



Built Environment Committee

Corrected oral evidence: New towns: Creating Communities

Tuesday 18 November 2025

10.50 am

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

Evidence Session No. 3

Heard in Public

Questions 33 - 46

Witnesses

I: Professor Rhiannon Corcoran, Professor of Psychology and Public Mental Health, University of Liverpool; Paula Bond, Head, Northstowe Arts; Kevin McGeough, Head of Strategy and Placemaking, Ebbsfleet Development Corporation.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

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

Examination of witnesses

Professor Rhiannon Corcoran, Paula Bond and Kevin McGeough.

Q33 The Chair: Good morning, and welcome to the House of Lords Built Environment Select Committee, where we are continuing to look into the issue of creating successful new towns and expanded settlements. In this module, we are focusing on how you create successful communities. Today, we are going to delve into the issue of social and cultural infrastructure in these new towns. I am delighted to welcome three esteemed witnesses to talk us through their experiences today. I wonder whether you could briefly introduce yourselves and set out what your background is, please.

Professor Rhiannon Corcoran: I am a professor of psychology and public mental health at the University of Liverpool, where I work for 60% of my time. I also work in practice in a social enterprise called Prosocial Place, where we do a lot of work with ~~the community~~communities, building the places where they live, and working mostly in existing places and often in places of extreme disadvantage. In my academic work, I focus on the social, psychological and environmental determinants of mental health and well-being.

Kevin McGeough: Good morning, everyone. I am head of strategy and placemaking for Ebbsfleet Development Corporation. Ebbsfleet Development Corporation is sponsored by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government. We are the only such development corporation in existence at the minute. We have been tasked with facilitating the delivery of a new town on the Ebbsfleet site, with up to 15,000 homes and many thousands of jobs on a site that is totally brownfield land, centred on Ebbsfleet International station.

Today, we celebrate the 5,000th home being completed in Ebbsfleet, which is quite a remarkable move forward since we were established 10 years ago, and that will be marked by a visit by Secretary of State Steve Reed and Housing Minister Matthew Pennycook to celebrate with us.

I was also active as the director of the healthy new town programme for Ebbsfleet. We were the largest of the healthy new town pilots, which was an NHS England-facilitated programme and, again, I have some useful information that we have gained from that as well.

Personally, I am a new town nerd. I grew up in Northern Ireland's new town, Craigavon—possibly one of the less successful new towns—and my whole career has been spent professionally and academically studying new towns, including working for the Commission for New Towns, English Partnerships, and Homes England, where I was head of strategy.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Congratulations on 5,000 as well. Well done.

Paula Bond: I am a director of Northstowe Arts, which is a CIC that we have set up in the new town of Northstowe looking at using creativity,

culture and the arts to build community within that space. I also run a small business as a ceramicist, so I am an artist and teacher as well. Historically, I have also been an arts development officer in a local authority.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Genuinely, thank you for spending some time with us today. As I think you know, we have a series of questions to ask you. Please could we keep questions and answers as brief and as succinct as we can? If you do not feel that you have anything to add to what your colleague may have said, do not feel like you need to fill the space at all. I am conscious of your time. Where you can, it would be fantastic if you could, when you speak, demonstrate some of the experiences that you have seen firsthand in the locations that you are involved in or, more generally, other things that you have heard or seen.

Q34 **Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer:** I think you, with your combined experience, will be able to help us with something that we are tussling with. Can you impose a sense of community on a new town, or is it something that would just emerge organically? Which stakeholders should primarily be involved if you are trying to design that sense of community into a new town?

Kevin McGeough: Just looking at my personal experience of growing up in Craigavon new town, it was designated under the European Poverty 3 programme as among the most socially excluded developments in Europe. If you abandon a new town, as they did, with the development corporation closing very early, it can create very poor conditions for communities to grow. People used to refer to "new town blues". That is depression; that is poor health outcomes. Leaving new towns without any foundations for community development is a problem.

~~The Development Corporation When we inherited the development corporation at Ebbsfleet inherited, there was already~~ permission for 11,500 homes. There was no expectation of anyone doing community development for those 11,500 homes if a development corporation had not been established. There were some requirements in Section 106 for some infrastructure, but no programming funding or other things to support that.

I am quite proud to say that, as an emerging new town today, Ebbsfleet is more renowned for its community development work. The New Towns Taskforce has used us as a case study and an example of good practice. Sir Nick Serota, chairman of the Arts Council, said that our cultural development has been outstanding. Most importantly, we do a resident satisfaction survey every year, which 25% of all households respond to. Of those, 80% say that there is a strong sense of community; 80% say that people of different backgrounds get along well together; and 50% have attended an event in Ebbsfleet in the past year. Those are quite extraordinary results, reported by people living in a new development.

That did not happen by accident. In fact, the main catalyst for us developing such strong community development work was being a

healthy new town. When the development corporation was set up, we did not own any land. Therefore, stewardship was not our responsibility, and community development was not necessarily one of our focus areas.

However, as a healthy new town, we recognise that busy people are healthy people. If any of you know about the blue zones, social connectedness is the best ~~catalyst for form of~~ longevity and good health. From very early days, we had very small amounts of seed funding from NHS England to test and trial ideas in order to understand what the community wanted.

For me, communities do not grow organically. They need the seeds of growth. They need to be nurtured and have the right conditions for growth. However, the positive sign is that there are lots of really enthusiastic people moving to new towns. You just need to give them tools. Sometimes that is very modest seed funding to get them started, for example by helping them set up a trust or a community interest company. Sometimes it is giving them access to infrastructure. Sometimes it is co-ordinating things.

If I just take a couple of examples, we established a community board in Ebbsfleet. Today, that community board has 18 residents who manage it themselves with very little input from us. When it was established, we had to set it up. We recruited it. It was chaired by the leader of Dartford Borough Council. It was a balance between the local authority, Ebbsfleet Development Corporation and residents. Today, those residents have developed their own action plan in partnership with Imperial College London. From that, they have identified the need for their own Our Ebbsfleet website, which will be a co-ordinating tool for the residents living there. They are now establishing themselves in their own right without any lead from us.

That is really important, because, as a development corporation, we are going to leave. My team's success is that we make ourselves redundant. It is about creating strong communities and building capacity and volunteering experience to allow those people to have an active role in the place long term. That would not have happened without having a little bit of seed funding or some people to co-ordinate that capacity and direct it in the early days, and then set up longer-term frameworks to manage that.

For example, we have set up the Ebbsfleet Garden City Trust, which will be the custodian of placemaking once the development corporation closes down. It will always manage the community assets and support the community, but only where it is needed. Had we not started, we would not have the strong communities that we have today.

Professor Rhiannon Corcoran: I completely agree with everything that Kevin has said, as you might expect. Just to add a few points, community can develop organically, and we see that happen. We see it happening more often in empowered communities and perhaps less often in disadvantaged and existing communities. The basis of that organic

growth of community, as with anything that comes in with seed funding or external stakeholders leading, as Kevin described, is trust. There has to be authenticity if you are bringing in an external stakeholder to begin to develop community in a new town. That person needs to have the very obvious traits that support that. An interest in the development of the place is really important, as well as, perhaps contrary to what Kevin was saying, some independence from the establishment itself, so that people feel that they can speak freely without fear of any reprisal at all in relation to their building of community.

It is also really important to think about how you might set that community off. In our work for the What Works Centre for Wellbeing, where I was leading the community well-being evidence programme, we saw that there are various ways to catalyse well-being. Light-touch governance, where you are bringing in individuals and stakeholders, is really important so that you can pass on control when you back out. As Kevin said, the backing out really is what we should be aiming for if we are bringing in external stakeholders.

Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer: Paula, Kevin has made it sound quite easy, really. Is that your experience?

Kevin McGeough: It was painful, but rewarding.

Paula Bond: Yes, it is rewarding. No, it is not easy. I am talking as a member of the community. I live in a village just outside of Northstowe and I moved there when we knew that Northstowe was going to be there, so I consider myself part of the Northstowe community. We have struggled. Setting up Northstowe Arts was not an easy thing to do, and we are still struggling five years after establishing ourselves. We have done lots of different things, and we feel like we have been a success with what we have done, but we have not had as much support as I think would have allowed us to thrive rather than survive.

Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer: Support from whom?

Paula Bond: Support from local authorities, from developers and from Homes England. We have funding. Everybody agrees that what we are doing is great. Nobody is saying that we should not be doing what we are doing, or anything like that, but there is no expertise that we can draw on. We have had funding, but what we needed was expertise. We needed people to be able to say, "If you go and talk to them, they can help you do the CIC application". None of us had ever done a CIC application to establish a company.

We went and found that outside of the space, and we have been working our way through all of the things that we have been doing and finding our own way with it. We have been asked to run projects for Homes England and for the local authority that deliver what their priorities are, and we have been paid for that work, which is great, because then that supports us when we do the funding applications to do the community development work that we have identified with the community directly.

More of the professional support and the knowledge support would have been nice for us to have right at the start. We have done all right, because we have pulled together people who have that knowledge, and we have worked it out, but we have done it on our own.

The one thing that I would agree completely with Kevin on is that it is about co-creation. It is about understanding that you can go in and help things happen, but you are helping things happen. You are letting them grow, and letting the community decide what they want and need. Sometimes, they do not know that until you ask them the questions, and you go in and show them what is possible.

The idea of seed funding things is brilliant, because it means that you have something that you can try without too much risk to anybody. It can fail, and that is okay, because you have learned what you needed to learn from it failing. Some of our programmes we have tried and they have not worked, but there are other programmes we have handed over and given to other people, who have taken them, and they have flown.

It needs that kind of flexibility built into all of the programming, the support behind that, and the acknowledgement that things are sometimes not going to work. Sometimes they are going to fail, and that is okay, because that is how we learn.

Q35 The Chair: Kevin, you mentioned your 10 years, pretty much. It is just over or just shy, whichever way it is. Paula, you mentioned three years or thereabouts. From your experiences—Professor Corcoran, feel free to add anything—that is quite a long time. If the concept of a new town is there on a piece of paper, 10 years is a long time, but what about the concept of a community? Where I am from, I can say, “This is my area”. I can talk about some heritage to some extent, but how long is it before there is a real sense of, “We are one body, one unit, one family and one community”? Do you feel like that? I appreciate that you are on the outside, but you say you are of Northstowe. Is that a shared view that has already been delivered, despite its issues?

Paula Bond: For the most part, yes. There are some very active people within the community at Northstowe who have been working very hard to bring people together across different forms. We are arts, culture and creativity, but there are lots of faith groups. There are some youth groups. There are lots of people working within Northstowe to build those connections and make that community. It is down to those people that that community has happened. It is the work that they are doing and the events and activities that they create that bring people together.

Our biggest things that we deliver are events, because we know that we can bring everybody together into those events. People talk and enjoy it, and it is a celebration. We have done some public art projects that have celebrated the heritage of Northstowe. Because it is a new site, people think that there is no identity or heritage to that space, but there is heritage that goes back to Roman times on that site. There are lots of layers and timing in between that history. It has been a site where people

have lived many times over that history. We have used events and things to build that acknowledgement and give a sense of identity and pride in the fact that people are living in a space with that heritage.

The Chair: Is there any one thing that gets it over the line to say, "We now have that final jigsaw piece that makes it a community", or is it that it is very organic and just takes time?

Kevin McGeough: To me, community in a new town today is perhaps not the same as what we would have established in the 1970s or 1980s in the post-war new towns. Communities today are more about communities of interest. It is not necessarily the people physically living in your neighbourhood. In Ebbsfleet, we have nine neighbourhoods evolving simultaneously. Although 500 to 700 homes are delivered per year, it could be 50 to 100 in one neighbourhood, so it is taking some time for them all to establish.

However, taking Paula's point, we tested ideas with communities to see what joint interests they had. For example, we have 16 Edible Ebbsfleet gardens, because growing, sharing and eating food was a common interest. We have an Ebbsfleet culture group, which has been funded partly by us and partly by the Arts Council. That is people from across the neighbourhoods who want to run events, as Paula just mentioned. It is about establishing common interests and giving people the tools to allow them to come together as that interest group.

Before there is a complete community physically, there are emerging communities of interest. The biggest challenge to community is the time lag around infrastructure being available for them to do the particular thing that they want to do together. That is a challenge in getting that physical space, and that is why outdoor spaces, for example, become really important. The sense of community can come from the early days as long as there are tools to allow people to come together and share that common interest.

Professor Rhiannon Corcoran: If I may just add, picking up a few points that Paula mentioned, community leadership is incredibly important here. You will, by default, get community leaders moving into new towns, and those people need the capacity to be able to bridge across what might originally be separate communities. Bringing people together is extremely important, and there are ways and means of possibly doing that in terms of layout and format of new towns that we might go into next.

Communities of interest are really important as we think about how we develop community across. Bugbears, trouble or challenges can be really important aspects of bringing people together. You might think that odd, but we know how well communities come together to face challenges that feel bigger than themselves. The very question in a new town of, "How do we set up and establish community?" is one that will, of itself, bring a community of interest together anyway, and then you get that magic blend of community of interest overlaying on community of place. When

you feel that you have that, that is when you know that you have something that is really going to work long term.

- Q36 **Baroness Andrews:** Good morning. Thank you so much for your terrific evidence so far. Can I ask a specific question of Paula? What you say is very poignant in a way, because there are a lot of people who want to do a lot of things. As Kevin said, busy people are creative people and are committed to building pride in place. You came from an arts development background and you had been in a local authority, and yet the local authority has not been prepared to support your voluntary organisation, as I understand it, or has not given you the support. Part of the problem is building capacity.

Paula Bond: It absolutely is.

Baroness Andrews: Very few people fund the building of capacity. They will fund a project, but they will not fund that. Am I correct? Is that part of the challenge?

Paula Bond: You are right.

Baroness Andrews: Therefore, that is part of the problem with sustainability. Can you think of a way in which the local authority, the Arts Council, English Heritage or whoever is in the business of helping you do the great work you are doing could build the capacity of those separate organisations or of you as the co-ordinating body, which would make a material difference between you being able to run not a two-year programme, say, but a five-year programme, bringing in different groups? What is missing in this chain of funding and innovation, in a way?

Paula Bond: The first point that I would like to make is that the local authority did support us in the beginning. We got a significant amount of funding from the local authority to set up and establish, so we did get support at the beginning.

In answer to the question, our biggest struggle is the fact that our funding is per project. We get project funding to deliver things, but we are not funded to fundraise or to strategically develop our business so that we become sustainable. Our biggest current challenge is that we need to create a commercial arm to the CIC that will allow us to fund our core business and also put some matched funding into grant applications to then deliver what we want to do.

There are one or two funds where you can get money for core funding to run an organisation such as this. There are not many. They are few and far between. That kind of funding is part of where we are heading. We are looking at getting that kind of funding. Alongside that, it would be useful to have a mentorship scheme or professional support, with access to legal professionals, for example, when you need them. Funding is great. We all need funding, but it is not the only thing that we need. We need the networks and the professional knowledge, et cetera, to support and build, as you say, capacity. I have done a lot of different things, and

I have a lot of different knowledge, but I do not know everything and this journey is new, so having other people to be able to call on would be useful.

Baroness Andrews: That is very interesting, because we are looking at new communities, and I am just wondering whether we could think of recommendations that the committee might make about investing through S106 in a different sort of community gift, as it were, which would enable communities to more quickly build up their skills and knowledge of what is required in order to get to the point Kevin has got to, where you can walk away as a development corporation, knowing that you have left a legacy that will sustain itself. I do not know whether you want to add anything to that, Kevin.

