

## **The Government Response to the Built Environment Committee Report on New Towns: Creating Communities**

1. The government welcomes the Built Environment Committee's report, 'New Towns: Creating Communities', published on 26 March 2026. This module is of particular interest given the government's ambition to ensure that new towns are grounded in a placemaking approach which creates thriving places built around new and existing communities. The Secretary of State appeared in front of the Committee in January and the government is closely considering both this report as well as those in its first module, 'New Towns: Laying the Foundations' as it continues to develop the proposed New Towns Programme.
2. The government agrees that it is important that new towns are grounded in a clear and ambitious vision. As emphasised in the government's recently published consultation, new towns represent a bold and nationally significant response to address the range of challenges caused by housing constraints, including the knock on impacts for health, education and family formation. We want to make sure that we are not only building new homes but building new communities which can support people throughout their lives.
3. Building at scale is central to this strategy. Each new town will deliver at least 10,000 homes, with many expected to exceed this number. This scale enables efficient land use, supports supply chain growth and innovation, and creates the conditions for integrated infrastructure and high quality placemaking. It also provides the opportunity to deliver affordable housing and social infrastructure in a way that smaller sites cannot, ensuring that new towns provide homes for everyone to live in.
4. As emphasised by both the Committee and the New Towns Taskforce, success will ultimately depend on strong and coordinated government intervention. The Taskforce was clear that delivery must be infrastructure-first and design-led, enabled by effective delivery vehicles such as development corporations where appropriate. Clear expectations and support will need to be set to achieve high quality placemaking with long-term stewardship to ensure that new towns are built to last.
5. The government recently carried out a public consultation on the proposed New Towns Programme and its environmental implications before any final decisions are made. It opened on Monday 23 March and was open for eight weeks, closing on Tuesday 19 May.
6. This consultation built on the findings of the New Towns Taskforce report in September 2025. It invited views on how the New Towns Programme will operate,

how new towns could be delivered and planned, and the proposed approach to design and planning policy. It also sought views on the government's offer to locations and includes a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) which assesses the impacts of the programme in the proposed broad locations, the cumulative effects of new towns development, and practical methods of mitigation and monitoring.

7. The consultation set out that government is proposing to take seven locations forward through its New Towns Programme. These represent the strongest proposals which are capable of collectively unlocking hundreds of thousands of new homes and improving people's quality of life in communities across the country. These proposals are at different stages of maturity and require different types of intervention and support, including blends of public and private capital, to achieve their potential. The government therefore intends to tailor its approach to each new town, with a view to making as much progress as possible, as fast as possible.
8. The Department has considered the 12 locations recommended by the Taskforce, other locations that were submitted as part of the New Towns Taskforce Call for Evidence, and locations that the Department or Homes England were already aware of, including locations we have been made aware of during the SEA process so far. Following this assessment, the government has consulted on a proposed programme of seven of these locations as new towns. These are: Tempsford, Crew Hill and Chase Park in Enfield, Leeds South Bank, Thamesmead, Manchester Victoria North, Brabazon and the West Innovation Arc, and Milton Keynes.
9. Six further locations were also found to appear to meet the programme objectives but at this stage are not being proposed to be taken forward as part of the New Towns Programme, but government will continue to look at further ways they may be supported through existing housebuilding programmes. These locations are Adlington, Heyford Park, Marlcombe, Plymouth and Wychavon Town (previously referred to as Worcestershire Parkway) and South Barking.
10. All six alternative locations meet the programme objectives and are propositions that represent credible development opportunities. However, we have had to prioritise central government resources on those sites which have the greatest potential for transformational impact. There remains strong potential to deliver housing in places that have not been selected as new towns. This is particularly true of Plymouth which is a unique opportunity to bolster the UK's defence and security sector. Plymouth will require special consideration and its own bespoke financial support package to unlock its potential as a centre of excellence in naval technology, and to ensure that housing does not act as a barrier to growth.

