

Built Environment Committee

Corrected oral evidence: New towns: practical delivery

Tuesday 29 April 2025

10.50 am

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Members present: Lord Gascoigne (The Chair); Baroness Andrews; Lord Bailey of Paddington; Lord Cameron of Dillington; Lord Faulkner of Worcester; Viscount Hanworth; Baroness Janke; Lord Mawson; Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe; Viscount Younger of Leckie.

Evidence Session No. 2

Heard in Public

Questions 17 - 30

Witnesses

I: Millie Mitchell, Researcher, Institute for Government; Dr Maya Singer Hobbs, Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR); Ike Ijeh, Head of Housing, Architecture & Urban Space, Policy Exchange.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

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

Examination of witnesses

Millie Mitchell, Dr Maya Singer Hobbs and Ike Ijeh.

Q17 The Chair: Good morning and welcome to the second meeting of the Built Environment Committee looking at new towns and expanded settlements that the Government have recently announced. Last week we looked at the role and involvement of local government. This week we will focus a bit more on central government, and we have a great panel before us. Please could you briefly introduce yourselves and who you are representing?

Ike Ijeh: Good morning. I am head of housing, architecture and urban space at Policy Exchange. I am also a practising architect.

Dr Maya Singer Hobbs: I am the senior research fellow at the Institute for Public Policy Research, where I work on transport, housing and planning reform.

Millie Mitchell: I am a researcher at the Institute for Government, an independent think tank focused on government effectiveness. My research looks predominantly at the role of devolution in England, but I also think across housing, transport and environment policy more broadly.

Q18 The Chair: That is the easy bit, you will be pleased to know. Again, thank you very much and welcome to you all. We have a series of questions that we will ask over the next hour or so. If a question is asked in your direction and you do not have an answer or it is something you may want to write about or you do not have anything to add, please do not worry. Feel free to pass it on to one of your colleagues or say you do not have anything to say. For everyone, witnesses and members of the committee alike, in the interests of time, among other things, please could we make our questions and answers as concise as possible?

I will ask the first, broad-brush question. What is your initial view of the Government's planning agenda here with the new towns and expanded settlements? What specifically are the things that you see within government that are holding them back? What is different here from has been done in previous attempts to fix this? Let us start with Ike.

Ike Ijeh: My view is that new towns potentially can be a very good thing. There is a mixed history of new towns in this country. We have the good, historic, revered heritage of garden cities, the early 20th century, late 19th century works. That changed quite significantly in the 20th century towards the last phase of new towns, places such as Milton Keynes and Peterborough—with all due respect to those wonderful cities—that maybe did not epitomise the ideals of community, good design, architecture, placemaking and public space as well as they might have done and as well as previous iterations did. But overall I think that the pledge to create these new towns is a good thing.

A word of warning is important. I understand that new towns have unique constraints and demands in terms of finance and delivery, but we should not be too distracted by the fact that they are something different. I think good design, to a degree, is universal. What works in Pimlico or Preston in terms of being a good street, good community, good design, good homes and so on will also work for new towns. We should not try to overly reinvent the wheel—we should recognise that they are different in finance and delivery primarily but understand that if we have good housing policy broadly, universally, within government or within what the planning system is trying to do, that will also impact on new towns.

Dr Maya Singer Hobbs: I broadly agree with what Ike said. The Government's agenda on new towns and more broadly on planning reform is very welcome. I feel that lots of the reforms that this Government have made to the planning system since they came to power

are likely to unlock lots of the sorts of developments that we need to see. That includes the delivery of new towns but more broadly than that, there is a recognition that we need to think at a more strategic level. We need to think about strategic planning beyond just the homes: how do you make sure that the homes you are building have the electricity and water and transport links they need?

I think that the reforms that this Government have made go some way towards making that easier. They have also made changes in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill to development corporations, and the compulsory purchase order reform is also likely to make the new town agenda a bit easier. Again, the finance will probably be a bit of a barrier here. We know that the Government are operating in a very constrained fiscal environment, and we will probably get into that in a bit more depth later, but I suspect that that will be one of the barriers.

The last point I will make on the opening question is that I urge the Government to be very clear about what problem they are trying to solve with the new towns. When we talk about the housing crisis, that means quite different things across different bits of the country. If the Government are not clear about what problems they are trying to solve with the new towns, potentially they could run into problems. We can go into that in a bit more depth but, for example, we know that affordability is a big issue in the south-east. That is less of a problem in the north-east, where housing quality is more of an issue. It is being really clear about what problems you are trying to solve and how that interacts with other bits of government policy, particularly industrial strategy and the growth agenda. It will be important to make sure that those are all aligned as they move forward with the new towns agenda.

Millie Mitchell: I echo what my fellow panellists have said on that, especially the point about the importance of thinking strategically about joining up the new towns agenda with the broader government ambitions for economic growth, solving the housing crisis, the net-zero targets and the like. There is a real risk. You asked what some of the things within government are that could hold this agenda back. Notoriously, government can be a siloed place of operation so it is important with this agenda that it is looking cross-government about how to ensure that all the different government departments, all the Ministers, are brought in and put enough political capital behind delivering these much-needed new homes and new settlements. The panellists have already set out why that is so important.

The Chair: Great. Thank you very much for that. Our next question goes to Lord Mawson.

Q19 **Lord Mawson:** Good morning. Should the delivery of a programme of this scale be left to government departments or is there a case for establishing a separate body? If so, should this be led by the private sector? What are the critical issues when you are thinking about this matter?

Dr Maya Singer Hobbs: There is a clear role for development corporations here. I think that every new town development—correct me if I am wrong—has been delivered by a development corporation. They give a strategic oversight, particularly if you are working across council boundaries. They give the ability to think a bit more strategically and are more able to access finance. There is a role for the private sector in the delivery of new towns, for sure, but one of the challenges with new towns is that when you start building there is not very much there and that will be an issue with absorption rates and buildout rates for private developers.

There is a real need for a public body, probably a development corporation but there might be other models out there, to do some of that, convening the land assembly, putting in initial infrastructure to make it a more attractive proposition for the private sector to move in. My response is that you need a public body to do that crowding in, in the first instance.

Millie Mitchell: I echo what Maya said about the role that development corporations are likely to play in the delivery of the new towns. A real advantage of development corporations is that they have boards that are made up, typically, of representatives from the public and private sectors. That can play a key role in ensuring that they are able to achieve that commercial success as well as improving the social outcomes. There is the blend of expertise that development corporations, locally led development corporations, can benefit from that mixture of expertise.

There is also the question of the role of central government in overseeing all these delivery bodies. Potentially up to 12 new towns might be created out of this programme and there is certainly a role for central government in overseeing that programme as a whole. I am not quite sure whether that sits in a separate body or in government departments. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, there is a need for cross-departmental join-up, so perhaps that is a case for bringing that outside. What is most important is the political direction from the top that this is a government priority no matter where those functions end up sitting, so that it trickles down and everybody gets behind it.

Dr Maya Singer Hobbs: Can I add another thing to that? I totally agree with everything that you said there, and I think your point about government being siloed means that however this ends up being co-ordinated within central government, you need to make sure that all the relevant departments engage and are strongly encouraged to engage with the process. That is what will make this a success, exactly as you said. Regardless of where it sits, there is a real need for there to be some central convening, either through the Cabinet Office or with a separate body, that has the buy-in from all of the relevant government departments: the Department for Transport certainly, the Department of Health and Social Care, the Department for Education. You need all of them thinking about where the schools and hospitals and roads will go at a really early stage in the process.