Kevin McGeough: Because we are the development management authority for Ebbsfleet, we are not the plan-making authority. However, our planners have been quite creative with this as well. For example, Keepmoat Homes had earmarked Section 106 money for heritage. We were able to use that, exactly as Paula was suggesting, to fund a local arts organisation to work with schools and with people interested in heritage and culture locally, to run a number of events, to develop a citizens' archive, and to get kids involved in the design and understanding of their heritage. Using Section 106 funding for programmes rather than physical infrastructure has been helpful.

Arts Council England has been incredibly helpful in a number of ways. It has funded a number of existing national portfolio organisations, ones that it funds generally, in north Kent. Two of those—Cohesion Plus and Cement Fields—have been responsible for developing a design group, which is totally about building capacity in local people to deliver for themselves in the future. It has also funded some people directly, such as Blueprint Arts and Arts Point. They are two local residents who are just really interested in developing their own businesses in Ebbsfleet. We sometimes commission them to deliver events, just to give them that little seed funding.

Everyone—the Arts Council, our planners and others, together with the community and the artists—is so enthusiastic. We get so much value for money from the cultural sector for quite a modest amount of money, which, even if it is from the Section 106s, has a huge impact and really builds capacity.

Professor Rhiannon Corcoran: If I can add a few thoughts, adequate revenue in the budget allocated to the new towns is critical. It is often missed off, and it has a massive impact on sustainable community well-being. That feels like a really important point in the initial funding.

There is also potential for the private sector to become involved here, so social impact investment might play a role, with lots of companies wanting to do good works. In that respect, I would call on private investment to build or to boost community cohesion. Similarly, good use of the ~~social value~~Social Value Act also might come into play here to help

build community in the first instance, as well as providing that longevity that is critical, and to avoid the churn and the turnover of population in new towns.

Q37 Viscount Hanworth: I have a question about Craigavon new town, which bears the name of an erstwhile Ulster Prime Minister. Presumably, there were two communities. Was there any success in bringing them together?

Kevin McGeough: I was 16 years old before I met a Protestant or someone of the opposite faith, so that would probably say no. You went to a school of one denomination. You lived in a housing ~~estate~~ of one denomination. It was socially and religiously ~~exclusive~~. People in social housing, such as me, lived in concrete brick housing. If you were in private housing, you lived in red brick housing. There are probably lots of lessons there about what not to do in a new town.

There is some evidence now of better success emerging from it, but it was a very painful process for the people living in that place. Again, it is really important for us, moving into the next generation of new towns, to look at those poor examples of what happened—its development corporation was abandoned within 10 years—as well as looking at the good examples.

Historically, looking back at the garden city model, we have based our new garden city trust at Ebbsfleet on the Letchworth foundation model. There are really good things to learn from it, but it is equally important to look at some of those other new towns that did not do quite so successfully, particularly in terms of community development. You just have to look at the health outcomes from some of those towns, which are almost the worst in their ~~sub-regions~~. In contrast, places such as Telford, Warrington and Milton Keynes are economically the most successful places in their ~~sub-regions~~. There is good and bad, and there has not really been a thorough investigation into what we should be learning from the new towns to date, including Craigavon.

Viscount Hanworth: I have to confess that I have experience. I was in Ulster in 1972-73, which was a crucial time.

Q38 Lord Mawson: I am interested in how we move on from dependency cultures. A lot of what you are describing is the machinery of the state still generating profound dependency cultures. I am a social entrepreneur. I have been in this space for 40-odd years and have experienced this a lot. Particularly in a country that is virtually bankrupt, I am really interested in how we generate more entrepreneurial cultures that are more business-focused.

There are two parts to my question. We have a Secretary of State at the moment in the health service, Wes Streeting, who is talking about a 10-year plan that is about getting up stream into the social determinants of health and moving services out of hospital. I know from practical experience, but we also know from all the research, that 78% of the determinants of health have nothing to do with doctors. They have to do

with, "Do I have a job?" If you ask the GPs I work with, that is the biggest impact on your health. "Is education okay?" It has to do with arts and creativity, and a whole range of other stuff. There is a whole question about the 10-year plan and what you are doing about that. The danger is that we can have a discussion here and continue, like we did in the last century, to put it in the health box, when, in the modern world, health is everybody's business.

Unless we can move up into this world—at the moment the Secretary of State is talking the talk, but I see no evidence of walking the walk—and unless we join the dots, there is a very serious problem. It would be interesting just to get a sense of where you are at with that discussion practically.

The second point has to do with culture and community interest companies. I was involved with Bates Wells & Braithwaite in bringing that legal structure together. We were very clear when we brought that together that this was not about dependency cultures and charities. Your conversation has been a lot about grants, when a community interest company is a business, not a grant. It is, again, an example of the machinery. Politicians and others half understand what a social enterprise is, and they see the word "social" and get very excited, but they do not understand what the enterprise is. In the charity world, they generate a grant dependency culture, yet again, that uses the terms "community interest company" and "social enterprise".

It would be good to get your sense of that, because my worry is that these things are not enterprises. There is nothing wrong with being a charity. They are just another form of a charity, when they need to be a serious business. Having built a social business that does not receive grants, I just wonder what your reflections are on the culture. The culture that you are creating has a profound relationship with the health of a community and of a nation.

Kevin McGeough: The healthy new town programme included Northstowe and Ebbsfleet, so we both benefited from that. That was the last NHS 10-year plan, so they did recognise, at that point in time, that investment up front in developing community would bring better long-term health outcomes. Most of our community development programme has come from that, and the legacy of that will continue beyond the life of the development corporation.

We are really getting away from that dependency culture. For example, 50% of ~~our~~^{my} placemaking budget this year is in capacity building in community development, and capacity building in volunteering, because we recognised that volunteering was one of the things that we were struggling with. Particularly in a new town, you tend to get a younger population. Most people are mortgaging to the hilt. They do not have that spare time, so you are quite volunteer-poor in new town communities.

From those little bits of seed funding, to take the example of our Ebbsfleet events committee, local residents have developed their own regular market. That market is local entrepreneurs selling their produce.

In the first two or three years of that, they got modest amounts of funding, some of which was to pay the management companies to use their own park or for access to electricity. Today, the Ebbsfleet events committee runs those markets without any funding from anybody. They now have the confidence to run it themselves. They can charge people for the pitches, and it has become self-sustaining. Our Ebbsfleet community board has commissioned its own web portal and website. They are now going to manage and run that for themselves.

I am very confident that they will continue beyond the life of development corporation, but the most significant legacy for us has been the establishment of the Ebbsfleet Garden City Trust. That has been established and needs to have an income. It is trying to get away from the default service charge model that all new developments are dependent on. Those service charge models generally are anti-community, because they are divisive between new and existing communities. They are pitting people against each other as to who is paying for the infrastructure.

We are trying to get away from that model, towards one where the infrastructure is owned by a garden city trust that itself is managed by the local community and has some transparency within that. To achieve that, we need to leave the garden city trust with assets that are sustainable. It is our job to try to make sure that it is left with an asset base that can become sustainable to manage that community in the long term. It is all about getting local people to run their own place in perpetuity and not be dependent on any outside funding long term.

Lord Mawson: How do you stop it becoming, over time, a thing that looks yet again like another local authority with all the treacle that comes with all of that?

Kevin McGeough: Do you mean the garden city trust?

Lord Mawson: Yes.

Kevin McGeough: We very carefully worked with a community development organisation to develop the trust model. We have developed the trust model with the community and with our community champions. Within the trust, there are currently business representatives, local faith representatives, local community representatives, as well as some co-opted people who are bringing particular skills that they need. That group is now developing a further governance structure for wider resident input, which may or may not be based on the community board that we currently have. It is very much for the community, by the community, but with professional skills. It is going to have a big asset base and is going to have to generate a significant amount of income, so it has to be professionally run as well.

Paula Bond: You are quite right about grant dependency. The reason why we set up as a CIC was that we did not want to be that. We knew that that was not sustainable for us. Our struggle has been to move to a

point where we found a way of creating the income commercially while delivering on all the programmes that we are delivering on, particularly with the capacity. At most, there have been three of us doing any kind of delivery. In reality, there has been one full-time person doing delivery, and two of us helping. It is down to capacity. If we are going to deliver what we want to deliver for the community, we have not found the time or the ability to create the business side of it without stopping those programmes, basically.

