



HOUSE OF LORDS

Built Environment Committee

Corrected oral evidence: New towns: practical delivery

Tuesday 22 April 2025

10.45 am

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Members present: Lord Gascoigne (The Chair); Baroness Andrews; Lord Bailey of Paddington; Lord Faulkner of Worcester; Viscount Hanworth; Baroness Janke; Lord Mawson; Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer; Lord Porter of Spalding; Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe; Viscount Younger of Leckie.

Evidence Session No. 1

Heard in Public

Questions 1 - 16

Witnesses

I: Dr Susan Priest, Chief Executive, Folkestone & Hythe District Council, District Councils' Network; Professor Tony Travers, Professor in Practice and Associate Dean, LSE School of Public Policy; Stephen Kelly, Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development, Greater Cambridge Shared Planning.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.

Examination of witnesses

Dr Susan Priest, Professor Tony Travers and Stephen Kelly.

Q1 **The Chair:** Good morning and welcome to the Built Environment Committee. This is our first public evidence session. Joining us today, we are delighted to have Dr Susan Priest, chief executive of Folkestone & Hythe District Council, representing the District Councils' Network; Professor Tony Travers from the LSE School of Public Policy; and Stephen Kelly, joint director of planning and economic development at Greater Cambridge Shared Planning. On behalf of us all, you are very welcome here today.

We have a lot to get through over the next hour or so, and I would ask that both the committee and witnesses keep questions and answers as brief as can be. If as witnesses you do not feel able to answer a question that is thrown in your direction, please do say either that you do not have the answer or that it is perhaps better for one of your colleagues to answer it.

We have a series of questions to get through. I first want to ask very briefly to what extent, as the Government are embarking on this new towns agenda, they are heading in the right direction. What are your initial views on what they have said thus far? Just based on your experience, what would your advice be to them before they start?

Dr Susan Priest: Good morning, everyone, and thank you for the invitation to join you. Not only am I chief exec of Folkestone & Hythe District Council, but I also have Otterpool Park in my district, of which the council is the majority landowner. If I may, I will extend an invitation to you all to come and visit Otterpool Park in due course, if that fits with your arrangements.

To answer your question, I am greatly encouraged. As an area wanting to embrace growth and a new town at Otterpool Park, we really want to get on with the job, but to do so in partnership with national government. There is nothing more important and powerful than national government working effectively with local government for shared outcomes and objectives.

The power that can come as a result of your recommendations and those of the New Towns Taskforce is very exciting and represents a very positive step in the development of new, well-designed and accessible communities for the future. That would be my opening remark. I have lots more to add, but I will stop there for now.

Professor Tony Travers: Thank you for inviting me to give evidence this morning. There is no doubt that new towns have contributed and can contribute to the delivery of a larger number of homes and more economic output, but they would, of course, be part of a broader policy approach, some of which they would have to embrace. They would be a contributor but could not be the only way of delivering a significant uptick in the number of homes built. Provided they are sensitively handled, they

can contribute, but they are not, in and of themselves, going to solve the problem of high house prices and rents, and the challenge of building more quickly.

Stephen Kelly: Good morning and thank you for inviting me to give evidence. We have five new towns in our Greater Cambridge area. The Government's focus on exploring the contribution that they can make is most certainly a positive, but it is important that that process is inclusive of the local authorities. New towns are complex things. They are entire ecosystems around place that involve not just the conception stage, but the consenting and then implementation and getting started. Generally, we have found that this takes quite a long time to lead into houses coming out of them. It can be 10 to 15 years. Northstowe was begun in 2007 and has about 1,500 houses now. The role of government in convening and co-ordinating, as well as collaborating with the district councils, county partners and so forth, is a positive if done well.

Q2 **Viscount Hanworth:** I have a brief question, to which I will append a comment. Who should take the initiative in delivering new towns? Should it be local government and, if so, at what level? I can envisage a three-way stretch between a local authority, a development corporation and building firms. There might be another party, which is a finance or asset management group. The question, then, is how these various parties should be reconciled.

Dr Susan Priest: I agree with you that there is an interesting dynamic at play, as you describe, from those different interests. I would just reiterate that a strong partnership, nationally and locally, particularly in the early stages of a large-scale new town settlement of some 10,000 or 15,000 people, is absolutely necessary in terms of gaining momentum and being a patient investor. My experience of working at Otterpool Park, where, as I said, the council is the majority landowner, is that there is a significant investment requirement, particularly in the early stages, with all the planning and establishment costs.

You are right to identify financiers as having a critical role in that, along with all the powers that we have with planning. The cost of early infrastructure can lead to levels of peak debt in the early stages of a new settlement that require a 30-to-40-year period to consider the money flows back into reinvestment in that town. The ability of all partners, whether local or national, and specialists such as financiers and developers, to take a longer-term view over multiple plan periods is really important.

My reflection is that strategic land use planning is an opportunity not to be missed, where you can say, "It's not sensitively designed to have large-scale settlements in AONBs or SSSIs, so where can we accommodate growth?" Where is there existing infrastructure, such as train stations and motorway junctions—both of which we have at Otterpool Park—that is underutilised? How can that existing infrastructure sustain further growth? What investment into that infrastructure is necessary? It is a complicated process, as you have said.

Part of your question was about who should lead. From my experience and perspective, local authorities can be really exceptional at visioning and place leadership, place making, demonstrating and communicating effectively with existing communities, welcoming in new communities, and providing some really excellent public services. They are also able to partner effectively with central government to deliver national policy frameworks, if they are funded and encouraged to do so, and there is a really important point in that. They can then have an ongoing, long-term view for promoting, engaging and communicating, and the long-term stewardship of the development and the assets that remain to support those communities through the evolution of their life cycle. It is a complicated picture, but local authorities have a critical role, as well as the others that I have described.

Viscount Hanworth: One of our questions will be whether local authorities currently have sufficient resources.

Stephen Kelly: Getting to the root of your question and going back to first principles, it depends upon what the purpose of the new town is. We have interesting dynamics in which, for example, the Wellcome Genome Campus is building a new town next to itself for the purposes of economic growth and science. It owns the land. It brought in Urban&Civic as a delivery vehicle in order to be able to secure that. At the other end, Eddington, on the edge of Cambridge, is university-promoted for the purposes of supporting the university's growth of student and post-doctorate spaces. Again, the university owns and controls it. Northstowe is a new town now owned largely by Homes England to meet broader housing needs and support the economic growth of the area.

In the first instance, it is important to understand the purpose that the new town is seeking to achieve. The functional role of the local authority or partners—county or district councils, or, in our case, combined authorities—but also government agencies are, in some respects, defined by the purpose, competencies and roles of each agency in that space, including registered providers and so forth.

Whether or not it is the local authority that leads, we have found that, in each of the three examples that I gave, we have a slightly different role. There are, inevitably, capacity and resourcing issues that you have to put to that. In the consenting and the conception phase, is it in the local plan? We released a green-belt site for Eddington; we released a greenfield site entirely outside of the local plan process for Wellcome.

We clearly have a role in creating that kind of coherence and the strategic context that was mentioned earlier, but our role in delivery is different in each of those cases. The university takes out very long-term debt bonds in order to cover its delivery processes and has very high internal quality assurance standards, meaning that the role of the authority is different compared with, say, Northstowe, where parcels are sold off to individual housebuilders, the infrastructure is put in by Homes England, and it is the planning process that delivers those qualitative outcomes, as well as the phasing and sequencing.