Ike Ijeh: I would echo all of that. I fully endorse the role of development corporations in helping to deliver these things and turn them round. I think it is interesting that some of our most totemic urban regeneration projects of the past generation—places such as Canary Wharf and Liverpool Docks—were delivered by development corporations. It is interesting that they are almost an opt-out from the planning system. I am sure we will talk about the planning system shortly. As a model for delivering quality quickly, the development corporation works really well and can be applicable here.

It is also interesting that the earliest iterations of garden cities that we all love—places such as Port Sunlight, Bournville and Letchworth—had nothing to do with the Government. They were done entirely by private enterprise. I am not saying we should do that now. Obviously, we live in a different time but I think that central government leading this is a way to deliver it well, but also in conjunction with local authorities and, potentially, local landowners. One of the problems, and the opposition that often comes up with new housing, is that local people, local landowners, do not necessarily see a local benefit from the national strategic benefit that comes from delivering new homes. If there was a way of making that relationship simpler, maybe involving local landowners in this delivery process as well, that could be an important way of bolstering local support for these ventures.

Lord Mawson: And the critical issues?

Ike Ijeh: The critical issues with that delivery model?

Lord Mawson: What are the critical issues about these kinds of organisations that you have to face?

Ike Ijeh: I suppose the key critical issue with any kind of multifaceted organisation is co-ordination. They have to have a unified vision, as we spoke about earlier. I am happy with central government taking the lead but there has to be local oversight and co-ordination between all parties to ensure that the benefit is distributed more fairly than may have been the case previously.

Millie Mitchell: I think that clear vision and strategy are important for development corporations to know what they are trying to do and what is the theory of change of how they are going to do it. When we look at existing development corporations, there are some—especially mayoral ones, on which I have done some research in the past—that have been held up. They have had a vision that requires obtaining certain parcels of land but they have not had the powers, funding and backing to obtain them. You need to be saying from the start, “What is your theory of change for this area? Is that feasible? Are these vehicles equipped with the right powers and funding from central government to deliver on that mission?”—otherwise you bring in community engagement and people get on board with something that ultimately might not be deliverable, so it is getting that clear from the start.

Q20 Lord Bailey of Paddington: Good morning to you all. Previous versions of new town proposals have sometimes been poorly perceived by the public and faced local objections. How can the Government overcome these challenges?

Millie Mitchell: I think it is worth starting from the point that the landscape of and tools for community engagement have changed dramatically from when the first generations of new towns were introduced in the 1940s, 1960s and 1970s. We are operating in a context where we are much better informed about the best ways to bring communities in as part of the process.

I will give you an example of some interesting things that recent development corporations have been doing to bring in communities as part of that journey. Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation in west London set up a community review panel that helps to assess any planning applications that come through its doors. It has been a really successful model that was picked up also by the London Legacy Development Corporation in the years before it closed its planning processes. That is one example. Obviously, you can have it later down the line, but it is important that the public are also involved in the initial vision-setting stage.

An advantage of development corporations is that they can offer a degree of political insulation, which means you can get the community voice on board. You also are able to go ahead and deliver—when you have local council-led developments, local politics can hold and stall developments. If we accept that the Government have set the new towns programme as a nationally significant agenda that they have a strong mandate electorally to deliver on, development corporations can offer the slight political insulation for delivering these at pace while involving the community voice.

Lord Bailey of Paddington: Dr Singer Hobbs made a comment earlier that I am quite interested in. You said the Government have to be very clear about the problem they are trying to solve. How does that impact the community piece as well?

Dr Maya Singer Hobbs: That is a great question. I think that will depend on a case-by-case basis. Some of that will be making sure that when you are deciding a placement for a new town, you are thinking about the issues that the community that is already there is facing. Is it that it cannot afford new homes and you have people who cannot get on the housing ladder? Is it that the council is spending millions on temporary accommodation because it has not been able to buy or build any social housing? Is it that the quality of housing stock in the local area is very poor? Is it that people are moving out because there are not public services available? Thinking clearly about those problems allows you, through a development corporation or otherwise, to think quite carefully about your plan.

The IPPR has previously argued for frontloading the public engagement in a planning process, and particularly in something as big as a new town. Doing a big, meaningful public engagement exercise where you are talking to people who already live in the community, but possibly also thinking about who you want to be moving into the area and what they need from the local amenities, is a good way to get that buy-in early on. It means that you do not end up with a back and forth around individual planning decisions and you can think a bit more broadly and get a sense of what people are objecting to here. Is it that they are worried that they will not be able to get a doctor's appointment or that their child will not get into the local school?

If you can identify those issues right at the beginning of the process, it helps to design a place that meets those needs. The Government have said that they want to deliver communities, not just houses. Making sure that you are thinking about that in a place-based way will be really important.

Ike Ijeh: Briefly, there are four ways in which we can overcome challenges with the perception of older new towns not having worked. The first one has been mentioned by both my colleagues. Infrastructure is key. We have to make sure that it is not just about places looking beautiful. That is important but the infrastructure and the services to support new communities have to be there even if it means a level of risk-taking from the Government in frontloading that at the beginning. I grew up in east London and I remember seeing pictures of Canary Wharf. Before all the builders came, the Docklands Light Railway was built and initially it was going through an empty wasteland, but that was a sign of confidence from the Government that infrastructure was key to the success of that development.

Secondly, a previous Government had education, education, education as a mantra. I would say, echoing my colleagues: listen, listen, listen. Too often public views are seen as an impediment to new housing rather than a potential boost or benefit to it. It does no harm to a Government to listen to what the public wants. This is what we in Policy Exchange constantly argue for, within our Building Beautiful agenda. Democratic consent is a hugely powerful community buy-in. It is a hugely powerful way in which new towns or any new development can have a new basis within a local community.

We also have some polling here. Policy Exchange ran the Wolfson Economics Prize 11 years ago and the prize was given to a new town, which was called Uxchester. It was an imaginary new town but the basis of it was a new town connected to an existing city rather than a brand-new city. As part of this process, we did a lot of polling as to what the public think about new towns and the result, even though this was 11 years ago—they might be more entrenched today because environmental concerns are probably higher in the public agenda—was that 70% of the public believed that building new towns was a better way of delivering housing than the way housing is delivered now, and 88% of the public

agreed that garden cities can protect the countryside from harmful development. There is a huge groundswell of public support for these kinds of things that the Government potentially have the idea of doing, but without asking the public, without engaging them at the start of the process, it goes untouched and it is a wasted opportunity.

Thirdly, I mentioned before Building Beautiful, which I am very much involved in. We must safeguard quality. Whether you call it quality, promoting beauty, promoting attractiveness or liveability, we have to make sure that we do not end up building another iteration of new towns that isolate and alienate the public. I know that there are arguments about what qualifies as beauty—is it subjective?—but we all agree it is important. Beauty, quality or aesthetics, whatever you call it, has to be hardwired as important into the new towns agenda. It is a natural way of communicating with the public.

Fourthly and finally, maybe a bit flippantly, I much prefer the term “garden cities”; “new towns” is a perfectly adequate description but it is a description. I think that “garden city” is more of a promise. It identifies an ideal community-based urban model that is deeply entrenched in the English psyche and also connects very well with the really successful urban settlements that we came up with at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Calling them garden cities may be superficial but it may make an impact on helping with the public.

Lord Bailey of Paddington: I have to say I agree. A “new town” sounds like a dormitory.

The Chair: Thank you. In a couple of weeks’ time we are going to focus in on that, so if you have any research or further thoughts on that, please feed it in. It is a crucial bit going forward. Next we have Baroness Andrews, who is Zooming in down our TV screens.

