the closest equivalent geographies available and provide the most robust comparison possible. While minor variations may reflect changes in census geography, the overall trends remain clear.

- The only region used that changed significantly was for Newtown (Wales). This was based on the town wards rather than the wider Llanllwchaiarn community area used previously. This provides a more accurate representation of the designated New Town area but results in slightly lower population and housing figures than identified in the 2011 census.

Investment and funding programmes

Evidence on investment and funding programmes was collected from publicly available records through desk-based research.

Many funding streams relevant to New Town regeneration operate with different objectives, geographies, timescales and eligibility criteria. This limits direct comparison between programmes. Consequently, this report focuses on identifying broader patterns in how New Towns access and combine central government funding rather than comparing funding totals.

Funds New Towns have received have included:

- Towns Fund
- Levelling Up Fund
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund
- Community Renewal Fund
- Community Ownership Fund
- Pride in Place
- City Deals
- Growth Deals
- Various devolved regeneration programmes

The Towns Fund

12 of the 32 New Towns received this, around 3% of all 1,082 towns considered by officials, but approximately 12% of those selected, indicating a fourfold overrepresentation. And awards were generally substantial, from around £15m to £38m. The 12 that received this funding were: Stevenage, Crawley, Harlow, Corby, Telford (formerly Dawley), Redditch, Runcorn, Milton Keynes, Peterborough, Northampton, Warrington, and Central Lancashire.

Levelling Up Funds

The following New Towns received Levelling Up funding: Antrim, Derry / Londonderry, Peterborough twice, Telford, Glenrothes, Harlow , Cumbernauld, Preston (Central Lancashire), Cwmbran, Irvine, and Newtown. 11 of the New Towns got this funding, which is 4% of the 216 projects awarded. 834 bids were made but this list was not published. Again, priority was made in allocations for regeneration and town centres; local transport; and cultural and heritage assets.

Pride in Place

There have been two key phases to the Pride in Place fund. Phase 1 included 6 of the New Towns, out of the 75 places allocated. Phase 2 included 16 neighbourhoods located in New Towns out of the 146 neighbourhoods identified, with multiple neighbourhoods in Peterlee, Corby, Peterborough and Basildon. The Impact Fund expansion of Phase 2 then awarded additional funding to five of the New Towns out of the 40 additional neighbourhoods funded: Washington, Cwmbrân, Irvine, Peterborough and Central Lancashire. This shows that New Towns were especially overrepresented in Phase 2 and the Impact Fund, needing support for especially deprived neighbourhoods.

Funding across the four nations

Funding approaches increasingly reflect devolved regeneration policy frameworks, limiting direct UK-wide quantitative comparison.

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all operate through different regeneration architectures, such as:

- Scotland: Growth Deals, PBIP, RCGF, VDLF
- Wales: Transforming Towns, Growth Deals.
- Northern Ireland: DfC regeneration funding, City Deals, LUF.

This Report was researched and written by The Town and Country Planning Association on behalf of the APPG on New Towns, drawing on the expertise and knowledge of its Members. Its contents does not necessarily represent the personal views of all APPG Members.

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