



Built Environment Committee

Corrected oral evidence: New towns: practical delivery

Tuesday 8 July 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 Miller of Chilthorne Domer; Lord Porter of Spalding; Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe; Viscount Younger of Leckie.

Evidence Session No. 10

Heard in Public

Questions 123 - 137

Witnesses

I: Paul Thomas, Director of Planning and Placemaking, Milton Keynes City Council; Tom Chance, Chief Executive, Community Land Trust Network; Hugh Ellis, Director of Policy, Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA).

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

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

Examination of witnesses

Paul Thomas, Tom Chance and Hugh Ellis.

Q123 The Chair: Good morning and welcome to the House of Lords Built Environment Select Committee. We are now in the 10th meeting of our inquiry into the building of new towns and expanded settlements. Today, as we are coming to the end of the first part of our inquiry, we are delighted to welcome three guests where we are going to focus on the legacy of new towns, what comes thereafter once they are built, the infrastructure and some of the mechanisms that could be put in, and the long-term management of these sites. I wondered whether the witnesses could first introduce themselves.

Hugh Ellis: Hello. I am director of policy at the Town and Country Planning Association.

Tom Chance: Good morning. I am the chief executive of the Community Land Trust Network.

Paul Thomas: Good morning. I am the director of planning and placemaking at Milton Keynes City Council.

The Chair: Once again, welcome to our select committee today. As you are aware, we have a series of questions and areas that we are going to be looking into. For all our interests, could you try to keep answers as concise as possible, please, and, for my fellow committee members, your questions too?

Q124 Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe: Good morning. I want to focus immediately on the whole question of how we manage to best ensure that the new towns continue as successful communities once the development corporations have ceased operation. What specifically could we build into their structures to ensure a lasting legacy? Are there any characteristics, such as returning gains from development to the community, that can be built into the planning and development of new towns to support this—so really specific things? Our aim is to get something concrete that we can build in now to ensure successful futures.

Hugh Ellis: I think that there are. It is an exciting time, in the sense that the Planning and Infrastructure Bill has amendments to all three types of development corporation within it. In using that legislation, there are two factors that need to be in play. First, you need a long-term stewardship body with credibility and good governance. Secondly, you need to be able to provide clear, meaningful timescales. A development corporation needs a lifespan of at least 40 years; if you are not interested in multidecade placemaking, do not get into the game.

It is interesting. The outcome of the mark 1 to 3 new towns was that the legislation did not contain a clear sense of how stewardship would work. Milton Keynes and one or two other examples aside, in general, the premature winding up of the development corporations in 1980 and the fire sale of their assets broke the model of stewardship. There are some

really bad, desperate examples—Peterlee perhaps being the best one—where assets were sold off very cheaply; now there are liabilities in green infrastructure, but there is no financial model for successfully managing it.

The critical intervention point is to amend the requirements on development corporations in the 1980 Act to prescribe the kind of stewardship body that the development corporation should then be evolved into and the kinds of objectives it should have. The development corporation winds up and that stewardship body should begin its work early, when the development corporation is still relatively young and then, ultimately, be clear about what assets it is trying to manage and, particularly and finally, what its relationship with the local authority is. That is the critical issue after that.

Letchworth is the gold-plated model of how to do it, damaged though it is by three bits of legislation, but it still remains a very powerful model. Milton Keynes offers lessons as well, but the opportunity is now. Specifically, place those requirements in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill.

Tom Chance: With the UK Cohousing Network, we led work over the last year looking at forms of community stewardship there could be in new towns, building on over 100 years of successful examples of this and the concept, already enshrined in the TCPA's missions and garden city principles, that community ownership of assets should form part of a successful place and that that is how you build community infrastructure and community. That is actually very rarely put in place, even though there are very good examples of it.

There are other organisations, such as Plunkett, that help set up community shops and co-housing communities in which people can come together to form small-scale communities with neighbours, and then community land trusts and community development trusts own things such as community centres. These forms of stewardship can be created from the start.

A very good example we looked at is in Chichester, where a community land trust was established as a stewardship vehicle for some of the first community assets being developed in a new large-scale development. In subsequent large developments nearby, that trust has become a partner in the development of new housing estates in the area. It has helped to shape and conceive what the community would need, which is missing in the area, in this new development—looking at sports facilities, workspace, flexible spaces for start-up businesses and a whole range of different sorts of assets that could be created.

That conception of community stewardship could be infused into new towns to ensure that they are not dead. The New Towns Taskforce has brought our attention back to the slogan that the people should be the heart of the new town. We say, "Give the people some ownership of their new town alongside the work of the development corporation".

Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe: Paul, you have been through this, or at least your predecessors have been through it. Does this ring true with you, or are there other reflections that you can add with your experience in Milton Keynes?

Paul Thomas: There are a couple more points. Hugh mentioned a couple of really good points. There is the importance of building trust with a local authority and not just taking a dev corp, imposing it on an area and saying, "That is it. We are done". In Milton Keynes, we are now doing really well, but the establishment of the bodies that came after the dev corp was something of an afterthought. The dev corp became the borough council, the Parks Trust and the community foundation; whereas, in many places, those three functions would be carried out by one body: a local council.

The Parks Trust is a strong example of a body that provides really good care of strategic open space. The question is, "If you were doing a dev corp now, would a parks trust result from it?" It is sitting on quite a large amount of assets. Those assets are paying for the maintenance of those bits of open space, but those assets are also sitting there out of the reach of a council, and we know what council funding is like at the moment. It is a fantastic body, but would you do the same again?

I have one other small point. There is the question about taking development gain and that going back into the community. The Milton Keynes tariff has been a really successful model. It is a blend of Section 106 and the community infrastructure fund. With a large chunk of money from government initially, it allows us to invest in infrastructure and make sure that that infrastructure is in place from the very start. That is community infrastructure: roads, open space, education and health. That has been really important for us.

The other important thing, though, is that we do not place an additional burden on the residents. A development corporation with lots of money does what a development corporation does and then hands a town over to a local authority with lots of assets, but those assets are depreciating over time. Milton Keynes is left with a very large road and bridge network that needs a lot of money spent on it, but there was no endowment to the council. There is no pot of money for the council to do that. That long-term maintenance needs to be thought through and cannot become an additional tax and burden on existing residents.

Q125 **Lord Faulkner of Worcester:** Good morning. Thank you for coming. Those are really interesting answers, if I may say so, particularly yours to begin with, Hugh, where you described the premature winding up of the development corporations, which was then followed by a fire sale. Paul, do you agree with that assessment of what happened in Milton Keynes after 1980?