Q21 **Baroness Andrews:** I hope I am Zooming in. Yes, okay. Good morning. Terrific evidence so far. My questions are related in part to where Maya took us on what is the problem to be solved. Since that first statement, Maya, we have now looked, through you and the others, at local problems that may be solved through new towns, garden cities and extensions, and national problems to be solved, and the need for clarity.

In your view, what is the problem that the Government are trying to solve and how would you describe the issues of growth as being solved by either a greenfield site town or an urban extension, which may be, in a way, the preferred choice because the infrastructure will be built in? If that is not too elaborate a question, I would like your views on that, and then we can go on to talk about how you pursue different forms of departmental objectives in that context.

Dr Maya Singer Hobbs: That is a great question. It is a broad question and there are a few parts within it. In the Spring Statement, the Chancellor was clear that the planning reforms and the building of homes was part of the growth mission. I think the new towns agenda probably sits slightly outside that. We know from the timeframe that although

some of the homes delivered in the new towns agenda will contribute to the 1.5 million, this is a long-term project. In my mind, what the new towns need to do is to complement some of the other bits of the Government's agenda. Whether that is industrial strategy and thinking about manufacturing strategy and where people will need to be moving to work to deliver electric vehicles or whatever the industrial strategy says—and that is due out later this year—the new towns agenda should sit alongside that, alongside the clean energy mission and thinking about whether there are opportunities to link those together.

Your question about greenfield or brownfield will depend a bit on the place. We know that urban expansions can be very successful but they can also run into difficulties. I do not know whether we count Ebbsfleet as an urban extension but there are challenges there. Again, that comes back to "What is the issue that is being solved?" My sense with Ebbsfleet is that it was partly trying to address some of the housing constraints in the Greater London area but there were issues there that meant that it has not quite met that agenda. There is testimony from some of the developers involved, which said that there was not the demand there, there was not the infrastructure there. This comes back again to needing to integrate the new towns agenda with other parts of the Government's agenda.

When it comes to the housing crisis, this is really challenging. To be blunt, it is not in developers' interests to flood the market with enough homes that prices will come down. That is just the way that their business is. That is the way they operate. It is thinking about how you make sure that you are providing homes for people to buy alongside the homes for people who perhaps cannot afford, and will not be able to afford, to buy so that you are meeting both parts of the housing crisis there. That will depend on which bit of the country you are in.

That was a bit of a rambling answer but, broadly speaking, the growth part here has to be tied to the other bits of the Government's growth agenda, particularly their industrial strategy, and making sure that you are linking those together so that the new towns are helping in a symbiotic relationship with other bits of the agenda to deliver the homes that people need in the places that they need them.

Millie Mitchell: I echo Maya's answer. In particular, I think we will get some clues, to be honest, in what the Government are trying to solve with this when we find out in the summer the recommendations from the New Towns Taskforce about locations. That will tell us a lot about whether it is oriented primarily towards the growth agenda or the broader solving regional inequality and tackling providing housing in new communities and places that may not be the biggest drivers of the economy but are so sorely needed. As Maya said, that really needs to be linked to the broader thinking about industrial strategy: where do we want to see growth, where will new jobs be in the next 20 or 30 years, and how do we make sure there are the homes and the communities in place to support those industries?

On the question of linking to other forms of departmental objectives, there is a real opportunity with new towns to think about how we want communities of the future to live. We are looking, for example, at the net-zero agenda, thinking about clean energy. This is a real opportunity when you are creating either entirely new towns or new urban extensions to think about being innovative with things such as the energy sources that they have, such as district heat networks. We know that the Government have introduced or are in the process of introducing new powers for development corporations to build heat networks as a form of infrastructure. That is an important core innovation that can happen but still requires cross-departmental buy-in.

There is a real opportunity, basically, when you are setting up this cross-government programme to deliver on some of the other objectives and think about how we want the communities of the future to live.

Ike Ijeh: I will give a slightly contrarian twist in answering. Cross-governmentally, most departments want to create good growth, they want to create new homes. There is potential, though, for cross-departmental clashes in terms of varying government policies not really going in the same direction. On new towns, this is one example that many architects have complained about. In 2022 the building regulations were updated. Part O of the building regulations, with very good intentions to mitigate climate change, now demands that window sizes and window numbers are limited so that there is less chance of overheating, internal rooms so you do not need air conditioning, and things like that. That works perfectly logically from an environmental perspective but if we are going to build a new generation of new towns that are boxes with small windows, it has the potential to be devastating in terms of ugliness, urban landscape and public support for the new towns programme.

There is a danger that sometimes government going in different directions wanting to get to the same point may harm other parts of government policy. Obviously, net zero is a considered, universal positive aim but here is one way in which it can potentially damage the delivery of another key government policy for creating beautiful new towns and making sure that they are popular places to live in.

Another side of that is that growth and economic improvement are worthy ambitions, but I detected a note in the New Towns Taskforce interim report that worried me a little. There was a lot of emphasis on growth, businesses and economic recovery. That is all well and good, but we know from history that there is a potential sometimes for housing to be seen just as a delivery of units. Housing is not units; it is homes; it is where people live. If we look at it exclusively, unilaterally, as economic models or economic units that help get to a greater target, yes, it may help you get to your housing target but there is no point in doing it if you do not have the quality to ensure that it is sustainable and resilient enough to make sure that we are not doing this whole merry-go-round again in another 20 or 30 years' time.

Growth is good but let us embed it with an awareness of the things that matter to people: streets, sustainability, public realm, placemaking, public spaces. The two should go hand in hand.

Baroness Andrews: Thank you very much. They were very good answers, if I may say. Millie and Maya both picked up the idea that if the growth agenda is paramount in the industrial strategy, whether that is skills and jobs and every other component in infrastructure, that will drive location. We might see that when we finally get Sir Michael Lyons' report. Do you think that the growth agenda will be different in terms of the expectations and the likelihood of delivery around extensions rather than new towns?

I think Ike is right to warn about the danger of compromising design if you are trying to meet a number of different objectives. That is the dilemma of planning and planning as it has evolved in placemaking. I am wondering whether he is pessimistic that even within a development corporation you will not get the co-ordination and the shared vision sufficiently strong to drive the best outcomes, and there will always have to be some form of compromise in design. There are two questions there.

Ike Ijeh: There is always compromise in design. Compromise does not necessarily have to be a bad thing. Without thinking too whimsically, St Paul's Cathedral is a compromise. Wren did not want it to look that way. It is one of the most revered buildings in the world. It is partially a compromise, with opposing ideals. Compromise is not necessarily a bad thing, but the way to guard against a lack of quality goes back to what we talked about at the beginning. It is the vision. The vision has to be strong enough and clear enough to ensure that it knows exactly what it wants and that it knows what it is prepared to tolerate and what it is not prepared to tolerate. Getting that vision right at the end and getting as many people feeding into that as possible is important.

The statutory framework does not necessarily help. Again, I am talking about the building regulations—done with the best will in the world, with the best intentions, but as we speak there are architects being forced to design houses with small windows. No matter how good your vision is, you cannot get around that if that is the statutory framework that you have to comply with in order to get approval. Vision is important, but we have to make sure that the statutory framework does not become an impediment or an obstacle as well.

Q22 **Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe:** Thank you very much and it is very nice to meet you. It is fascinating. I was very interested in your comment because only last week I saw a house that had to be altered because the local authority decided that the number of windows needed to be changed—

Ike Ijeh: It is common.

Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe: —reduced and made smaller for environmental reasons. The designer did not want it, the builders did not want it, and the street did not want it, but they got it. I think you are

right to urge caution on this front.