We are now at a point where our original founder has stepped down, because she burned out from trying to deliver everything. I am now at a point where I am delivering what we have already committed to while developing a business plan and looking at that commercial side. That is my focus at this point, because I recognise that, going forward, it is not sustainable to maintain what we have been doing. It is also not wise, to be fair. There are a lot of strings with grants and things. It is a lot more flexible if you can manage your own money. I agree completely.

There is still a great misunderstanding of what CICs are generally. People within our community do not understand when we deliver things and we charge for tickets. They do not get that. Because we are community development, we should be delivering free things, but sometimes we have to do something ticketed to support another programme.

As part of the business developing, we are looking at our messaging and how we make sure that people begin to understand what we are. We are professionals delivering. We are not a community organisation that delivers as volunteers. We have volunteers who help us, and we manage volunteers for delivering some of our events. We also train people to deliver some of our events. We have handed off things that we have done to other people because, rather like the development corporation, we have developed the skills within the community and they have taken them away from what we are doing without needing the funding to carry on. I agree completely that it needs looking at, and we are doing that.

Q39 **Baroness Andrews:** What you have told us is a mixture of the positive and the disappointing. If you were advising new towns now, and the people who were commissioning the master plans, or the development corporations that are going to be set up, how would you advise them to avoid the sorts of failures that we have seen in so many communities? Northstowe, unfortunately, is often quoted as a community that never thought of putting a shop in, et cetera, which may or may not be true. You may tell us that this is not true, but that is what the assumption has been.

What would you say to those people who are going to be responsible for designing the new towns? How do you overcome either the visible or the invisible cultural obstacles to building in social infrastructure at the very initial stages so that it is part of the thought leadership as well as the development principles and the implementation processes? What key advice would you give to stop the situation where it is always retrofitting and always asking people slightly too late?

As a second part of this question, what would you say is the most important thing to build first in terms of signalling to the community that this is about a community and not a housing estate? What is it that people need to see in front of them before they begin to believe in that community? Should we start with Professor Corcoran, because of all the work that you have done?

Professor Rhiannon Corcoran: This is a really important point. I question the whole idea about prioritising. In order to build a successful, viable, sustainable new town, you cannot avoid building in social infrastructure, but I even question the whole idea of social infrastructure. If we think about the infrastructure, whether we call it physical or social—the infrastructure that becomes town and community—all of that is social. We need to give that thought leadership outwards and suggest that we might be asking the wrong question or thinking about priorities when we should not be.

Perhaps a better way of thinking about it is as developing a whole place, so that we are sweating the social out of everything that we build, everything that we do and everything that we bring forward. We need to think about how we make every part of what we would formally call physical infrastructure a social asset. How do we make sure that the community can benefit from these particular infrastructures? In that way, you avoid the whole affordability argument, which, again, probably does not have legs. It is simply not affordable to put all the money into 12 new towns and then not provide what we are calling here social infrastructure. We cannot do that. That is the affordability argument. We need to be sweating all the assets and all the infrastructure so that we make sure that it all delivers for social and community.

Baroness Andrews: Can I just come back on that point? You have given us a definition of social infrastructure, and we have not had one yet. It would be very useful to know whether everybody would agree. What you have said is that social infrastructure is just infrastructure, and we should not have to spell out the social bit, but it is used as a term and is a bit vague. If you were pressed to define it, and if you had your developer in front of you and he said, “What do you want me to build?”, what would you say to him that would make most sense to him?

Professor Rhiannon Corcoran: That is, again, a really good question. “Social infrastructure” is a vague term, which is one of the very reasons why we probably need to ditch it and to think differently in relation to it. When we think of social infrastructure, we are usually thinking of buildings, are we not? We are thinking of community hubs. We are thinking of schools. We are thinking of health centres and that kind of thing.

If we reframe that and start thinking about infrastructure that helps people feel good and function well, that includes all sorts of things, including how we move around towns and new towns, how we meet people, where the bumping spaces are, how we get to know our neighbours, and how we design layouts that afford sociability and

community. It is as much about process as it is about physical things and buildings. It is how we do things, and co-production becomes a key part of that. There is a lot of learning to be had from existing communities and the work that is being done in disadvantaged places to bring back that community that has been hollowed out.

Baroness Andrews: Kevin, you now have a developer in front of you. How is she going to avoid the problems? How is she going to take advantage of all the best that social infrastructure can offer?

Kevin McGeough: I would really simplify our approach to social infrastructure as places to go and things to do. It is the quality of the place that you are creating, but also the quality of life that you are facilitating in that place. It is that quality of life bit that is often forgotten. We were saying outside that, sometimes, a little bit of a time lag before some of that community infrastructure is in place was helpful to allow the community to be part of that shaping and co-production process. That might include meanwhile development to have temporary space, or looking at designing the first park so that you can actually have events in it. Incredibly, some of these parks did not have water or electricity, so you could not do events. There are things that you could do quite simply to make sure that there are opportunities to have things to do and places to go from as early as possible.

To me, the most important element of pre-planning is that quality of life and quality of place is integral to the development of infrastructure. It is as important as electricity. It is about having the basis of what you can do, not just the physical but the programming element of it, and that support for somebody, whether they want to be a garden city trust or a community interest company, who has responsibility for managing the place.

The reason that this is important today is that, generally, local authorities do not take on that role. They do not want to be taking on new community assets. They do not want to be taking on new youth programming or new cultural programming. Basically, you are trying to create a new place in this desert where a local authority no longer wants to do what it previously did. It is a challenge, because the people moving into this new place do not want to be double-taxed. You do not want to be paying your council tax to receive the services that the people next door are getting, and then having to pay a service charge to get the same things. That is a real challenge.

The only way to get round that is that this stewardship and programming element of place has to be in the pre-planning part. It is as much of the development cost of a new town as anything else. Until we get that into our heads, if someone is assuming that their land value is based on selling land to developers, they build and they leave. Again, patient investment is what you need in new towns. You need people who are going to be custodians of place and there for the long term. The normal, mainstream developers can be part of that, but we have to recognise that

they are not there for the long term. Some housing associations might be.

What we found at Ebbsfleet is that there are lots of other people there from the early days. There is a whole group of pioneer ministers, across all religions, and they send them to these new towns from day one. We have had lots of ministers from different religions there from very early days and trying to do things, but they did not have any places to go and do things. It really is about getting away from that service charge model and towards genuinely thinking of community infrastructure.

It is not just physical buildings. It is about thinking about how groups establish structures such as web tools. The first thing that our community boards asked for was, "Can we have community noticeboards in every neighbourhood?" That low-tech thing, as well as them now having their own website, is really important, but who would normally fund a community noticeboard? These are the kinds of things that you need to have in that pre-planning—pre Section 106, pre CIL or whatever it happens to be—so that it is really part of what is needed in a new town.

Paula Bond: I would agree. The way of communicating with people is vitally important within creating the communities in new towns. We have a local resident who has put together *Northstowe News*, a newsletter that goes out quarterly. We have Facebook groups and WhatsApp pages. They have all been developed by different members of the community, and we still get people going, "We don't know what's happening here".

You need an overarching structure of communication that you know is going to reach everybody, as far as it can, because nobody reads everything. At least you can say, "It got out to you. It was here, here and here. You could have seen it". It needs to be formalised, rather than a lot of us trying lots of different things.

Baroness Andrews: It could be part of the development strategy.

Paula Bond: Yes, it could, and having that nice and clear from the start would be good. From our perspective, the challenge of all of this for something such as a local authority will be the amount of flexibility that is going to be required in terms of looking forward. You can start it, but you do not know where this is going until it gets there, because you do not know who is going to come forward from the community. You do not know what the community is going to say it wants or needs. Some of it, you do, but there is going to be a challenge in that.