Paul Thomas: I do not know whether I would say it was premature, but the winding up of the development corporation maybe was not as thought through as it might have been. We have the benefit of hindsight

in this room, with your knowledge around the table and ours as witnesses. We saw the development corporation being wound up, with the council not being trusted to take on the open space, and the creation of the Parks Trust resulted. Only five years later, that same council was given care of all of the adult needs in the city. Five years later, it went from being not trusted to cut the grass to being very trusted to look after the residents of the city, so it definitely needs to be thought through better than that. We are doing that now, which is great. If Milton Keynes has the benefit of being one of the new new towns, we know exactly how the model will work, and we have learned from those lessons of the past.

Lord Faulkner of Worcester: Presumably, as the new town programme is developed, the bodies that will exist to manage those will be new development corporations. Looking back, do you think that it would be better if the future ones had a longer life and clearer terms of reference?

Paul Thomas: If there are to be development corporations, and that is certainly the mood music that we are hearing—that there will be development corporations—they need to be longer term, but they need to work hand in glove with the local authorities and the local residents. Milton Keynes became a new city of nearly 300,000 people from a population of probably 30,000 people, so there were not a lot of residents to consult with to understand their needs. Now there are; now we are a whole city.

Any development corporation cannot come in and be quite as bullish as maybe they used to be. They need to work with the residents and local authorities, and there needs to be a long-term plan. If there is no long-term plan, where is the certainty for investment? Where is the certainty for residents? What are they buying into? How can we plan over that period?

Lord Faulkner of Worcester: I should declare an interest. In the 1970s, I worked for the Telford Development Corporation and the relationship between it and the district council was dreadful. The local authority, indeed, even refused to name its local authority as Telford and stuck with the name of Wrekin, which was a bit weird and led to a lot of ill feeling. Your description of being wound up prematurely, from my recollection, certainly applied there.

How can we get this relationship right in the future? How can we be sure that local authorities have bought into the concept of a new town and the concept of working with a development corporation?

Paul Thomas: There are two things. The development corporation with national funding is important. That would seem to suggest a nationally led development corporation. That works, but there has to be local lead in it. There has to be local leadership, vision and buy-in to it as well. I do not think Milton Keynes should have a development corporation unless there is that local lead in there as well.

Lord Faulkner of Worcester: Would you recreate the New Towns

Commission?

Paul Thomas: I do not think I know enough about the New Towns Commission, but Hugh might do.

Hugh Ellis: I have two quick points. There is no timescale for development corporations in law. That is an omission. Our minimum timescale for the life of a development corporation is 40 years, which is extremely difficult politically.

Lord Faulkner of Worcester: It is challenging, you could say.

Hugh Ellis: It is challenging to say the least. Whether you can write that into law is equally challenging, and that remains a debate. What really worries me about the current process is that there is a continuum between the new towns programme and eco-towns. If you mess this up, you end up with eco-towns and the programme lasts only 18 months, because you fail the governance test. The governance test is twofold: designation and operation.

In designation terms, mark 1 new towns were not, in 1946, rustled out of the air. They were based on regional studies that were a decade old at least. The conversation about designation was partly a “this place” final decision, but also a proper public inquiry and respectful listening. At least in two-thirds of new towns, which was a lesson to me—that I did not understand—there was a negotiated settlement with local government: Peterlee, Skelmersdale and Milton Keynes. Buckinghamshire negotiated about a settlement for how to deal with strategic growth.

There may have been tensions, and there were down the line, but in the designation process there was building consensus. You cannot hurry this. These are unpopular messages. You cannot rush it. You have to devote care to it, because, if you do not, the political backlash always unravels the programme. The political backlash led to, in essence, a Government saying, “We do not like development corporations. We are simply going to wind them up”, and the consequences of that were damaging. You need time and proper requirements in law for timescale.

On the New Towns Commission, yes, you need an oversight body for all the individual development corporations. Homes England has been suggested for that. It would be better if it was a bespoke body.

Q126 **Baroness Andrews:** I have a couple of quick points. We have had suggestions that mayoral-led development corporations would be successful. That, in a way, is the sharp end of the local government relationship and it would make it sustainable and held in the strongest possible way politically. I do not know what you thought about that.

There is a question I want to ask Paul. Was the Milton Keynes tariff something that grew out of the original financial settlement, when you had significant central government funding after the war, which made a lot of things possible? How did you manage to merge CIL and S106? What did it require? That is a very sustainable financial model if you can

get it. Does this mean that there were no other CIL or S106 moneys at all? It was all merged into a new financial framework.

I have another question for you, Paul. I see that you are director of Destination Milton Keynes, which is a fabulous idea and is part of the long-term strategy, presumably, and the sustainability to make Milton Keynes somewhere that people want to go and visit, even if they do not actually live there. Is that part of the long-term strategy as well?

Paul Thomas: On the mayoral question first, Milton Keynes was not successful in its first bid to work with other authorities in devolution, but it is still keen to work with its near neighbours to get a mayoral-led strategic authority. If there were a mayoral-led development corporation, I think it would support what I have said previously about the need for local leadership in the development corporation. It would be one of the mechanisms that government has already put down on paper as being part of the strategic authority framework.

The tariff works in our expansion areas. We have had a considerable number of expansion areas delivering a considerable number of homes over the last few years. It tends to be the tariff working in expansion areas and then the Section 106 process working in our city centre regeneration or development in other parts of the city. They tend to work side by side, rather than together.

The tariff is basically a Section 106, but with a chunk of money that started us off, which means that we can invest that money as a council. On some occasions, we have put council money alongside the tariff money in the knowledge that we would get that money back through the development over the course of 10, 15 or 20 years. It is a mindset for the council as much as it is a financial transaction. The council has been really supportive of growth and keen to get infrastructure-led growth, so it has put its money into that infrastructure from the start.

I am a director of Destination MK and it is about making Milton Keynes a place that people want to visit. We do really well with business trade during the week and we have some cracking destinations, such as Bletchley Park. We have the Snozone in the city centre. There are some really good places and we look forward to Universal happening on our doorstep as well, because that will change the face of the area and certainly change how people view Milton Keynes.

Hugh Ellis: I am really worried about the use of mayoral and locally led new town development corporations, not because I do not agree entirely with Paul that we need to change the governance of new town development corporations to make sure local government is fully represented, but there is one fundamental difference; they place all the burden of risk and responsibility locally. The art of a new town development corporation that was so important was that the Government, the department and a Permanent Secretary were responsible.

Although that sounds like it has drawbacks, which I am sure it does, it also meant that central government could not walk away from, ignore or not co-operate with it. Given how difficult it is to get a road bridge over or under a railway in this country, you need someone at Permanent Sec level to negotiate those deals. If you shift the responsibility to a mayor, the challenge is, "Does the private sector feel confident in them?" That is partly the lesson of the north Essex development that tried to develop a locally led new town development corporation. For us, we need to blend together the very best of the new towns with a new form of governance, which puts local authority in key places of representation on the board of that new town development corporation.