Professor Tony Travers: Building on what my two colleagues have said, we are all looking at this, to some extent, through the lens of what the Government said they want to do with a smallish number of large new settlements, against the backdrop of what happened after the war and into the 1950s, with the creation of new towns across the country, first in the south-east and then in other parts of the country.

A huge amount has changed since the 1940s and 1950s. Let us take one obvious example that you referred to, which is that many local authorities are used to leading huge developments over time and are financing them in a very different way to how new towns would have been financed back in the 1940s and 1950s. Local authorities are used to undertaking development on their own or with partners, as we have just heard, but, beyond that, the evolution of the idea of a new town today would have to involve and include local government, which has developed enormously in the last 50 or 60 years in the direction of being able to manage and negotiate development and land value capture through Section 106 and the community infrastructure levy.

Not only is local government, in many parts of the country, used to doing some of this itself separately—both of my colleagues have implied this—but the local authority will be there long after the development corporation, if there is one, has gone. A local authority will inherit the consequences of the policy 50 or 60 years from now, in the way that the post-war raft of new towns are today trying to rebuild and regenerate themselves, because many of them were built, to a significant extent, all at one time.

The whole way in which local government and planning operate has evolved enormously since the last wave of new towns, and local government will have to have a substantial role in any development corporations that are created for this set of new towns.

Viscount Hanworth: Bracknell is a good example of what you have just mentioned. Thank you very much.

Q3 **Lord Mawson:** I was interested in what you were saying about the Cambridge exercise, but, Tony, you are a bit too optimistic for me. I spend a lot of my life in the north of England, where the incompetencies of the public sector are profound and in plain sight. I am very interested in what you are saying about Cambridge, because there are real management issues. Urban&Civic, which you mentioned, takes a long-term view, which is a very good thing, because it seems to me, from my experience, that the long-term management of these developments is often a real issue. Councils come and go. There is the competency of councillors and all those other things.

As a Select Committee, we went to see the development that Urban&Civic is responsible for in Halton, near Rugby, which was very impressive, but it had the long-term view. I just wondered what your comments, Stephen, were about that long-term management issue and how much thought you had given to that. I was rather encouraged by the

willingness to open up about the more complex conversation between the competencies of the various agencies involved.

Stephen Kelly: It is absolutely critical. This comes back to the point that Susan was making about the role of partnership and collaboration. You have to flex. Indeed, Urban&Civic is one of a limited number of very long-term developers that can take that master planner and strategic management role over a site that they control absolutely.

In some of our new settlements, we have multiple land ownerships, in which the role of the local authority or authorities as convener becomes a lot more complex, because you then have to steward the implementation of infrastructure and deal with the potential relationship issues between those various landowners. You have to reconcile existing surrounding community interests and objectives with a broader strategic narrative for the place, and try to keep people honest and clear on that, while dealing with day-to-day housekeeping issues: "We can't get a bus service between either end of the site because the developers haven't opened the access road that connects them".

There is a granularity to this that requires resources not just in planning authorities but across the public sector and, indeed, sometimes involves government in helping to convene things such as, in our case, water management. Susan highlighted the importance of understanding wider connections into that network of county and, for us, combined authority responsibilities, as well as the NHS and others.

Q4 **Baroness Andrews:** Good morning. Thank you very much for the really interesting evidence so far. I have a specific question for Stephen, if I may, and then a more general question.

First, to your knowledge, is the Cambridge partnership unique? If so, why is that? Could it be replicated in terms of spatial geography and politics, as it were?

Secondly, have you put into the task force for more growth points and new towns? If so, what has driven those decisions? You have quite rightly mentioned that there is a bit of a Venn diagram between growth and housing in driving the new towns policy. Where would your proposed new settlements sit ideally, and how would they complement what you already have?

Finally, I have a question about the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, in relation to what Susan said. It should give you a bit more freedom and scope to make decisions, with fewer constraints. Is that the case? Does it create a bit more agency, as it were, to get things done more quickly?

Stephen Kelly: There is quite a lot there. Is Cambridge unique? There are other examples across the country of local authorities collaborating. Indeed, there are other examples of shared planning services. I oversee Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council. Leicester is a good example of local authorities coming together to think

about that strategic context as part of then delivering their local plans, which translate that strategy into reality.

I do not think that we are unique. There has been a long history of debates about growth in Cambridge, which perhaps precede many other locations. Going back even to the last century, in the late 1990s, Cambridge and its constituent communities were talking about growth in something called Cambridge Futures. That has paved the way for a consistent and long-term conversation about growth choices.

We have not put any proposals into the task force for new towns. We have plenty, and we currently have around 70,000 homes in our emerging local plan, which is more than enough to meet the forecast economic growth that we have identified, even allowing for Cambridge's exceptional performance in that respect.

The Government, through the Cambridge Growth Company, are looking to dial that up further and see what more can be intensified, but we do not have any submission and have not made any proposed bids. Our current new towns are probably 10% delivered, if that, and so there is a very large pipeline of supply already in them that we feel we do not need to supplement. Indeed, given housing absorption rates, if you put too many new towns close to one another, you have to reduce the number of homes that you expect to see delivered each year.

For example, in Cambourne, there is a new settlement called Bourn Airfield that we have identified for 3,500 homes next to it, but the combined outputs of new homes from those two settlements is around 200 per year each, so it will take 30 years or so for them to be built out. If they were separate and, in a sense, isolated in their own right, you might assume 300 to 350 dwellings per year from them, so you have to be careful about disrupting the market with that.

On whether they would complement what we have already, Tony highlighted that there is an immensely complex process now of convening conversations around growth among all the infrastructure and utility providers. Local authorities carry a huge risk to their local plan processes of things just being plonked in, given that they are highly evidentially driven, and disrupting that process. For example, if you have a new town of 10,000 to 15,000 homes, you are looking at potentially thousands of vehicle trips on to a network that you have not factored in as a local authority.

In our local plan, we are trying to work through how all those things fit together. There are risks with it, but it is important, as I said at the beginning, that, if new towns are to come forward through this process, they are integrated into existing growth propositions. That is hugely important as well for community confidence and for clarity among the utility providers.

Finally, to your question about the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, the spatial development strategies that, for us, the combined authority will

bring forward may well be hugely helpful in arbitrating in some of those growth choices. Certainly, in my experience working in London, the role of the London Plan was hugely helpful in arbitrating some of those growth points, if not the site allocations.

As for the other elements of the Bill and, for example, the additional step-in rights of government, if you have to go back to the Section 106 agreement and bang the developer over the head with it, things are not going well in your project. It is about a shared understanding of where you are going. There are potential positives in the Bill, but, again, it is about the sequencing and implementation of it.

Q5 The Chair: I am conscious of time, but I wonder whether I could throw one in the direction of the District Councils' Network. While we are talking about being local authority-led, there is the counter-push about development corporations. Are they seen as something that is welcome, or are they perhaps considered to be more of a threat?

Dr Susan Priest: I can talk only from my experience, which would be that it needs to be in partnership. I would welcome some intervention, but it has to be done in true partnership and in a co-designed way. To answer your question about freedoms and scopes along with that, they are absolutely welcome. Strategic land use planning is really important and a first-base principle across the country. There are certain things that I would suggest can be done nationally on that in terms of available space to accommodate growth. We know where the infrastructure is.