Q40 **Lord Faulkner of Worcester:** Following up on those interesting questions and answers, this is really for Paula and Kevin, but do come in if you want to as well, [Rhiannon](#). How important is it that residents—particularly existing residents before the new town has developed—feel that they are part of something new and something that they want to be proud of, particularly when it leads to maybe a change in name or identity?

Professor Rhiannon Corcoran: If I may, that is a really interesting question. It is important. Perhaps a link into that way of thinking is to give them that challenge up front and to say, "We have a new place here. How do we build community? How can we think about and foresight the needs of the future generations?" This new town is going to be there for years, not just for the next 10 years. How do we think about what they are going to need? How do we build those steps in?

Just as important, particularly in relation to potential greenfield new sites, is how we build a culture of community right from the start. That is a really interesting and challenging question to give people. How do we build a future heritage? Those are questions that communities can really begin to grapple with and to think about in relation to their place and staying there.

Kevin McGeough: It is a very interesting one, because nowhere is totally new. Everywhere has been built in an existing place. Many new towns such as ours and Paula's are based on existing villages and communities, and that relationship between the new and existing is paramount. In the urban development area for Ebbsfleet, before we arrived, the neighbouring villages of Northfleet and Swanscombe—Swanscombe being right in the middle of our urban development area—are excluded from our development zone. There has been a lot of schizophrenia over the life of the development corporation around whether we should be doing anything in the existing communities. As a placemaking team, we know that we absolutely should be working across new and existing communities.

Lord Faulkner of Worcester: There was no such place as Ebbsfleet before the new town. Is that right?

Kevin McGeough: The station was called Ebbsfleet. There is a River Fleet that has become known as the River Ebbsfleet. Northfleet Football Club called itself Ebbsfleet Football Club voluntarily before the development corporation was set up.

Lord Faulkner of Worcester: Northfleet and Gravesend, I think.

Kevin McGeough: You are very right. Again, it was very controversial for it to call itself Ebbsfleet before the development corporation was set up. Naming is a whole other thing. Trying to develop a naming strategy in a new place, with Royal Mail still insisting on calling it somewhere else, is another challenge that even I have not managed to get to the bottom of quite yet.

We took the view that you should not try to impose an identity on anyone. If people want to be called part of Ebbsfleet, they will, because it is somewhere that they really associate themselves with. We were designated a "garden city". That is a George Osborne term that was used when we were set up as a development corporation. I found it useful in so far as it set a level of ambition above just delivering a normal development. "Garden city" was very much about land value capture and

communities being in control of their place. We have taken much of the essence of a garden city to inform our placemaking approach. We do not impose the term “garden city” on the residents who live there. If they want to use it, they can. It is not going to be an official name when we leave.

However, residents do seem to want to have their own identity. They do not want to be named as the same place that was there before them. In our example, Swanscombe is an existing town. Our physical area on the Dartford side—we are in Dartford and Gravesham—was within Swanscombe town council. The district council chose to physically divorce us from the town council, so there is now an Ebbsfleet ward, but Ebbsfleet as a place does not officially exist. There is a historic name of Ebbsfleet Valley that was agreed by a developer way before we existed, and it is very difficult to change those names.

It is a very interesting one, because local people do want to have their own sense of identity, but we have to be very careful that we do not offend our neighbours, particularly, in our instance, because our urban development area is non-contiguous. In other words, we have some isolated sites of development, and we will not try to impose the name Ebbsfleet on them. We do not try to impose it anywhere, but they are physically within and will always be seen as part of Northfleet, which is totally fine.

Lord Faulkner of Worcester: As my colleagues know, I worked many years ago for the Telford new town development corporation, which did impose its name on the new city. It was named after a person and not after a place. One of the things that they did was to buy Wellington Town Football Club and change the name to Telford United. It was in their ownership for as long as the development corporation existed. Presumably, you have not thought of buying Ebbsfleet.

Kevin McGeough: No. It was owned by a Kuwaiti owner who was trying to bring forward a theme park on the Swanscombe peninsula for some time. We have no desire to do that, nor do we have any desire to impose the name Ebbsfleet on people. The names that we are working with are those that we inherited, on the whole.

Viscount Hanworth: Swanscombe Man was a pre-modern human, I think.

Kevin McGeough: The oldest surviving woman was called Swanscombe Man, but was a woman. That is a really good point, because our Ebbsfleet citizen archive has worked with groups across the whole physical area, including schools, to show that there is a rich heritage in the area from Roman times right through to the industrial heritage of the cement ~~works..finds~~. It is really interesting that people know more about their heritage than what you call the new place.

Lord Faulkner of Worcester: Do they know about their heritage in Northstowe as well, Paula?

Paula Bond: They do, since we did the project with them. Also, the county council did all the archaeological digs, and shared the results from those and the finds with the people there as well. The council came to us to run the heritage project, so we used some of the finds that it was going to rebury in a piece of art. The artist did lots of community workshops and worked with the community to design the artwork. We shared it on social media and did all that kind of information sharing.

Outside of that, unless they have done their research themselves or gone to the Longstanton heritage society, they possibly would not know the heritage of the site. Although we say we are Northstowe Arts, we work with the people of the surrounding villages as well, because they will be the people who are using the facilities that come up when they are built in Northstowe. These are all the people who are going to live and work there, and most of the kids in the surrounding area go to the schools there. We all have connections in the surrounding villages to Northstowe already.

There are people who want their village to still be their village and keep it very separate, but there are others who have moved into the villages specifically because Northstowe is going to be there, and their children can go to the schools and walk to the town centre when it is built. They are looking to that for the future.

Lord Faulkner of Worcester: Baroness Andrews referred to the lack of a shop. Is that still the case?

Paula Bond: Yes, but there is a town centre plan and it is coming forward.

Q41 **Viscount Hanworth:** Talking about places to go and things to do, it occurs to me that people tend to gather around shops. Ideally, these should be dispersed among the communities. However, the realities of modern commerce mean that branded outlets are liable to seek central locations, such as large grocery stores. Do we perceive that this is a problem and, if so, how would we address it? Sorry to overburden you, Kevin, but what does the experience of Ebbsfleet, where there is an absence of local retail shops, suggest to us?

Kevin McGeough: I briefly mentioned that Ebbsfleet will consist of nine separate neighbourhoods. Each neighbourhood is designed to be a 15-minute walkable neighbourhood. Each of those neighbourhoods will have its own neighbourhood centre with a community building, a school and a range of shop facilities.

Viscount Hanworth: I perceive an absence of shops in those neighbourhoods.

Kevin McGeough: Each neighbourhood will have its own local centre, which will include shops, coffee shops and different things within it. There will then be a hierarchy of those neighbourhoods. The Whitecliffe site, for example, is a large quarry next to Bluewater Shopping Centre. That is an interesting point because we are a new town being built adjacent to the

most successful shopping centre in the south-east, Bluewater. We are never going to compete with Bluewater and our development has to respect that. In the last month, we have now built a direct fast-track connection through that quarry to Bluewater, so people will have access to that.

Along that one quarry, there will be three neighbourhoods. Two of the neighbourhoods will be lower-order neighbourhoods, which will have the shops, the school and the community building. The first, which is complete, is a neighbourhood called Castle Hill. That neighbourhood has a coffee shop, an estate agent, a community building and a school. We are exploring the opportunity to build our own cultural centre as part of our infrastructure project.

The central neighbourhood of the three neighbourhoods in that particular section will have the higher-order facilities. It will have a secondary school campus, which will be an eight-form entry academy. A temporary school opened this year. The full school will open next year. It will have a higher-order market centre, with a Sainsbury's or Morrisons-scale development within that. There are higher-order facilities in the middle development.

Across the nine developments, we will then have a town centre. The town centre is going to be built around Ebbsfleet International Station. That was the biggest challenge because of the logistical issues with replacing the car parking. In that particular instance, as the development corporation, we took the move to buy it ourselves. We will become the master developer of Ebbsfleet Central and create a town centre in that location. To complement our town centre there will be eight neighbourhood centres. The higher-order one will be in the centre of Whitecliffe, which will have the secondary school campus.

