



Built Environment Committee

Corrected oral evidence: New towns: Creating Communities

Tuesday 11 November 2025

12.20 pm

Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord Gascoigne (The Chair); Baroness Andrews; Lord Bailey of Paddington; Lord Cameron of Dillington; Viscount Hanworth; Baroness Janke; Lord Mawson; Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer; Viscount Younger of Leckie.

Evidence Session No. 2

Heard in Public

Questions 27 - 32

Witnesses

I: Edwin Heathcote, Architecture and Design Critic, *Financial Times*; Phineas Harper, Independent Writer and Critic.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

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

Examination of witnesses

Edwin Heathcote and Phineas Harper.

Q27 **The Chair:** Good afternoon. Welcome back to the House of Lords. We are here in our second session, where we are focusing on design. I am delighted to have the second wave of witnesses before us. I wondered whether you would perhaps introduce yourselves and give us a bit of background if you could, please.

Edwin Heathcote: I am an architect and I am the architecture critic of the *Financial Times*.

Phineas Harper: I write for the *Guardian*, but I used to be the chief executive of Open City, which is a kind of think tank and cultural organisation about architecture and the built environment.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Welcome very much to our committee. As you know, we have a series of questions that we are going to ask. We are going to go around this horseshoe. First up, we have Baroness Miller and Baroness Andrews.

Q28 **Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer:** Welcome. We are very pleased you are here. In the last session, we heard about the importance of place, history, culture, topography and so on in trying to engage on building new towns. My worry is that that is just going to stifle innovation because we will always be rather looking backwards to successes such as Poundbury. How are we going to encourage the new and exciting architecture and design that we could be having and that perhaps young people aspire to? Do they aspire to it?

Edwin Heathcote: Is new, exciting, innovative and experimental new towns what we really want? I have just noticed in my paper there was a big feature on Neom, which is a new, experimental and bold new town in Saudi Arabia, which is not going to happen because it is unrealistic. Maybe the lesson from that and from a lot of other very experimental architecture is that people are relatively conservative. I say this as someone who is a big fan and advocate of modern architecture.

We more or less know what people want from cities and what makes cities work. If you look at where people go to take short city breaks around Europe or the world, it is not to new cities; it is to historic cities. We need to be a bit careful when we are talking about experimental approaches to new towns.

In a way, the plan needs to be relatively conservative, but it needs to have space in it for happy accidents. It needs to leave space for changes in the way people live, for changes in lifestyles and for cultural changes. It needs to have a diversity of accommodation, to accommodate a wide range of people and so on. We do not need to worry too much about experimental architecture because that might come if it is necessary.

Phineas Harper: There is a lot of wisdom in that. I am slightly more in favour of experimentation, but the focus of the experimentation is not wacky new shapes or exciting new materials. It is thinking, "What are we currently getting wrong and how could we do that better?" Often there are lessons from the past that we could be learning from. There are lessons from what our colleagues in Europe are doing.

We do not have to reinvent the wheel to be innovative. I am thinking of a report by Arup, the engineers, on material cultures that looked at materials in South Yorkshire and the north-east, and how you could retool the agricultural economy to grow construction materials. That approach would be fantastic for the economy of those regions. It would be incredibly sustainable to grow timber, straw and ecological construction materials from scratch. It would also mean that the houses that we were producing and refurbishing with that approach were intrinsically connected to the land that they were on and the communities that they were serving.

Really good innovation works with heritage; it works with historic architecture. It enhances those things. If you have an approach that is turning its back on the past and refusing to learn the lessons of history, that is not innovative. That is the same old defunct approach that we have had again and again.

The really interesting younger practices, the people I am most excited about in the architecture industry and the development industry, are the people who are marrying heritage and innovation, and knitting those things together. That is what I would love to see more of in the new towns programme.

Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer: That is a very interesting example. To follow up, it would be good to have some examples. I accept what you say about taking the lessons from the past. One of the epidemics we hear a lot about is the epidemic of loneliness. What lesson would you take from any of the new towns that you are aware of to start to deal with that?