I want to pursue the point about the long-term vision here. I want to link it to the building of social homes and government targets. You have all said, I think, that this will take a long time. Every one of our witnesses has told us it will take a very long time. The question for us is: what contribution can new towns make to the Government's current target in this Parliament? Let us look at the short term now. The Government will be judged on what they can deliver in this Parliament. In relation to our work, should the new towns agenda be viewed as a separate initiative from any work aimed at meeting that target? I like you to link the points you make about social housing to the issues of quality because that seems to me to be one of the biggest dilemmas when trying to persuade local communities to have large-scale social housing built. It may be needed but it may not be welcomed.

Millie Mitchell: I think that we can expect, within reason, that the new towns will start to contribute towards that overarching 1.5 million homes. That is what the Government will want to do. It is their flagship programme and they have this flagship target. Realistically, it will not be the quick fix to achieving all that, especially when we are talking about delivering quality, as Ike has rightly pointed out, not just overfocusing on housing numbers. It is important for these to be long-term, sustainable communities with local economies and local infrastructure, and that we are taking that long-term view.

Going back to the point that was made around extensions versus new towns and the trade-offs, when we are thinking about the pace of delivery of these new towns and settlements there are a few things that come into that, that play into that choice of location. On land acquisitions, if the land is difficult to get hold of, it will not be delivered very quickly but it might be a very good location to build on. That is something that the Government will need to be considering. There is also the question around infrastructure delivery. To build quickly and contribute towards that target, the Government will be looking at some sites that are building on existing train stations and transport infrastructure to try to deliver that quickly. However, it is not about more homes as quick as possible and there needs to be that trade-off between the two.

Dr Maya Singer Hobbs: I totally agree with everything that you said. Another thing I would add is that historically most new towns had a big chunk of social housing or there was housing for sale in the private sector but it was built by a public body. That model is partly due to your point about the Government taking the risk. It is a risk to build a new town because you do not have the demand there yet. It is a completely new town; there will not be people there. It is right that the Government take that risk, both through putting in the infrastructure and delivering some of that social housing, so that you can bring people in and start to build that community without being subject to the whims of the market. With social housing you can deliver regardless of what the market is doing. There will be construction costs, but the sale of the homes is not

dependent on what the market is doing. That protects the new towns in the early stages while you are building them up.

I totally agree with what Millie said about the contribution to the 1.5 million target. They will go some way towards that. I imagine that the majority of homes delivered through this programme of work will come after, but particularly the extensions and the ones around transport infrastructure that already exist—there is no reason that those could not contribute to that 1.5 million.

Ike Ijeh: I would agree. We have said before that we will not finish new towns within the next Parliament. I think that there is no problem at all if new towns within this Parliament are delivered as a statement of intent or as a general identification of the Government's direction rather than looking at them as something that will help meet their 1.5 million homes housing target, as worthy an ambition as that is. I do not think that there is a problem with viewing it almost as a separate entity, a separate challenge, which will happen over time. Certainly, what this Government can do and what the task force can do is identify the principles on which it is based and try to give the public as much confidence as possible that we are going in the right direction and it will be something for the public good and for the public benefit as well.

I also think that social housing is critical to this. Social housing is really important. Social housing is one of the keys to solving the housing crisis, but it also plays a role within new towns in terms of making them truly mixed communities and making sure that you have the economic as well as aesthetic variety that makes places interesting and attractive and makes them work. We have done lots of research on how social housing can be used to unlock growth and development and to, as you said, stabilise projects before the market comes in and you require sales.

I often talk about history, but we used to do these things so well. You can look around London and the country: Peabody housing estates, Bournville, Port Sunlight—they were not built for aristocrats, they were built for workers. We used to do this well and if we use new towns as a way of re-engaging with this historic precedent we have of providing excellent social housing and worker housing, it could be a good way of boosting new towns among the public but also making sure that it makes a meaningful—long-term, admittedly—contribution to solving the housing crisis.

Q23 Lord Cameron of Dillington: Good morning. Thank you very much for coming. My constituency, if I had one in the House of Lords, is rural England, as it were, so I come from that perspective. I wonder whether you feel that the choice of the location and size of individual towns or expansions should be the job of central government, local government or another body entirely.

Dr Maya Singer Hobbs: My short answer to this is that it will have to be a bit of both. All three of us have talked quite a lot about the need for this to be a set of strategic decisions that interact with other bits of

government policy. That will have to happen at a national government level. However, you really need buy-in from local communities. We know that even if you have a development corporation you need those local councils built in so that when the development corporation winds down it is a seamless transfer to the local authorities that take ownership of the project.

You need both, which I know is a bit of a fudge to the question. You need that strategic oversight from a national level and you need to make sure that you are engaging with the people who live in the places where you are thinking of putting them.

Millie Mitchell: I would add that an increasingly important tier of government within England is the regional authorities, so mayoral strategic authorities, which exist predominantly at the moment around metropolitan areas but are increasingly being expanded in the direction of rural and town areas as well. If the locations that are being determined are likely to fall within the remit of mayoral strategic authorities, mayoral strategic authorities are being empowered to develop spatial development strategies, so thinking strategically across their whole region about where key infrastructure needs to be located. They are also responsible for creating transport plans and overseeing strategic transport. They are responsible for environment levers. They are also important for stimulating the local skills that will be needed, especially in the construction sector, to deliver these towns. I echo what Maya said. It is definitely both central and local, but it is also thinking about where those levers are held to enable this to be a success. A lot of those are held at the regional level now.

Dr Maya Singer Hobbs: I totally agree with that. One of the exciting things about the devolution agenda is that it reinserts a level of regional planning that has been missing in England for a number of years.

Lord Cameron of Dillington: In addition to my question, the lands commission or whatever it is called is limited to towns of 10,000. Do you think the concept of new towns and garden cities could apply in a wider franchise across, say, rural England, slightly smaller, like Poundbury, which is not as big as that? Would that work? How do you see that going forward?

Ike Ijeh: I think that it could work. I am more comfortable with the model of a new town as an extension to an existing city or town rather than virgin territory in the middle of nowhere. However, that is not to preclude doing that if the local demand converges enough with local infrastructure to support it. I do not think that there is anything intrinsically wrong with doing that, but again the safeguards in terms of vision and design quality will need to be there.

If you look at Poundbury, clearly there is royal intervention, but one thing it does not lack is a vision. The then Prince of Wales knew exactly what he wanted to do there. You see that clarity of vision as a continuous chain from the initial designs to what it looks like today. The issue is not

so much what Poundbury looks like, but the delivery that created it was one that knew exactly what it wanted right from the start.

I echo the conversation about it being a combination of central government, local landowners and local authorities. The devolution aspect with regional assemblies is potentially really important as well. We all had a real-world example of central government algorithms—they have a role to play in our lives, I am sure—when housing numbers were recalculated last year. London’s housing target was cut from 100,000 to 80,000. It was met with bemusement on the ground. Ensuring that central government works more closely with local government and local stakeholders will ensure that that kind of discrepancy is minimised, I hope.

Lord Cameron of Dillington: Yes, and the rural housing targets were doubled.

Ike Ijeh: Yes, they were, which also was met with bemusement, I would imagine.

Q24 **Baroness Janke:** My question is to do with distribution within the country. I am a former member of the Core Cities group and one of the missions of that group was to get government to appreciate the missed potential that many of the core cities were experiencing. Most of the locations we have been hearing about are in the south. Do you agree with the current distribution or do you think that there ought to be a further, more wide-reaching approach looking at some of the work that has been done before in different parts of the country? You were talking about linking it to industrial policy, for example. Perhaps that has some bearing on the question.