Government action would be really welcome, and a few things in particular, if I may. Patient capital has been spoken about. Access to relevant skills and expertise needs to be made available nationally to support local authorities, because some of this is really complicated. Negotiating Section 106 conditions, triggers and viability assessments is really complicated and something that some chief planners may do only once in their career. Having the ability to look and think nationally, and to deploy this expertise to support places in our place-making role, is something I would particularly welcome.

The focus and momentum to deliver is really helpful, as is the ability to have long-term decision-making. As we said earlier, the stewardship over many years relates to some of the decisions and Section 106 agreements of today. It is significantly complicated, so having influence over some of our critical partners, such as utility companies and other statutory agencies, to coalesce around that shared objective is really the prize that can come from this.

Of course, we have local government reorganisation and devolution in the short term, which has the potential to be a huge distraction. In some parts of the country, there is no timescale set out for devolution. There is no timescale for mayoral strategic authorities or mayoral development corporations. In my own area, for Otterpool Park, we do not know where that home will eventually go to, but we are concerned about making sure that its journey along that is protected and considered through all the

decision-making. There are a lot of benefits that can come from the Bill. I would encourage some decisive action behind the achievement of the objective, involving partners from different levels behind that.

Q6 Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe: Thank you so much for being here. It is already raising all sorts of questions in my mind, and we have many of them here as well. You have all emphasised the complexity of the process. You have referred to the hierarchies within local government, where responsibility might lie, and so on. My question is about accountability: in all of this, where does accountability lie? If local authorities are going to lead this process—and there is general consensus that local authorities are essential in doing so—should they be held accountable for the success or failure of either new towns or expanded settlements in their areas and, if so, in what way? What shape should it take?

Dr Susan Priest: Of course, I would say that local authorities are already democratically accountable bodies through the ballot box, and that has its cycle. It is right that local authorities are held accountable, but for things that are proportionate to what we do, such as effective and meaningful public engagement and delivery of statutory services, political commitment to deliver those plans, ensuring democratic legitimacy, representing the views of the community, effective place-making, and championing the role that we spoke about earlier of co-design with communities and place leadership.

Accountability needs to perhaps stop where we do not have the powers, funding or freedom to act. For example, we can award resolution to grant planning permissions, but we do not have all the levers to require places to be delivered out by developers. We might have incentives, but there are more mechanisms that could be considered for moving from the award of a planning application through to delivery on site. That is an area worthy of further thoughts.

There are more powers, I would suggest, that government at whatever level can deploy. We have already spoken about, for example, the wastewater treatment that is needed at Otterpool Park. That will take two years to get through its planning process. That requires the active involvement of the utility provider, so some of the powers that we have could be significantly strengthened.

Being accountable brings with it a great privilege, and we are very well placed to do certain bits, but there are tools that we do not have to allow us to do it all, which is why it is quite a complicated picture.

Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe: I wonder whether Professor Travers, with his long experience in assessing these sorts of issues, can add something of an umbrella answer to that question, because it seems to me that accountability is going to be crucial in much of this.

Professor Tony Travers: Yes, absolutely. As Susan has said, because local authorities have the magic of electoral legitimacy, they are currently

able to make decisions locally and then defend them. The interesting thing about these new settlements—or new towns, if they are to be new towns—is that they are going to require a significant amount of explanation to the public.

Some of them are going to be built on green land in a way that people are not overly enthusiastic about. They are going to be built at higher densities than was the case back in the 1940s and 1950s, because contemporary public policy, perfectly sensibly, believes in densities around railway stations and their infrastructure, whereas the new towns that were built in the past were built at low densities to give people who were leaving cities more space. There was a completely different logic there.

These things will need a lot of explanation and, again, as Susan has said, getting the utilities, most of which are private companies, to deliver what is required is difficult, even for existing local authorities in areas where there is a currently built-up town or city. It is a really big job.

Then, of course, there is the issue of how far and to what extent development corporations are used, because we then have the question: how far is the local authority to be involved in a development corporation? They can have members on the development corporation. Sometimes they do not.

Last but not least, this enormous reorganisation of local government in many parts of England means that the policy implementation is going to take place through the lifetime of the existing set of local authorities and a new set, with new combined authorities, which is a lot of management to handle as it moves along.

Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe: I wonder whether, from the experience of bringing together a lot of different local authorities in Cambridge, there might be a different dimension there.

Stephen Kelly: It is really difficult to distil this down to a binary proposition. As a case in point, in Northstowe, which is now several years old, there is a lot of local anxiety and concern about the absence of a shop. The planning permission had a shop in it. We granted permission for a shop. We assumed that the market was going to deliver that in 2014. In fact, the council has now had to step in and underwrite the lease in order to be able to deliver a local community shop. That was not envisaged back in those days. The local authority inevitably ends up, through our community forums, being accountable. Our local councillors are the councillors on the ground, standing in front of residents and facing the brickbats, so they are absolutely critical.

What is important, however, as Susan has highlighted, is that, behind or with the local authority, there is appropriate accountability for the delivery of the pieces that matter. Phase 2 of Northstowe was held up by the fact that the Department for Transport had not promoted the A14 improvements. In another part of our district, Bourn Airfield, with 3,500

homes, was held up by the fact that there was no water supply. It is not just that the water company, Cambridge Water, has a responsibility to make sure that there is a supply; the Environment Agency and Defra are responsible for approving the plan to deliver that supply, and Ofwat, the regulator, is responsible for agreeing that the water company can fund that plan. There is a very complex web.

Inevitably, local authorities end up being at the front line of that conversation, but it is critically important—and this is where the Government and their agencies leaning in can add real value—that, collectively, the public sector can reassure communities, some of which are investing directly to buy houses in these new towns, but some of which are neighbouring villages concerned about excessive waits at their GP practice, for example, or rat-runs through them.

It absolutely is a collaboration, and a long-term one. Although development corporations have a role in bringing that process to a head, they have a democratic deficit, by and large, that Tony has highlighted, which plays out in the local dynamic and the local conversation. The behaviour of the local council is, in part, contingent upon the approach of the development corporation. If there is hostility locally to that development corporation, it inevitably travels through to the ballot box, the behaviour of the local authority and what its officers can do because of which people are elected and what their mandate is. This complex point around collaboration and delivery becomes essential, particularly when it comes to capital funding and so forth that Susan highlighted.

Q7 Lord Bailey of Paddington: Good morning to you all. I need to declare an interest as the chairman of Faraday Ventures, a small developer that specialises in delivering social and key worker housing.

My question is around local authorities and the opportunities and challenges associated with developing new towns across multiple local authorities, whether that be geographically or between different layers of local government. We have had a lot of analysis this morning of the challenges, of which there are many, so maybe we could focus on some of the opportunities.

I am also quite interested in development corporations in London. I am also a member of the London Assembly. In London, we have had, you could argue, largely successful development corporations, and they seem to be able to circumnavigate many of the frictions in the system. In developing new towns, could you set up corporations that did the same across the country to get around a lot of those frictions? To do that, what additional role in that corporation would you have to give to local authorities?

Dr Susan Priest: In terms of opportunities for joint working, we should do better at the pooling of resources, skills and expertise than we currently do, to be quite honest. Having a much more focused way of providing skills and expertise for this large-scale development would be very welcome.