Edwin Heathcote: One thing that you need to take from that is density. In England, our planning laws, with a few exceptions, militate against density once you are outside the city centres. They are based on bizarre dimensional precepts. For example, windows need to be 21 metres away from each other for privacy. The road dimensions are based on the turning circle of the largest possible vehicle that would ever go down that road, which might be a dust car or a fire engine. They are kind of idiotic. The basic dimensional dumbness of them is extraordinary.

If we look at cities such as York or Canterbury, which have city centres that everyone enjoys being in, they are very dense and very tight. The streets are close together and people live in close proximity to one another. Not everyone likes that. I appreciate there is always a desire for a more suburban existence. The towns that we build need to have a mix of those dimensional spatial experiences, so you have a dense centre and

then maybe a more suburban edge. There needs to be that mix of possibilities. Otherwise, you get a monoculture. What we have now is two, three or four-bed houses being built in car-dependent estates completely away from public transport with no infrastructure built into them.

Fundamentally—this is one of the points that I really want to make, and it is drifting a little bit away from your question, so forgive me—the Government need to be involved in this to make sure that it happens in the right way. This cannot be left to the private sector. It cannot be left just to developers because it is too important. This is the future of the country.

The lesson that we can take from the towns—this is your question—that were built after the 1946 New Towns Act is that they all had government-led development corporations, which employed land value capture. I am sure we will come on to this later. It is economic rather than aesthetic, but it is critical. At the moment, we are allowing the private sector to Hoover up all the value from planning permissions. Instead, the new towns need to be able to capture that value uplift and reinvest it in community assets, which are the things that stop people being lonely.

Phineas Harper: I completely agree that loneliness is a rising problem and that it is linked to poor housing design. The Design Council reckons that between 50% and 75% of new houses are poorly designed. That is quite a grim finding, especially if we are about to build a whole load more of them. I am very lucky to live in a 1964 council estate, which has an incredibly strong community. The strength of that community is partly because of the way it is designed. It is because of the generosity of the communal facilities and public spaces within that estate, the pedestrian routes through it and so on.

I grew up in a new build on the edge of a town with bad public transport links and nowhere for kids to play. It felt very different; it felt very isolated. I knew none of my neighbours. That was probably an early 1990s housing scheme. There is a real need for this stuff.

The thing that I want to point to on the question of loneliness is the role of the police. When we did the last wave of new towns after the war, and in fact all the very successful more historic types of housing that we did before that, the police did not have that much say on how these things were designed. Since 1989 in Britain—it is only in Britain; this is not repeated around Europe—our police forces have got more and more involved in the design of houses, schools and public spaces. That often leads to some extremely negative outcomes, unfortunately.

They have this programme called Secured by Design. Ostensibly, it is there to reduce opportunities for crime. Many built environment professionals, including security consultants, feel that in fact the result of the Secured by Design programme is more isolated and fragmented communities and neighbours who do not know or trust each other.

I have a quote here from the architect Russell Curtis, who is a housing specialist. He says, "The problem with Secured by Design is that it's diametrically opposed to good placemaking and promotes fear. Britain has a huge problem with loneliness and isolation. We should be taking steps to address this, but Secured by Design does the exact opposite, encouraging people to live in fear of their neighbours".

It includes recommendations such as, "If you are putting benches in, don't use benches. Use individual seats set several metres apart". It warns against providing too many footpaths or even cycle lanes. It discourages the use of well-equipped communal areas in housing blocks. There are lots of little ways that this guidance is really contributing to the isolation crisis that you are talking about. It is partly why my 1960s estate is so successful, but the 1990s estate that I grew up in was so unsuccessful from a community point of view.

In terms of the new towns, we need to have a critical conversation about the right level of police involvement in the design of these places. Are there other security professionals we should be involving who have more expertise? That would be a very welcome piece of leadership. Of course, finding the political will to do that is very challenging, but it needs to happen somehow.

Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer: That is very interesting. Would you send us that quote?

Phineas Harper: Of course, yes.

Q29 **Baroness Andrews:** It is very good to see both of you. We had a very interesting contextual discussion earlier about topography, landscape and how every place has meaning. It may not necessarily immediately have character, but it certainly has a location in the landscape. I am very interested to hear what you said about reconnection, Phineas.

