



Built Environment Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Meeting the UK's housing demand

Tuesday 14 September 2021

10 am

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Members present: Baroness Neville-Rolfe (The Chair); Baroness Bakewell; Lord Berkeley; Lord Best; Lord Carrington of Fulham; Baroness Cohen of Pimlico; Lord Grocott; Lord Haselhurst; Lord Moylan; Lord Stunell; Baroness Thornhill.

Evidence Session No. 4

Heard in Public

Questions 34 - 47

Witnesses

I: Jonathan Manns, Executive Director, UK & Monaco, Rockwell Property; David Bainbridge, Planning Director, Savills UK; Victoria Hills, Chief Executive Officer, Royal Town Planning Institute.

Examination of witnesses

Jonathan Manns, David Bainbridge and Victoria Hills.

Q34 **The Chair:** Good morning and welcome to the House of Lords Built Environment Committee public evidence session on our inquiry on meeting the UK's housing demand. I have to say that it is very good to be in Parliament physically for the first time in this committee. Given the committee's remit, what a joy it is to walk through the beauty of Westminster Hall on my way into the committee today.

Our inquiry will investigate the demand for new housing in the UK and how barriers to meeting the demand can be overcome. We are looking at key factors shaping the type, tenure and quality of housing, but we will also examine a range of challenges to meeting that demand, including skills shortages, the need for adaptation to climate change in that context and some aspects of the planning system. That is the focus of the session today. This inquiry will not undertake a wholesale review of the Government's proposed reforms, but we are interested in how the planning system can act as a barrier to meeting housing demand and how we can improve it. We will then make recommendations to the Government later this year.

Our witnesses this week are Jonathan Manns, Executive Director of UK & Monaco at Rockwell Property, David Bainbridge, Planning Director at Savills, and Victoria Hills, Chief Executive Officer of the Royal Town Planning Institute. The session is being broadcast by parliamentlive.tv. A full transcript is being taken and will be made available to you to make any corrections shortly after the session. Please may members and witnesses keep their questions and responses brief, because we have a lot to cover.

I would like to start by asking each of you a general question. What part does the planning system play in identifying housing demand? In what way does the current planning system in England act as a barrier to meeting that demand?

Jonathan Manns: To start off, I think it is important that we distinguish between need and demand, because they are used interchangeably quite often and they are quite distinct from one another. When we talk about demand, we are talking effectively about something that is based on preference and an ability to pay, whereas when we talk about need, we are talking effectively about an indicator of deficit.

When it comes to questions of housing supply, housing supply is critical, because the planning system tends to focus on addressing the need in an area, which might, for example, be for larger family homes whereas the demand in that same area may well be for two-bed flats. Demand also includes elements such as second homes, buy-to-let properties, pied-à-terre and things that typically sit outside of need. I think that distinction is important.

Thereafter, the planning system's key role in many respects, as I see it, is in setting targets to meet that identified need. To contextualise that, if we are talking about need, evidence of need suggests a figure of around 200,000 new homes per year, and evidence of demand might suggest a figure of around 400,000 new homes per year. That is why we often see the figure of around 300,000 new homes per year, sitting in the middle. Target setting is key. In the emerging White Paper, the proposal to set targets nationally seems to me to be an exceptionally good idea, particularly if there was a clear and published evidence base, or clear articulation, as to how we will meet our national need. At the moment, that is undertaken at the local authority level.

The Chair: The point you are making is that it is not published.

Jonathan Manns: It is published, but it is published across 300 local authorities nationally.

The Chair: It is not added up into one paper or even one website at the current time.

Jonathan Manns: Yes. I am not aware of it being aggregated.

Victoria Hills: Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide evidence. I would throw another figure into the mix. At the Royal Town Planning Institute we have identified that we need about 145,000 new affordable homes every year within that. I am sure we will get on to it, but affordability and type of tenure is key within all this.

To answer your question on what role planning and planners and our members play, in short it is the critical role. Planning is the gateway to construction. None of it happens without permission, and none of that can happen without a well-considered, thought-out local plan. Within that local plan, as we know, the Government have proposals to beef up the importance of that local plan, to have a strong role for it, which we think is important. Within that, you have a number of detailed pieces of analysis, including strategic market needs assessments and so on. I will not go into the technical names of all these supporting documents, but there is some very detailed analysis that looks at the actual need and, furthermore, the types of tenure within that. It is important to get that evidence base locally, because that then sets the targets that are appropriate for the local area.

I would go a bit further than Jonathan and say that it is really important that the community are involved in that conversation from the outset, because they will be living with that development, and we are winning the hearts and minds of the community as to why more development, more homes, is needed. Let us face it, many of them understand that argument. They want their children and families to be able to stay in the local area. They want to be able to have that sense of community. I think the lockdown has shone a light on that even more, as families and communities were separated, not being able to travel.

People want to be able to stay in their local area near family. They get the need for more homes, but a really important part of it is taking the local community through that local plan process and having a very open and transparent conversation with them about what can sometimes be quite technical documents that our members are involved in preparing to show all the different types of needs, the tenure types, the affordability, the mix.

As to what role it has played, I can quote you a couple more figures, and we may get into this more as we move along. Planning is sometimes cited by people as a blocker to housing, but the number of permissions that are granted has been steadily increasing over the last decade. Reflecting back to 2010, 187,000 planning permissions for housing were granted. As of 2019, we were up to 398,000. We always say that it would be a wonderful thing if they were built. If the need is 300,000 or 400,000 a year, it is about the buildout. No doubt, we will be returning to that in some of the questioning, but right from the get-go you can see the permissions come through the current local plan process and the controlled development management process. Our focus is more on what is stopping those being built.

The Chair: On a point of fact, how many local authorities have valid, up-to-date local plans?

Victoria Hills: You would have to ask the department for the exact fact on that. The summary answer is: not as many as they should, which is why the Government are proposing strengthening up the requirements to have one in their Planning Bill. I do not have the exact stat to hand, but it is not as many as need to be; that is probably a better way of answering it.

The Chair: That is a barrier. Jonathan talked about transparency of data being a barrier. You have talked about the need to take people with you as a barrier.

Victoria Hills: Having an up-to-date local plan is a barrier. If we look at the resourcing of planning, the area where the biggest cuts have manifested themselves over the last 10 or 15 years has been in local plan preparation. Local authorities focus on dealing with the here and now, the consents coming through, but we have seen the biggest drain of resources in local authorities in the local plan. That will have an impact on how quickly you can move it forward, how you do that authentic engagement with the community, and ultimately whether it gets through or not—whether it is paused. Yes, that is also an area of concern.

David Bainbridge: Thank you for the opportunity, everyone. I have spent the last 23 years working in planning in local government and in property consultancy. I am a chartered member of the Royal Town Planning Institute and very proud to be so. I would like to think that, although I have spent the majority of my time working in the private sector acting for clients, whether landowners, developers or land promoters, I still have a strong affiliation to the public sector role in the

provision of planning in the country. It plays a critical part in planning for development in our country.

To answer the question, as Victoria has mentioned the planning system plays an absolutely critical role in identifying housing need. I would endorse Jonathan's comments that the terminology we would often use is about housing need rather than demand. Of course, the planning system does that in a number of ways. You will no doubt be familiar with the fact that the planning system is a plan-led system. The point about having a local plan, or whatever terminology is used for a plan to come forward, is so that there is some certainty as to the level of growth and the locations for growth. For many clients that I represent, the lack of certainty is the enemy to investment. I act for many clients, including landowning clients, who would like to make their land available or to bring it forward for residential development or residential-led development, which is mixed-use development, but they need the certainty to be able to bring that forward.

The planning system, in playing that critical part in identifying housing need, identifies the number of homes in any given location that are required over a period of time. It is typically 15 years for a local plan, but of course local plans, as you will be familiar with, need to be reviewed partially or fully every five years. Perhaps we will get into the methodology, but the standard method that the Government have set is based primarily on an assessment of household formation. It will always be the case that the evidence looks back, and the method then projects that evidence forward to see what might happen if one were to project past trends forward for the number of homes that are required.