Q127 Lord Bailey of Paddington: I have heard what you said. As a Londoner, I might disagree, because we have two dev corps led by the mayor, and that is the thing that has made them both work. They have both worked across different Governments and different parties at mayoral level as well. Why can that model not be expressed elsewhere? What is the problem with that?

Hugh Ellis: It is a good question. I think that the answer to it is about purpose and objectives. In the case of the Olympics, there was big government investment, big money and a focus on regeneration. I am not saying that there were no controversies, because there were, but, on the whole, it was a successful outcome. It was very focused on the regeneration arm, and that goes back to urban development corporations, which have been used for a focused regeneration job under separate law.

Our view about that is that that still depends on there being a powerful governance figure with a powerful structure of accountability built around them, which you have in London, but which none of the rest of the country possesses. For us, the issue is about the credibility, accountability and confidence you can have in whoever owns that development corporation. In London, you have it for regeneration purposes; in the rest of the country, we worry that we do not. The consequences of that could be a lack of confidence in the long-term credibility of a development corp.

Lord Bailey of Paddington: I see your point, but is it not a bit chicken and egg? Do we not have it in London because we had the dev corps? We have OPDC and all the rest of them. I do not know; I worry about a new governance system, which is going to cost new money, people and time, whereas, if we used a model that is, in effect, a boilerplate, would we not just get it all done a little more quickly?

Hugh Ellis: It is an important challenge. To be clear about it, Milton Keynes is brilliant, but quite unique. If we are going to build a whole series of these out there, local government, with its current levels of bankruptcy, and with capacity issues, would find it very difficult to take on the role of development corporation, in my view. As someone who believes passionately in local democracy, this is not an accountability point. It is actually a capacity, focus and credibility point.

There is one final thing, I suppose, about it. The new towns programme post war was the biggest urban experiment at that time the world had ever seen. It worked through a development corporation tied into the commitment of central government. It is that commitment of central government that I am really worried about. I can imagine locally led development corporations having four years, then a change of mayor, which will happen frequently in the devolved areas, and the development corporation gets pulled.

That political uncertainty worries me. If you are going to do it, it is a 40-year process. On balance, the new town development corporation model with central accountability is the best for most places.

The Chair: Can I suggest we move on to the next group, which links very neatly into that?

Q128 **Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer:** It is such an interesting discussion that it is almost hard to know where to begin with the next set of questions. There is something at the top of my mind that has been prompted by your discussion there, which we have had in our evidence. A combination of local authorities came together; I think it was around the Harlow area and that there were five, which seems unlikely. Where local authorities are crossing boundaries, and the new town is sitting on the boundary of all of them, I wonder whether you could briefly talk about what might happen.

Slightly to follow on from that, it almost seems to me an absolute no-brainer that a community land trust is the long-term answer. It is there for the people. I would be interested to hear a bit more about why that model is not at the top of everybody's lips. Obviously, it would be at the top of Tom's.

Hugh Ellis: With the issue of strategic planning, the new Planning and Infrastructure Bill is reintroducing strategic planning. We are also going through a process of local government reorganisation. No Government have ever tried to do those at the same time and I am curious as to the outcome. The challenge around that is that seeing the process of new towns in these two distinct phases of designation and then operation is really helpful to my mind.

Local authorities may come together to push for a designation or an expansion of Harlow, but then the issue is how those local authorities agree what the delivery vehicle would be. In my view, in a case like that a development corporation really works, because trying to keep agreement between five authorities across electoral timescales is very difficult. If they agree now for an expansion programme led by a development corporation, that would be the best model.

Tom Chance: There is an example with Sherford new town, which has other problems. The two Devon authorities there recognised that it was going to span two authorities, did not have a natural parish or town council, and did not have any existing governance mechanisms. One solution they had was to create a community land trust to become the

steward for community assets in that new town. That has been established, is up and running, and has been reasonably successful. That could be used elsewhere.

Hugh mentioned Letchworth. The Letchworth community foundation is a sort of giant community land trust. It was one of the inspirations for the community land trust model. It holds land long term and uses that land value to help finance community services. Paul also mentioned the Parks Trust in Milton Keynes, which is similar but unfortunate in that it has a very narrow single purpose. It does not have a wider remit for social, economic and environmental development in the city.

One interesting question is what role these community land trusts have alongside the local authority. At a certain scale, you need proper democratic governance of a place. Particularly if these are urban extensions, there will be an existing local authority; presumably in most cases, that will take on that function. We think that there is a real value in having more community land ownership and more of an ability for the community to adapt and change the area over time, and to utilise the land value of the assets that they hold in order to support the development of their community.

As to why this is not more common, that is the million-dollar question that drives all of our work. I would characterise it as a cultural paternalism. If you look at the work of the New Towns Taskforce to date, the only way it can think of communities having any sort of an agency is by being engaged, as though there is—with no disrespect to Hugh—a sort of modernist godlike planner coming in and deciding what is going to happen in the area. The idea that people locally, who start up and run businesses, run voluntary associations, are active in their PTA and all the rest of it, can have some sort of a role in or vision about the place they live in just is not considered.

For us, it is vital that you create community-owned institutions in places from the start to begin to give people the tools to do some of these things. That can be done. Sometimes it has been done retrospectively. One of the many mechanisms in Northstowe was recognising that there is a complete lack of social infrastructure. They have now brought in a specialist developer to build two co-housing communities to try to seed a bit of community life into there. If you had done that at the outset, you would have several dozen people already mobilised together as neighbours with homes, a common house, a meeting place and the ability to mobilise some sort of a community life.

There is nothing stopping this being put in place. It has been done for over 100 years. It was done in Milton Keynes with self-build, housing co-operatives and a variety of approaches, and then we just forget it again. We have said to the Minister, who has been interested in this, that it should be right there in the centre. It should be absolutely central to the way that you do new towns that, alongside the development corporation, is a sort of community development body through a community land trust.

Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer: Did you get an enthusiastic response from the Minister?

Tom Chance: He was enthusiastic enough to ask us to go away and look at how it could work. We have reported back. We do not know what that is going to result in. We are going to wait until we see what the task force says. We are meeting with him again in the autumn to discuss his response to it.

These approaches are very marginal in the debate, which is led by professionals with very little voice for communities or consideration of how communities can be built into it. That is a great crying shame, because it was at the heart of the garden cities movement at the outset that came out of the co-partnership societies. It is part of our tradition of how we do placemaking and we ought to bring it back.

Q129 **Viscount Hanworth:** A great deal of information has already been imparted, but I would like to continue to ask about Milton Keynes. I fear that this is overworking Paul. I have to imagine that those who are living within it have a very different impression from those who suffer a giddy confusion in trying to penetrate from outside. There are no radial roads and no well-defined centres, in my experience.