One of the differences between now and 1946, which I think you are moving towards, is the difference between experiment and innovation. After the war, the degree of social engineering in the new towns was much more ambitious. We began to talk about this earlier, but they were partly the project of a paternalistic state, which thought it knew what the people wanted. We have moved away from that. Our new settlements are going to be much more democratic and designable, I hope, by the people who will move into them.

The Government are keen on innovation. Where do you see innovation being within reach for those new communities? They may not yet exist in some places, although most of the communities that are planned are going to be urban extensions rather than greenfield sites. You could argue that that will make the doing of it easier. It should be easier to create the happy accidents because you know you are dealing with a fixed community, as it were.

Edwin Heathcote: I am not sure I entirely agree with the initial premise of your question about social engineering and paternalism. You might say

it was social engineering. When Stevenage was built in 1947, all of the first tranche of 10,000 houses and dwellings were council. You might say it is a kind of social engineering, but, after the war and with the bombed-out Docklands and so on, there was a need to house people. In a way, the assumption was that everyone needs council housing. We are in a very different moment now, but the underlying suggestion is that everyone needs council housing now as well. To some extent, there is a vast need for social housing.

We do not want to create an economic monoculture. We would want to intersperse that with private housing as well. In a way, we now see anything that is not led by the private sector as paternalistic. That is probably a mistake. The state needs to get involved in this and not care about being seen as patronising.

Baroness Andrews: Can I just stop you there? I absolutely agree. We are not talking about paternalism now. We are talking about an enabling state, which can put things within the reach of people. I am sorry to interrupt, but that is an important distinction.

Edwin Heathcote: In Germany, Switzerland and central Europe, planning is very different. Local authorities have big planning departments and they employ professional planners and architects. They have their own architects. The framework is established. In Germany, it might be too rigorous. The framework that they have set up is too rigorous.

Here, there is nothing. Here, effectively, the private sector makes a proposal. A developer makes a proposal and the local authority says, "Yes, that's okay, but could you make it two storeys smaller, put in a playground, do a little bit more Section 106?", or whatever it might be. We need to switch that. The Government need to plan these places. The government authorities need to have really excellent planners and architects of the highest calibre planning this stuff. In those plans, you need to make space for innovation and experimentation.

The plan does not need to necessarily tell you what the city is going to look like. It just needs to lay a framework. Look at New York. You have a grid in New York, which works impeccably and has worked impeccably since 1780 or whatever it is. It is very simple. The plan needs to be there. Then you can have the Empire State Building, the Rockefeller Center, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the opera all growing within that framework. There needs to be an intelligent framework that acknowledges the topography, the space, the existing buildings and so on. Within that, you can innovate.

Innovation in 20 years' time might look very different from innovation now. We are thinking very far into the future. The mistake that the modernists made in the first wave of new towns was to assume, "This is the way that everyone is going to live in the future", using cars, with asbestos-lined houses, aluminium windows or whatever it was. Those things lasted 60 years, 10 years or whatever it was. We always think that

our vision of the future is the vision of the future, but my vision of the future now is probably out of date already to a 20 year-old. We have to create the framework and not worry too much about the innovative forms and so on.

Phineas Harper: I love to compare Britain to other countries with comparable economies and comparable challenges because you see some very striking changes that seem to lead through to different outcomes.

One of the things that I find oddest about our private sector built environment industry is how top-heavy it is. It is a little bit like supermarkets. The big five dominate groceries in this country. It is the same in property development. About half of our new homes are built by the same 10 or so companies, which is very weird. A German, a Dane or a Dutch person looking at this would say, "Really—only 10? How do you get that healthy mix of local knowledge and innovation? Where is the competition coming from?"

The fact is that we do not have any of those things because these very large firms are able to roll out roughly the same sort of thing everywhere. They might change the cladding or tweak a bit here and there. Local authorities do not really have the power to stop them or to say, "We would like something a bit more contextual or innovative within local needs or wants".

It is a real shame because there are so many small and medium-sized not just architects and urban planners but also property developers who could be doing really good work for this country if they were allowed a slightly bigger share of the overall mix of new development.

Look at a project such as the Phoenix in Lewes.

Baroness Andrews: Sorry, I have to declare an interest.

Phineas Harper: Okay, fair enough. Are you connected to the area?