I have a couple of other points before I finish on this particular part of the question. There is a second part to household formation, which is to try to address the issue of affordability. The planning system, in trying to identify the number of homes in any given location, is not just about the quantum and the figure but about the type, range and affordability of housing. That is so very important.

Finally on this part of the question, the point about local plans being up to date is highly relevant. I agree with Victoria that unfortunately within local government it does feel as if there have been significant cuts and a reduction in skills in local plan teams. They face a very challenging process. It is very challenging, as you know, to get a local plan through examination by an independent government-appointed planning inspector. Where there is no up-to-date local plan, and you will be familiar with this, the Government have put in provision whereby the terminology, the presumption in favour of sustainable development, will apply.

Almost twice-monthly I attend events with members of the public where I act for clients in trying to explain and listen to views on proposed development, mostly residential development. One of the issues that regularly comes across is: why have the Government put in place a presumption in favour of sustainable development, particularly where

there is a lack of five-year land supply? That does seem to be a particular bugbear with residents in communities that I get involved in. I will stop there, and I am happy to respond to any points.

The Chair: We should move on, but if any of our witnesses have come across particular examples of local plans that we should be looking at, preferably in different parts of the country, that would obviously be good, and examples of failure of pace, because it does sound as though there might be a speed issue, which we have identified in other areas of our inquiry already.

Q35 **Lord Haselhurst:** Will the introduction of the zone-based system that the Government are introducing make the slightest difference? If a big project is deemed to be right for a part of your area and will have great beneficial effects for the country as a whole, it will still be opposed. How does one overcome the fact that you are being marked down in a particular area? I am one of the people who bears the scars of the battle over Stansted airport. I know that intimately and the grief it has caused, and no local plan has yet succeeded. Everybody is against it. Why? Because in addition to the obvious, they fear that more housing will come and will spoil their environment and make matters generally worse, not better.

Should the Government therefore perhaps look at how it is possible to persuade people to support some of this, even though they may not exactly like it—to see benefits coming from it, to see that some goodies will be found in the basket at the same time? I query whether simply saying, “You are not a high priority area for development and you are” helps us to get to any better position than we have been struggling to find so far.

David Bainbridge: First, we have to see the detail when it comes to the zoning system, of course, because while it has been referred to in the planning White Paper issued in August 2020, we have yet to see much of the detail of it. No doubt you are familiar with a number of the headlines, not least in the national press, which refer to the fact that there might be discussions taking place as to whether the zonal type of system is appropriate.

I would question whether the zonal system, as I understand it, would come in in the first instance, because it does look as if it is intended—and I accept that we need to see the detail if it does come in at all—to slim down the local plan-making process. The local plan-making process is a very democratic, accountable system. It is quite transparent, although I would accept that there are parts of communities who find it difficult to access it. It does allow engagement over many stages within the plan-making process. That will not necessarily be taken away, but if you have a zonal process that seeks to front-load the identification of land for development and to identify what type of development that would be, what the scale of the development would be, and what have you—almost an assumption or presumption of planning permission, or whatever terminology, coming forward—it does feel as if that would be very

challenging for local communities and for the planning process system itself to accommodate.

We will have to wait to see the detail, but I suspect that even if it does come in—Victoria might have more comments as to the prospect of it coming in—it will not make a great deal of difference to the delivery of the volume of housing within England.

Victoria Hills: At the Royal Town Planning Institute, we studied zoning extensively, as many academics have around the world, to look at the good, the bad and the ugly. There is perhaps an urban myth that zoning speeds everything up, that it is very simple and if we could just zone everything we could get on and build.

When I speak with my counterparts in America, which has a very detailed zoning system, I am sorry if what I am about to say sounds trivial, but the reality is that the zoning documents that go alongside all that regulation quite frankly make the local plan look anorexic. It is a very complicated process and it is constantly updated, reviewed and challenged. We need to be careful about what we actually mean when we are talking about zoning, because there is different zoning in Europe and the Americas. It is very different if you go to Asia and so on.

Will it make a difference, though—to answer your question? The business of where you put homes and development is, quite rightly, complicated, because there are a lot of considerations. You either do the engagement and the detailed studies up stream in a local plan or zone, or you do it mid stream, which is probably how we have it at the moment in the local plan, or you do a lot of detailed matters downstream.

There is no cutting corners in this business when you have to deliver on need, on infrastructure, on net zero and so on. There can be no cutting of corners, in our opinion, so you still have to do the work somewhere. It is just about where you do the work. We do not think that it would speed anything up. It just changes where you put the focus of the resources if you do a deep-dive engagement with the community and get everything lined up up front.

The problem with that is the democratic deficit, in some senses. We have had the same system since 1947. Communities are used to being involved in detailed matters. That is how it works in the UK. If you take the detailed matters point from the application stage and front-load it two, three, maybe even five years in advance in the local plan stage, there is a danger that some of the people who want to get involved five years in the future missed the boat because they did not live in the community in the first place. Then you run the risk that you disenfranchise those people from the whole process, who say that it was a stitch-up: "You did it all years ago and I wasn't involved, but now I'd like to have my say, because I think there's a better way of doing this particular development".

To finish, you asked about how to get the community signed up to development and on board. We are strong believers that if you can demonstrate the benefits, and communities want things, if you have an up-front conversation with them early on—"What would you like?"—and you start on that tack right from the start, then you have something to build on. I draw upon my own experience at Old Oak and Park Royal, when I was running the mayoral development corporation there. You have a very honest conversation, which is, "It's beyond our control, this station is landing, there will be development. What would you like, community?" It turned out that, apart from homes, they wanted sustainable jobs for the community, for their children. They wanted to benefit from the wealth that was coming. Our focus there was on employment right from the get-go, ensuring that the community could benefit, years in advance of any homes being built.

I do think that it comes back to authentic community engagement and resourcing that properly within local authorities, and having somebody holding the ring on that conversation to make sure that promises or safeguards do not get lost in the wash as the buildout happens many years in advance.

Jonathan Manns: I would probably echo most of the sentiment that has already been expressed by Victoria and David. To give you a direct answer, "possibly" would be my view, subject to a number of caveats, as you might expect.

The transition to a zonal-based system, even if it were for larger sites only, would be a significant transition in the way we operate and have operated in the UK. As has already been expressed, the planning system, whether in this country or elsewhere—all planning systems, in fact—grapple with the same issues. There is an inherent tension between offering certainty and offering flexibility. If you speak to planners who work in a zonal system, they will feel weighed down by the certainty and comparative lack of flexibility, whereas here we have a lack of certainty by virtue of the greater amount of discretion.

Zoning can offer more clarity, but it can create opportunities to articulate a clear vision for an area more effectively, it can encourage development to come forward in a less piecemeal manner, but it does require an awful lot of public engagement and a huge amount of work to be done at considerable expense with considerable resource. It is also slower to respond to changes in preference within the market—if we are talking about commercial uses, for example, they may no longer want to be in the east of London but in the west, or not on the east of a settlement but on the west—and preferences locally about how they feel their community should look.

So whether you are looking at the existing discretionary system or the potential for a more zonal system, ultimately it comes down to whether the decision-maker feels able to take decisions for their area. As we know, it can often be very difficult for people to feel that they have the support of the local community to make those decisions for their area.

Subject to resourcing, I would not discount it, but it does require a huge amount of up-front work and a huge amount of public engagement.

Q36 Lord Moylan: For the sake of transparency, I will say at the outset that Victoria and I used to work together for a former Mayor of London, although in different parts of his empire, and that Jonathan and I have met before in the context of a planning application brought forward in the area where I was a member of the council.