Be that as it may, I should like to ask Paul to recount the succession of arrangements that have affected the governance of Milton Keynes. They have been mentioned, but I am not altogether clear about the evolution. The inception was in 1964 and the development corporation was established in 1967. It lasted, I think, until 1998. Thereafter, there was a whole confusion of governance, including the Commission for the New Towns, English Partnerships and the local MK council. What has been happening? Are there significant regrets about the way in which the governance evolved? Can you explain all of that and comment on it?

Paul Thomas: I would love to be able to, but I think that might be better for me to follow up in writing to set out a clear chronology and maybe some commentary alongside that. It might be easier for me to do after this, rather than through the meeting.

Viscount Hanworth: I think that the Commission for the New Towns was abolished in a rather contentious way. Can you put some light upon the politics, the motivation and so on? How did that affect Milton Keynes in particular?

Paul Thomas: That is quite difficult for me to comment on this morning. Not passing it to Hugh, but others who have been involved in this for longer may have a better perspective than I do on that particular question. I am happy to come back to you and the committee after to provide some kind of commentary on that, if that is okay.

Viscount Hanworth: That would be very valuable. I think that you are being a little reticent because you do not want to say things or express any outrage, which I am sure you feel, but perhaps others can comment.

Hugh Ellis: Milton Keynes, of course, escaped the premature winding up of most development corporations in 1980. Then a series of other oversight bodies ran, including the commission. This speaks to a much bigger point, really. The fate of the new towns programme and Milton Keynes was very much despite the framework that national government created for their oversight, not because of it, from 1980 onwards. That is to say that we had a variety of oversight bodies; we moulded into English Partnerships and now we have Homes England. In terms of how we see, manage and support strategic growth in this country, the lesson of the last 50 years has been high levels of uncertainty, huge amounts of institutional change and no clear long-term vision from government about how new placemaking should take place.

If I am going to be critical, which I have to be, the one glaring error at the moment is that there is no such vision of what these towns are meant to achieve. If you set off down that road, without clearly setting objectives for these places, you will fail. For the mark 1 new towns, there was a consensus post war that new towns were about creating new lives for people and transforming people's lives, health and opportunity. Designation of these places without a clear sense of what they are meant to achieve breaks every lesson of the new towns programme.

Viscount Hanworth: I have another question specific to Milton Keynes, if I may. How is the money extracted to support the upkeep of parks and other amenities, if it does not come from the council's rates nowadays?

Paul Thomas: There are two main routes. The first is that the Parks Trust has a property portfolio which, through the rental on those properties, supports part of the Parks Trust. As and when it moves into new areas and takes on new strategic open space, it will take an endowment from the developers and that will pay for the upkeep of that land over time. It is by no means a cheap solution. The endowment may well be a little more than a local council might expect to get for maintenance of open space but, because the Parks Trust is such a good body and provides such a good service, and the quality of open space in Milton Keynes is, I would say, second to none, developers are willing to pay that extra money.

Viscount Hanworth: There is sufficient money coming in.

Paul Thomas: There is sufficient money through the growth and the property portfolio, yes.

Viscount Hanworth: That sounds helpful.

Q130 **Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer:** I have one last follow-up on this. In the past, there have been engagement exercises for new developments generally, such as Planning for Real. Now that we have such a big range of tools at our disposal that were not even invented, I think, when the first Planning for Real sessions happened, could you talk a bit about specific examples of engagement that people might have at their disposal now?

Hugh Ellis: You are right to say that our problem is not about how to do it. We have a multitude of tools, and digitisation is alleged to make all of that easier. Since I am of a certain age, it does not make it easier for me, but I can understand that it would make it easier in principle. I am not at all worried about the fact that, as planners and a built-environment community, we understand how we can engage with people much better. The question is whether we want to. Tom's point is right: there is a separation between engaging people in proper participation in decision-making and their complete ownership of the place, and that is an important caveat.

The problem that, again, really worries me is that the general tone of planning reform, which these proposals fit into, is about not respecting local voices. If you look at the scheme of delegation in the planning Bill and what is being said about local infrastructure, there is a strong entrenched view in Whitehall that people are a problem. I encounter it directly. With the little credibility I have, I can say that the command and control view from Whitehall is incredibly damaging to this agenda. New towns have to be designated through, at least, respectful listening and, I would hope, full participation. Participation means sharing power, listening to local opinions and listening—brilliantly, I think—to local knowledge.

All those things are technically possible to achieve, but the governance question is the one that is missing around this agenda. How will that happen? Let us see a programme. Let us see a policy paper about how people are engaged in the designation and running of these towns. Finally, just because I am such an optimist for these places, there is the idea of democratic renewal once the places are designated, through citizens' assemblies, creating a new form of democracy and exploring all those ideas as a town builds itself. What an opportunity that would be, to start afresh, if you like, with local democracy.

Q131 Baroness Andrews: This follows on and it is a very short question. Paul, you raised the question of Northstowe and the attempt to retrofit some democratic engagement into Northstowe. It was disappointing that they did not get that right, because Northstowe has been on the cards for some time. I thought that we had actually learned some lessons by the time we got to deal with Northstowe.

In principle, everything that you say makes total sense, but new greenfield sites, or brownfield sites that are not urban extensions, pose a challenge, do they not? How do you engage with a population when you do not actually know what it is going to consist of? Maybe that does not exist anymore. No matter that we do not know the purpose of the town, we might know what the local demand for housing is, and therefore the type of people who would want to live there—because they had no other choice, frankly. What are the real challenges of the greenfield site?

Tom Chance: With Northstowe, there was originally a strategy to create a community land trust as the steward for a large number of assets, and it was dropped. This is one of these things about chopping and changing.

The Government, at a certain point, completely changed the whole delivery approach to Northstowe, which led to a lot of the problems there, and dropped a lot of these commitments.

Baroness Andrews: You were engaged in the beginning.

Tom Chance: We were not. There were a number of consultants who created a detailed proposal in the mid-noughties for the stewardship strategy for Northstowe, which included a community land trust to own energy infrastructure and a whole range of community assets, with a business model somewhat similar to the Parks Trust and the ability to be financially sustainable. That was shelved, along with a whole variety of other stuff. It has gone through lots of iterations of how it is being delivered. Homes England comes back into the picture, tries to deal with some of the problems, and one of the first things it does is to bring in this co-housing developer to try to bring some community life into the place.

The other thing I would comment on is another example from Cambridgeshire, which is somewhat more positive, talking of greenfield. It is called Kennett Garden Village. It is a development of about 500 homes, so quite small compared to these, but it is tripling the size of an existing parish in a garden community area. There was a community land trust at the start, which became the partner on the development. This is partly to pick up from what Hugh was saying also about engagement: if you are going to engage or involve local people, you have to be clear about whether it is being done in good faith. Are you clear about what influence they actually have over it?