Clearly, there is the advantage of sharing costs. My own local authority has invested nearly £80 million in bringing forward Otterpool Park and up to 10,000 homes. That is a significant investment, and all due credit to the members for their commitment to delivering a new town in a sustainable, well-planned way. That is quite significant for small local authorities, when my net service budget is in the order of £22 million per annum. It is a relative scale, so the sharing of costs between areas might be another opportunity that arises, and no doubt Stephen might be able to say a little bit more on that.

Focusing on the economic growth at a bigger geographic scale is another opportunity, as is building real coalitions of political and community support for the development. There are some downsides, but I know that the question was very much more about what the opportunities are. That collective endeavour to bring forward the necessary infrastructure is something that I would be particularly keen to ensure in that scenario.

To your second question, on the development corporations, what they would offer for an area such as mine is not necessarily appropriate for everywhere in the country. Stephen will have a slightly different view from mine. It provides some momentum and focus on delivery at a time when local authorities are distracted with local government reorganisation, devolution, and the day-to-day service demands of adults' and children's services and housing.

In the relative scheme of priorities and where we put resources and focus, there is the potential, as Tony said earlier, for that distraction to lead to inaction and a loss of momentum. It is a really interesting point around the role of a development corporation with very strong local democratic input, and a clear role for that democratic accountability to be embedded within a development corporation.

It is not beyond the wit of man or woman to be able to do that. I come back to my starting point, which is that there is nothing more powerful, in my opinion, than national government working with local government. This is all doable. It is in our gift to design it effectively and to make sure that skills and expertise are available to those places that need it. It is a very exciting task ahead.

Professor Tony Travers: There are significant potential advantages for new developments in terms of creating a population that will then make it easier to run rail and bus services, to promote communities that are sustainable in their use of public services, as long as there is proper planning—this point has been made by both of my colleagues—and to have better public services, access to ATMs, and all sorts of other things that rural areas often suffer from when they lose them. These are all things where extra development can create further demand that would make life better for those who are already living nearby, even if they are not so certain about the development in the first place.

I realise that this inquiry is about new towns, which we are largely imagining are outside existing big cities. Of course, within walking

distance of the Palace of Westminster, you have areas such as Elephant and Castle and Battersea Nine Elms, which have been transformed by development and massive amounts of private sector contribution in various ways. I am trying not to use the word “dystopian” here, but Elephant and Castle, as it was—others might not agree with me about this—has been transformed by development and a lot of new housing created.

Down at Battersea Nine Elms, there was a tax increment finance arrangement, which is another possibility to help capture the tax uplift of development and spend it locally. These developments—and there are others in other cities—do demonstrate how well-managed development and master planning can lead to radical improvements in areas of the country.

Stephen Kelly: Building on Tony’s and Susan’s comments, form must follow function. For example, development corporations can be fantastically powerful conveners. They can raise finance, because they are corporations, as long as they are allowed to do so. My development corporation, when I worked in Northamptonshire, was quite constrained in its ability to raise private finance to fund infrastructure, partly because it was under the control of Treasury as a national devco. If it is a local development corporation, there are issues relating to how financially secure the institutions are that are backing it and, picking up on Susan’s point, the costs involved.

Really good examples in London are the Olympic Delivery Authority and the Legacy Development Corporation, which had very significant and almost unprecedented financial reserves to draw upon to deliver that place.

If we look outside of the capital, the funding of devcos is substantially less, and it is a challenge, but there are also the functions within the organisation. In Cambridgeshire, there is a housing affordability crisis. If you are to try to bite into resolving that, you need to think about public housing contributions and the public housing programme that delivers not just market houses. When a three-bedroom house is about £800,000, you need to think about the private rented sector and how you crowd in that kind of institutional funding. A devco can help by creating clarity and certainty around that.

Picking up on Susan’s point around resources, capacity in local authorities is challenging. In Greater Cambridge, two local authorities that were really quite small—South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge City Council—came together to create capacity within the shared planning service. Those two councils have invested significantly to do that, but that is not always possible across the country. Access to resources and additionality, rather than competing, becomes really important.

Q8 Lord Faulkner of Worcester: Apologies to you for not being here right at the beginning of your evidence. I had a slightly complicated journey from far away this morning.

I would like to ask you about what happens if a local authority is dead against a new town development or even just an expanded settlement in its area. Who should take action to listen to it and possibly adjudicate, if that happens?

Dr Susan Priest: My experience is around effective communication and engagement with communities from the earliest outset and having the principle of co-design with them. The charter that we have for Otterpool Park was designed with our local communities.

One of the things that I would like to highlight is that we made the case about the need to plan for homes. That is recognised locally, as there is a need to plan effectively for more homes, but some of my villages and small towns did not want to see their characteristics or unique differentiating factors changed. They wanted to retain some of the essence of their place and did not want to have urban settlement expansions, and so having the new town in an area that had some underutilised infrastructure, in order to address our national housing targets, was a real incentive to get that local buy-in. Local, smaller villages could see the benefits of having a well-designed new town with the necessary infrastructure, rather than bolt-on, piecemeal village expansions, which they did not want to see.

That early, upfront engagement and co-design is really important. The imposition of something brings along with it the potential for the lack of support. Things may not be resolved through dialogue and reasoning over time. We have designed into Otterpool Park things that the local community wanted to see, as a way of making sure that there was some—"payback" is the wrong word—stake for the community. More accessible open space, for example, was really important, so we have designed that in with them and they can see the benefits arising.

In an environment where there is not the support, it gets to a question about who the arbiter of those disagreements is. At the moment, as I said earlier, the role, powers and funding available to the mayoral strategic authority remain really unclear. There is not a well-defined regional layer at the moment. It is really ill defined in terms of what those powers would be, so you end up with the challenges that just get escalated up to national government or through the courts. There must be a way that that layer can be addressed and more fully fleshed out in terms of the point that you quite rightly raise.

Lord Faulkner of Worcester: There is a danger, is there not, that, if the degree of local opposition is so great, residents' groups will start putting up candidates for local elections with that as their sole platform?

Dr Susan Priest: Yes.

Professor Tony Travers: I would have thought that that is inevitable. Given the history of attempts to place new or extended towns, not in the past but more recently, this will become a matter of both low and high politics, and candidates will stand, if it is handled badly. Of course, there

is a slight sense, with a big thrust of the current Government's policy, that, here and there, things need to be imposed in order to cut through. It is just real politics and the way that the mood of the moment is taking the Government. There will be a space for those who then come into politics, or political parties, to oppose what is being done. That is the way politics works, as we all know.

Therefore, to something that Susan has just referred to, there has to be visible benefit for the areas, and for the individuals and people who already live there, in terms of what they get back. The difficulty with the local government finance system as it operates and, to some extent, with the surrounding funding arrangements to do with Section 106, CIL and so on is that they are opaque to the point of impossibility. Therefore, it is very hard to say to people, "Look, there will be benefits to you from this", because they will see the disbenefits, and all the benefits will be so opaque as to be impossible to understand, or there will not be any. There has to be some financial advantage locally to having more people settled locally. Otherwise, people will oppose it.

Q9 Lord Mawson: I will just declare my interests at this point. I have interests in Barratt Redrow plc, Kier Group plc, Istock plc, the NHS, and parts of the public sector.