Developing Lord Haselhurst's point, one of the counterparts of zoning if it were introduced is that it would go with a lighter touch as to the detailed approval of minor matters and reserved matters to do with development. The local authority might be in a position—this does not have to be the case, but it could be coupled with this—to say that in that zone, which is zoned for, say, housing or commercial or whatever, subject to certain massing, bulk and height provisions and possibly façade materials, and provided that the development is consistent with building regulations, there will be no further consideration of those matters or of the details from the local planning authority. In other words, you can operate within certain parameters, but you do not need to come back to us, as you do at the moment, with constant reserved matters, approving this, approving that, approving the other as you go on. Would that not be attractive in giving both certainty and flexibility to developers?

If you do not find that compelling as a general principle, do you think that it would at least work with small development sites in encouraging small builders to come forward by reducing the amount of risk and increasing the level of certainty they would have if they were to build out that site? Customarily, we indicate who should start, but it is a question as much for Victoria as anybody else. I would be happy with whatever order you took it in.

Victoria Hills: I can finish making the points that I made before. You have already worked out the level of detail that would be required to go in to ensure that you had every eventuality, all bases, covered—everything completely sewn up, all the unknown unknowns—because you have baked it into those requirements. It sounds too good to be true. In our opinion, it probably is. There are always uncertainties, eventualities and things that come out through the master planning process that we did not know were there, or something changes in the area. The discretionary system enables you to pivot and be flexible, to respond to changing needs. That flexibility provides an opportunity to address needs but also to give something back to the community that may not have been on the table in the first place and to get it over the line, for example.

On the face of it, what you have just described sounds all too perfect. We are not against zoning per se. The point is that you have to do that detail somewhere.

Lord Moylan: Do you need to do all the detail? Do you really need to have reserved matters about the shape and form of the windows, or the pitch of the roof to be the subject of planning approval in every case?

That is really my question.

Victoria Hills: One of the points I alluded to earlier was the cultural change required as part of that process. You have to ask yourself whether the public are ready for that level of non-involvement in some of those detailed matters. They may sound parochial, but when you have a neighbour's extension going up next door it can be very important to you where that window is sited or the height of the extension.

On the face of it, it may seem all very trivial, but these are important points that really do matter to communities day in and day out. If you take away that opportunity to comment, as long as it meets what would have to be quite broad parameters it is fine. Where we have got to as an institute is that we are not convinced that the public are ready for that level of cultural change at this particular moment in the system that we already have. I will leave it there and pass over to my colleagues.

David Bainbridge: The prospect of a streamlined system whereby zoning could speed up the delivery of a consent for development is attractive. It is attractive to landowners, developers and promoters. I do feel, unfortunately, that the detail and the implementation of it will be exceptionally difficult to get right, not least because developments and development sites can change hands or the market changes.

There was reference to the need for flexibility. Zoning, if it has a relatively constrained building envelope, building height and what have you, is unlikely to give the flexibility that is sought. I find that my developer clients in particular find a level of comfort from having to go through the consent regime, including engagement with statutory consultees, the local community, in the planning system. I know that some clients absolutely pride themselves on their community involvement, which means that they roll up their sleeves, stand next to boards and display screens, and speak about their, let us say, product, but it is about place-making.

Finally, the level of detail is absolutely critical for the quality of place-making: roof pitches, roof materials, façade treatments, as well as building scales, footprints of buildings, and the spaces in between buildings. I am not suggesting that it is impossible to get that correct through zoning by a front-loaded system, but I think it would be exceptionally challenging.

Jonathan Manns: I suppose I might take a slightly different stand but echo the same essential points. To my mind, it is all a question of how you cut the cake. You still have to grapple with precisely the same issues. The question is at what point in the planning process you choose to grapple with them. If we are talking about how we might deliver in a zoning system a less intensive reserved matters stage, there is scope on larger sites to introduce design coding that would set the pitch of the roof and the orientation of the windows. That does not mean that you do not have to deal with these issues. It simply means that in order to get them

ticked off more quickly downstream, you have to thrash out the detail further forward.

Q37 Lord Best: My question is about the proposal to bring in the infrastructure levy that replaces Section 106 agreements and, indeed, the CIL, the community infrastructure levy. My question is whether this will be a good idea. We all know that Section 106 is a flawed system; it is a very difficult system, but it produces about half of all the affordable housing in the country year after year.

Work by Professors Christine Whitehead and Tony Crook, for example, suggests that we will not be able to squeeze out of this new infrastructure levy all the good things that we want, and affordable housing may be pushed further back down the queue and, instead of being half of the output, it might be a lot less. Victoria said that we know that we need something like 145,000 affordable homes for people who cannot afford the market prices, and this sounds like a backwards step, since that is three times what we are getting at the moment. We have to massively increase the amount of affordable housing. There is very little disagreement about that. Will this do the trick?

Victoria Hills: The view of the Royal Town Planning Institute is that Section 106 and developer contributions as they were originally envisaged are an unsustainable way of funding affordable housing going forward. We need to find other ways of funding affordable housing without relying on the CIL and Section 106.

The overreliance on it—you just quoted the statistics—which will be eye watering to those who conceived it many years earlier, has meant that, using Jonathan’s words, there is less cake to cut to give the community the infrastructure that they require. We all hear communities saying, “We don’t want these homes, because we don’t have enough GP surgeries, school places, roads and transport”. It is a big problem, and that is why people object to homes. Very rarely does the community object to a housing development because there are not enough affordable homes. They are objecting because there is not enough infrastructure. The starting point should be to use the infrastructure levy for what it was intended for, which was infrastructure, and find a different way to fund affordable homes. That is the starting point.

To answer your question specifically, on the face of it simplification into one single infrastructure levy sounds very enticing, and we support the principle of simplification. What the last year has shown is that, while some people complain about or find Section 106 a little bit tricky, what has landed in our inboxes is people saying, “Hang on a moment. Don’t take away Section 106. We rather like it”, because it is a legal requirement to tie in the local authorities to deliver this roundabout or that bus stop. Why do developers like it? Because they need to sell things and they are not selling those homes unless the primary school is built on time or the roundabout is there. You could have the most beautifully designed homes in the middle of nowhere, but nobody can get to them. Section 106 provided that certainty to developers: “We pay our money

and we're getting this by then". That is one of our concerns. What was so wrong with it that we need to get shot of it?

The other point is about the community infrastructure levy, merging it all together. Does one size fit all across the country? Ultimately, the areas where you will be able to raise the most money will be the higher-value areas based on the land. Perhaps some of those areas, if we take the notion of levelling up and the need to regenerate other parts of the country—regeneration is coming back into fashion, I hear—how will we pay for it if those values are not there? Will the infrastructure levy fix that? At the moment, from our perspective, the jury is still out on that. We support the notion of simplification, but it is fair to say that there is an awful lot of detailed work that the Government and the department will have to do to get this right.

Jonathan Manns: It is worth starting by stressing the fact that there are a great number of question marks over what the infrastructure levy will look like, how it will work and what the implications of these will be. There is also, on a fundamental level, a great philosophical leap in the way the infrastructure levy will be applied compared to the existing system. It is a simple tax. Unlike Section 106, which is intended to mitigate negative site-specific impacts, or the community infrastructure levy, which deals with an identified need or requirement for infrastructure in an area, this is a simple land tax on sales receipts. It is not tied to the need for infrastructure, including affordable housing; nor is it tied to mitigating any negative impacts arising from development.

That simplicity is appealing, of course, and, as Kate Barker identified in her 2004 review of housing supply, there are clear benefits to simple taxes like this in credibility, simplicity and being perceived as reasonable. But there are a great number of questions. First, should a tax like this even sit within the planning system, or does it muddy the waters by introducing what is effectively a super-stamp duty into the planning system? There is no direct link there.