I will say there was a time lag, similar to Northstowe, from people moving in until that first coffee shop was opened. It was a day of celebration when the first coffee shop opened. There is a pub and a hotel, but there is a time lag. It also coincided with Covid. In that instance, the developer that was trying to build the neighbourhood centre was struggling. The first contractor went bust. The development corporation helped out by buying the neighbourhood centre to enable it to be brought forward more quickly. We are now trying to go through the process of giving that neighbourhood centre to the garden city trust in order to give it an income in perpetuity and to make sure those facilities are sustainable.

That magical first coffee shop is now as much a community centre as a coffee shop. There are so many different activities and events happening in that coffee shop.

Viscount Hanworth: I am glad to hear that my perception of excessive centralisation is incorrect.

Kevin McGeough: We still have Bluewater at the end of that fast-track bus line, which will be a mecca for many people. We will be the third new town ever to have a John Lewis officially connected to it.

There is that hierarchy of need. We will never compete with Bluewater. However, we will have local facilities as well and a town centre that will be appropriate within the context of north Kent. All the authorities within north Kent will be amalgamating into whatever form they decide is the right one. Ebbsfleet will establish its own role within that north Kent authority of the future.

Professor Rhiannon Corcoran: Critical mass is absolutely vital to pull in shops. It is a real issue for new towns. We have been working in Birkenhead on a community-led place plan, and a number of things came out very strongly in that. In a couple of the new developments around Birkenhead, Wirral Waters and Borough Yard, the developers have really insisted on work to pick up the current centre of Birkenhead so it becomes a vital and viable place for their communities to go to. If it is unattractive, if it does not have the offers that they want, those developments are simply not going to work. The links to established town centres are really important here. That is probably the priority.

Baroness Andrews took the Chair.

Q42 **Viscount Younger of Leckie:** I apologise for not being here at the beginning. I also perhaps further apologise if I ask questions that have been asked before. I am picking up that you have covered a lot of the ground in terms of understanding the evolving needs for residents in terms of new towns. We know that new towns are standalone or, indeed, are major urban developments. I would love to hear from all of you about how spaces are created, who takes responsibility for creating the spaces, whether they are temporary or permanent, what has worked and, crucially, linked to that, where the funding comes from. There are really three linked questions there.

Paula Bond: With Northstowe, we had a schools-first policy. The schools went in. The primary school was the first one that went in there. As part of that development, because the primary school was not going to use the whole building, part of the building called the wing was used for community activities. That worked very well. It was run by a community development officer from the local authority. Lots of different things happened there. The community congregated around that space.

The challenge came when that space was then needed by the school before the permanent community centre had been built. The local authority then had to go through planning and put in another temporary community centre, which we have called the cabin. That is what we are currently using while the permanent community centre is being built next door. It will be open in spring. The local authority, the district council, is running that temporary space. Its community development officers are based there. It has a café space and spaces that you can hire to do

things. The Northstowe Hub, which is another charity organisation in Northstowe, runs the café.

Those spaces have been very successful at bringing people together. The council has managed them well, although it has become a very large part of the community development officers' role. It takes up a lot of their time.

That is a good way of starting. Having a temporary space that is flexible and accessible for people to use has meant that, when they have gone to build the permanent community space, they know what they need. They know what the community want because the community have already been doing all the things that they are doing in those spaces.

The café worked brilliantly at bringing people together because people would go in and talk to each other. Lots of organisations have met each other in the café and a lot of collaborations have come from simply going and having a cup of coffee. That works very well. I would suggest it as a way forward.

Viscount Younger of Leckie: That is very helpful. It was local authority funding, crucially.

Paula Bond: That was local authority-funded.

Viscount Younger of Leckie: Is there funding from anywhere else?

Paula Bond: No, not for those.

Viscount Younger of Leckie: I will come to Kevin in a moment. Of course, it is very important to have a café and places like that to meet, but you also need space for exercise, for mothers and toddlers, and all those sorts of things.

Kevin McGeough: I have a sad story to tell at the beginning and then we can move on to a more positive one. When we inherited the planning approvals for 11,500 homes, in the typical old-fashioned approach, let us say, under Section 106, each site had been given permission one by one. Each site had permission for 700 or 800 homes, the largest being the quarry we just mentioned, which had 6,250 homes. Each was looking at social infrastructure just based on its site. No one had perceived the whole place as being a town or a whole place and how it might function together.

Two buildings had been delivered before the development corporation was set up. In the old model, a developer had to build a certain amount of space before he could build any more homes. It was then his responsibility to try to pass that on to someone else. Most mainstream developers do not want to retain this community space. They were literally looking for the first person who would take it from them.

In one instance, the developer did a deal well in advance of the infrastructure being developed with a local evangelical church that was

maybe 10 miles remote from the site. That church was able to invest more money in that infrastructure and create what is commercially quite a successful community centre in one of the neighbourhoods.

I have worked there for the whole 10 years that we have been developing. No one in that neighbourhood really sees that as their community centre. They are asking us when they are getting their community centre because they see it as an evangelical church. In the last couple of weeks, we had an instance where a young person was not allowed to pray in the building because he was not of the right religious persuasion. It is a problem when you give infrastructure that is meant to be for the community to a particular interest group.

The second model that we learned from was one that was delivered as the basic minimum that the Section 106 required. It was 324 square metres because that is what the Section 106 said. It does not function; it does not have a commercial kitchen; it does not have a storage. It is a huge liability to the people who live there and it is going to be for ever a service charge anchor around their neck.

Very quickly, we thought, "This cannot happen". If you look at a whole town of 40,000 new people, how can we have this default approach? That is why we took a stewardship angle and started thinking about the right infrastructure that is required for a town of this scale.

In the last month, we published our community infrastructure model, which we called *Space in the Place*. This has been an internally focused document for the last few years. For this document, we started off by working with the community in a co-design process. "What do you want? What kind of community space do you need in this place? What functions do you want to have in this place?"

A lot of the statutory functions that were integral to the original Section 106s are not delivered any more. There was an adult social care day centre. Kent County Council does not want that. There were GP surgeries for four GPs. None of the GPs want that. We want a world-class health and well-being hub that serves the whole 40,000 population.

This new model, which we developed with the community through a scientific approach, identified a requirement of 311 square metres of community space for every 1,000 residents. On that model, we have now developed a plan to deliver infrastructure across all the neighbourhoods over the next 15 years. Within the plan, we have identified a hierarchy of building types, starting from a modest 250 square metre building, which we call a neighbourhood house, that would serve a small community of up to 1,000 residents. That would be managed by a local person in perpetuity for the benefit of the community.

Two of these first buildings will be completed in the next three months. For the first one, a local entrepreneur, who was starting up her own coffee business and has been working from a cart for the last four years, is going to run that building or operate it on behalf of the community so

that managing it will not become a cost. It has to be open to the community. The community will have charges for using the space, but it is for her.

In other words, this model now gives us a framework, from a 250 square metre building up to a 10,000 square metre health and well-being hub. It tells us where it should be developed in each neighbourhood. We have a plan. There is a gap between the Section 106 and what we think is the ideal best practice approach. That is where we have to develop business cases to Treasury to try to secure that extra funding. We also work with the garden city trust and the community to develop the brief—it is a co-design process—to make sure it is sustainable long-term and each building has an income stream that will make it sustainable.

Viscount Younger of Leckie: We would love a copy of *Space in the Place*.

Professor Rhiannon Corcoran: I will talk about some principles, if that is all right. As a piece of general advice, when you are thinking about infrastructure, always start with children and young people. Everything that we know about public health suggests that a good childhood means a good healthy adulthood and old age. That is really critical. We need infrastructure for children. They need accessible playgrounds, which they can walk to, to enable them to develop some independent mobility.

There is a mounting body of evidence to suggest that, as children's ability to get around declines—and it has declined rapidly in recent years—mental health problems in childhood increase. Independent mobility is incredibly important for young people. It gives them all their pro-social skills, which they need to develop through their life. With that in mind, safety becomes a really important principle.

Walkability is probably the key principle in terms of infrastructure that you want to support the needs of children and young people.