I am interested in the current under-resourcing of local authority planning departments, and whether, in reality, they have the ability in the present climate to deliver new towns and expanded settlements. It would be good to get your feel for what that looks like. Susan, it sounds like you have made really great progress. To invest £80 million is a serious commitment. It is impressive, and it sounds like you have built lots of relationships with local people, all of which is very encouraging. What does that feel like from the chief executive's point of view, given what is happening financially, the shortage of resources, and all those pressures? I am interested in that.

The second part of this question is about the machinery of the state. There has been lots of discussion here that seems to be overconfident, in my view, about the ability of the machinery of the state to deliver this stuff, so it would be good to have honest reflections about what is working with the machinery of the state and what is in quite a lot of difficulty, if we are to get into more co-creation of events, into the complexity, and into the whole question even of the granularity of the community shop.

You can hear the good will in a local authority that wants to support it, but probably none of those councillors has ever run a business model and they do not have the faintest clue how to make that well-meaning idea work in practice. One has often seen those well-meaning ideas not work because no one has the business skills to make it happen. It would be good to just have some reflections on some of what that looks like in reality.

Dr Susan Priest: To the first bit, it feels quite exhausting and harder than it should do. It really should not feel this hard. With the powers that we have nationally and locally, with a willingness and with community support, it really should be easier than it feels. That would be my honest reflection on the matter. Otterpool Park has been in gestation for a very long time, but we are now on the cusp of moving into much welcomed delivery.

In terms of planning, there is lots of evidence and surveys that the District Councils' Network can give you about planning shortages. The roles are really important for the country and for our places, so any announcements from government about enhancements for planning as a profession are really very welcome. Of course, there are lots of dynamics at play. There is the lure of the private sector, with perhaps higher salaries. There is always a challenge about recruiting and retaining experienced planners. There are not many planners who, during their careers, have planned and seen through the different stages a new town of scale, or even some significant urban expansions, which have their own issues of renewal, reinvestment and reinvigoration. I would just urge the committee not to forget about the needs that they have with their own developments from perhaps new towns to new cities.

The recognition by government has been welcomed, but I would encourage it to go further. There is much more that could be done nationally to support our planners and those who have been involved in some of these large-scale developments. A national centre of excellence could be deployed to those development sites as needed. There are lots of technicalities about planning for these large-scale developments, not least in terms of strategic-level planning, but then through to the negotiations of the issues around Section 106, viability, and the trigger points over many years, as I said earlier.

That is my honest reflection, but, as a chief executive, there is nothing more rewarding than seeing our planning colleagues involved in what I would say is this fabulous opportunity of creating new places and communities. That is really rewarding, and I would hope that national government can do much more to talk up the planning sector and the great roles that we have for planners in the local authority world at a time of significant change, where, to be quite honest, people will be thinking about whether now is the time to jump out and go to the private sector, and to deploy their skills from perhaps another perspective. In my experience and perspective as a chief exec, there is a real danger for planners.

Turning to your second question about the mechanics of the state, my view is that there should be more decisive action from the Government's agency, Homes England. My Homes England colleagues, with whom I work very closely, will have heard me say before that they are uniquely placed to take that national and local view, and to deploy their skills and expertise, but they are not resourced sufficiently. I have had to fight to make myself known, accessible and available, and to encourage them to

come and join me in delivering Otterpool Park, which has been a harder challenge than it perhaps should have been.

There are some really interesting state levers that are just not quite honed and focused enough to do things at the speed at which I am hearing government wants to do them. All of that absolutely has to involve the democratic accountability that comes through local authorities being a key partner.

Professor Tony Travers: It is worth pointing out that planning, along with a number of other pretty local services, has been squeezed significantly in the last 15 years in order to protect social care. Now that there are counties and districts, that is slightly more complex, but there has been a squeeze on non-protected local government services, and planning has undoubtedly been one of those. That is a financial issue.

Separately, there is a structural issue. Whitehall departments are regularly reconfigured. How many Housing Ministers have there been since 1997? It is something like 25 or 30. Local government is regularly reorganised, and is about to be significantly reorganised. Governments have swung from believing in very little planning to now believing in lots of planning. We have had housing targets, which were then abandoned and are now back.

The environment in which this kind of policy operates over 10, 20 or 30 years changes a great deal. Paradoxically, of course, it is often the developers that survive through all of this. Their companies are more likely to survive in many circumstances than any of the agencies, public authorities and Ministers concerned. The churn of institutions, as well as the constraints on the planning service, have rendered the delivery of housing and other development just a bit more difficult than it might otherwise have been.

Stephen Kelly: If I can add a note of positivity, however, I talked earlier about how the council has brought together the shared planning service. About half of our funding now comes from fees and income. In fact, we have a wholly funded team of planning officers, paid for by the developers through planning performance agreements, delivering our new towns. That is a long-term commitment from the development industry, so we have been able to crowd in some funding.

On top of that, through a process of planning performance agreements, we have in-house resources in ecology, sustainability, landscape, urban design, drainage and trees that help to make these places happen, but you do need scale and certainty of commitment. There is a role for local authorities, as well as government, however, in seeding this project. We are quite well staffed and have less of a recruitment difficulty than we did a few years ago. The council has introduced some innovative HR policies to allow it to do that, but we have a fully staffed team and a commitment from members.

We are also resourcing for the future. We have eight apprentices in the service. We worked with Cambridge University to have some interns for the last year in order to stimulate people to want to join the public sector. We have a youth engagement service that goes out and picks young people in primary schools, and tries to inspire them by involving them in planning projects, so that, in 2040, when Northstowe needs planning officers, or Waterbeach needs experienced principal planners, either our interns will remember what we are trying to do, or the young people of today will want to step into the public sector and be involved in it.

It is not easy to do, and the councils have had to invest in that, but we have increasingly found that, as Susan has highlighted, through robust conversations with the development industry, including Homes England—although Homes England is quite difficult on planning performance agreements—developers are prepared to fund youth engagement and to fund planning and specialist officers to help us.

Because we have quite a lot of infrastructure projects going on at the same time in Greater Cambridge, the Planning and Infrastructure Bill makes provision for infrastructure providers to also fund those resources. It has taken a huge amount of effort and investment on the council's part to do that, but we now have an in-house business manager, in effect, because the turnover of the specialist team and the application support team runs into millions of pounds. You have to manage that, and you and the developers have to be confident that they are getting value for money.

By investing in that way and opening the service up for people to come and have work experience, to have interns and others, as I said, we are trying to seed the process for the long term. What smaller district councils may well struggle with, or, indeed, the county council—it is highway engineers; it is land drainage specialists in the lead local flood authorities—is how they ensure consistency.

The property sector is remarkably dynamic. Development stops at times; developers do not want to pay for staff when it stops, so we have had to introduce a financial management process, which is incredibly complex for a planning authority, to take a portfolio approach to our funding. We make decisions such as, "Is this development going to happen next year? Will they pay their application fee? Will they pay a planning performance agreement?"

We are carrying financial risks. It is the local authorities that are carrying that financial risk, but the payback is that we have an amazing team at Greater Cambridge. We have been able to invest in that team in the long term. We have a pipeline of future officers ready to step into that team; they are highly experienced people, who will no doubt get snapped up by the private sector at some point with much more lucrative offers.