Going on, there is a question about how and when the infrastructure is delivered. Take, for example, a new road. A new road would be required to make a development acceptable. However, the money for that road would come in only when the tax is paid when the homes are sold. You would presumably be in a situation where you are asking local authorities to borrow against anticipated future receipts from a tax, which requires local authorities to make assumptions about what those receipts will be, but also in effect requires them, as opposed to the developer, to carry the development risk for the scheme, which opens up risks such as: what if the developer does not build out the entire site, or what if the values that are achieved are not as were anticipated?

There is then also the question of geographical difference. As we know, there are high values in the south-east of England, and lower land values elsewhere in the country. Do areas with lower land values not also require infrastructure? Do they not also require affordable housing? If those receipts are lower, the question arises as to how that affordable

housing and infrastructure will be paid for. Presumably, again, one method of mitigating that would be to borrow from the higher land value areas in the south and redistribute that money as part of a wider levelling-up agenda. Whether that is politically popular remains to be seen, not least in light of recent by-elections.

Finally, there is the question of how the affordable housing comes into being and at what benefit or at what price. It is not clear at the moment whether the local authority or a housing association is expected to pay full market value for the units, how they might be designed into a scheme, or at what point they arrive. At the moment, the planning system deals rather admirably with all this in so far as it is able to secure infrastructure at the point of need and affordable housing at the point of need.

There are certain significant questions that I think would need to be addressed before what is a very appealing simple tax were introduced.

The Chair: David, before you comment, would Lord Grocott like to come in? Perhaps you could make sure that we have a comment on small and medium-sized operations in the 106 context. That was something that we needed to inquire about.

Q38 **Lord Grocott:** What our witnesses have had to say is extremely interesting, but also slightly depressing. I cannot quite see what system this leads us towards, given that I imagine we all want to see the kinds of developments where there is a mixture of housing that meets local need but that has the essential infrastructure there. It may be that my view of all this is coloured by having represented a new town for a long time where it is taken as read that, if you put up a lot of houses, you make sure that there are shops, a community centre, a pub and various other things.

Whatever happens under the present system—this is perhaps anecdotal, and I have certainly heard what Lord Best said about the operation of Section 106 agreements—I still see housing estates with nearly identical houses on them, with nothing in the way of providing the essentials for a community to exist in those areas. New towns did that. There were lots of things wrong with new towns, but they did it. We do not just want to apply levies, but levies with a purpose. How do we get to the objective that I think we all want to see?

David Bainbridge: The Section 106 process, as I see it, is not broken. It could do with improvement, but it is not broken. If we had a tier in levy regimes, I would put Section 106 at the top, the community infrastructure levy some way down, and then, although we have to see the detail, the prospect of a national infrastructure levy.

I do not see that a national infrastructure levy will be workable, because if we take Section 106 and CIL into consideration, Section 106 typically deals with the delivery of development and infrastructure on a development site, while the community infrastructure levy deals with the provision of infrastructure off a development site. That is such an

important consideration. As I am sure you are familiar with, there are many local authorities that do not have the community infrastructure levy in place. It can be quite divisive, particularly if you are in a two-tier local government system. Therefore, I am certainly not a fan of the community infrastructure levy.

At a national level, for, let us say, the Government or someone on their behalf to collate growth requirements, which then translates into infrastructure requirements, which then gives a cost, which then gives a figure for gap funding for provision of that infrastructure, for them to collate that for each local authority in our country and arrive at a levy, which then might have regional variations, which then has to go back down, it is absolutely not workable in theory, never mind in practice. I would say that we need to wait to see the detail.

On the question of the provision of development that leads to a community, the plan-led system can deliver that development. The plan-led system, as we currently have it, identifies land for development and identifies the components of that development. No development should take place without planning permission. To be able to get planning permission, you should demonstrate that you are in compliance with local plan policy.

It comes back to the points that we have made. If you have the skills and the resources and you have a good profile for forward planning or policy officers, particularly in local government, and you can bolster that part of the planning system, you will get a better quality of output in the years ahead once a local plan is made. That comes down to the creation of a community, sports facilities, community benefits, green and blue infrastructure. That comes down to plan-making and allocating a site for development.

Q39 Lord Best: I have a brief supplementary, which is looking for the big solution. How do people react to Sir Oliver Letwin's proposals for the creation of development corporations—Victoria knows all about these—where the council itself, through a subsidiary body, acquires the site, a big site, and then parcels it out to house builders, to the people who can do the affordable housing, for some retirement housing, a very important component, with a master plan that ensures that it happens and thereby allocates the subsidy because it has come out of the purchase of the land in the first place? How does the Letwin proposal land with some of you?

Victoria Hills: Thank you for the question, because it is one of the points that I wanted to make. It was an excellent piece of work back in 2018-19 and it seems to have been a bit forgotten. There were some really helpful recommendations, and I would draw the committee's eye to those recommendations, which we fully support.

One of the focuses of Letwin was having strategic delivery teams. You could have that within the local authority. It could be in a mayoral development corporation, an urban development corporation or some other way. If you think about the process of planning, you have the really

important local plan-making stage, and then you have the development management stage. The bit that seems to be lacking in the UK—we have looked to international counterparts that do it very well; the Dutch do this very well—although not in every local authority, for them the permission was just the start. They have a delivery-focused team within local authorities that is focused on not letting any developer off the hook, on unblocking and on delivery. We are very good at the first two bits, but in some areas we lack that delivery focus.

Yes, my experience was in a development corporation, and the clue is in the name: development. When people came to talk to us, it was, “How can we help you? What can we do to unlock this site?” Yes, in an ideal world, you will own all the land, but you do not need to. You can do that through development agreements. It is about getting everybody around the table. Why would they? Because you can provide certainty through a planning framework, through a local plan, but more importantly, if you get everybody around the table you can attract funding. Often these sites are not easy. If they were, someone would already have done them. If you are going to convince a government department—obviously the Treasury, ultimately—that you want some housing infrastructure funding or something like that to unlock the site, it will only look at you credibly if you have everybody joined up.

For me, it does not have to be prescriptive. Yes, I am a big advocate of mayoral development corporations, because I think they are a powerful entity to bring everybody around the table, but it does not have to be in a mayoral area. The powers already exist. The New Towns and Urban Development Corporations Act is still there. There is nothing stopping any local authority in the land setting up an urban development corporation. They could do it tomorrow if the political will was there to do it in the areas where the devolved mayors can do mayoral development corporations, but you can take different models.

I will give you a couple of very good London examples. In the London Borough of Enfield they are getting on with the business of Meridian Water, because they have set up a development team within the council to get on with it. That is very direct delivery. If you look a bit further east out at Barking and Dagenham, they have set up their company, Be First, to get on with delivery.

I think that Letwin spotted all this and unfortunately it got a bit lost somewhere in the mess of the last 18 months. If this committee could do great things, one of the great things would be to bring the Letwin report off life support and get some oomph behind it.

Jonathan Manns: I think that the answers are all in front of us in many respects, from the various independent reviews that have been commissioned over the past 15 or so years. Sir Oliver’s report and the two by Kate Barker set out some very clear principles as to how we might achieve an effective and streamlined planning system that we all want.

To speak frankly, I think the answer is not to fudge it but to resource it. I know that is not necessarily the ideal answer, but it is the reality of it. If we want Section 106 agreements to be a better quality or prepared more quickly, we need the resource. If we want planning applications to be of a higher quality, we need the expertise there to interrogate them and hold them to account properly. That means proper training and proper resourcing in local authority planning departments, ultimately.

The Letwin review identified that large-scale development is a very good way of delivering a large number of homes, albeit only at 6.5% a year typically. He and Kate Barker both identified that the best approach is to secure more planning permissions, because when you have more permissions you create more opportunities for SMEs, you introduce more competition into the market and more homes get built.

It is somewhat naive in many respects to assume that all planning permissions will be built out, because people get planning for very different reasons. You might get planning to underwrite the value of your asset. You might get planning because you want to expand your factory or expand your settlement, but then the market changes and you no longer want to deliver it, you do not want to deliver that particular product. We need to be approving more homes in many respects than there is need or demand for to ensure that there is that competition and to ensure that there is that high rate of buildout.