11. No final decisions will be made on either the locations or delivery until the completion of the SEA process, which requires government to assess the environmental impacts of the proposed locations and to consider and assess the environmental impacts of any reasonable alternatives to achieve the programme objectives. Following confirmation of locations later this year, the government will drive early delivery of homes and infrastructure through establishing clear programme governance, agreeing delivery bodies for selected locations and working with local partners on funding and business cases to enable infrastructure-led planning.
12. The government will continue to engage with local authorities, investors and communities throughout this process to ensure new towns are planned and delivered to the highest standards of design and placemaking. To enable the delivery of our proposed locations, we are setting out a government offer that would be available to any locations that are taken forward as new towns. This offer combines funding, delivery expertise, and policy support to ensure these places can be planned and delivered in a way that meets the programme's objectives. The exact offer to each location will depend on their individual needs. More details of what this offer will consist of at location and programme level will be set out in the full response to the Taskforce report later in the year.
13. Given ongoing work to develop a new towns programme and respond to the consultation and the Taskforce report, the government is responding now to the Committee's report but will address many of its recommendations in more detail later in the year once the necessary assessments have concluded, including more detail on how our confirmed locations will be delivered in line with our ambition for the programme.

## **Annex A: Response to the Built Environment Committee recommendations for Government**

This annex sets out the government's response to the recommendations within the Committee's report.

### **Vision and Innovation**

**Recommendation 1:** The Government must demonstrate and articulate a clear, inspiring, long-term vision for this next generation of new towns with high quality design and placemaking at its heart.

**Recommendation 2:** We continue to stress the need for a single, autonomous, extra-departmental body, analogous to the post-war New Towns Commission, to oversee and manage the operational delivery of the new towns programme. This body should report to a single, dedicated Cabinet minister with the authority to drive the programme from the centre and coordinate other Government departments to deliver the programme.

**Recommendation 3:** The Government must encourage delivery bodies and planning authorities to support innovation in the delivery of the new towns and expanded settlements by including diverse plot sizes, leaving room in the masterplan for experimentation and adaptation, and using design competitions to explore a range of alternative approaches to design.

**Recommendation 4:** Innovation and novel approaches must, however, be managed appropriately and must not override established, evidence-based design principles purely for the sake of novelty.

**Recommendation 5:** The Government must empower delivery bodies to take a long-term approach to innovation in design and construction methods. To that end, it should avoid focusing on short-term delivery targets and the resulting need for standardised designs and templates in order to meet them.

**Recommendation 6:** The Government must ensure that its design guidance for the new towns is grounded in established design principles while also allowing for community leadership and a clear sense of individual local identity. This guidance must include the requirement for new town delivery bodies to prioritise the inclusion of green and blue infrastructure in the masterplan of each scheme, to ensure every resident has access to such infrastructure from the very beginning of development.

**Recommendation 7: The Government should explore and evaluate the extent to which Secured by Design principles support or hinder effective urban design, community building, and placemaking.**

**Government Response:**

*Vision:*

14. The government agrees with the Committee that the New Towns Programme should be grounded in a clear long term vision and to reshape the way that large settlements are delivered in this country.
15. As set out in the consultation, the government believes that a new generation of new towns is essential to address England's structural housing shortage and unlock economic growth. Housing constraints are limiting labour mobility, productivity and social outcomes, with knock-on effects for health, education and family formation. New towns represent a bold and nationally significant response to address these challenges and to seize the significant opportunities that they represent. We want to make sure that we are not only building new homes but building new communities which can support people throughout their lives.
16. Building at scale is central to this strategy. Each new town will deliver at least 10,000 homes, with many expected to exceed this number. This scale enables efficient land use, supports supply chain growth and innovation, and creates the conditions for integrated infrastructure and high quality placemaking. It also provides the opportunity to deliver affordable housing and social infrastructure in a way that smaller sites cannot, ensuring that new towns provide homes for everyone to live in.
17. To ensure that new towns are built in an effective, holistic way, the programme will be delivered through a dynamic cross-government approach. Government departments and arm's length bodies will factor new towns into future spending plans, ensuring they have the utilities, transport, and social infrastructure needed for the community to thrive. This includes programme governance at senior level, with a New Towns Unit (NTU) providing escalation and extra capacity across departments and arm's length bodies, and proactively prioritising resources and innovation for selected locations.
18. The government will use the full range of levers at its disposal to secure delivery and manage risk, including planning reform, land value capture, fiscal tools, guarantees, and institutional investment. Our ambition is that new towns will act as exemplars for integrated planning and funding, setting a model for future large-scale development that will change the way that housing is delivered in this country, beyond the programme itself.