Q10 Lord Bailey of Paddington: It is clear that the services you provide are not provided everywhere; it is patchy. Is it possible for you as a local

authority to provide that service to other local authorities at a cost, so that they do not have to build the capacity but get access, and you could build more capacity?

Stephen Kelly: We are exploring that. We have talked to some of our neighbouring authorities that are smaller—very much like Essex County Council does with its place services team—about whether we can share some of our expertise in ecology with them. They are interested in that. However, they also need confidence that they will have a funding stream to cover those costs, because if we recruit somebody into the service—and you can have a more collegiate nature with conservation officers and so forth—we need surety that we are going to have a pipeline of income to cover those costs.

Q11 **Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer:** Good morning. You have touched a bit on this question. For example, one of you mentioned existing residents worrying about GP services being overwhelmed. Going back a little bit to what was said about how you might get opposition candidates standing just to oppose it, how are you going to reassure existing residents that local authority resources will be able to expand enough, so that people are not going to have their current levels of services threatened?

Professor Tony Travers: That is an absolutely essential point. As I was saying earlier, the way the local government finance system operates is not massively responsive. It has not been brought up to date for a decade now. There is the curiosity that, even in the normal way it works, the more a council develops, the less grant it gets because of the equalisation arrangement. It sounds a bit odd, but that is how it works.

There is supposed to be a measurement of need to help authorities that are growing or with particular problems, but in truth it is very, very hard for the system to be immediately responsive and sensitive to the sense of loss or the sense of a challenge that is coming with the development for people who already live there.

That means that, not only for local government finance, but frankly, for the National Health Service and the earlier mentioned utilities, the utilities will have to be galvanised to provide resourcing in order to deliver gas, water and electricity in areas where these new settlements occur. They are private companies that operate in the way they choose to operate, to some degree; they have statutory obligations, but they are not as accessible as the council is, or even the development corporation would be.

If this policy is to work, then the whole of government and ancillary institutions such as utilities have to be brought into line. That requires a bit of top-down government, with central government making sure the policy is pushed all the way through and does not just leave councils trying to negotiate as they go along with other institutions that have their own agendas.

Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer: What sort of mechanism would

you envisage for that galvanising from the top down?

Professor Tony Travers: This is going to be an MHCLG priority, but the whole of government is behind it. A number of statements have recently been made about planning and licensing, which have a range of Ministers, Business Ministers and the Chancellor behind them.

With that in mind, this is going to have to be dealt with at the highest level in government, so the NHS is told, "You have to support this policy", and the business department or whoever regulates the relevant utilities has to get those utilities to deliver on the ground, not only where there are new towns, but where there are new settlements being managed by local government, as my colleagues have been discussing.

Dr Susan Priest: I wholeheartedly endorse that.

Q12 **Viscount Younger of Leckie:** This has been a very helpful and informative session so far. I wanted to pick up on two key areas that I think the committee has been focusing on. One is communities, and I will come back to that. The second one is the siting of businesses. I was very struck by what you said, Susan. The planning of new towns is very complicated, of course, and we are looking at a 30-to-40-year view. I think it was Tony who said that communities are very important. There is the question of building on existing communities or not. First, where do you see there being a priority for building communities and creating communities?

Secondly, there is an expectation that the communities are going to be built and expanded upon existing communities. Bearing in mind the challenges that you have outlined, is it not better that the communities are actually created from scratch in terms of creating new towns, literally on a brownfield or greenfield site, or whatever it might be?

Linked to that, which has not really been raised, we are really talking about the south-east or the south, are we not? To what extent should we look up north where future businesses might be created? I am just picking up what Stephen said about Greater Cambridge. There is so much going on in Cambridge already. It is slightly easier to build houses around Cambridge because you have some fantastic new businesses, AI and all the rest of it there already.

Dr Susan Priest: I will just reiterate the point that early discussion with existing communities is really important. My experience of working with our town and parish councils—so really at the local level—has been fundamental. My other reflection on that is that it is actually quite resource intensive, and it is a continuous dialogue. Expectations need to be managed, because, at scale, things do not happen overnight. There needs to be a recognition and acceptance that this is an ongoing dialogue over a great period of time. That co-design and continuous input is really important.

There are lots of other techniques that I have used elsewhere in the past. We might have worked with schoolchildren or worked with a cohort as

they have evolved, because they can see the development around them, as a way, as Stephen said, of inspiring youngsters and getting different perspectives and parents, et cetera, involved.

From my experience, the priority for communities is around what is in it for them. Largely, what they want to see is early provision of health infrastructure, GP surgeries, dental surgeries, or even accessible public open space. It might be an enhanced train station, as is the case in Westenhanger Castle. Whatever it is in that place will come through the dialogue that you have and that meaningful place-making. That is my starting point.

In terms of your further questions about what comes first and whether it is brand new, those conversations help to design how it expresses itself, along with the points that Tony has made about the gentle, or otherwise, encouragement of other public services to step in line, align and move at the same pace for that really important community infrastructure.

Then, as the development happens and as places evolve, there is a need for an identity in order that those who move there, the first movers, particularly in a brand new town, can feel a sense of place. Again, that comes back to the local community being able to support that, and the local authority enabling and facilitating that, because success will breed success. We want first movers to feel at home in a new place. We want to do what we can to encourage and facilitate their successful lives there.

In terms of geographic coverage, you might have noticed that my accent is from the north, but I have been down south for 30-odd years. It is a national issue. It should be considered as being about what the opportunities are across the whole country. As you rightly say, are there elements of economic focus? Are there some economic drivers that would give rise to certain settlements or new towns in a certain place, as Stephen so clearly made reference to in his own example? I would certainly say this is not just a policy for the south-east, although there are much-needed homes all over the country.

Professor Tony Travers: I do not want to take time saying I agree, but I agree. The earlier post-war new towns wave started around London and in the south-east, but then there were new towns in other parts of the country, such as Peterborough, Cumbernauld and elsewhere. For the time being, in the southern part of the country, the evidence from both rents and house prices heavily suggests that that is where the need for the greatest additional housebuilding is, which is not to say that there would not be occasions when a new town might be considered elsewhere.

Stephen Kelly: Just to echo colleagues' comments, there is something around convening the initial conversation with communities about why growth or why a new development must happen. We have faced hostility to growth from certain quarters in Cambridge. In fact, Cambridge historically was very much a town in the last century that said, "We don't want growth. It should go elsewhere". Actually, it is about describing the problem and the solutions.

Cambridge's challenge in part is around commuting. It is also a place committed to resolving the issues of climate change and looking at biodiversity net gain. Those objectives and housing affordability require you to engage in discussions around, "How do you solve those problems?"

For me, there is something about convening the conversations with as broad a cross section of the community as possible, because, understandably, communities around sites are uncomfortable with the concepts of growth. Around Northstowe, for example, in the villages of Longstanton and Oakington, there were very strong views about, "It must be separate. It must be independent". However, now that there are schools in Northstowe and the young people from those villages are playing or engaging with the young people who live in Northstowe, connectivity between those places, the historical villages and the new town, becomes much more complex. It is about trying to recognise how that conversation changes over time. New communities come in and, of course, they have positive impacts as well as negative impacts on the existing communities around them. It is about trying to find those collective solutions and talking to them around that.