Finally, we need flexibility, which Paula talked about. Any spaces need to be really adaptable because space becomes very quickly contested. A number of community groups want to use it for different reasons. More importantly than that, if we keep spaces flexible and adaptable, we are building in future readiness as well. As the population shifts and cultures change, your infrastructure has the capacity to support those changes as well.

Q43 **Temporary Chair:** Can I just ask you a very quick question? One thing that we have not talked about is people working at home. In your communities, are you planning for shared workspaces and work hubs as well as different types of housing where you have room for study? Can you be very brief? We have not touched on it.

Kevin McGeough: The 311 square meters per 1,000 people includes touchdown workspace for residents. We also commissioned *Building for a Healthy Life*, which enhanced *Building for Life* as neighbourhood guidance for homes. That encourages work from home spaces.

Paula Bond: I am not sure about this one because it is within the planning side of things. There has been some discussion about work-live spaces within Northstowe.

Temporary Chair: I am thinking about work spaces, so hubs where people can go to set up temporary accommodation or start-ups and consultancies.

Paula Bond: I am not sure where that is for Northstowe.

Temporary Chair: That is interesting in itself.

Q44 **Baroness Janke:** We have learned that it is important to have these facilities and social infrastructure in place at the beginning of the development. You have outlined some very good examples of where commercial enterprises have taken over such things and worked them very well to the benefit of the community. Where this is not initially commercially viable, how can it be developed, by whom, and who should be responsible for providing and maintaining such spaces, if they are not initially commercially viable? Could you perhaps answer that? I will start with you, Paula. I do not know, but I think you were struggling to get this sort of support.

Paula Bond: A lot of the spaces and activities are not commercially viable to begin with because they are so focused on the community. You are figuring out what people want from them.

Yes, it is a tricky question. Where there are community organisations that can support and operate things, they should be managing those spaces, but they will need support to build the capacity and be enabled to run those spaces. It is a long-term view, to begin with. It is about putting things in place. Like Kevin has been saying, it is about looking forward and making sure those community organisations have the assets and have what they need to be sustainable in terms of people, skills, capacity and the actual capital side of things.

Baroness Janke: In some communities—not just new communities—these organisations rely on such transient funding streams and insecurity is inherent in so many of their projects that there is a lack of confidence among the local community. That kind of thing needs to be avoided.

Paula Bond: It does. Sustainability will be key.

Baroness Janke: Kevin, you said the cost of the social and cultural infrastructure ought to be part of the initial costing of the whole project. Presumably, you would say that that is how those organisations need to be financed to start with, or do you have other views?

Kevin McGeough: Yes, it should be part of the development costs. That might include recognising that in the first couple of years there might be a negative income stream. That has to be part of the development model.

As I said, we have developed a garden city trust model to manage the buildings in perpetuity. It does not have to be a garden city trust. It could be a housing association, which will have a long-term commitment to the place. It could be a parish council. It could be some other community interest company that takes on the management.

For us, we need to secure Treasury funding to invest in our community infrastructure. Therefore, we have to have a robust business case to take to Treasury. We need to show that it is not going to be a noose around a future neck. That is why we do a lot of work, not just with the community in designing it, but in looking for other potential anchors, such as cultural organisations and, as we mentioned before, local entrepreneurs who are looking for space. For example, having a commercial kitchen in a community building, which enables someone not just to manage it while they are in the building but to run a business from that building, is a bit of upfront investment that makes the building viable. That is the kind of thinking that you need.

Baroness Janke: It is hard to get that in right at the beginning, which is when it is important to get things off the ground.

Kevin McGeough: It is. The development value is integral to the original planning. When you do it, it is really important that you do not just build the building, like our first example. It has to be built with the community. It has to be built with the users and the anchors to make sure it is not just viable but actually thrives.

Baroness Janke: Professor Corcoran, the health service is not renowned for being as flexible as we could sometimes hope in these circumstances and is certainly very jealous of its own budgets. Do you anticipate that sustainable facilities can be delivered through funding from the health service or would you expect other means of funding to sustain that?

Professor Rhiannon Corcoran: Yes, it is a good question. The move towards prevention in the 10-year plan might open up some possibility for the health service to be involved in this. We have already seen examples through NHS healthy new towns becoming involved in the development of new towns.

In terms of rationale, the task force has said we need to use new towns. This is new. We are treading new ground, although of course some examples already exist. We need to use new towns as test beds. We need to think about innovation and entrepreneurship, as Lord Mawson was talking about.

Baroness Janke: We also need to think about sustainability.

Professor Rhiannon Corcoran: Yes, with sustainability in mind. We need to think about how we do things differently, bring in the private sector and use the ~~social-value~~[Social Value](#) Act better, as I mentioned before. Impact investment and impact capital might be an important thing to look at.

In relation to Kevin's point about building these needs into the strategy in the first place, we could use persomething like Per cent for artArt, which Paula will know about, or think more innovatively around per cent for communities, where a percentage of the budget is allocated to initiate community activity and then to sustain it.

Those all feel like powerful opportunities to begin to think differently and to look at what works. Evaluate, as Kevin does in Ebbsfleet, what people are happy with and what they would like to change. That becomes an important part of that.

Baroness Janke: For confidence in the new town, sustainability is absolutely key. We have all seen these projects die because of a lack of funding. Does the assurance that sustainability will be an objective need to be a feature of the initial business plan? Are there other assurances that we need to put in place to make sure that these projects, particularly if they are run by the community, do not just die from a lack of funding?

Professor Rhiannon Corcoran: Sustainability is critical. These new towns will be here to stay in the long term. In relation to sustainability, again, a rebalancing might be needed here. When people talk about sustainability, they usually think about environmental sustainability. Here, of course, we are talking about social sustainability.

Q45 **Lord Bailey of Paddington:** Just to build on this, I had a little rant earlier on about the chattering classes taking over everything when you build a town like this. It may seem that I am anti the Government getting involved in setting up communities because I am. I fully accept that some infrastructure needs to be left not even planned so that the community can grow into it and set up on its own.

I will start with Kevin. I am very interested in this idea of contracting. When the place is initially built, it can be written into the plan that these buildings will exist. We are fairly good at capital infrastructure. Have you seen any way to leave behind a revenue stream? I have been in community work for 35 years now. The problem is literally keeping the lights on. You could always get people to fund a football team, buy you kit or whatever, but you cannot get people to pay for the light bill, the heat bill or staff; I separate staff out. Have you seen any examples of where, in the initial plan, somebody has had a thought about where revenue will come from so that the community can build into the future?

Kevin McGeough: Not in the initial plan, no. That is why we have had to retrospectively come up with a model in Ebbsfleet. That is why I would like to express that, if it is possible, it should be built into the plan for future new towns. However, our experience of trying to retrofit it is helpful in informing what you need and giving you a sense of the scale of what needs to be invested.

We did go to Treasury at one point and asked for a dowry to give to our garden city trust, which would let it run in perpetuity. As you can imagine, that was not successful. That does not mean you cannot have the same ambition. It just means that each building and project has to

have its own strong business case, and that you have to invest in physical infrastructure to give you revenue in the future. That means making sure your buildings can work harder for longer and have more uses. We need to move away from having single-use buildings, such as a sports building, an arts building and a statutory service building. Buildings need to function for all of them at the same time. They need to be working from 7 to 10, not just 9 to 6.

It is about designing buildings to work better for longer for more people and to be more flexible. That is a design thing. It does take a lot more investment. All our community buildings through this model will be BREEAM outstanding, which means they will be the top 2% of buildings environmentally. That is about reducing the long-term cost to the people who are going to run it.

You are looking for more opportunities to raise revenue long term. We have challenged our garden city trust to include programme funding in its business plan. There is no point in having a cultural building or a sports building that does not have any programming for youth. We need that to be built into the model in order to generate income for the trust as a whole. That is why we are giving out things such as shops to own as well. It is not just the community buildings.