In this case, the local community was given the choice. "You can have a community land trust, which is defined in law, has to be democratic, has a local membership, and so on and so forth, which will then be a partner with the landowners and the local authority in doing the master plan. It is not going to be engaged. It will be sitting at the table, signing off the master plan". They did a Planning for Real exercise, and the planners described how interesting it was working with a local community organisation that was constituted and that was going to own stuff at the end of it, and how it changed their perspective on what they were looking to influence.

It then sits on the development board, overseeing the development, which is being built out by a large-volume developer, negotiating over the assets that it is going to be receiving from the developer. It will own all of those assets at the end, so about a third of the affordable homes, all the open-space allotments and commercial real estate, which will give it some income. That is the basis for subsequent development in the area.

It is very unlikely that you are going to create a new town in an area where there is no existing population whatsoever. We can begin to structure them in, not as people who are going to be having a say on the planning committee, but having some sort of an agency and control over where their businesses are going to be located, where their allotments are going to be and so on. We need to enrich those forms of engagement

and ownership alongside the other forms, whereby you can go along to a consultation evening, a Planning for Real exercise or all the other sorts of exercises.

Also, it is really important for public confidence, because there is very low trust in the planning system currently. Polling done by Grosvenor a few years ago indicated that something like 3% of the public trust developers and only 7% of the public trust local planning authorities when it comes to public consultation in the planning system. We need to do something to recognise the dire state of public trust that people have in this. Rather than giving people some sort of tokenistic form of engagement, give them something that they can actually have some ownership and control over, which can be complementary to the role of a really strong public-led development corporation in developing the overall site out.

The Chair: That is great. There is a lot of read-through to the planning Bill and the debate we had the other day in the Chamber. Thank you very much for that. We are moving on next to planning for an uncertain future.

Q132 **Viscount Younger of Leckie:** I want to pick up on what Hugh was saying earlier. He made some very important points about purpose and direction. We have been discussing the 40-year stewardship, or the need for the 40-year planning and maintaining that. This is a fascinating area in terms of looking ahead at vision and what the future holds, and must be enormously challenging for town planners.

We need to take into account smart technology, driverless cars, which are here with us really, air taxis, AI, automation and drone technology—meaning that things are going to be delivered by drone. Then we need to take account of climate change, with droughts, heatwaves, floods et cetera, and let us add in healthy homes. I think that this chimes with many of you. These are just a few of the things that need to be considered.

My question, and I know Lord Cameron may want to follow up, is how we can anticipate future need. How can the new town master planners possibly take into account all of this? How do they do it? Crucially, what are the limits to this? Let us start with those. If I may, I will start with Paul, even though I have mentioned Hugh—we will come back to you—because of the Milton Keynes experience.

Paul Thomas: There are currently driverless cars and drones doing deliveries in Milton Keynes. We are very pleased as a city to be a test bed. That is what we like to call ourselves.

As for the importance of vision, as Hugh said in his response on what new towns are lacking, you have to have the vision. Milton Keynes had that at its outset. It was a green field and then it was a city of 300,000 people, not through consultation with local residents, because there were few, but because of the vision of planners and the Government at the time.

We have done the same kind of thing to plot our vision for the next 25 years. We commissioned and led a piece of work called the strategy for 2050, which set out how the city would grow over a period that is currently longer than any local plan would look. It is probably akin to how long a development corporation might expect to be in place for. Within that vision, we set out some big topics and themes. We have not deviated from those. Some of the detail has changed within them, which is the strength of a strong vision.

One of the two important things for the strategy for 2050 is that it had corporate buy-in. It was adopted by the council before it became a local planning authority document. Our council plan is in line with our strategy for 2050. Our local plan, which is being worked on at the moment, is also in line with our strategy for 2050. To have corporates and local planning authorities working so close together gives investors confidence. It gives residents confidence in what is going to happen. Like I say, it sets the strong vision out.

The other thing about Milton Keynes is its physical form. It is a grid road structure, as most of you will know. Some like it; some loathe it. It is a really strong framework, but it allows us the flexibility to change the content of those grid squares with very little impact on surrounding grid squares. We could turn employment areas into resi. We can turn residential areas into any other use that we like, subject to planning. We can use our grid road network for cars, our emerging metro system and driverless shuttles. We can fly drones along it. The strength of the vision as a document, and the strength of the framework as a document and as a place, has probably put us in quite a good place.

Viscount Hanworth: You are proposing that the very curious topography of Milton Keynes is an advantage for future developments.

Paul Thomas: I believe that it is. I do not think that it is everyone's cup of tea and I do not think future towns will necessarily be designed in this way, but we have made it work for us and it works really well.

Viscount Hanworth: Trams can be imposed upon it as well.

Paul Thomas: Our dual carriageway network around the city, or through the city in its grid, means that we can look at dedicating a lane for a tram system. Because cars have lots of opportunities to take different routes, we can do it with very little impact on our existing traffic network.

Viscount Younger of Leckie: You were talking about 2050. When was the beginning of that? Are we talking about 40 years going back from 2050?

Paul Thomas: That is a good question. We adopted the strategy for 2050 five years ago.

Viscount Younger of Leckie: That is interesting.

Viscount Hanworth: Do you have plans for trams currently?

Paul Thomas: We do, yes.

Viscount Hanworth: Can you give us an indication of the schedule?

Paul Thomas: The metro system that we are looking to implement in the city has been through two business cases and we are currently in conversation with various government departments about how it might be funded. It is not a heavy tram, so there are no rails. It is a rubber-tyre solution, which will run on three routes that traverse the city.

Q133 **Lord Cameron of Dillington:** Some of my questions have already been asked by Lord Hanworth. There is a saying that people being born today will find jobs that have not yet been invented and I am sure that the same applies to life generally. We do not really know how our communities are going to work. I am wondering whether you could envisage what real changes are going to happen in the next 40 years. That is kind of a surmise for you.

My second question is more pointed. Some of us went to Copenhagen to look at some of the new towns they are developing there. One of the developments, Ørestad, started in the 1990s. It was a very narrow site and they had not anticipated, for instance, quite a simple thing—that a large number of young families were going to settle there and therefore they were going to need more schools. Suddenly they had to build more schools in a space that they did not really have and these schools were kind of squashed in.

I was wondering how you allow for those sorts of changes if you are developing a new town. If you are developing your new town, as you were saying, Paul, in your villages, bit by bit, in units, which I accept is a good idea, how do you allow for the possible changes that society will demand of you as you go along?

Paul Thomas: The specific Milton Keynes example is that we built in space for change. Within our grid squares, we had sites that were not developed and that could accommodate future community facilities, schools or different forms of housing.