Finally, in terms of how you might deal with the issues nationally, you need to take a very long-term view. There is something called the UK2070 Commission, which was led by the late Bob Kerslake, that did a piece of work looking at some of those spatial dynamics. Again, the reason for a new town in the north of England may well be very different from the reason for a new town just outside of Cambridge, or, indeed, an urban settlement. It becomes hugely important to align all the agencies, as Susan has highlighted, so that the negatives do not outweigh the broad positives in a largely consensual local democracy.

You need resources and you need to fund that. There needs to be a recognition, as Tony has highlighted, that local government finance is very retrospective; it looks backwards, rather than what we find on the European continent, where a lot of public sector significant investment and significant benefits arise through the way that local authorities are able to load that infrastructure up front, so that communities benefit from the prospect of future development, rather than vice versa.

Q13 Lord Mawson: I have a quick question to Susan and Stephen, really, around health. I was responsible for founding the Bromley by Bow Centre 40 years ago, which now has 55,000 patients. What we found many years ago was that 70% of the determinants of health have nothing to do with doctors; they have to do with, "Do I have a decent home? Do I have a job? Is this school any good? Are my family relationships in order?"

It is all those things, yet, when I go around the country and look at developments, we are still having a last century discussion about, "Have we built a health centre?" We are asking residents, "Do you want a GP practice?" rather than a multidisciplinary team that brings all those things together. Wes Streeting is noticing this. If we carry on with the present business model, the NHS will be bankrupt by 2070. It is totally

unsustainable.

I wonder how far the two of you have gone into, with your residents, that upstream prevention agenda, which is not a last-century model about hospitals and endless biomedical conversation, creating a dependency culture, but getting upstream into the real prevention agenda?

Dr Susan Priest: I absolutely echo the importance you place on that preventive aspect. Those discussions about local government reform and local public service reform with our partners are the prize, I suppose, of local government reorganisation and devolution. There is an opportunity to have local government reform as well as public service reform in its broadest sense, which is around different ways of delivering health benefits.

From my perspective, housing and employment is a major determinant of health, as well as having appropriate housing tenures and facilities. What might have been an appropriate housing solution or option at one phase in your life is not necessarily what our communities and residents need as they progress through their lives. Being able to provide that as a way of preventing other health issues is really important. As a housing authority, we see that a lot. Conversations with our broader public service partners are really important. As Tony said earlier, we need active encouragement for those conversations to happen in a meaningful and focused way.

Lord Mawson: Is the housing office going to be in the health centre? These are fundamental questions about how we break free of these ridiculous silos.

Dr Susan Priest: Absolutely, it is about co-location and focusing on the needs of individuals or families, as opposed to going off for acute support or otherwise. I can see that on a day-to-day basis with my communities that I support.

Professor Tony Travers: I know you wanted Stephen to respond, but the challenge is, as with many things, that there is a "perception is reality" issue. There is a real feeling people have that somehow, if you build a new town or an extension to an existing one, their resources are further stretched or they do not get a GP that other areas already have.

To your precise point, a broader issue, which requires much consideration, is that we spend £200 billion a year in the United Kingdom on the National Health Service and £4 billion on public health. That is a separate issue from this inquiry, but convincing the Treasury that it is worth investing in prevention in order to reduce the downstream costs of services such as the NHS is very difficult, as you will know, but there is a genuine issue there, I totally agree.

Dr Susan Priest: The local authority sector also has to be willing to do precisely that, but there needs to be some encouragement from elsewhere to bring that about.

Lord Mawson: Some local authorities have no engagement with the

health service.

Chair: Lord Mawson, I am conscious of time. Mr Kelly, is there anything you want to say?

Stephen Kelly: There are a couple of things. We have had the conversation about growth, well-being and inclusion. It is one of the four key themes of our local plan, because there is a role in that early intervention and preventive strategy for places to contribute, alongside all the broader reforms that have been highlighted. We have just updated Northstowe with a healthy new towns pilot. It is one of 10 in the UK. We have just updated our health impact assessment SPD to make sure that the conversations around our planning applications are about how people can become healthier because of it.

That is not just about the NHS health infrastructure. There are very significant 106 contributions in Bourn Airfield, for example, with over £10 million towards primary care treatment on-site early in the process and temporary facilities, but it is also about the absurd level of things such as encouraging people to be together in community spaces because of the mental health crisis that the country is facing. That is historically not an area for planning. We were all very concerned about aesthetic and design considerations, but we are increasingly thinking about the role of open space and community support. We are creating orchards and allotments so that people can come together, and thinking about the sequencing of that. Susan has touched on affordable housing, which is a massively significant determinant of people's health and well-being.

There is potentially a lot more that planning can do, but there is a huge amount, as Tony has highlighted, that needs to go into working with the clinical commissioning groups locally to try to see if we can bring a lot of those early interventions upstream, not just through planning, but through those other agencies.

Q14 **Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe:** I just wanted to ask one very specific question. In Cambridge, given the developments, has your development of social housing—not affordable housing—enabled you to reduce your waiting lists?

Stephen Kelly: Cambridge City Council has a council housing programme that has delivered the second largest number of new council houses in the country. It is aiming for 1,000 new council homes. Has it taken people off the list? The list continues to grow, because affordability has continued to head in the wrong direction, unfortunately. The eligibility criteria have accordingly had to evolve, but I would be surprised if our housing need has gone down in terms of people who are not able to access private market housing solutions.

Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe: What lesson would you suggest we learn from that that we can transmit to the Government?

Stephen Kelly: One thing that is missing, and I know Tony has spoken about this in the past, is a public housing programme that is cogent and

coherent. The new towns of Stevenage, Milton Keynes and so forth were delivered at pace and scale because of public housing programmes that underpinned them. For obvious reasons to do with economic cycles, the market process on its own is not going to deliver that kind of transformative growth. Government needs to think through how it can facilitate that public housing programme to come forward even more significantly. Picking up on Susan's point around capacity and capabilities, it takes time, but there is most definitely an appetite in local government to be able to deliver against that.

Q15 Baroness Andrews: I am conscious of time, so I will try to make this short. It is a bit difficult, because I am coming back to the question of community engagement. You are clearly such exemplary local authorities, but I do think that you have some advantages. You have identified early conversations, ensuring that people see the benefits, recognising the need for co-design where possible, and recognising the impact on character for people who are not going to see the benefits immediately.

My question is this: is there a difference? How do you deliver that? Can you deliver it equally, or are there different issues, whether you are dealing with an extension, where you may have not a sense of place but a sense of displacement by the existing population, or a new town, where the challenge is possibly to build identity? In another life as a Planning Minister, I remember standing on Northstowe when it was an airfield. There was not a house in sight. I was thinking, "How on earth are you going to build a community that has character, a sense of belonging and a sense of meaningful place-making?" That is a really powerful description. You say nobody has come forward to build a shop, which is really telling.

Is there a difference in the way you do things, the expectations and the success you are likely to have between the two different types of settlement? In relation to what Professor Travers has said, you have talked about the democratic deficit. By collapsing some of the processes, is the Planning and Infrastructure Bill going to make that more challenging and actually more difficult for people such as Susan and Stephen to deliver?

Dr Susan Priest: I was just reflecting on the two different experiences I have had. With the new town, there are five parish councils. It was a former agricultural area. The buy-in that we have managed to secure through that was because it was addressing the council's housing numbers. It was not net additional, which is one of my concerns about the Government's emerging policy in this area. If Otterpool Park and our 10,000 homes are on top of our existing housing numbers, that will not be well received locally. It was a solution to a statutory requirement and a housing need that I would suggest we have effectively progressed.