Baroness Andrews: I live in Lewes and I am very familiar with the Phoenix project.

Phineas Harper: What is striking about that project is that it has majority support from the local community. It is very unusual to get majority support for a big development. They have achieved that because they are not a massive corporation. They are relatively small in the scale of property development companies. They are working with the community. They have lots of different and really talented architects and landscape people involved. They are using a biomaterials-led strategy, so it is going to be sustainable. I am highlighting it because there is really good work happening at that smaller and medium-scale tier.

If there is one key lesson for the new towns, it is to figure out a way to work with smaller players in the private sector. Because we do not have the capacity in the public sector any more, we will need the private sector

to do a lot of this. Let us try to recreate the healthy mix that other European economies have.

Baroness Andrews: That is very important. Thank you very much. Going back to what you have said, Edwin, it is very important to take a sort of broader view. We went to Copenhagen as part of the first module. In Copenhagen, they have a national policy for architecture, which is governed by a set of principles. They were very keen to point out that they were principles. I was challenging them to say whether it was a national policy for placemaking, but it is not. It is about architecture. I cannot help but believe that that sort of thing would not be very resonant in this country. We have enough problems with 20th century design, despite the Twentieth Century Society, which is probably the least popular of all the amenity societies.

Apart from architecture, there are lots of things that can be done on a very local basis, as Phineas has pointed out. What have we lost with the loss of the Office for Place, for example? Would the Office for Place, had it survived, been in a position to do some of this thought leadership and action leadership for the new towns? Should we be putting a lot more emphasis in the new towns process on things such as design competitions?

Edwin Heathcote: Yes to design competitions. You need to give opportunities to younger architects and international architects. I honestly do not know that much about the Office for Place and its achievements. It sounds like a good idea, but place is such a local thing that I wonder whether a centralised office for place is exactly the right response. Local people, small local developers and local architects, are the people who understand the place the best.

There is an issue with reuse. The country has become quite bad at adaptive reuse. If you look at the Teesworks site, for instance, there were the most incredible steelworks buildings around. They were really monumental alien monsters, these things, really extraordinary. They were all demolished, just flattened, because it makes the site easier and cheaper to develop. If you wanted to make a place in the middle of a former steel-working space, you would keep parts of the steelworks. They are readymades; they are fantastic pieces of industrial archaeology.

We did it for the Tate Modern. The Bankside Power Station was kept. No one knew what to do with it. Then someone decided that it should be an art gallery. It is fantastic. You would never get a public space like that in an art gallery if you had to build it from scratch. In the same way, you would never build a building as insane as a steelworks because it would be nuts to do that as a folly, but you can have it as a folly, as a marker of identity, place, history and people's associations with the steelworks, in a place that is entirely built around industrial history.

It seems extremely short-sighted. You see it now with cooling towers and 1960s office blocks. If you walk around London, you see 1960s office blocks being demolished every day. They are good buildings. They are

part of the city's history. An entire layer of post-war history is being wiped out. You say that the Twentieth Century Society is the least popular amenity society, but brutalism is the hippest thing there is. Everyone loves brutalism now. That stuff would have all been destroyed 20 or 30 years ago. All right, not everyone loves brutalism.

We have been bad at retaining interesting structures. That needs to be learned from. The Ruhr valley is a great example where they turned the industrial heritage into an epic park. It is a public leisure facility, effectively. That is one big part of placemaking. It is about looking at what there is there. There is no tabula rasa. Everything has structures on it. Even if you have to dig them out, they are there.

Baroness Andrews: Yes. Phineas, you have already addressed a lot of that.

Phineas Harper: I do not have too much to add to Eddie's points, but this thing about demolition is a well-made point. We are quite addicted to demolition as an industry. It is a huge sector. Some 60% of our waste is construction waste. It is not plastic straws, paper cups or electronics waste. It is old buildings that we have smashed up and thrown away. You are quite right. A lot of these things could be retained.