Lord Cameron of Dillington: What were they while they were waiting? Were they green space?

Paul Thomas: Yes. We did the same with our road network. Our roads are obviously in a very set, regimented grid, but some of the grid roads are expected to expand out further as the city expands, so we have allocated grid road reserves. They cause some consternation; there is no denying that. At the moment, they are green space that families use and houses look out on to, but their policy designation is a grid road reserve. As and when the city expands, the grid road will move through that space and then move on to the next grid square.

Tom Chance: I will add one very brief point to this. I have absolutely no idea what we will need in 40 years' time. I do not think that anyone else does either. Part of the way you have flexibility is to unlock the dynamism of the people who will be living and working in that new town.

There is a question of equity as to how that is done, which is why, for us, land ownership is very important to ensure that a wide range of people within that community, including the business community and the residential community, can flex and change what they are doing in the new town in future.

That is part of the purpose of the community land trust model—to have deliberately broad objects around economic, social and environmental development and to not over-specify what you are trying to do with it. If you create new towns in which you immediately privatise all of the land into little pockets with organisations that have certain narrow commercial objectives, you will constrain the ability of that community to adapt over time. Particularly given climate change, as mentioned, and the changes that will affect communities, having both the role of the local authority and other forms of land ownership is a big part of enabling that flexibility.

We have seen this certainly with high streets. Some of the worst high streets are the ones with very fragmented ownership, absentee owners and extractive investors that are simply looking for land value, do not care about what is happening in that high street and are strangling it. It is a contemporary example of where we have created ownership structures that make it difficult to adjust to change, which has happened with the decline of retail.

Hugh Ellis: When Letchworth was built, we had an era of global conflict and transformational change in the economy that no one had envisaged, so I am confident that change is always with us and we keep trying to work this out. Interestingly, everyone was going to travel by monorail when we were planners in the 1960s, so a little bit of caution is necessary here.

It is true that the nature of work is going to be transformed again. That means that the nature of travel and movement will be transformed. You partly deal with that in the way that Paul has described and I will not repeat. It is very difficult to know where that economic change ends; it is much easier to understand where the climate challenge ends, because we are much more equipped to understand that. We have projections 300 years out from the Environment Agency for critical infrastructure, so that is the timescale that somebody needs to be thinking about in relation to this.

The case for new communities, which we might come back to, is definitely going to be about managing that climate change, the relationship between water use in the south-east and where we are heading currently with drought circumstances; and the fact that, although no professional wants to say it out loud, we will be moving communities on a big scale in this country within the next 30 years. When they cancelled Lowestoft's strategic barrage last year, that town had a death sentence written around it, which nobody wants to talk about publicly, but it needs to be placed on the record, because the insurance industry and investors will rapidly not be able to go there. We are going to need to rethink England. In rethinking England, new settlements will

be a part of that. Climate resilience in places, in terms of design, will be really critical.

The only piece of advice I can give about what success and failure look like from your Danish experience is this: do not begin a series of new communities based on their contribution to GDP growth as a design idea. You must always begin the creation of place from the human experience and the messiness of what it is to be human. There is a great long tradition in this country of being really good at this and creating a framework that people can grow lives around and the conditions that people can make choices for. That creates flexibility.

Milton Keynes, for example, through its green space, creates that opportunity for people's relationship with nature. The cultural tradition the TCPA represents—it is deeply unfashionable and linked to our wider utopian tradition—is to start with the human experience. From that point out, it is quite hard to make catastrophic mistakes. Where we have made them, we have decided that we know what it is to be human at that moment in time and imposed that vision upon people. Tom is quite right that, to build flexibility, you give people a long-term choice and stake in the communities. That is why places such as Letchworth still do pretty well.

Lord Cameron of Dillington: You will be glad to hear that that is the main lesson we brought back from Copenhagen.

Q134 **Viscount Younger of Leckie:** I have a final question, which is just to come back to the limits. Hugh, you have touched on this. An easy decision, perhaps, is to be sure that there are enough green spaces and parks. Less easy is the question of infrastructure, roads and transport. As I say, if we have more air transport, drone delivery and driverless cars, perhaps the roads do not need to be quite so wide or there are fewer of them and all that. Perhaps we can start with Hugh. What are the limits? What are the great challenges in looking ahead with the vision? I might hear very briefly from Tom and Paul as well.

Hugh Ellis: That economic and transport one is certainly a challenge. It relates also to a zero-carbon future. That has to be blended into that. As I said, I am less exercised by the way that drone deliveries and that new technology might impact on people's lives, except to say that connection between people will become much more important—not in the way we traditionally understand it, in terms of commuting and transport, but in the fact that it will be possible to live a life without ever seeing another human being very rapidly, and already is.

I am sorry that it does not directly answer. I am really exercised by how you create communities that solve, for example, the critical loneliness problem that exists in our society and the way that that plays through into GP appointments and the cost on the NHS of that. It is that human connection between people. I say this slightly provocatively to Paul. We were, as planners, obsessed with transport planning in Milton Keynes. We learned lessons from America we may not have learned so well.

It is really that challenge, the human challenge, that seems to me to be the critical one, closely followed by the fact that we will be living in a critically unstable climate. That will mean the way we design places is going to have to be radically different, from sustainable urban drainage all the way through to property-level resilience—all the things that are not, frankly, being taken seriously enough at the moment.

Tom Chance: I do not think that I have anything to add. That was very well answered.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That was a good session. The next is the final area, with Baroness Andrews and Lord Bailey.

Q135 **Baroness Andrews:** We are coming back to the beginning, in a way. You have already made your position clear, Hugh, that you do not think the Government have a clear vision for their new town strategy. I do not want to misrepresent you, so correct me if I am wrong about that. You are not the first to say this to this committee. We have had a lot of evidence that makes it clear that this set of prescriptions, so growth, affordable housing and exemplary developments that we can learn from, are a bit of a mixture. It may be that we have too many purposes, rather than a single, clear strategic purpose.

Is it possible to make a clear strategic purpose out of something as messy as what you have, rightly, described? If we are building for people in a future we do not understand, which is critically unstable not just in terms of climate but in many other ways as well, is it more sensible not to pin oneself down to something that may be really difficult to achieve, and to be more modest but clear? Is there anything that the Government can still do that would reassure you that they know what to expect and there is a predictable outcome? I will ask that of Hugh first, because you inspired the question, but will go across the team.

Hugh Ellis: The experience is that it is extremely difficult to get it right, but it is worth trying because without that you have no moral compass for what you are attempting to achieve. In the past, we had things such as the Urban Task Force. It has been 25 years since this country had any urban policy. How will towns, villages and communities develop? What is the sense of what the Government want to achieve?

We have now slipped back to before sustainable development, before 1987. Sustainable development, which you might expect to be at the front and centre of this, is simply not spoken of by the Government in terms of a core agenda for what these places might do.