Dr Maya Singer Hobbs: In some ways, the locations, in my mind, should be dictated by what the problem is that you are trying to solve. I do not think that it makes sense to say that we should evenly distribute them across the country because that is fairer, because that is not the basis of a good decision, particularly if you are putting them in places where there is no economic activity and there are no jobs. That does not make sense. But the devolution agenda is important and this Government have said that they are committed to regional growth. That definitely has to be part of the decision-making process when thinking about the location of the new towns.

I think that it is a combination of making sure that they are going in places where there are jobs, or at least growth opportunities, but also making sure that they are meeting regional growth objectives.

Millie Mitchell: I echo what Maya has said. It is important, as we have discussed, to link to that industrial strategy. That industrial strategy should be thinking about regional growth. It should not be totally focused on London and the wider south-east. Yes, it is important that we think about how we can put homes and communities in the places where we want industries and the economy to thrive, and that should be a national picture. It does not equal even distribution everywhere, but it is that

consideration that on balance you do not want it all to be a south-east agenda.

Ike Ijeh: I agree. New housing is about meeting local demand, not necessarily about achieving equilibrium. I would not have a problem if new towns were not evenly distributed. I think—to repeat myself—they should be located in places where local demand most powerfully converges with local infrastructure, the demand for or the existence of. Again, as a national agenda, yes. We have those other policy vehicles such as the industrial agenda and the growth agenda to try to spark national improvement and growth across the country, but I do not think that new towns should be the vehicle to do that. I do not think that there is a problem if new towns specifically are not evenly distributed across the entire country.

Baroness Janke: You are talking about, to a large extent, urban extensions. Some of these cities do have infrastructure and a potential contribution to make to the growth agenda. There is also this human issue that the north very often feels itself very second-rate in terms of government attention compared with London and the south. Do you not feel that there ought to be some measure of recognition of the potential of other cities, for example, in different parts of the country, and the whole business of selling these to the public ought to perhaps recognise that there is an underinterest in various parts of the country but an overinterest in others?

Millie Mitchell: One of the benefits of the devolution agenda today is that we now have a strong cohort of regional mayors who really speak up and talk for their areas. The new Government since coming in have taken steps to forge much stronger relationships and listen to those mayors. I was up in Liverpool a couple of months ago doing some interviews and conversations up there, and I was hearing that one of the bids that has been put forward for the New Towns Commission to consider is an urban extension in Liverpool north. It has the support of the city council and the combined authority. We do not know whether that will be one of the many that have been submitted that gets selected, but there are new opportunities for stronger voices in other parts of England now.

Dr Maya Singer Hobbs: I agree with that and, particularly if we are seeing urban extensions, we would really want to see those alongside the transport infrastructure needed. Leeds is the classic example. It does not have a tram and it should. There are lots of examples like that where we would want to see investment in transport infrastructure and other bits of infrastructure in the north to help to unlock those new town developments.

Ike Ijeh: Yes, I agree. Leeds is a good example. It is the largest city in Europe without a metro rapid transit system, I think. It is also a city with, I think, the lowest residential density of any big city in the UK. An urban extension there would make that density even lower and it would put more pressure on an already overburdened transport system. Leeds would appreciate a Tube more than it would appreciate a few more

thousand homes on the edge of the city, I would think. This must be dictated by local need and by making sure that you meet regional voices in the best way possible, but not necessarily insisting—I know you are not saying that—that their cities must have new housing along their edges.

- Q25 **Viscount Hanworth:** To what extent is it appropriate for the Government to specify standards of provision in new towns concerning such things as schools, shops, doctors' surgeries and so on, as well as the proportions of affordable and social housing? Could these and other standards be imposed on the various parties responsible for the design and construction of new towns? How could they be imposed and how could these various agents be co-ordinated?

Ike Ijeh: I think that there is no problem with imposing certain statutory guidelines from above on things such as design rules and design codes, for instance, as a way of safeguarding quality, which I always keep talking about. That is one way of doing it in a way that you allow the local community to construct their idea of what a local code should be and then that is the guiding principle for the new town development. That is a good example of national policy leading down to local people to be able to choose what they want the design to look like. I think that principle is very good.

That leads on to the fact that there is nothing wrong with having certain nationally imposed structures or frameworks, such as design codes. We have the national planning policy guidelines, for instance. You do not have to follow them, but they look like a bible of what the Government would like to see. We have these things throughout the planning system. I do not think there is any problem if we extend it to new towns as well.

All I would say is that there should be the flexibility to respond to local need, local vernacular, local demand and local character to ensure that we do not do again what we did in the late 1960s and early 1970s—a one-size-fits-all modernist agenda that makes the centre of Telford, say, look like the centre of Peterborough. Instead, we have a national policy that encourages local integration and local involvement, if that makes sense.

Dr Maya Singer Hobbs: I broadly agree with that. It is worth saying that we already do this. There are already requirements on new developments around when you have to deliver a school and when the health service has to get involved to make sure that there are extra doctors' surgeries. We are already doing this. To be honest, it comes back to something you were saying earlier about the importance of a vision and then what the objectives are that you are trying to achieve with the new town. If you are clear on the vision, what you want it to look and feel like to live there and what the objective is, what the problem is that you are trying to solve, that inevitably leads you to having a set of requirements about green spaces, shopping centres, doctors' surgeries and schools.

Interestingly, my understanding is that one of the problems that Ebbsfleet ran into is that they could not get the town centre up off the ground for a long time. They struggled to get schools delivered, and it meant that people living there did not feel like they were living in a community because they did not have local shops and there were not enough schools. I think that the Government thinking about what the amenities are that are needed to make a new place feel like a community is very important, to make sure that you have that so that the people who are moving in feel like it is home and a community. It is placemaking rather than just delivering a lot of homes.

Millie Mitchell: Building on what my colleagues have said, I totally agree that this is part of the Government's role in making a success of this programme. It is important that where these standards are being set it is set out from the start. When we talk to people in the planning and development industry, the frustration with constantly changing rules and regulations they have to follow can really hold up and slow down delivery. Inevitably, new towns will be 20-, 30- or 40-year programmes. There will be policy change within that, we are not saying there will not, but the Government should use this time now to think clearly about how they can set it out so that once these delivery vehicles are set up, they are able to run within those regulations, they know what is expected of them and they are empowered to deliver on that.

I would also echo what Maya said about the importance of government departments supporting them. If you are saying you have to have this infrastructure in place, these community facilities, it is making sure that all of government is oriented towards when delivery vehicles and development corporations approach the Department for Education, for example, and say, "We need to get our school set up", it is responsive and co-operates, that the Department for Transport is responsive and co-operates. I have interviewed people involved in previous new town development corporations. I know that Milton Keynes ran into this challenge where they struggled for a long time to get a hospital in the town and that held back delivery. Yes, government should set the standards. They should set them out early doors, but they should also make sure that they are oriented towards supporting those places to deliver on those standards that they have set.

Viscount Hanworth: It seems to me that the retail trade is now dominated by large organisations that are interested and will be attracted only if they can participate in a massive retail centre. That seems to dictate the topography of new towns. Would you agree with that or is there a prospect of dispersing the retail trade more widely within the town?

Dr Maya Singer Hobbs: Sorry, can you clarify? Are you saying that new towns have to have a big retail centre or can we have high streets?

Viscount Hanworth: I am saying that that is what attracts retail and it is very difficult to attract retail unless you propose a massive retail centre. I am saying that that seems to dominate the topography of new

towns. The question is: am I correct in that aspersion?