19. The Taskforce report sets out a clear new towns vision: built at scale to a masterplan with land assembly and housing delivery usually beyond the capacity of the private sector alone, driven by strong delivery vehicles, and in line with leading placemaking standards which will ensure that the needs of existing and new communities are met and create a distinct feeling of place.

20. As part of the draft New Towns Programme consultation, we have set out the following high level objectives for the New Towns Programme:

- **Scale** – New towns will be at least 10,000 homes in scale, and either significantly more or with the opportunity for further expansion.
- **Economic Growth** – New towns will be strategically located to unlock high levels of national economic growth, in places that could foster high productivity and can provide appropriate housing at all levels of affordability, boosting the scale and ambition of planned development.
- **Spread** – New towns will be geographically spread across England.
- **Deliverability** – New towns will be delivered in an ambitious, innovative way over many years, overseen by an appropriate delivery vehicle. Their promoter will have identified any significant barriers to delivery and measures to overcome these.
- **Placemaking** – New towns will be built in a way that is consistent with the new towns placemaking principles. This includes timely delivery of all necessary infrastructure and high standards of amenity, services and social inclusiveness, and cohesion. They will be sustainable in transport and environmental terms and aligned to the government's Net Zero agenda.

21. These objectives set our vision for the programme and have informed our proposed approach to take forward and deliver the programme, including the selection of new town locations and the interventions that will be required to deliver them.

#### *Delivery and Design:*

22. As emphasised by the New Towns Taskforce, success will ultimately depend on strong and coordinated government intervention. The Taskforce was clear that delivery must be infrastructure-first and design-led, enabled by effective delivery vehicles such as development corporations where appropriate. Clear expectations and support will need to be set to achieve high quality placemaking with long-term stewardship to ensure that new towns are built to last.

23. Placemaking is a fundamental part of the programme objectives and is essential to creating successful new communities. Subject to the outcomes of the current consultation, the government intends to incorporate the proposed placemaking principles in the planning policy. The placemaking principles should be reflected in town-wide masterplan and town-wide design codes.

24. These principles are:

- **Vision-led** - Each new town should have a clear long-term vision for creating a well-designed and distinctive place, supported by a town-wide framework masterplan and a town-wide design code to ensure placemaking quality.
- **Ambitious density** - new towns should aim to be built at a density sufficient to enable residents to walk to local amenities, support public transport, unlock better social infrastructure, and create active and liveable neighbourhoods.
- **Affordable housing and balanced communities** - new towns should provide a diverse range of high-quality housing, with a range of housing types and tenures to suit the needs of a balanced community. This should include a minimum target of 40% affordable housing, of which at least half to be available for social rent.
- **Social infrastructure** - new towns should support thriving communities by ensuring access to schools, cultural, sporting and healthcare facilities, and other social infrastructure that meets new residents' needs from the outset.
- **Healthy and safe places** - new towns should be healthy and safe places which promote active lives for residents, with easily accessible green spaces and recreational facilities.
- **Environmental sustainability** - new towns should be designed and delivered to embrace ambitious environmental standards, with buildings and neighbourhoods that are low carbon, climate resilient and which help to protect, restore and enhance biodiversity.
- **Transport connectivity** - new towns should connect people to skills, jobs, services and amenities. This should include high quality public transport, walking and cycling networks within each town and convenient connections into wider transport networks.
- **Business creation and employment opportunities** - new towns must be places that provide jobs for residents and enable businesses to grow, supporting the government's economic growth mission.
- **Stewardship** - A long-term stewardship model for new towns should be in place from the outset, including clear governance and funding structures to manage and maintain communal assets over the long term.