To be more helpful, if I were pushed to give a precise answer, the NHS's Healthy New Towns provides you with the foundation of the objectives of these new places. That programme was interesting and useful. The health and well-being of people and the planet is the heart of the vision. It does not want to be too prescriptive because Milton Keynes needs flexibility, but we need to know the direction of travel, and that is the direction of travel. How can we create places where human beings can thrive with nature, not in opposition to it, over the long term?

Baroness Andrews: Is that not an outcome as well as a purpose, though? The Government's challenge is to make people want to own this new policy initiative. They want us to believe that we need new towns, that we have the right idea about why we need them, and that they are going to be deliverable. As you say, you cannot hurry any of this. Healthy towns would be the best outcome, surely, from a clear prescription about why we need new towns. Do new towns deliver growth, for example?

Hugh Ellis: They certainly do. New towns can meet multiple public policy objectives. As we have said, that is the great thing about them. At the moment, they are focused on only one, which is GDP growth. That assumes that you thought planning was the problem in the first place, which I heartily do not think is the case.

If you want to broaden that out, it is important to have a holistic vision of what these places are intended to do. All I would say about that is that we have done that before. It was implicit in 1946 during the parliamentary debates. It was absolutely shot through with a notion of really high-quality design based on social justice. During the parliamentary debate, the Minister stood up and said, "I want the builder and the architect to walk down the same street together and live on the same street. I want these to be experiments in the best way that people can live together". These were all phrases about the ambition.

What we get now is simply, "This is a contribution to GDP growth. This is about the growth agenda". That leaves me cold and, interestingly, it leaves most of the population pretty cold because it does not create a vision of a human experience. The idea of that vision remains clear. The outcomes may well be health and well-being but, without that holistic vision, how is accountability ever to be held up in relation to delivery of these places? How is enthusiasm ever to be generated for them?

Baroness Andrews: Is it possible to be bold if you are talking about settlements of 10,000 people? Are you saying that the whole programme simply is not bold enough?

Hugh Ellis: It is not. With all due respect, a programme of 10,000-home urban extensions, most of which we probably already know about and most of which might already have been planned, is not the visionary programme of new towns that we at TCPA would have hoped for. It is as simple as that. The risk is that a 10,000-home urban extension—not in Milton Keynes, because you have a good plan—could just be an opportunity for another one of those isolated developments, of which we have developed a number, that do not provide the right social facilities or connections. If you are going to put 10,000 homes on a place, you must replan the whole place. It is the Peterborough example: you cannot bolt it on.

Baroness Andrews: Would you agree with that, Tom and Paul?

Tom Chance: One aspect of this, beyond the abstraction of healthy new towns in general, is that places are very different. I probably know the

least of anyone in this room as to which places might have new towns but, if we think about the names that have been suggested, the nature of the economic, social and environmental challenges faced in these areas is very different.

The idea that you will drive this agenda by simply saying, "We want to build as many homes as possible to contribute to GDP" is definitely the wrong place to start. When the announcements are made about locations, it will be interesting to see the extent to which each of them has a distinctive vision as to how that new town is going to address some of the particular challenges in that place.

It goes back to Lord Bailey's question about the role of mayoral development corporations and the question about local political leadership. Notwithstanding his expertise on how you deliver it, there has to be some sort of local vision as to how this is going to fix, address or enhance some aspect of that local place as opposed to simply being an exercise in letting a fairly broken development industry knock out as many boxes in a field as it can.

Paul Thomas: There are two questions there. First, how can the Government deliver on their housing agenda? It will not surprise you to hear that I think government should look for places that already deliver a lot of houses, that have a track record for growth, that were planned for growth and where growth is widely accepted as being okay by residents and certainly by political leaders, which we have in Milton Keynes. There are places that can accommodate and start to contribute to the figure of 1.5 million.

New towns is almost a separate argument. The new towns will not deliver any of those 1.5 million within the term of this Parliament, but they can be planned and they will deliver consistently and well over the next 30, 40 or 50 years. It is not just a one-off 1.5 million problem. More and then more after that will be required. New towns are the solution for that.

The Government and the task force should look to the places that have done new towns well. You have heard a few names mentioned already and I know you have started to explore some international examples. We have to learn from those examples. We have to take a long, hard look at what we have done well and what is not working. Some of that might mean changes in governance. Some of it might mean that the Government have to put a lot of investment into making these places work.

Milton Keynes was created from a £700 million loan from the Government in 1969. That is £12 billion in today's money. I know we are not talking about GDP, but our GDP in 2022 was £16.1 billion. We are an example; we can demonstrate that investment in new towns does work. Milton Keynes is a really good place to live. The records are starting to show that, as well as me as a planner obviously thinking that.

Baroness Andrews: Finally, would it be easier if the Government were

to make clear what they really expect? It sounds as if you are committed to the notion of the exemplary new town. Would it make it clear if there were an oversight body or a real visible champion? That would be somebody who could create and carry the narrative and make sure that it is associated with leadership and with the Government.

Hugh Ellis: An oversight body is essential. Homes England has a lot of power; it also has some quite complex responsibilities. Placemaking at this scale for a new towns programme is a very special idea and requires a body that can support that politically.

It would also require a change in the politics. In 1946, a Minister was on the train going to parish halls, arguing the case for new towns. There was an attempt to persuade. That was in the context of a different political environment where we did know who we were trying to house. Very largely, we were talking about people who had been de-housed through warfare. In that sense, you cannot magic that; you have to work. It is very hard work to build that political consensus, but it is ultimately worth it.

Q136 **Lord Bailey of Paddington:** In the short time we have left, imagine that the Government did have a purpose that they knew. I am of the firm belief that they absolutely do not. The agenda is being driven by people who spent too much time in London and think the solution in this country is just to build more homes, when a home works only if you have a job, neighbours, pets and all the rest of that. Building homes is not the answer.

I will come to Tom first, please. Imagine that they did have a vision. How could they best go about articulating that vision to the public? Given the way that they have put this out, I sense that they are just going to start a fight rather than bring people on board. I could be incorrect about that. How do you feel?

Tom Chance: They probably need to start by just putting to one side, as related to what Paul said, the target of 1.5 million homes and taking this outside of being perceived as a means to achieve the Government's growth and housing delivery agenda.

It needs to be articulated, as I said earlier, in terms of a whole variety of visions for different places. If I think about some of the local authorities that I have spoken to, Liverpool has been depopulated for the best part of 60 years and is still trying to bring itself back. It has had a long history of housing interventions, which have led to a very toxic legacy in the city and a lot of distrust in the city with the whole housing system. If you are trying to get the people of Merseyside behind a new town, saying, "We are going to give this existing system, which you hate so much, the ability to help us deliver 10,000 homes in the area" it will not wash. It needs to be a place-based vision, which gives the people in those areas confidence that they will have some sort of stake in something that is going to improve their lives, improve their area and deal with the potentially quite long-standing issues they have had.