Again, if that is to be achieved, it will not be achieved by trying to make well-intentioned proposals work. We cannot get the square peg into the round hole. The infrastructure levy is a good example of that. Inevitably, someone will suggest that it works on some sites and not others, in some areas and not others, that it works alongside Section 106, and it begs the question: why are we doing it? Do not fudge it, resource it.

Victoria Hills: To endorse that point, last year we submitted our CSR input, *Invest and Prosper*, a very considered piece of work with vivid economics demonstrating the economic value of resourcing planning. Obviously, it was the CSR that never was, but it will go back in again this year. It very clearly sets out the economic value to the country if you resource planning properly. We are not talking about trillions or mega billions. We are talking about £400 million, half a billion, over four years for every local planning authority for what is required to get going with that focus on delivery. It does not get the headlines, but every landowner, every private sector member, members who are here today, every developer and every local authority consistently say to me and my team that local planning authorities were underresourced before we went into the pandemic and it is now starting to pinch even more.

This is against a backdrop of record numbers of planning applications coming through. We hit a new record for UK standards last July and I think that we broke it again early this year. All through the pandemic, planning has not sat still. It has become busier, and we all know that from looking in our own local areas. Everybody is building and extending and getting on with the business of improving. The logistics sector has

also been a huge growth area. Everything has become much busier. We need more planners, not fewer, but we are hearing that it is starting to get critical now.

We really hope that the Government will listen when we submit our CSR ask this year. Now is the time. If you want the green recovery, if you want levelling up, you have to invest in local authority planning departments now, and that is before we get into planning reform.

The Chair: I would like to move on—we will come on to the skills shortages in planning—and bring in Lord Stunell.

Q40 **Lord Stunell:** How should communities be engaged in the planning process? In the light of the discussion that we have had so far, when should communities be engaged in the planning process? If it helps to focus your answers, I am a member of a neighbourhood forum.

Victoria Hills: That is very good. One of our asks within the CSR was that every local authority should have a planner who is a community planner—it would be interesting to hear your experience of this—somebody whose job it is to work with the community on their planning aspirations, whether it be things coming down the line in applications or whether it be through neighbourhood plans. It is that consistent approach and having that relationship with the planning department. Their job is not to write the local plan, it is not to determine applications, it is to be that community planner to work with chairs of neighbourhood forums, for example, and to work with communities when big or small developments land to help them to navigate in their conversations with applicants and developers.

That capacity added within local authorities would be essential. We know that the Government are a big supporter of neighbourhood plans. They would like to see more community involvement that way. Many of the planning departments I have just described are so busy—they are on their knees already, just doing the statutory stuff—that it is very hard then to throw yourself in and engage with the community or a neighbourhood forum on their specific plan. We will need to resource that and we have made our ask very clearly in the CSR.

As to the when, it should be constant. It should not be stop/start. It should always be there as early as possible. It sounds so obvious, but often we would hear from communities and chairs of neighbourhood forums that they are not getting the traction or the turnaround as quickly as they would like because the resource just is not there. They will play an increasingly important role in helping to identify—we heard that word earlier—need, and can play an incredibly proactive role in taking the community with the council, the local authority, on what is needed in the area, but it does need resourcing.

Lord Stunell: If neither of your colleagues wants to contribute, can I press you a little bit? There is a certain amount of professional hostility to the neighbourhood planning system, yet it is the only part of the system

that, taken overall, is bringing forward more homes for development than the local plans. There is a missing element here, a missing engagement. Could you comment on that?

Victoria Hills: I do not recognise that nationally, actually. I think they are playing an increasingly important role. There may be certain cities where perhaps neighbourhood plans are not as prevalent—I take that point—but nationally I think they are having a positive impact. The Government have put funding and powers behind them to date.

I cannot accept that there is professional hostility to them. Our members recognise that they are an important part of the planning process, of that broader engagement. I do not want to put words in your mouth, but if it is not hostility it may be just lack of resource, which is, “We don’t have time to engage with you, because we’re too busy on the business of the local plan or determining these applications”. For me, it comes back to resource. I am not aware of any hostility to it. Our members work within the system that we have. The system is clear that there is a role for neighbourhood planning, and it is an important role.

Q41 **Lord Stunell:** The Planning Bill that has been proposed would seem likely to extinguish neighbourhood planning as a function. Would you accept that or not?

Victoria Hills: That was not our reading of it, no. That was not our interpretation. Our interpretation was that it is beefing up their role and they will have a stronger role than they have now. The detail would obviously follow, but our interpretation was that they were not being extinguished and that they were going to be supported going forward.

David Bainbridge: On the question of how to engage, one has to identify who the community is, because there is not just one community in an area. It is not just for the public sector, for example local government to undertake the engagement. Of course, what we have realised over the last 18 months or so is that we have all become used to digital means, and that must continue. One point in particular is that local government especially should be encouraged and supported to televise, broadcast and make available recordings of committee meetings. In addition to engagement on plan-making and planning applications, the ability to sit at home and observe a meeting and understand the decision-making process, without necessarily having to turn up to the town hall, is really important.

There are different views in respect of the process of neighbourhood planning, and I would say that there is an element of hostility towards the process. It relies on an evidence base that is significantly less than a local plan will have, but it will then have the same legal status once it passes a referendum and the neighbourhood plan is made. That is not necessarily a bad thing in its own right, but it is, as I and others see it, a streamlined system that does not always result in a better quality of decision-making. So there is hostility towards it.

Finally, as I read the planning White Paper, it is not looking to diminish the role of neighbourhood planning. If anything, I think it is a continuation of a narrative of the Government, which is to bolster the role of neighbourhood planning.

Q42 **Baroness Bakewell:** Can I take up this question of communities and which community we are talking about? We are now living through an era of quite rapid change. We are all aware that people all want to move to the south-west and abandon the cities. They were the people who were consulted 18 months ago about the future of their community, so I am interested in how you accommodate the change in communities.

Victoria, you spoke about a democratic deficit. I am also interested in whether these communities represent housing need or housing demand, and whether you listen enough to the people who perhaps are on waiting lists and are not as articulate or as organised lobbyists as we all benefit from and how you address that. How do you include people? Tuning in to council meetings does not come well in tower blocks. They will not spend their time doing that. How do you reach them and how do you respect what it is they want? Of course, everyone moves into a new area because they think that it is exactly what they want, so they want to keep out change. How do you engage people with the merits of change around them?

Victoria Hills: Thank you for the question. I can give you a case study of experience, but you have to do it through authentic engagement, through community planners resourcing it within the local authority, so that community engagement planner is not in the pocket of the developer. They are working for the community. They are part of the community, ideally living within the community. We think it is important that you have that dedicated resource in local authorities, which is why we have asked for the additional funding for it.

Some of it works very well on digital for certain communities. We have strongly supported the continued virtual planning committees, because, although I take the point that it will not work for everybody, some of the public inquiries and committees have had record attendance numbers that PINS have never experienced before. These are not all just consultants or developers; these are people within the community who have had that opportunity to engage in planning and are talking more about planning, which we think is a brilliant thing. Digital is a gift, but it is not right for everybody and it will not reach everybody. There has to be a hybrid approach to community engagement.

I am sorry if I am drawing too much on Old Oak examples here, but where we landed was a very hard to reach community. It crossed three boroughs. It was the north of two and the south of one, and it was the bit that no one really got to. They all felt a bit left out, because they were the bit of the borough that crossed over.

Anyway, fast forward to the HS2 station coming and the development corporation: how do we get out and talk to this community? In local

authorities like the one we set up at Old Oak that invest in genuine community engagement, with people on the ground, one of the first things we did was not to build a house but to open a community engagement shop in a local area for people to go in and have a chat. I think we are seeing more innovative use of these pop-up planning shops on high streets now. For a best practice example, Sir Terry Farrell has one in Nottingham that I have visited, and there are others around and about. It is somewhere where you are inviting the community into a community living room.