Dr Maya Singer Hobbs: This is slightly outside my area of expertise. My sense is that—well, I am not actually sure. Because local finances are constrained, there is a need to bring in public investment. Thinking about what works for the private sector when it is investing is probably part of the decision-making process. I would imagine that you can speak to this better than I can, that people want thriving high streets—

Ike Ijeh: Only slightly, not much.

Dr Maya Singer Hobbs: —rather than big retail shopping centres, but there is a tension there, I guess.

Viscount Hanworth: I am happy to explain myself. That question arose because of the nature of Ebbsfleet, which you just described, where they did not have a possibility of attracting retail trade until they established a large centre.

Dr Maya Singer Hobbs: Yes. My understanding partly was that the development corporation, I think, struggled to raise the funds to do the up-front infrastructure investment. That might have been due to struggling to bring in the private sector, but my understanding—again, please correct me if I am wrong here—is that the development of the town centre was held up by other things beyond the retail sector getting involved.

Millie Mitchell: It is also important to think about the long-term sustainability of high streets. We know that it is not just about shops any more, it is about the cultural economy, the night-time economy and the rest of it, and building in that long-term sustainability. I grew up in Harlow, which was one of the very first new towns. It was designed on garden city principles and each neighbourhood had its own local shops and you also had the central shopping in Harlow town centre. Unfortunately, lots of those neighbourhood shopping centres did not stand the test of time because there was not an attractive enough investment opportunity to do it. What you ended up with was the odd barber shop and all the rest of it. You have to work with where the market wants to locate itself. It is trading off between the good design principles and how you make sure that town centres are accessible and vibrant throughout maybe not the whole 24 hours but the whole day beyond that core retail proposition.

The Chair: I know that Baroness Warwick wants to come in. Very quickly, switching back to something you just said, Millie, about higher standards, do you think that with the new towns these should be set out at the very beginning and that they should be to some extent higher and an exemplar? You are all nodding.

Ike Ijeh: Yes, I would say that. I would have no problem with that.

The Chair: Thank you. We did a high street report under the previous chair of this committee, which I am sure you have read with great

interest. We will be having a debate on that as well.

Q26 Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe: This is a very specific question because we have all been focusing on collaboration, co-operation and consultation. In your view, very specifically, should central government ultimately have the power to override local objections and local decisions?

Ike Ijeh: To a degree, yes, I would say.

Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe: “Ultimately” and “to a degree” do not quite—

Ike Ijeh: No, they do not. I think, ultimately, yes. Local democracy and local consultation are hugely important, but occasionally locals are not best primed to see the national interest. The overriding ambition here should be collaboration, and it should be taking local views on board and making sure they are part of the process, but sometimes central government does need to act as central government. There are all kinds of projects that would never have happened, which we look at maybe as being for the good of the country, if central government had allowed local opposition to override it.

The key to avoiding the dictatorial, totalitarian outcome is making sure that central government sets out a framework in which local views, local ideas, local vernacular and local character can play as big a role as possible, and that is the best way of ensuring that central government speaks with the same voice as local authorities and local people.

Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe: Is there any divergence from Millie or Maya?

Millie Mitchell: I primarily agree. There are some larger decisions, specifically around the location and the size of these towns, where the final say should be coming from central government because this is a national programme. It is addressing national growth issues and national housing crises. Local place should be brought into the conversation about where they should be, but the final say should come from above. Then when you get more into the details, as Ike has rightly pointed out, national government should set out the framework of what is expected and then within that framework it is up to local communities to decide the best way to deliver on those agreed-upon priorities and standards.

Dr Maya Singer Hobbs: I agree with that. There is a national vision here and it needs to align with national priorities. Then at the local level or the regional level there are specifics that can be dug into.

The Chair: Before we move on to the next question, Lord Faulkner has a quick follow-up.

Lord Faulkner of Worcester: Yes, it is just a quick question and a comment on what you have all said. None of you has referred to the possibility of parliamentary accountability for central government. I can understand why you do not want to give veto powers to local authorities,

but is there not a role for Parliament in supervising what the Government are doing it and approving it?

Ike Ijeh: I think that Parliament's role is at the start. When you set up the framework at the beginning, when you are setting up this national umbrella that you want all new towns to work under, yes, that is the time for Parliament to scrutinise it and to make sure that the framework works and that it combines flexibility with the protection of national interest. However, once that framework has been established and it is then disseminated across the country in towns and communities, by that point if the framework is good enough and if Parliament has done its job scrutinising it, then local communities should be left to work within that framework as best as possible.

Lord Faulkner of Worcester: I do not agree with you, but I will not pursue that.

Q27 **Viscount Younger of Leckie:** My question is perhaps the elephant in the room and focuses on Treasury and funding. Clearly, you have highlighted a tension between the need and the wish to develop new towns, which is more of a long-term aspiration, and the Government's immediate aspiration, which is to build 1.5 million homes by 2030. There is a definite tension there and I was struck by what you said, Maya, about Ebbsfleet and lessons learned. Going back to what you all said at the beginning, it was the importance of community, and I think that Ike said the importance of co-ordination from central government.

My question is quite simple. What have we learned from the previous generations of new towns and their development? There has been significant financial backing in the past for new towns/garden cities. How can the Government financially deliver what they want to deliver? This is a key question bearing in mind the community aspects of this; in other words, you cannot just plonk houses in an area and expect the rest to be delivered—hospitals and so on.

Finally, the role of central government—what about non-financial support? What is needed in that respect?

Ike Ijeh: To answer the latter question first, what I think is needed from government, going back to what I said before, is the safeguarding of quality. However that is done, through national planning policy guidance, design codes, making sure that beauty, character, placemaking, sense of place, public realm, squares, streets, whatever you call it, all that has to be considered as part of any new town development, is one clear way in which central government can make a meaningful impact on the aesthetics and liveability of what we come up with at the end.

Secondly, ensure democratic consent. We have public consultation avenues that are established, which vary in their effectiveness, but this idea of community buy-in that you mentioned and we have talked about is crucial. It is critical. I think that central government is uniquely placed to make sure that that buy-in is delivered right from the start of these projects.

Another thing that we have all talked about is infrastructure. Central government is there to, if not necessarily pay for all the infrastructure, to provide and to facilitate the best environment in which it can be delivered by others if necessary. It would be very hard for local stakeholders to fund a new train line, for instance, but central government exists to fulfil that broader strategic role. Those are just three examples whereby central government can have a clear role in making sure that new towns work.

Financing is not my area of expertise, but I do know that in the Wolfson Prize submission the idea of land capture was something that was considered. I know that it is an evolving consideration within the House and there will be others here who know far more about this than I do, but potentially it offers a way of squaring the circle I talked about earlier of ensuring that national benefit percolates down to immediate local benefit as well. That is possibly one of the vehicles whereby we can capture additional revenue to also fund the infrastructure and all the other things that are required to make those developments work.

Dr Maya Singer Hobbs: I agree that it will not be possible to deliver new towns without some financial support from the Treasury. Historically, the development corporations of the previous new towns took loans out through, I think, the Public Works Loans Board, which does not exist any more. Those were long-term loans, 60-year loans from government, to deliver those. Exactly as Ike said, a lot of that money was recouped through land value capture. The development corporations would buy land at agricultural rates, so without the hope value attached, carry out land assembly, service it, put in infrastructure, and then sell it at a higher rate to the developers. That requires them having the funding up front to purchase the land and put in the infrastructure, but it means that they recoup those costs quite quickly.