There is a huge climate problem with that culture of wanton demolition. It takes a lot of energy to build anything, even using lower-carbon materials. You are looking at about a tonne of CO₂ and equivalent greenhouse gases per square metre of new construction. It is slightly above that for housing, in fact. Some estimates say that, without switching to greener construction techniques, this Government's housing policy alone will eat up our entire carbon budget by 2050. There is a really big need to decarbonise construction, which is about more wood, more biomaterials and more stone, which uses much less carbon than concrete. There is also a really big need to use our existing buildings as efficiently as possible so we are not wasting these structures. We need to be refurbishing, upgrading and transforming them for new uses.

I am a trustee of the Twentieth Century Society. We have a difficult job because we have to persuade people that a building that they consider to be a bit of an eyesore could, with a bit of love and care, be transformed into something really useful and beautiful.

Baroness Andrews: This takes us, finally, to this whole relationship between the character and meaning of place and heritage buildings. From my own past experience in another life, I could point you in the direction of many wonderful new places that have been constructed around old industrial sites, for example.

I can see that that can happen more easily in extensions because there will be layers of archaeological history and existing buildings. How do you construct meaning when it is going to be on these occasional greenfield sites? There will be a connection with landscape, with rural tradition and rural materials, but people are going to have to commit to living there

when they do not recognise anything of their own. I think what you are both saying is that in every settlement we should be making sure our historic and heritage buildings have the scope for innovation and experiment as well as repurposing. A lot of experiment can and is being done, but what can you do and how do you start that process in a greenfield site?

Edwin Heathcote: A greenfield site is a complex thing because, in a way, there is no site without history or archaeology. If we are building new towns and they are not anywhere near anything, so a road, a motorway or a light railway system, that is a failure already. We should be building things around the edges of existing settlements. They should be interesting places. We should be using them to revitalise industrial or agricultural sites or failed existing housing estates that could be densified.

The word “greenfield” is probably a bit of a misnomer. I do not know what the colour is between brown and green—sludge? We need to be looking at sludgy sites, where there are unpopular things that can then be reinterpreted. In a way, there are no real greenfield sites.

Phineas Harper: Yes, I sort of agree. The best architects start by understanding the history and heritage of a place. What is the ground made of? What are the local animals like? What are the local traditions and people like? They start with that research process and that somehow leads to the spark that creates the hook that the new project, building or town hangs on.

I quite like the materials consultancy Local Works, which does material mapping. “Within one mile, 15 miles and 50 miles, where can we get materials for this project from?” As far as possible, they try to source almost everything locally, which is an incredibly difficult thing to do in a kind of globalised supply chain model where people are used to specifying that concrete from that ship that has come from that country. They say, “No, we are going to take this local thing seriously”. They really map it in a lot of detail.

There is also a role for a bit of flair. Frederick Gibberd said, “Every town deserves a crown”. That crown could be a really good local library with quite an expressive pergola or something. It could be a fantastic train station. There is always a role for that. Even for those projects, the architects I admire most will not just start with some wacky idea they have dreamed up in the shower. They will look at the place and it will come from the place somehow.

Q30 **Baroness Janke:** This area covers quite a lot of what you have said already. It is about balancing respect for local character and context with the need to encourage innovation and experimentation in the design and architecture of new towns. Some of the things that you have said already are very helpful. You talked about local materials and so on. You mentioned the topography argument and said that good innovation builds on heritage. Members of the public would be very much reassured if they

felt that new towns were going to embody that.

Given the scale on which we are supposed to be producing new housing, how do you relate those particular concepts to building on a large scale? I agree with you on using smaller operators. That is a very good thing, particularly local firms. Are there other things that you feel we need to think about in addressing such large-scale developments for the future?

Edwin Heathcote: The cynic in me wonders whether we really are going to be doing this large-scale development. Are we looking at Gulf-type or Chinese-type third-tier cities of 8 million people? I doubt it. We are looking at tens of thousands of people on the edges of existing conurbations.

Baroness Janke: We are talking about 6,000 houses a week, theoretically.

Edwin Heathcote: That would be nice. Phin makes an interesting point. There is a conflict between the carbon targets and the housing targets. The 1.5 million houses and the carbon targets are not compatible. You cannot do both. There is an interesting disconnect there, which needs to be thought about.

Your question was about how we think about building at this kind of scale.

Baroness Janke: Yes, while respecting local issues and local materials.