In addition, you can host events to get the community talking. We did a tea dance; it worked incredibly well. You get the community in and they start talking to you. That is not for everyone either, but you have to have a blended approach. I do think that there are opportunities here, in repurposing some of the high street, to open up some of that space for the community and tell them what is going on. They may be very busy, but they might be inclined to drop in for a cup of coffee and see some plans.

One thing that the pandemic has done—it has done many things—is to shine a light on place-making and access to space. I think we are in a sweet spot. If there was ever a time to engage with the community about the quality of homes and the quality of their living environment, their access or not to green space, this is it. We must make use—for want of a better expression—of this time to bring them into that conversation. For communities that are not there, to answer your question, that is why we want a discretionary system: so that everything is not all lined up a few years before, and people can then rent in the area and be brought into a conversation: “How are we going to have homes for us?”

Baroness Bakewell: How do you accommodate the changing in communities, with the anticipated movements of people, not to mention the old and the retiring changing their way of life? How is that accommodated?

Jonathan Manns: I can speak anecdotally from experience. During my career I have met thousands of people at different formats of public consultation, and I think that definitely before the pandemic the traditional way of going down to a town hall at 3 o'clock in the afternoon and hoping that someone would drop in is very niche in the type of people it captures. Obviously, you have to be available at 3 o'clock to go to a town hall, know about it and be able to do it.

We have seen a phenomenal transformation during the pandemic through engagement with digital, and it has been a very positive experience. It picks up on the points that you make about the nature of community. In a number of boroughs where we work, we have seen people dropping in. We have had digital consultation events, so as well as physical ones we have had the same consultation boards but on a website with a live webchat and with presentations running in parallel.

The type of people who drop in are very different. In the online events we see many more young people, young families, from much more diverse backgrounds, and a number of people who say, "I'm looking to move to the area. Can I have a say?" That has been consistent in the number of events that I have taken part in, where people have signed in and said, "We're thinking of moving to this part of the world, but I was wondering", "We might be interested in this, but is that really the best place to put a community centre?" or, "Is this really the best layout for that?" Of course, we are all human; the engagement is identical in the comments that we are making about how to create better places. It is a very different base when it comes to the people you are engaging with.

As a result, the proposals in the Government's White Paper for greater reliance on digital engagement are incredibly positive. As David mentioned, we have seen the same situations with planning committees, which, although there have been examples of the opposite in the news recently, are typically much less hostile, much more effectively managed, with a greater range of people expressing a greater range of opinions. We are living in a period of better quality decision-making as a result of engagement through digital platforms.

David Bainbridge: The point about engagement is that there will inevitably be communities that are difficult to reach, so a community outreach-type worker, who maybe straddles different departments or functions within local government, could be one of them, which again comes down to resourcing.

Finally, on planning applications, of course it is not mandatory just now for developers, promoters and landowners to engage with the community. It is strongly encouraged by government, and I think that any planning officer or planning adviser would encourage that. It is not an absolute requirement, so there are still examples whereby planning applications come forward and the first time someone in a neighbourhood knows about it is when they see the notice on the lamppost. I think that there is an area that could be looked at there.

Baroness Bakewell: I depend on lampposts quite a lot.

Victoria Hills: It is a hybrid approach. You need a little bit of everything. There is no silver bullet.

Jonathan Manns: There is also a question of tone. Sorry, I appreciate that you will want to move on, but at the national level there has been a lot of faith in planning over the past decades, not least as a result of references to Stalinist top-down planners sat in ivory towers and suchlike.

Victoria Hills: Not my members.

Jonathan Manns: No, not at all, but we need to think about deploying a language in planning that encourages people to get involved. That has to be about seeing planning in a wider sense, not as restrictive but as

positive, proactive, visionary and creative. As a profession, planning is all those things. That is, in many ways, the purpose of regulating development, because we believe that by doing that we will create better places and draw more people into the process. Until we start deploying that language in planning in a broad sense, it will become harder to build the faith that we need and to encourage the engagement that we all want to see.

Victoria Hills: Could I add one extra point on engagement? It starts with political leadership, so the leader of the council, and that genuine desire to engage, but it also starts with the executive leadership. I am talking about chief planning officers.

Our research at the RTPI showed that the majority of local authorities now in England do not have a chief planning officer at the top table of local government. You may ask why that matters. What we say, again through our research, is that the business of place-making is serious stuff. It is about joining the dots across transport, education, health, social welfare, housing, and delivering on net zero. Somebody has to join all that together into a credible spatial strategy and then get into the business of delivering and making it happen.

The lack of that strategic figure in many local authorities, not all of them, has seen a watering down of that importance for the purpose of place-making. In some local authorities, not too many, planning is seen as regulatory: "Let's just get the numbers through, get the plan done". Planning is about the councils and local authorities being able to deliver their strategic vision, their corporate vision. The majority of your average corporate strategy is about place-making and delivering a better community.

We have made the case very strongly to government that we need to beef up that role of the chief planning officer again. When I started my career last century, the chief planning officer sat at the top table in the corporate management team, and they sat alongside the legal officer and the chief finance officer. They joined the dots and they made things happen and had that influence. We think, not through rose-tinted glasses but through serious, credible need for delivery, as we heard from Lord Best earlier, that you need to have that seniority of leadership. With that comes the resources. With that comes a genuine commitment for that engagement with the community.

Baroness Bakewell: Is the decline in that appointment because they are seen as obstructive?

Victoria Hills: That is a very good question. It was the question I had coming into this role: where have all the chief planning officers gone? I had a hunch that they were not sitting at the top table of local government. In 87% of local authorities, they are not at the top table in local government.

As to the why, I think it is probably a combination of factors: the need to make resourcing cuts and take money out of planning, perhaps a move by some local authorities to generalisation—being able to have people to move around and do general jobs. I think we have lost our focus a bit—not necessarily deliberately, it has just happened, and we have woken up 20 years on and where have they gone? As an institute, we are making the case that now it is more important than ever that you have that place-maker, the chief planner, working at the top table of local government to unlock the infrastructure funding, to join the dots on very strategic, important things that local authorities want to deliver in their areas. Having that significant position there will help a whole heap of things, including leading that genuine community engagement.

David Bainbridge: Very briefly, in some local authorities they have split the functions of the planning system between different directorates, which I personally feel is not helpful. For example, policy and plan-making may be in one directorate. Development management, dealing with planning applications, might be in a different directorate. Therefore, you do not necessarily have a head of one directorate with the two main functions of planning, and I do not think that helps. I would certainly support Victoria's points.

Victoria Hills: It dumbs down planning, and all the challenges that we had even before the pandemic have had a light shone on them now and shown that we need somebody joining that up. Planning should not be seen as just a regulatory numbers game, getting the applications through and somebody over there can sort the local plan out because we have to do one. What we are saying as an institute is that that is not good enough now. It is far too important. If you want to deliver on the broader ambitions that are in many local authorities' corporate strategies, you need to have that chief planner back at the top table in local government.

The Chair: Thank you, Victoria. I will have to cut you off and ask Lord Berkeley to come in. We now only have quite a short time to deal with two groups of questions, although the next set of questions links in very well.

Q43 **Lord Berkeley:** All three witnesses have made the point that there is more planning activity going on and that there needs to be more. More planning applications have gone in and more education is needed not only to help the public but to help members of councils deal with these things and maybe get the chief planning officers up again. Is there a skill shortage in the planning profession at the moment? Is that shortage caused by a lack of people or a lack of money, either from the council or individual salaries? What will we do about it? All three of you have mentioned this already, so I do not mind who starts.