It also has a benefit for the developers because it de-risks that land for the developers. You can sell it to the developers with much clearer planning guidelines. We hear from developers that one of the challenges with the current planning system is that uncertainty. By doing this land assembly and servicing the land and selling it on, you make life easier for the developers as well but it requires some up-front funding. There is a possibility—and I do not definitively know the answer to this and I suspect the people who do are in the Treasury and do not want to tell us—that the new fiscal rules might offer some scope around how they lend money to these development corporations that might unlock the finance that will be required.

On your second question about non-financial support from government and what else central government can do, we know that almost every department is drawing up some form of spatial plan, whether it is Defra's land use framework, the Department for Transport doing its integrated national strategy, or DESNZ doing its strategic spatial energy plan. We really need them all to be talking to each other about how they overlap and where there will be pinch points. Again, it comes back to that need

for strategic oversight so you can make sure that you are not granting planning permission for a new town somewhere that is highly water stressed and you will not be able to build the homes. You really want to know that sooner rather than later.

We have said this multiple times. Making sure that government is aligned and thinking strategically so that everyone is pulling in the same direction will be very important.

Millie Mitchell: I do not want to risk repeating what my colleagues have said because I wholeheartedly agree. Inevitably, this will require some up-front funding from government. Without that, it will not be possible, as Maya set out, to acquire land and to provide that initial infrastructure that creates that de-risked environment for developers to come in and create on. I imagine that right now MHCLG and the Treasury are deep in negotiations for the spending review and what that initial package will look like. As Maya said, getting that land at the right price is an important starting place for any large-scale development. Making use of the compulsory purchase powers that enable development corporations to purchase without hope value will definitely be key to that.

In terms of the future delivery, it depends where these are located. If a number of them are located in parts of the south-east where there is high housing demand, if the development corporation assembles the land and sets out a master plan for what it wants to deliver, it is a very low-risk environment for investors and developers to come on board and deliver against those. As Maya said, they are not having to deal with the uncertainty that there would usually be in the planning system when they are in an unplanned way finding sites to bring forward for development. It is about getting that up-front investment right to then unlock the private investment later on.

As for other non-financial things that the Government can do to support it, as I have said throughout the session, the three main things that I think government should be doing, and they do not all require funding, are about setting the direction, setting the standards and then driving the pace, putting that political weight behind this being a thing that we want to deliver. If they can do all three of those things, these delivery vehicles should be able to deliver against the ambition set out.

Q28 **Lord Faulkner of Worcester:** You have partially answered my question and I was very interested in what you said. I was going to ask about land value capture. I agree with you that it could provide the means for the funding of new towns without the developer getting all the benefit from the increase in hope value. When compulsory purchase is being applied, should a valuation rigorously avoid what I think is called hope value?

Dr Maya Singer Hobbs: Yes.

Ike Ijeh: Yes.

Millie Mitchell: Yes. These powers have been introduced and strengthened and I think this is absolutely the use case for when those powers should be applied.

Lord Faulkner of Worcester: You are supporters of there being development corporations to deliver the new towns. Do you think that they will need powers that were not given to the earlier development corporations?

Millie Mitchell: The Planning and Infrastructure Bill is already introducing a number of new powers for development corporations to bring them in line. There are, I think, five different kinds of development corporations, which until the Planning and Infrastructure Bill had very different remits as they evolved throughout history as each iteration of the new legislation came in. Things such as compulsory purchase without hope value is a new power. They are also being given stronger powers around the delivery of infrastructure. Those steps have already started to be taken.

There is a question around whether this needs to go further and that is something that the Government should be open to and be receptive to having that two-way door. Once you have these delivery vehicles created and they are up and running, are you talking to them and finding out what issues they are running into and how you can be responsive as a Government to keep enabling that to go further?

Lord Faulkner of Worcester: Thank you. As some of my colleagues know, many years ago I worked for Telford New Town Development Corporation. The general manager's patron saint, who guided him on what he was trying to do, was Ebenezer Howard. Ike, you referred to garden cities in your opening comments. Why have we had only two garden cities, Letchworth and Welwyn? Welwyn was in 1920, which is a long time ago.

Ike Ijeh: It is a good question because they are both successful and revered by people who have never even been there but they have heard of them as ideals of urban living. It is a good question. Ebenezer Howard himself was such a force. He had this vision and he wanted to do it. He also did it from a very corporatist point of view, which people may not be aware of. He was very keen. He had an idea of what he wanted to do and he drove it.

It would have been nice if the further iterations of new towns that happened straight after the war—you mentioned Harlow; Harlow was conceived on the idea of a garden city and it is very different from some of the other later ones, such as Telford, Peterborough or Milton Keynes. I think that there has been an awareness from government that the garden city was successful, but I do not know. The modernist ideology was hugely powerful in the middle of the 20th century and to a degree it rejected the garden city aesthetic of a community-based development as opposed to a centralised imposition of a grand idea. In the past, that may have been the reason, but I definitely think that now—with our pluralist

awareness, I would hope, of what works and what does not and a historical enlightenment about what worked in the past, even if we do not rename the whole programme “the garden city task force” or whatever—I would hope to see some of those core principles that established the early garden cities return, especially under a Labour Government. These principles were burned into the early ideals of socialism—houses for the poor, working-class improvements and so on. It should not be a hard sell, you would hope, to the current Government.

Lord Faulkner of Worcester: I agree with you completely. I intervened earlier, but I certainly agree with you on that.

Lord Cameron of Dillington: On that last point about value capture of land, I assume you do not mean that that will cover all the infrastructure. By the time you have surgeries, hospitals, schools, graveyards, green spaces, police stations and so on, there will be far more money involved than that. I am not quite sure whether you are insinuating that land capture would provide all the money.

Ike Ijeh: I do not think that it needs to provide everything, but what is critical is providing the initial steps towards that infrastructure services provision. Transport is critical. By having a transport link you immediately give confidence to businesses and residents to move in there. All infrastructure is important, but I would say that certain kinds of infrastructure should be frontloaded within a project to give confidence that the whole thing can proceed sustainably. Maybe that is what land capture, initially at least, should focus on: providing that critical infrastructure that carries future development.

Dr Maya Singer Hobbs: Yes, I would agree with that. It is about kick-starting the development. You said this very well earlier and I will absolutely butcher what you said. It was something about getting the environment right so that then private investors can come in later. You need the public sector to kick-start that, delivering graveyards, hospitals, schools, buses and so on.

Lord Cameron of Dillington: The public sector will have to consider input from the Treasury as well as the—

Dr Maya Singer Hobbs: Yes.

Lord Cameron of Dillington: That is the point.

Dr Maya Singer Hobbs: Yes.

Ike Ijeh: Yes, it will do.

Dr Maya Singer Hobbs: What we would hope, and I think what government is hoping, is that the new towns deliver growth and that makes it easier to fund those things.

Lord Cameron of Dillington: In the end, yes.

Dr Maya Singer Hobbs: Yes, but my sense is that in the first instance there will need to be investment from the Treasury, whether that is in the

form of loans, so that they can start the process of buying the land. The land value capture will help them pay those back.

Lord Bailey of Paddington: I would say that the fundamental amenities would be transport, sewerage and power, but I digress.

I want to go back to Lord Faulkner's point about political oversight. Would one way of providing political oversight be to centralise it around, say, the Cabinet Office or a new department or ministry within the Government? Personally, I hate arm's-length bodies. I think there are too many of them and they become a law unto themselves. Is that not one way of doing it? Your point about having central co-ordination I think is vital. We are a siloed Government and that does not work. I want to explore that. Could you set up something in the Cabinet Office or a brand-new department under a new Minister to drive this?