Edwin Heathcote: Phin's point about materials is very interesting. For instance, there is now this stone demonstrator that has been built in Earl's Court by the Future Observatory of the Design Museum, which is a three-storey house that has been designed and built to show that stone is a completely usable material. It is fireproof; it fits all the contemporary demands. It is not being used, either because it is perceived as being a bit expensive or because it does not quite fit with the building regs. Why would you not have a settlement next to a quarry? Effectively, the quarry builds the city around it. It happened in Carrara and Forte dei Marmi in Italy. They are amazing places with epic landscapes.

In a way, we need to begin to think about our landscapes of production in a slightly different way. We are very keen, in this country, to separate out industry, agriculture and residential. That is kind of boring. Industry is not what it was in the 19th century. It is not big, smoky, brick-built, eight-chimney polluting plants full of eight-year-old kids making matches or whatever it was. Industry now is clean. It is employment. It gives a *raison d'être* to a community. We tend to think about residential places. What do those people do? Why could not they work in the factory that builds the rest of the city? Why could they not work in the materials industries?

I just went to a house where there was a brickworks on the site. The architect does not like building new houses. He likes to work only on renovation. It was the first time he had built a new house. They crushed

the building that was on the site into aggregate and made a rammed-earth house using the aggregate of what was on site. It is a completely circular process. When that house is defunct or unneeded, it just melts back into the earth. There is nothing in it. There is no concrete. There are no toxic materials. It is just earth and timber.

I like that idea that Phin was talking about. The place emerges from what is around it and underneath it. Where we do not have a big industrial archaeology or an existing framework to build off, that is what we have to do. We have to understand what is there and build places where there are things that can build the city, whether it is a forest, a quarry or a clay pit where the bricks could come from. We need to think about these things now, not just about bringing in bricks from China or cladding from Germany.

Phineas Harper: There is something slightly nerdy about procurement that is also in your question of how you scale up these good projects.

At the moment, when do the procurement for big sites, we sell off the land to the highest bidder, often a very large property developer, which then builds it out at a pace that maintains very high profits. Of course it does. That is its job. That is what its shareholders want it to do. It is not an unreasonable thing to do, in a way. It is not really what we, the public, want. If we are wanting it to build quickly and well, we possibly need to be a bit more strategic about how we dispose of those parcels of land.

The French model is rather different. The price of the land is set, and then the bidding happens on, "What are you going to do with this land? How good is it going to be? How fast are you going to build it? How are you going to bring those things to market in a way that is creating really successful communities?"

Just tweaking the bidding process in terms of how you procure a master developer or a lead developer for a site fundamentally affects design decisions, but also affects things such as build speed. A lot of the answers are up stream, and are in those slightly technical questions around, "How are we selling this land, and what are the consequences that that is baking into everything that comes later?"

Q31 **Viscount Younger of Leckie:** I just wanted to explore further this important discussion about the balance between experimentation and tradition, or history, perhaps, whether it is local or not. I particularly wanted to offer a bit of a challenge to you, Edwin. Going back to what you said at the beginning, you started off by saying that we should be careful about experimenting, and that you were a slight cheerleader for the traditionalists, but then you did cite some examples of experimentation. I am just being careful here.

My challenge is really this: it is probably less experimentation but more necessity to design houses and housing estates in terms of what our lives are going to look like. I am bringing up the question of drone delivery, of

driverless cars, and of a completely different way of life that is almost upon us. We need to think about the balance. Where do you both think we are on that spectrum?

Edwin Heathcote: The way that you interpreted what I said is interesting, because there is a tendency in this country, when we talk about architecture, to very quickly get into questions of style, which is very important to avoid. I am not an advocate for historic, pastiche architecture. I do not hate it. I do not care about it particularly. That is not what I am recommending. When I say “conservative”, I am really talking about the plan. We know what makes cities work. We do not necessarily know what makes cities look good. That is a much more subjective thing.

You are absolutely right that lifestyles are changing hugely. Families are changing hugely. In Stevenage, housing was built for nuclear families. Nuclear families in London are not really a thing now, as I understand it. I have my grown-up kids living with me. We are not a nuclear family. Life is changing extremely quickly. You are right about drone delivery and cars. People in my daughters’ generations do not really drive cars. It is not a thing. It is a fundamental 180-degree shift from 40 years ago when I was growing up, or when Milton Keynes was built, for argument’s sake, which was predicated on a Los Angeles type of model.