Victoria Hills: I can bring you the view from the profession. We know that before the pandemic there was a bit of a skill shortage anyway. Everything has got much busier and much more enhanced now. We have recognised for quite some time as an institute that there is a need for

more planners, and we are hearing from the public and the private sector now it is getting quite acute.

Yes, you can solve some of this through digital investment. You can, for want of a better expression, digitise some of the back-office regulatory. However, you still need qualified professionals on the ground to deal with some of the sensitive and important matters on planning. In case you think, "Yes, you would say that, wouldn't you?", a lot of the easy sites have been developed a long time ago. What we are left with now are complicated, brownfield sites that need funding, and so on, to bring them forward.

How do you do that? How do you increase the number of planning professionals? It is a combination of there being not enough people and not enough funding, in local authorities in particular, for those people. There is also, and we recognise this as a professional body, not enough diversity in the sector. You have other things going on as well as just numbers. We at the Royal Town Planning Institute launched Change, our diversity action plan, to ensure that our aspirations to have a profession that is as representative as the communities it represents are met. That is really important for many of the things we have talked about this morning, like engagements and feeling that developments are put on you. You have to have a representative profession.

We have left no stone unturned. Obviously, there is all our usual engagement work like ambassadors out at the schools. But the thing that has been most successful for us to date, and we are really ramping up on it, is the town planner apprenticeship. Back in 2019, we launched our level 7 chartered town planner apprenticeship, and we have the best part of 300 apprentices across 13 planning schools in England going through that currently. We may have the first chartered one pop out of the machine sometime in the spring or summer next year.

This not only enables employers, the public and the private sector, to spend that levy on something that is much needed, but it enables a broader cohort of people to come into the profession, particularly those who may not have wanted to be faced with those fees, and so on. I am sure you know all about that. I am delighted that this year we have just had approved our level 4 technician apprenticeship, or assistant apprenticeship, which brings GCSE and A-Level into the profession as well. We hope that this grows from the hundreds to the thousands as quickly as possible, and we are working very hard on that.

It is also about making the case for resourcing, which we are doing through the comprehensive spending review, and it is not only about attracting the brightest but about retaining them. We accredit planning schools around the world, and in the UK we now have more planning schools than we have had to date, but we need to do more. That is what we are doing on behalf of the profession, but perhaps it would be helpful to hear on behalf of the private sector, because I am in the "You would say that, wouldn't you?" camp. Yes, we need far, far more.

Lord Berkeley: You are absolutely right; I am sure you would say that. There is also the question of a balance between the skills and the number between what local authorities can provide and what the developers come up with. You get a public view that the developers have just trodden over the local authorities because they know more and so on. Jonathan, maybe you have some views on that.

Victoria Hills: Just before Jonathan speaks, I forgot to mention a very important partnership that we have with Public Practice. You may not have heard of them. They are about putting additional resourcing into local authorities, very successfully in London and the south-east, and we hope to support them to roll that out nationally. They are about bringing people into the profession who were peripheral to it. They may be urban designers, they may have history degrees, but they are interested in the business of place-making and planning. We are now in partnership with Public Practice to support that cohort and to attract them into planning, and then to retain them. Sorry, Jonathan. I would be for the high jump if I did not mention that one.

Jonathan Manns: I might express points differently, but I think there will be a lot of alignment, speaking as someone with a history degree who went into planning later. There are some key strands here. First is obviously the need to engage people, and getting out into the community to make people aware that planning exists as a profession is a key part of that. Secondly, you need to encourage people. Coming back to my point about tone, when I say to my friends, "Do you know what a planner does?" all they will know is the TV series "Permission Impossible" or "The Planners Are Coming". We need to try to captivate people with how creative, and dynamic, and visionary planning can be, and indeed is, and the social benefits of planning. The planning reforms are a great opportunity to promote those views and that position.

Then we need to train people. I believe that scholarships at post-graduate level no longer exist. Bursaries from the Department of Communities and Local Government, as it was then, now MHCLG, certainly used to exist. The reintroduction of post-graduate scholarships would be a very positive thing. Similarly, the apprenticeships programme that the RTPI is rolling out is very positive, because you have to train more planners. If we are going to get the homes we need, we need more planners, and at the moment there simply are no planners out there.

To answer your question directly, yes, there is a shortage of planners. To answer your subpoints about where they might be going, yes, they are generally going to the private sector, and that is because in a context where there is significant demand that outstrips supply for planning trainees and trained planners, it is a case of whoever can offer the greatest salary or the greatest excitement.

Public Practice, just to finish on the point that Victoria made, is a fantastic initiative to attract and retain people in the public sector. Again, coming back to my point about the language on planning, the public sector offers fantastic opportunities for planners to have a role in place shaping that

arguably does not exist in the private sector. You are not involved in piecemeal applications. You are involved in shaping a community that will have a lasting legacy and a direct impact on people's lives. Without being trite, we talk about units or homes, but these are the places where people fall in love, raise families, and have memories. The public sector has a real opportunity to attract and retain people if we start focusing on those benefits.

David Bainbridge: Very briefly, quality decision-making in the planning system relies upon skills that go well beyond town planners. That is about skills and resources, in particular when it comes to highways development management and legal offices. But I appreciate that time is getting on.

Q44 **Baroness Cohen of Pimlico:** I will only ask the second half of my original question. Is the new biodiversity and climate change requirement going to make skill shortages in planning departments more acute, or, come to think of it, more interesting?

Victoria Hills: I often say on climate change that we need to deliver more homes and address social inequalities—to make big demands for better, beautiful places, more green space and flexible working. With all the structural changes going on in our society that we do not quite know how will shake down, who would not want to work in town planning at a time like this? The younger-than-millennials coming through now, many of whom live extremely sustainable lifestyles, have already signed up to a vegan lifestyle and want to be in the business of saving the planet, and for them we need to get better at telling the story that planning is a really exciting way in which you can practically put your frustrations into reality.

It is not just about where we put the place, although that is extremely important; it is about what is going in it and how it relates to other things. I think, as you were alluding to, that it will help us attract an even brighter cohort of bright young things who think, "This will be the career for me".

David Bainbridge: There will be a greater demand for the level of skills as a result of biodiversity, net gain and sustainability factors, but also development viability and such like. A lot of those skills will be within the planning profession but will come from outwith the planning profession, such as Natural England or the Wildlife Trusts. On many sites that I am acting on, the most involved discussions are with the local wildlife trusts, sometimes even volunteers or semi-professional officers who really know their areas and understand what can be done to deliver, in some locations, between 5% and 10% biodiversity net gain as a result from residential development coming forward. It is a challenge, but it is one we have to tackle.

Jonathan Manns: There is already a shortage of trained sustainability and biodiversity specialists in the industry. I would suggest that that will be mitigated hopefully within the next five years because of the

excitement, if you could term this such, about the need to address the climate crisis, and the fact that 75% of local authorities have signed up to the idea of a climate emergency. We are also seeing organisations like Extinction Rebellion causing far more scrutiny from members of the public on some of these issues. There is a great need in the short term, but I also think that is raising the profile of these areas and creating greater enthusiasm for people to get involved.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We are coming on to our last question now, and Lady Thornhill is going to go first.

Q45 **Baroness Thornhill:** Thank you very much for coming and sharing your vast knowledge. I am finding myself sinking deeper into my chair, because, as a previous directly elected mayor of a town that not only had to transform itself physically but its residents' perceptions of where it lived, I share all your views about place shaping, involving people, and all of that. My heart is absolutely with you. My ideological political bias is absolutely with you. But over the last 15 to 20 years, the gap between that and reality in the district council planning office has evaporated.

I would like to posit a different theory: that people are not going into the profession or doing things, because they might have once felt that they were changing the world, as indeed I did, but now the policies are quite punitive and they are disempowering. Communities feel that this is something that is done to them, that is foisted on them. Planners feel that they have to produce the planning permissions. They cannot haggle in the way they used to do, and, Lord Moylan, we used to haggle about pitch of roofs, believe you me, and do our best to get the quality of things.