- **Community engagement** - new towns should establish clear and effective ways to engage the local community in shaping the vision and goals for each new town, and empower residents to build social capital and help define the town's cultural identity.
25. The government will publish Design and Placemaking Guidance for new towns which will provide further information on the Placemaking Principles and their delivery in different local planning and delivery contexts. The guidance will outline areas of innovation that might be considered by delivery bodies in new towns in order to achieve the placemaking ambition of the programme. It will also address delivery issues that impact quality of developments, including funding, governance, clienting skills, procurement, quality review and evaluation, as well as key design and digital tools relevant for proposals of this magnitude.
26. Alongside this guidance, the Department will establish a New Towns Place Review Panel to provide impartial advice to new towns delivery bodies, relevant planning authorities and government on the design and placemaking quality of emerging masterplans, design codes and development proposals across all new town locations.
27. The New Towns Unit will keep under review its proposed mechanisms for achieving design and placemaking quality in new towns to reflect the emerging shape of the programme and the final selection of locations. As set out above, the Department is also working with departments across government to ensure that new towns have the utilities, transport, and social infrastructure needed for the new communities to thrive.

## Place and Community

**Recommendation 8: When setting the placemaking requirements for each new town, and for the programme as a whole, the Government must specify the criteria against which it will measure the long-term success of placemaking in the new towns, while ensuring that such criteria do not prevent new towns from adapting to changing needs over the course of the delivery process.**

**Recommendation 9: Regardless of the type of site, there will always be local heritage, and this is a valuable starting point for new town delivery bodies. As such, new town delivery bodies must seek to capture and leverage the local heritage in their placemaking principles.**

**Recommendation 10: Where possible, existing structures and buildings should be retained or refurbished to support heritage and imbue the new towns with an identity connected to a sense of place.**

**Recommendation 11: The delivery of the next generation of new towns must include a commitment to the early provision of social and cultural infrastructure. In the early phases of development this might be in the form of temporary, flexible space that can then be adapted further as the new town develops.**

**Recommendation 12: New town delivery bodies should also support the leaders of emerging interest and cultural groups by providing professional advice and training.**

**Recommendation 13: Effective, inclusive, and formative community engagement can support the delivery of new towns by reducing the risk of public opposition. We welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to community and resident engagement in the development of local plans to set clear parameters for new town planning and development.**

**Recommendation 14: The Government must ensure that the new town delivery bodies adopt an ambitious, inclusive, formative and effective public engagement strategy, in line with the Secretary of State's stated desire for community and resident involvement in the development of local plans, to ensure that the public is fully engaged without delaying individual new towns or the programme as a whole.**

*Community and Identity:*

28. The government is clear that existing communities should be a key part of any new town development and that effective community engagement is key to create connections between existing and new residents, to help build successful places. The New Towns Programme is not just about housing numbers, it is about creating new communities with a shared sense of place, building on existing identity of locations. There are strong heritage links across the locations being consulted on, from the former RAF airfield near Tempsford to the globally significant industrial heritage of Leeds South Bank.

29. Community engagement is a core part of the placemaking approach set out in our programme objectives and is specifically highlighted as one of the placemaking principles to be incorporated into the draft planning policy being consulted on. The proposed principles make clear that new towns should establish clear and effective ways to engage the local community in shaping the vision and goals for each new town, and empower residents to build social capital and help define the town's cultural identity. There is also a specific principle on social infrastructure which requires that new towns should support thriving communities by ensuring access to schools, cultural, sporting and healthcare facilities, and other social

infrastructure that meets new residents' needs from the outset. As highlighted in the Taskforce report, this is key to ensuring that new towns are about more than bricks and mortar.