You are right that there are huge changes that need to be understood, but they probably do not change the fundamental structure of the city that much. The circumstances that people like to live in—in proximity and in interesting, well-designed homes—are probably pretty steady. If we have a drone fire service that could put out fires, we do not have to worry about the turning circle of a fire engine. That does not have to be how we design a close, for argument’s sake. Technology might facilitate a more interesting city, if we think about the changes that might come and if we do not have to have parking everywhere. Parking messes everything up in planning. They are really big issues, and really positive issues for the city. Cities could be much better.

Phineas Harper: The fundamentals of what make a good home and a good community do not change very much. It is lots of insulation, lots of light, lots of natural materials, some sort of landscape strategy with some trees, good public transport links, loads of pedestrianisation, somewhere you can meet your neighbours, and a sense of the heritage of the area. Those things have been true for ever, as far as I can see. Maybe we had a blip in the 20th century where people got very excited about cars, and now we are removing away from that again and rediscovering the wisdom of some slightly older forms of development pattern.

If we can get those things right, then we will be future-proofing our housing for all sorts of social change. It is striking to me that Britain had the smallest average house size, and certainly average room size, in the EU when we were in it. This is an EU statistic. That means that we do not have any flexibility. Many people have only one place where they can put

their sofa, or only one place where they can put their television. If social norms change, they are stuck.

Just giving people a little bit more wriggle room in how they choose to inhabit their house will make us much more resilient to changing climate, changing family structures, technological change, and so on, but we need to find a way to claw back a bit more generosity from the system so that people have that flexibility in their neighbourhoods. That includes little places to play with your kids. As we get rid of those places to put more flats there, you start to lose community resilience.

The Chair: Thank you very much. You will be pleased to know that that is the end of this session—oh, Lord Bailey, go on.

Q32 **Lord Bailey of Paddington:** Sorry, I just have to make a little plea for the car. This is a serious point. This whole thing is dominated by the well-heeled middle classes who seem to forget that, for people who live on the outskirts of very large cities such as London, their life simply does not work without that car. We do not own cars because we like them. We own cars because of where we have been put. London does not work without its suburbs. Its suburbs do not work without its cars. If you are going to remove them, please do replace them with something.

Edwin Heathcote: We are talking about building new places, are we not? We are talking about avoiding those situations where people have to have a car. People can have cars. I am not arguing for people to be criminalised because they have cars. If we are designing places from scratch, I am arguing for people to have places where they do not have to have cars.

Lord Bailey of Paddington: The second part of what I will say is that a lot of these places that we are talking about are extensions to urban conurbations, so you are still going to have the problem of butting up against some kind of suburb, which needs to be taken into account as well. How does that happen? I am not arguing for cars. I am arguing for an alternative, which does not seem yet to exist. It is very popular to be green and all the rest of it, and most people who talk about these things do not have a clue what they are talking about. The car debate sometimes feels like that.

The Chair: That broke down the consensual, but no, quite right.

Phineas Harper: I would maybe just fact-check that it is poorer people who are less likely to own a car, and it is middle-class and wealthy people who are more likely to own a car.

Lord Bailey of Paddington: I happen to be on the London Assembly. We and the Mayor had this out. It is a fact that the poorest people on the outskirts of London, zone 4 and outwards, are most likely to be dependent on a car of some kind, in terms of their own ownership, family ownership to get around and go to work—teachers, et cetera—and then the whole minicab situation. It is not the idea that it is rich people tootling around in electric cars out of town. It is poor people trying to

make their lives work. It is very important to them as well.

The Chair: Not everywhere in the country is like London in having a Tube, either.

Thank you so much. Genuinely, thank you for coming in and talking to us today. I appreciate your time massively. I am sure we all do. I know you are very busy doing your actual jobs but, if you could share some further thoughts, we have our call for evidence in there. You have mentioned a few international examples. Anything that you feel you could add to this debate that you have not said already would be greatly appreciated. With that, thank you very much, and this meeting is over.