My ultimate question is about top-down targets, which I suspect are going to become more controversial in the near future. When the regime is that you have top-down targets imposed on an area with a community that does not feel that is acceptable, and you then have to engage with them, how do we square that crunch and what I perceive as the reality in the middle?

Victoria Hills: I think you are talking about Watford. Congratulations for all that you have achieved there. It is a cracking planning team, by the way. How do we crack all of that? There is a moment in time when everybody is talking about planning. They have been talking about planning for the last year, ever since the White Paper was issued. We are now waiting for the response from the Government on it in advance of a Bill. I believe the response is coming very soon. I think we should take the opportunity afforded by the conversation to make the case for resourcing and for seniority and how seriously it is taken in local authorities, to make the case for the future skills pipeline, and to make the case for any reform that is coming down the line that addresses all those issues you have just touched on.

I know we are short on time, but, in summary, it is about investment in skills and apprenticeships, it is about the resourcing of local authority planning departments through the CSR ask, it is about ensuring that chief

planning officers are rightly restored to a position where they can do that haggling, and the push-back, and call some of the shots. Chief planning officers who I have interviewed, including some very eminent figures, called the shots. When people came to see us, if they were not going to move the way we wanted, we said, "Not here, thank you very much".

Whether you agree with that approach or not, somehow they joined the dots and got things done, and were able to take the community with them in the process. Now is the time to pull together resourcing, seniority, champions, the leadership—the big P and the little P; the leader of the council and the executive—and take the community with you, and we will continue to make the case for that.

David Bainbridge: Also, the planning system seeks to reconcile often competing views as to development and the use of land, so tough decisions need to be taken. It is important to increase the housing stock, the quality of places and the affordability of new homes for the decision-maker within that planning system to take those tough decisions. There was once a system that was more strategic in its approach, perhaps 11 years ago and prior. If there were to be more of a direction towards strategic planning, which includes co-operation across boundary, when it comes to growth targets, which is not just about housing but is particularly relevant, those tough decisions can be made.

I often find, and you will be familiar with this, that at the local level where there is an electorate it can be difficult to take those tough decisions, because often the response would be, "You are imposing something upon us. Our local community does not necessarily want those fields to be built on, no matter what benefits you might see in terms of wider community gain". Often there is a situation there whereby a slightly removed decision-making body can come in and look to unlock that. The planning inspectorate plays an important role in the planning system in a number of regards. Yes, there need to be the tough decisions, particularly when it comes to housing requirements.

Jonathan Manns: I would echo both those comments, to be honest with you. I would also encourage you to remember why we have planning: it is the benefits and the fact that we regulate development for a reason, because we believe that that process of regulation can achieve better outcomes for communities and help us meet the objectives of delivering sustainable development. That means that we should not try to water down the system, whether that is through permitted development rights or other means by an erosion of control over what good-quality development constitutes.

It also means that we need to make sure that we have a system that we do not reform for the sake of reforming. We need to make sure that we have a system that is resourced, robust, and muscular as a result. All too often, again speaking anecdotally, when people are overworked or things are taken off their plate, they feel impotent and unable to make the change that they went into the profession to make. We should try to

focus on the way we can empower the planning system to do everything we want it to do.

Q46 Lord Carrington of Fulham: It has been a fascinating, but rather dispiriting, discussion at times, I have to say. One thing has been left out of this, picking up on something that Lord Grocott said about new towns in particular. It is something that I think gets communities really going. Yes, there is all the spatial stuff, yes, there is all the infrastructure stuff, but actually it is the role of the architect. It is the design. It is what has been described as the carbuncle factor after the Prince of Wales' intervention on the National Gallery extension, and even more, of course, his intervention with housing on the Chelsea Barracks. They are interventions where the planning system was being completely adhered to. It had permission. The design was considered by an individual with influence, but I have to say that he was not alone by any means in either case. This was a disaster.

You get this in new towns all the time, or you did. I lived in Telford at one time, which was one of the new town estates at one stage, and they were miserable. You still get developments where the design seems to have been constructed to create something to a price rather than to a living creation of a community. How do we get around that? What role do architects play in what we have been talking about?

David Bainbridge: We should look at what good looks like, successful examples. There are successful examples, and we should learn from them. I have worked for many years in Milton Keynes, and Milton Keynes is a successful example. Whatever one might think of it, those who live there and work there enjoy redway routes where they can walk and cycle. I could go on, but it is a successful example.

Of course, it is not just about architects, who one would typically think of designing a building; it is about the place in between the buildings, which is planning, ecology, and landscaping. We need to look at good examples and try to learn from that, and many reports and reviews are undertaken in which we can keep going and look to try to improve matters.

Fundamentally, it is probably too big a topic to cover in any detail before colleagues pick up, but the economics of land development are fundamental. On a typical new town where the public sector has come in and has acquired the land, and so arguably is less driven by the commercial returns of the development, one might think that there is a better quality of engagement in the process and better quality of output from the process. But I would only go so far on the potential for the involvement of the public sector in acquiring land to deliver places. There is a whole debate that we could have there, but no doubt colleagues want to speak.

Victoria Hills: There is now, of course, something that we have been asking for for a long time in the profession, which is a stronger hook to reject poor design quality. It is a constant frustration that it has all been a bit of a grey area as to whether it was good enough or not, and, as you

say, whether it is compliant with the policy and the community looking at it and saying, "But how could that happen?" Our members have consistently asked for it. We are delighted that the Government updated the National Planning Policy Framework earlier in the year alongside the new national design code, which sets some broad parameters as to what "good" looks like. It is now for local areas to produce their design code to say, "This is what we want in our local area". Of course, that needs resourcing. We do not have time to talk about that, but it is an important step forward to move away from the situation that you described.

Q47 Lord Haselhurst: Thank you very much indeed. I was fired up by Baroness Thornhill's passion, to which I would add my full endorsement. The additional problem is the political swings that take place as a result of it, and there is more than one example—I have one very close to home, but there are others in the country who study the local election results—of existing authorities in power swept away completely by populous groups arguing about the dreadful intrusion and vandalism of the countryside, or their town, or village, or whatever.

The other issue that has made some local authorities unable to produce a local plan is that they produce one and, despite controversy, it goes to inspection, the inspector rejects it on the basis that it should have been more condensed into two or three communities, and so they get to work on that, produce another plan, and then a different inspector comes along and says, "No, no, I would not have done it that way at all". There is an inconsistency on the part of planning inspector inquiries, which worries me. I have seen that.

It encourages people then to be dissatisfied with whatever the current plan is on the table, and then the wolves at the door are the developers who, while there is no local plan in place, think it is a fair game to try to get permission to take that particular village and enlarge it in some way or another. There is a real nastiness around, and I would only hope and pray that by a bottom-up approach one could get people really talking together about what their common needs are. I know it is a bit late in the proceedings, but does anyone want to answer that one?

Victoria Hills: Yes, everything you have just described can be solved if we resource plan properly in local authorities, because then you have a way to have the conversation. Let us not fudge it, let us resource it. I like that, Jonathan.

David Bainbridge: Politics at the local level is an intrinsic part of the planning system. Although one will have different views as to the role that one should play, as you know, local politicians represent their electorate, and they are entitled to do that, and it is an important conduit in passing of information. It is a whole different debate area, but it is so important that residents feel there is a locally elected person or persons who can represent their views.

Jonathan Manns: I agree.

The Chair: It is good to end on a happy and agreed note. Thank you all

for a really excellent session. Feel free to send us in some more thoughts. We are receiving evidence, we are reading it, and it is a very interesting inquiry. We did not touch much on innovation today, so I would be interested in your thoughts on that. Then right back to the beginning, we have to solve this demographic issue. How do you make sure you have the right data for people to frame their local plans where there needs to be a national effort as well as a local one? Thank you very much indeed. That ends this morning's public hearing.