

1 May 2025

The Lord Gascoigne
Chair
Built Environment Committee
House of Lords
Westminster
London, SW1A 0AA

Dear Lord Gascoigne,

It was a great pleasure to give evidence to your Committee's inquiry into '*New Towns: Practical Delivery*' last week on behalf of the District Councils' Network (DCN).

District councils have significant experience of delivering and regenerating new towns. Many of the original generation of new towns and garden cities are located in district council areas (Basildon, Central Lancashire, Crawley, Harlow, Hatfield, Hemel Hempstead, Letchworth Garden City, Redditch, Stevenage and Welwyn Garden City). Many more recent new towns and garden cities are also in district areas (Sherford, Waterbeach, Welbourne, Longcross, Northstowe, Berinsfield and Ebbsfleet).

In my own council, Folkestone and Hythe District Council, we are proud to be the majority land-owner and promoter of [Otterpool Park](#), a new garden town. Created in the beautiful Kent countryside, we intend it to be a landscape-led new town of some 10,000 plus homes where residents can lead a healthy, active, sustainable lifestyle in a creative, inclusive and vibrant community near to the coast and just a short train journey into London.

I would be delighted to welcome you and the Committee to visit Otterpool Park to see our work first-hand. If this would be of interest, please contact dcn@local.gov.uk who would be delighted to make the necessary arrangements.

During the evidence session last Tuesday, committee members asked me how we can bring communities on side with these new developments. Drawing from my own experience at Otterpool Park, which was co-designed with our local communities, it is clear to me that meaningful communication and effective participation from the outset, and on an on-going basis, is really very important. The original Charter for Otterpool Park (<https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/downloads/file/2627/a-charter-for-otterpool-park>) sets out the design principles for the development and this remains a key reference document today, now with further evolution embracing our net zero aspirations.

The case for Otterpool Park was made to the local community on the grounds of the need to actively plan for more homes to meet local housing need. This is why it is so important that new towns are included *within* rather than 'over and above' the new housing targets. It is the DCN's view that making new towns additional to housing target numbers risks jeopardising local community and stakeholder buy-in for new towns in local areas, and disincentivises local authorities from putting sites forward.

If we are to deliver the next generation of new towns at pace, we must ensure the necessary investment, resources and skills are available for us to do so. As I mentioned during my

evidence, national government (and their agencies) could play a far more impactful role in delivering large sites through quicker more decisive action. For example, pooling expertise across a wide range of technical matters needed to deliver large scale new towns (such as complex land assembly, masterplanning, enabling infrastructure design, planning and negotiating s106 agreements, triggers and viability assessments) there is an opportunity for local authorities and development corporations to accelerate delivery as this would be an efficient route to access relevant expertise and experience.

While the focus is on new towns, its equally important that the same emphasis on design and infrastructure investment is given to urban extensions. Extensions can be of considerable size and have the capability to completely alter the feel of an area, as well as having a huge impact on local services. As with new towns, master planning, adequate and early infrastructure resources and design codes to support their expansion are crucial.

Alongside the next generation of new towns, we also urgently need clarity on the government's intentions for new towns like Otterpool Park that are currently ready to be delivered with careful stewardship and targeted investment from patient funders. With local government reorganisation taking place at pace, and devolution timelines and funding unclear in many areas, there is no clarity about how delivery momentum will be accelerated, or even maintained, to achieve the government's ambitions. As I noted to your committee, decisive action by the government is required now to set out the investment and support available to ensure housing delivery in new town and urban extensions doesn't falter.

The District Councils' Network (DCN) also support investment focus on the renewal and regeneration of the original new towns. There are existing new towns that could become 'new cities' with the right policies and support. We want to ensure that we reinvigorate and revive the original new towns project to maximise the contribution they continue to provide.

Alongside this letter, the DCN will be making a full written submission to your inquiry providing further details on all these points.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to share my experience delivering a new garden town with your committee. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can provide any further information on Otterpool Park or drawn from the wide experience of DCN member councils.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Susan Priest', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr Susan Priest
**Chief Executive of Folkestone & Hythe District Council
& Representative of the District Councils' Network**