Dr Maya Singer Hobbs: I published a report earlier this year that called for a Minister in the Cabinet Office to do exactly that, to co-ordinate a national spatial plan for exactly the reason that you are saying. I am an ex-civil servant and sometimes it was very frustrating even talking to colleagues in the same department, let alone between departments. Part of that is a challenge with misaligned incentives. I think you are right. Having either a Minister or someone in the Cabinet Office who is senior enough to pull in people from the relevant departments and ensure that they all talk to each other will probably be quite important here.

We come back to your question about who has the final say. I think that the role of that team or department or whatever it is in the Cabinet Office should be more about making sure that the strategic priorities are aligned rather than saying, "In this town you should have this hospital", but making sure that at the very least the Department of Health is thinking about whether there will need to be a hospital in that town, if that makes sense.

Lord Bailey of Paddington: Yes.

Q29 **Lord Mawson:** I found it a very interesting presentation. I find interesting your endless confidence in government and the machinery of the state. I think that you would find it instructive to read the debate that happened in this House last Friday on the current financial state of this country, which is virtually bankrupt, and the challenges of all that. To build anything will require, I suspect, very great imagination from any Government and real innovation and new thinking. That is the first point.

The second point is that Ebenezer Howard and those histories are interesting. If we were to really dig into these things, which we cannot do today, in my experience, having sat on the Olympic Legacy Development Corporation for 19 years—from day one for 19 years—and watched the whole thing. It is why I was pushing you on the critical issues, which I did not hear any of you really respond to. For us, there were three critical issues. The first was a clear narrative and a vision that was deeply rooted in the place and understood the place in very great detail. It did not start in the Cabinet Office or No. 10 Downing Street or any of that stuff. It

started with a small group of people in the East End of London who got into that issue.

The second was a real focus on quality business leadership from people who knew the different disciplines you needed around that table. It was about people; it was not about representation. It was about the right individuals with the right skills who would stay over time.

I suppose the third thing we discovered was very much a simple thing about who cared. Who really cared? The problem with this overconfidence in the Cabinet Office is the churn in all these institutions and personnel. Some brilliant people appear for five minutes and then they are off. These are long-term things.

For me, these critical issues are fundamental, and I worry a lot about this overconfidence on all sides in what the machinery of the state, particularly in the present financial position we all face, can actually achieve. You do wonder about some of these older models, Ebenezer Howard, Bournville—indeed, the Prince of Wales, who is now the King, has stayed with that a long time. He may not have got everything right, this is a matter for debate, but he has built some stuff. It was not a policy paper. It has become a set of facts.

I would be interested in your reflections on that point about who will stay the course and build this stuff. Those of us who have stayed the course and built quite a few things have found government endlessly getting in our way in terms of enabling us to do the next piece of the jigsaw in the real world where people will live and it will become a fact rather than a policy paper.

Dr Maya Singer Hobbs: My sense is that one of the advantages of development corporations is that they can stay the course, exactly like you said and like Millie said, because they are isolated from the political blowing of the winds and they are place-based. The good ones, exactly like you say, have representatives of the developers, the council and whoever it is, whichever expertise you need to pull in, to make sure that you are delivering places that work.

It almost feels like there are two conversations that we have been having today. One is a broader question about the role of national government in the new towns agenda, and then a question about how you do the delivery. It feels to me like your points are pretty bang on about how you do the delivery. You need that place-based knowledge. You need people who are sticking around and will see it through, and you need to know who cares. I think that is right.

At the national level, particularly given that they are saying they want 12 new towns, you do need some integration at that level to be thinking about how it aligns with the other bits of government, which can be frustrating. It is a big machine. You cannot deliver new towns if you are not thinking about how they interact with the other bits of government.

Millie Mitchell: I will echo what Maya said there about the advantages of development corporations in being able to provide that long-term vision

and long-term stability for an area. In Stockport, where there has a mayoral development corporation since 2019, they have representation from the local authority's main parties on their board along with other private sector representatives and developers.

Lord Mawson: Can I just challenge you here? This whole idea of representation is very confused. There is a great confusion in this country between democracy and delivery. What we tried to make sure in the legacy corporation is that, of course, we had Sir Robin Wales as the Labour Mayor of Newham, but because he was the right person who was going to drive the delivery questions and understood the need to bring business partnerships into Newham, where there was no confidence for business. These details really matter. We talk too easily about representation. This is about delivery. For me, getting into—

The Chair: Lord Mawson, I am conscious of time.

Millie Mitchell: I take the point.

Lord Mawson: The problem for me with these conversations, if I am honest, Chair, is that they can be very general but they do not get into the granularity of delivery, which Ebenezer Howard, if we looked into that, would have had to do.

Millie Mitchell: I totally take the point. Where I was going with that is that the leadership of the council has changed multiple times since the development corporation has been set up, but because there has been that stability across the development corporation board, that has not impacted on the long-term vision.

On your point around the Government and their financial state, there is a risk: are the Government potentially spreading themselves too thin in trying to achieve 12 different new towns across the country on their timeline? You have raised an important point there and it is a key consideration for the committee.

The Chair: The final point is from Viscount Younger.

Viscount Younger of Leckie: This is, first of all, an aside. I was listening carefully to what Ike said about garden cities, but was Bicester not mooted as a garden city and then it never happened?

Ike Ijeh: Yes, I think it was.

Q30 **Viscount Younger of Leckie:** That was not my question. It is: I cannot let the session go by, with all your knowledge and expertise, without asking what you think about what we can learn from other countries. Ike, you might want to start off.

Ike Ijeh: It is a good question. The Netherlands has lots of examples of sustainable new housing, community based. They may not call them new towns or garden cities in the way that we do, but they have a tradition of finding a way of avoiding some of the battles we have had between contemporary and traditional architecture, merging the two in a way that

works on the ground and that responds to local vernacular and seems to be successful in providing the housing that is required. The Netherlands is far more sophisticated generally when it comes to infrastructure than we are. It is a much smaller country as well. But it gives some good examples of what we should be doing.

Another country that I think has been doing great things recently in new developments and new social housing is France. There are a number of developments around Paris that are exceptional: 50% or 60% social housing. I am not necessarily saying that that is what makes them great, but they wonderfully embody the principles of placemaking and nature, building on the tradition of French apartment blocks but reinterpreting them in a modern way that works for now but still harks back to something that every French person would be familiar with.

In a way, and I fear my profession is part of the reason for this, we have been quite stylistically combative: you are either in a traditional camp or you are in the modernist camp. There are ways in which if you do good design, style does not matter. If you attend to local people, if you speak to local vernacular, if you engage with local character and history, you will find that those things are less important. Some of these developments around Paris—I cannot remember any of their names but I can provide the information in future—are good examples of what we should try to do here.

Baroness Janke: Could you send us that information?

Ike Ijeh: I can do, yes.

Millie Mitchell: I do not have any other key examples I could point to. When I was doing my research on development corporations I had some conversations with representatives from the US. They have some interesting financing models and I am happy to follow up with more detail later.

Dr Maya Singer Hobbs: I too am not an expert on other countries' planning systems, particularly not for new towns, but would echo that the Netherlands and Germany have quite interesting approaches to doing land assembly and servicing infrastructure beforehand. Germany in particular is interesting in how it does design and the guidelines that it gives developers. But I am not an expert on new towns abroad by any means.

The Chair: Thank you so much. You will be pleased to know that that is the end of this session. You survived it; you got through it. Genuinely, thank you for giving your time here today and for giving such sterling evidence to us. As a few of us have said, if there is anything that you want to provide in addition to what you have said today, please feel free to send it in. With that, the meeting is closed.