### *Consultation and Community Engagement*

30. As the Programme moves towards delivery, the government will continue to engage with communities, local authorities, delivery bodies and investors throughout this process to ensure that new towns are planned and delivered to the highest standards of design, sustainability and long-term stewardship.
31. This consultation was the first of many opportunities for people to shape the design and creation of the next generation of new towns. Tailored to each location, these opportunities will include formal routes such as future place-specific consultations as well in-person engagement and social impact activities to ensure residents and businesses have a key role in shaping their future community throughout the lifetime of the programme.

## **Health and Inclusion**

**Recommendation 15: The Government must ensure that this next generation of new towns and expanded settlements proactively support the health and wellbeing of their residents through integrated, mutually reinforcing interventions, including active travel opportunities, high-quality green infrastructure, and a range of spaces for the community to meet.**

**Recommendation 16: The Government must ensure that new towns are fully equipped to support the needs of an ageing population and should pursue initiatives such as the inclusion of a major intergenerational housing project.**

**Recommendation 17: New town delivery bodies must capitalise on the enthusiasm of young people and their willingness to participate in consultation activities to create youth engagement strategies for each site. These strategies should seek to consult with young people at each stage of development and incorporate their perspectives into decisions.**

**Recommendation 18: Interventions in the built environment to support accessibility and inclusion are often low-cost, unobtrusive and mutually beneficial across diverse groups.**

**Recommendation 19: When setting guidance for placemaking in new towns the Government must include explicit, targeted guidance for delivery bodies to deliver accessible, inclusive design.**

**Recommendation 20: Delivery bodies for new towns and expanded settlements should create ambitious accessibility strategies that include targeted engagement activities such as forming diverse design review panels. Delivery bodies for each new town should also appoint an Accessibility Champion to ensure that high inclusivity standards are incorporated into the plans for every new town. This should be supported by an Accessibility Champion within central government, providing oversight across all schemes.**

*Health and Wellbeing:*

32. As set out above, the consultation proposed placemaking principles to be incorporated into the draft planning policy and these will be a core element of the delivery of any new town. This includes a specific principle that new towns should be healthy and safe places which promote active lives for residents, with easily accessible green spaces and recreational facilities.
33. The Taskforce was clear that new towns should be designed to support healthy lives and the wellbeing of all residents, in addition to providing the core health infrastructure and recreational facilities outlined in the social infrastructure principle. This includes neighbourhood design which plays a critical role in shaping the daily lives of residents and must therefore be approached with intention and care.
34. The work of the Taskforce also re-emphasised the importance of having accessible and affordable public spaces, including parks, streets and squares, and community facilities such as sports and recreation centres and grounds. This is important not only to encourage physical activity, but also to foster social interaction and community cohesion, both of which are essential to the mental and emotional wellbeing of residents.
35. Further detail on how delivery bodies should consider this principle will be set out in the Design and Placemaking Guidance being developed for new towns, following the outcome of the public consultation.

*Inclusivity:*

36. New towns offer the opportunity to deliver a more diverse and inclusive mix of housing types and tenures. Their scale and delivery model means they can accommodate a wide range of housing. This includes homes for market sale, private rent, affordable housing, and specialist accommodation for students, families, and older people, all within a single coherent masterplan.

37. The government is clear that new towns should be places where people of all walks of life can play a significant role in the community and feel proud to call home. This is why another one of the proposed placemaking principles is clear that new towns should provide a diverse range of high-quality housing, with a range of housing types and tenures to suit the needs of a balanced community. This should include a minimum target of 40% affordable housing, of which at least half to be available for social rent.
38. The Taskforce emphasised that new towns should provide housing to suit the needs of different household demographics, including a variety of age groups and affordability levels, to create genuinely mixed communities. They should contain a range of housing typologies, including flats and houses, to accommodate different types of family sizes and structures. It is also important that they include homes for older people, as well as specialist housing built to accessible and adaptable standards.
39. Similarly to the above, further detail on how delivery bodies should consider this principle will be set out in the Design and Placemaking Guidance being developed for new towns, following the outcome of the public consultation.