Lord Bailey of Paddington: Professor, how do you embed that principle? How would someone approach a developer and say, "This is good for the community; this is what they would want"? As someone who develops on the other side—fortunately for me, I have been involved in community work—I have seen developers who want to help, but it has not been put to them in the correct way. Have you seen anything around that?

Professor Rhiannon Corcoran: Yes, that is a really good question. With developers, if ~~you~~you'll excuse the metaphor, you might have to kiss a lot of frogs before you find your prince. There are good developers around that want to have a positive social impact in the work that they do. It is about identifying those people and, as Paula and Kevin have suggested, calling on social landlords who are embedded in their community. Those might be the right avenues.

I would also think about CICs, trusts, which have been talked about, and community benefit societies, which can take over and begin to generate their own revenue. They can take over activities such as aluminium recycling or anything that might bring in revenue. They can run community cafés and community pubs. Those sorts of things can also help.

Lord Bailey of Paddington: I will just come to Paula with two questions. First, can you imagine a scenario where, if you were around a table, you could have asked the developer to leave behind some of the things that would have been useful for you, going ahead? That might be anything: the type of building, the size or whatever.

Secondly, you talked about needing support to develop. I used to be a youth worker. I set up a charity. I was trundling along quite terribly, I did not realise, until I came across London Youth, which basically rescued me from myself. They were compliance experts. They ran a course. You went on a course. Does that environment exist? It sounds like it does not, but should it exist for community interest companies as well?

Paula Bond: Yes, there should be something like that, so you know there is a place and where you should go, and it is really obvious. There are lots of places out there to get business advice. There are lots of places that we go. We have found places that we can go, but there are lots of disparate places for different elements of the business.

It would be nice to go to a central one and say, "Okay, we have this contract. I do not like this bit in it. Who can help me rewrite this and get it sorted?", and then come back later and say, "We need to get the safeguarding in place for our volunteering strategy. Is there an example template that we can use for our volunteering to make sure it covers everything that we need it to cover?" and so forth for all the different things. It would be nice to have a central place for that within a new town because you are going to have a lot of organisations coming from the community wanting this stuff.

We already support community groups with insurance, banking and all that kind of stuff within Northstowe Arts. We have safeguarding policies in place that we share with other organisations so they can see what they need as well. We are providing that for some of our organisations.

Lord Bailey of Paddington: You have had to go through the wringer to get there.

Paula Bond: Yes. If there was somebody who had that kind of expertise within the community development team in a new town, so you could go, "Okay, I have this question" and they could give you the answer, that would be brilliant.

Lord Bailey of Paddington: For a developer, one of the challenges is the difference between consultation and engagement.

Paula Bond: Yes.

Lord Bailey of Paddington: I have been involved in consultations. I would like to believe that I deliver engagement. What would you have asked for, in your particular case, if you had been at the table when the money and the drawings were first discussed? What would you have asked for?

Paula Bond: That is a very good question. I would have started off by reminding the developer that having a vibrant place to live sells houses so that they were a bit more open to being asked for things that are a little bit different.

What would I have asked for? They are very practical things. We would like a space to work in because we see that as an asset that we could make money from, which would make us more sustainable. It also gives us a base and storage. For an arts organisation, we have a lot of stuff. We have a storage cupboard that is well overfilled in the community centre at the moment. I would have asked for really practical things such as that. Access to some of their staff in terms of marketing expertise and that side of things would also have helped us to build capacity and skills in the beginning.

It comes down to those two things. Alongside the money to run and put our programmes together, it would be space and expertise.

Lord Bailey of Paddington: Chair, one of the things that the Government probably could do is to create a portal with information. From the two charities that I set up, one half of the war was about money; the other half was, "What am I meant to be doing? What am I allowed to do?"

Temporary Chair: It is a different definition of resource in a way, is it not?

Lord Bailey of Paddington: Yes, it is.

Temporary Chair: We did touch on that very briefly.

Lord Bailey of Paddington: It is intellectual resource.

Temporary Chair: Yes, and thought leadership. We talked about it briefly when you were forcibly detained in other places.

Q46 **Lord Porter of Spalding:** Who should pay for all of this? There are roughly four pots of money. There is the landowner. It is too late for them. We have missed that. That boat went out. There is the developer. They might be able to show some value added. They might think that they could get an uplift. There are the existing taxpayers. In Northstowe, that is clearly where the burden is sitting at the moment. People who are not benefiting from the service are paying for it. That is a hard one, given the place that the local government family is in. The fourth one is the national taxpayer. That is all of us collectively because we all need people to have places to live that are better, for all the reasons that you will have outlined. I was not here for what you said, but I imagine you have explained that when people live in good places all the health outcomes are much better. Mental health is better, physical health is better, crime is cheaper to service because you get less of it, and all the rest of those things. Who should pay for it?

Temporary Chair: Can we have really short answers? That is a really big question.

Professor Rhiannon Corcoran: It is a really big question. I did not outline all those things, so thank you for doing it for me. I should have done and I did not.

What I will say is that it should not be the national taxpayer. One of my reservations about new towns is that they are only for some, for the people who can move, for the people who have the resources to move. They leave other people languishing in existing places whose community facilities have been hollowed out. Therefore, we are potentially building in further health inequality as we build new towns. That is a really important thing. For that reason, it should not be the national taxpayer. That is all I have to say. It seems to me that the developer might cop some of this.

Lord Bailey of Paddington: Gary, they should take out the value of the land. Land value capture is one way to do this.

Lord Porter of Spalding: Yes, but it is too late for Northstowe. For Ebbsfleet, it is way too late.

Lord Bailey of Paddington: Ebbsfleet seems to be getting money from the taxpayer, but we are talking about new towns, places that are yet to be built. The Government are having this big conversation about eradicating hope value. One of the benefits of hope value is that you can spend some of that value on these things.

Temporary Chair: We should give the witnesses a chance to answer the question.

Kevin McGeough: New towns pay for themselves, if you are a patient investor. You will get a return on your investment. It is not like the taxpayer is paying for Ebbsfleet with no return. We will see a return over time when the town is successful. It gets returned to the taxpayer through businesses and other things.

Land value capture is central to new town development and garden city principles. You cannot develop a new town without expecting that the increased land value that is generated from designation as a new town will pay for some of the essential infrastructure, whether that is social infrastructure or not. That has been integral to all new town developments, whether they are the public-led post-war new towns or those on garden city principles.

When you try to retrospectively call an existing development a new town, or when a landowner has already taken out the perceived value of that place and tries to call it a new town, that is when you are going to have challenges. That is when you need someone else to try to plug the gap. To a degree, that is what we have had to do at Ebbsfleet. The whole point of this exercise is to share that lesson so that we do not do that with future new towns and we plan in advance.

I totally agree. It is not going to come from local taxation because people do not want to pay. People love to hate new towns. In other words, the last thing that you want to do is give people the opportunity to blame them for the cost. Factually, if we look at how much new towns have returned to central government over time, it has been positive.

When I worked for English Partnerships, income from Milton Keynes—it had inherited the development corporation—was the main source of income for English Partnerships for some time. Baroness Andrews was our sponsor at that time.

Temporary Chair: Yes, that is right. That is also the story of the post-war new towns. They paid back what they borrowed quite quickly.

Kevin McGeough: They exceeded that in Milton Keynes and other places.

Temporary Chair: Yes, that is right.

Paula Bond: I am not sure I have that much to add. I would agree that it is about being patient with the returns, wherever the money is coming from. It is a long-term investment. That is the only way that it can be seen.

Temporary Chair: Thank you very much. It has been a very rich session. It has been really important for us to hear your experience on the ground and the big picture. We have learned a lot about things such as capacity building, co-creation and how you identify what people are going to respond to. You made good points about food and growing, creating virtuous circles so that people have a lasting investment in the community, how to build pride in community, the use of heritage and so on. It has been very rich indeed. We are very grateful to you.

You will see your written evidence in due course, but I hope you will stay in touch. If there is anything that you feel you have not been able to say or if we have not asked a question that you wanted to answer, just get in touch with us by writing to our clerks. Thank you very much indeed.