I would contrast that broad support—all the things you mentioned in your introduction that we have tried to secure—with a smaller-scale development, which has had quite significant objection. That is because the local community did not feel there was choice. They did not feel that

they had much influence because the capacity was so constrained. It was not a very big part of the district that had opportunity to flex, to support a park, to have orchard space and things that the community wanted to see. The urban extensions are much smaller in scale but much more constrained in space, and that has translated into some of the objections that we have had.

It is a really good question about what we can do differently. My only reflection is around the ability to have emotional intelligence and real understanding when dealing with communities about the issues. I suppose that is one of the dangers of a top-down national or regional approach, and one of the benefits of having a local authority engage co-operatively and as co-designer to get a merging between the two of where powers and influence can come from. I do not know whether that addresses your question fully, but those are just my reflections on the two different examples that I have lived through for the last 15 years, I suppose.

Stephen Kelly: Building on that, you touched on phasing within a development and assumptions about phasing that go all the way back to the original planning permission, as I said earlier. Those are really important conversations with the communities, because cash-flowing major new settlements requires choices to be made about what you want, whether it is the affordable housing upfront, or the primary or secondary school upfront, versus, for example, food and beverage facilities.

We have done a lot of post-occupancy surveys of some of our new settlements, and ironically it is not about the green spaces, the sports pitches and so on, which they all love. The feedback we get is about amenities, shops and places to convene. We have five new settlements and five urban extensions to Cambridge in our area and areas around that. It comes back to people's sense of place and identity. Planners and psychologists are increasingly starting to understand that this concept of place attachment is critical to acceptance.

Through the shared planning service, we are trying to understand what that might mean not only for market delivery and the absorption rate—if people are to choose this place over that place, it needs to be different and there needs to be genuine choice—but also, as you say, for how you create an identity from scratch in places such as Northstowe that is distinct from, say, Bourn Airfield, Cambourne or Cherry Hinton on the other side of Cambridge.

There are design parameters in that, but there is also some seeding that the local authority needs to do. We did some village design statements with our local communities about five years ago, with the objective of helping people in those villages understand their place and what their place meant. We then have challenges in how we deliver against that, because within villages people want to explore modern design and so forth. It is partly about how local authorities help maintain and secure that identity for existing communities, so that when they feel threatened

by change there is something that they can rely upon. We have not fully cracked it. Our communities would say there are still a lot of challenges with growth, but it is about the mindfulness of the importance of those entities and using all the tools at our collective disposal.

Finally, on the point around development corporations and the top-down imposition of that, Susan's use of the phrase "emotional intelligence" is absolutely pivotal. There is a real risk at times that government can come crashing in with a group of consultants not based in a locality and with no understanding of the place. If done badly, that can just antagonise and reinforce all those negative perceptions of communities, at a time when they are looking for reassurance.

Professor Tony Travers: I am not an expert on community building, so my two colleagues could give better answers on that. I can see that the risk of damage to the sense of community is going to be impacted by some of the things we have talked about this morning, so the risk of sprawl—the negative word "sprawl"—stress on services, traffic-filled roads and all of that.

One thing that we have just bumped up against, but have not really talked about much this morning, is what it looks like. Any new housing development, if it is building out from an existing area, should definitely have some sympathy to that, but, even if it is a freestanding community, what it looks like and how it is designed is crucial. As I said at the very beginning, contemporary town building has more to do with higher densities than in the past, for good reasons. Not worrying people about higher densities is an issue, but it can be done in a very elegant way. Explaining how higher densities do not mean high-rises, overcrowding and all the other inevitable, perfectly sensible misconceptions people have is definitely part of this accountability process.

Baroness Andrews: Do you think that there is a better way of making CIL and S106 easier for people to understand? You said they were very obscure, and yet, when you try to tell people there is a real win and a real benefit here, they cannot get to the point, because CIL particularly is so obscure.

Professor Tony Travers: CIL is a levy. Section 106 is effectively resource generated by negotiation to try to capture at least some of the uplift that comes with the granting of planning permission. Of course, some of that negotiation goes on behind closed doors. Not all the improvements or the infrastructure will be built near you. Without an explanation of how communities benefit from what is often portrayed as a behind closed doors negotiation between wicked planning officers and avaricious developers—all in inverted commas; it is not my worldview—it is easy to see how people can fight against that, even when it is not true.

Q16 **Baroness Janke:** You have answered quite a lot of my question, but it is to do with the fact that the new towns are quite likely to be building on existing settlements. Somewhat alluding to what you were just saying, there is a big lack of public trust in politicians and people who are seeking

to impose things upon them. The mood music about the new towns and housing has been that it is going to be imposed on you, and you are getting it whether you like it or not. Do you think the measures that you have outlined so far are sufficient to encourage the public to be more trustful and to have confidence in the new towns? If not, what else might you need to do to achieve that?

Professor Tony Travers: Opinion polling is very clear about this. It is very regularly tested. However suspicious people are of local politicians and local planning departments, they like them more than they like Ministers. The polling is absolutely clear on this issue. Going back to my colleagues' earlier remarks—and they are the experts on this—the more local people are involved in the process, both elected and official, the greater the chance it will have a higher degree of buy-in from the public.

Baroness Janke: You are a local councillor. It is sometimes quite difficult to take some of this messaging through, particularly when you have local revolution on your doorstep, with people getting very angry about what they see as destruction of their communities. Some of the developments that I have seen have not been very encouraging for the future. This idea that the planning system is now being changed in order to let these things go through is a message that does not go down terribly well with the public I deal with.

Professor Tony Travers: More broadly, in terms of the future of liberal democracy, which is the most important issue, the mood music from the current Government—you heard it from previous Governments as well—is definitely, "We need to push the opposition aside to get this done". There is a strong sense of that. Suffice it to say, the Government are legitimately elected. It is their prerogative to do this. They are in power.

All I would say is that, as I said a moment ago, the polling evidence is that people trust local planning decisions more than they do national ones. That is not to say there is not a legitimate role for central government to push some developments through because they are of national importance, but when it comes to trust and democracy, the more you devolve power, the nearer you are going to get to people trusting those who make the decisions. It is nothing to do with new towns, but it applies precisely to the debate about new towns.

Dr Susan Priest: It is a great question. I am just reflecting, really. It is about the early provision of whatever the community want to see and however that expresses itself in that place. Actions can speak very loudly, particularly demonstrable action at the earliest opportunity of something that they recognise. If they have been involved in the co-design of the charter or the vision and that is delivered early, where financially possible—which of course is a challenge, but that is the intent—as Tony said, you can foster some trust in the local development.

That is perhaps an idealistic way of looking at it, but it is the principle that we are working to, in terms of that early positive feedback loop. Local residents have said what they would like to see; we give a

commitment that that will be delivered early; and we then deliver it early. Now we need to make sure the funding is right on all of that, which is a technical challenge, particularly with some of the partners we spoke about earlier, but that is certainly what we at Otterpool Park are seeking to do.

The Chair: Thank you very much. You will be pleased to know that we have finally come to the end of a mammoth first session. Thank you sincerely on behalf of the whole committee for the huge amount of time that you have given us, but also your views and experience that you have shared. Thank you very much.