That will be very fundamentally different to the case that will be made for Milton Keynes, which is that we are a successful growing city, we have had decades of continuous growth, we have strong economic foundations, we are close to London, blah, blah, blah.

The purpose needs to be a sense of renewal for places based on their local narrative. That is challenging for a Government who want to make a simple announcement about housing delivery. At community level, that is where that trust needs to be built from.

Lord Bailey of Paddington: I want to ask you one other question, Tom. I am a little more persuaded about community land trusts from listening to you speak this morning. How do you give people a sense of local ownership? One of my many big challenges with all this is about the revenue streams into the future. How do you give a community some ownership? I will come to Dr Ellis afterwards about the governance structure. How do you give people a sense of ownership? Where does the stream of revenue come from to continue that ownership into the future?

Tom Chance: It is something that we do very badly. I used to work on this for the GLA in London. The GLA does this very badly. I will just give you two examples.

One is in America. In Boston, there is a community land trust where the city authorities vested 30 acres of land into a community land trust that over the ensuing decades has been able to do what they describe as development without displacement. They are not sitting on it as nimbys; they are developing their area. They lead that process as landowners, working hand in hand with the city authorities to do that and then reinvesting particularly in empowerment programmes for young people within their community, trying to ensure that there is racial diversity in the leadership of their community and that it is being led by and reflective of that place. That is an example of powerful community leadership that can be unlocked when you give community the tools to do something.

In London, people have been trying to do this for many years and have largely been rebuffed. One interesting example was a site in Tottenham, in Haringey, called St Ann's, which is a hospital site. There was a proposal that the local community were very opposed to because it had a very low level of affordable housing and was not making very good use of the site. Going back to the comment about Planning for Real, the community led a process to ask, "What would it look like if we could develop the site ourselves?" They came up with a proposal that had double the housing density with much higher levels of affordable housing and more amenities that would meet local needs.

That led to the GLA buying the land out and then bringing forward a development that almost exactly matched what the community had proposed, but the GLA would not take the final step, which would have been to trust the community that had led to this process and give them some sort of ownership of that development. The most that it was willing

to do was to say that 56 of the 950-odd homes that were being developed would be put into a new community body, which is now a BME-led housing co-op.

If the GLA had taken the Boston approach, it would have transferred that land into a community land trust and given the community the ability to work as partners, as well as some trust and ownership. That is what we critically miss. We spend too much time coming up with elaborate ways to engage, consult and ignore local people and not enough time giving them the tools to do something to make their area better.

Lord Bailey of Paddington: Dr Ellis, I have a specific question for you. What is the right governance structure? How could the Government sell it to local communities? If you are going to come and build 10,000 homes, most people will not be ecstatic about having that on their doorstep. They are going to need some support to accept it. Part of that would be saying, "This is the kind of governance structure that there would be. Here is what that would look like and how you would be involved. Here is how some local power would be in your hands".

Hugh Ellis: Very quickly, this takes us back to the very beginning. You make sure that the development corporation itself has a clear remit in law to be sensitive to those community needs and create places for people on the board. Local government and communities need to be there. That is a really important point.

Secondly, there is a multiple set of choices about how you do governance in terms of community land trusts and the other models that Tom has described, all of which are really powerful and can run in parallel to that process.

The heart of it, to make it practically realisable and fundable, is all based on land value capture. You have to make that model really work. It is a simple response. Currently, too many people are extracting too much value for development, which means extremely poor-quality development at the wrong price and in the wrong place. If you mutualise those values—that is the Letchworth model—and set up a stewardship body to hold them, you have a different kind of development. It looks perhaps a bit more Danish, but it is essentially operating exactly like a mutualised building society operates.

That model of development is Letchworth. It is partly the new towns. That is the learning that could break this problem between nimby and yimby—which are two words that I wish no one would use ever again.

Q137 The Chair: I wonder whether I could just ask a very quick final question. This is a quick-fire round. It is perhaps more to Dr Ellis and Tom but, Paul, feel free to answer. We have heard a lot about holistic visions and citizens assemblies. Tom, you mentioned that engagement is a tick-box exercise. In this room we do not necessarily all agree with the Government's purpose, but we agree on the virtue of new towns, growth and development. How do you engage? This all sounds very idealistic or

utopian. We want this grand vision, but how do you engage with people?

Dr Ellis, you talked about a Minister going up to a parish meeting. With modern technology, that can be done sitting in your own bedroom, if you so wish. How do we do it? Should it be mandatory? Should we look at exploring more consultation in the hope of appealing to yimbys and bridging that divide?

I have one more very quick one. If you were Prime Minister for one day and you could pass one thing to fix this problem, what would it be? Go on, Dr Ellis. You have the answers.

Hugh Ellis: How can we rebuild public trust in planning through one fix? I would give communities proper legal rights in the planning process to have a voice that is clearly described in the designation and running. I would put that into law. All my experience suggests that your point is right. Unless it has a hook in law, it can always be negotiated away or passed over. These things need a legal basis so that people can have confidence in them.

How you do that is, in some sense, a second question. Do you know what? Ministers need to go to places.

The Chair: No, I totally agree. Try to get them before committees and you will see how difficult it is.

Tom Chance: What one change would I make? I would probably legislate so that every new development had a community land trust or some community land in it. That is not just because I represent the network. We have that concept with social housing, for example. Every new development should have a proportion of affordable housing in it. We have other things that we include. Community-owned land for businesses, residents and a variety of community needs could be part of every single development. That would change the relationship that the public have with development from one of merely being a consultee to one of being agents of change.

Paul Thomas: The problem with engagement is not the tools that we use to engage, but the fact that after engagement often very little happens. The key for me is that, after you engage, you actually do it. We do that in Milton Keynes. We had a site for 5,500 homes that was in our local plan in 2019. It had a framework in 2021, an application in 2022 and it was approved eight months later. They started on site six months after that. People were engaged and they saw activity.

The second thing is to demonstrate to residents, not the new residents but the existing residents, how that growth has benefited them. Again, in Milton Keynes, our growth has contributed £15 million towards our new radiotherapy unit. That is paid for by growth. We need to engage, do and then demonstrate the benefits.

The Chair: You had more than one thing there, Paul, but I will let you off. It is classic politician. Thank you so much. Genuinely, this has been an amazing discussion. We have come to the end of our deliberations in

this inquiry, which has been very worth while. We massively appreciate the time that you have given us today. If there are some bits that you want to follow up on, please feel free to write to us. I am sure we will come and visit you in Milton Keynes before too long. Thank you very much on behalf of us all for your time this morning.