## **Smart Investment, Sustainable Places**

**Recommendation 21: The Government must ensure that the next generation of new towns receive adequate initial funding and investment to be able to deliver essential community and natural infrastructure from the start, with the explicit understanding from the outset that the return on this investment will take place on a timescale of decades, rather than years or months.**

**Recommendation 22: The Government must ensure that development corporations and community associations in each of the new towns are empowered from the start to make effective use of the fullest possible range of placemaking techniques, and to experiment with a range of approaches to find interventions that best serve their particular neighbourhoods or communities.**

**Recommendation 23: The Government must require essential community, health and social infrastructure to be in place from the date on which the first residents move into each new town or expanded settlement.**

**Recommendation 24: The Government should encourage the early deployment of temporary spaces or alternative uses for buildings in the early phases of a development as a way of providing essential community infrastructure. It should encourage and facilitate the piloting of alternative uses and configurations for**

such spaces in order to discover the true needs and desires of each new community.

**Recommendation 25:** Good design and effective placemaking can pay for itself, but the Government must ensure that it regulates and finances the new towns programme and individual towns in a way that supports and encourages developers, investors and delivery bodies to take a long-term approach to the realisation of these benefits. Relying on a speculative model will not deliver the Government's aspirations for the new towns.

**Recommendation 26:** This next generation of new towns must ensure that the health and wellbeing of all generations are supported from the start and that the infrastructure necessary for active, healthy lifestyles is included from the beginning.

**Recommendation 27:** The Government must ensure that delivery bodies are empowered and required to include age-appropriate housing that enables and supports older residents to retain their independence for as long as possible in each new town and expanded settlement to help reduce public expenditure on adult health and social care.

**Recommendation 28:** The Government must require all new towns and expanded settlements to include green and blue spaces from the outset, to maximise the potential savings generated by such infrastructure.

**Recommendation 29:** The Government must carefully monitor the cost effectiveness of placemaking, design and community infrastructure, using the reporting from this monitoring to disseminate best practice and improve the quality and ambition of placemaking in future developments of all sizes in England.

**Recommendation 30.** The Government must move beyond standard and short-term metrics and methodologies in monitoring and demonstrating the cost effectiveness of the new towns individually and the programme as a whole and should pilot a range of alternative methodologies to ensure a robust and well-supported evidence base for long term savings and returns.

**Recommendation 31:** Delivery bodies should make proportionate use of digital planning and governance tools—where supported by evidence and community need—to improve transparency, track design quality over time, and reduce friction in engagement.

*Funding and Investment:*

40. As part of its report, the Taskforce made a range of recommendations on how to deliver and fund new towns. This included recommendations on delivery bodies (including the role of the private sector), planning and build-out, and how to encourage investment, as well as the short- and longer-term funding models and approach to land.
41. We are looking closely at these recommendations and considering a range of options to fund new towns, noting that different funding models will be appropriate for different sites. The funding required for new towns in this Spending Review period will vary according to the needs of the locations chosen.
42. The government has already announced that the delivery of new towns will be backed by funding across the government's landmark housing programmes, such as the £39bn Social and Affordable Housing Programme, hundreds of millions of grant from the National Housing Delivery Fund, and additional capital funding managed by the National Housing Bank.
43. The proposed government offer in the consultation sets out that, subject to the needs of each location, locations taken forward as new towns would benefit from resource and capital funding (a mixture of grant and financial instruments including equity investment, loans and guarantees) to develop town-wide masterplans and design codes; technical studies; business cases, as well as establish and maintain governance structures. Funding will be used for land remediation and land acquisition, enabling infrastructure and placemaking as part of a joined up approach across departments to future infrastructure investment.
44. We will also work closely with other departments and regulators to ensure new towns will be factored into their future spending plans, ensuring they have the utilities, transport, and social infrastructure needed for the community to thrive. We are learning lessons from the Healthy New Towns Programme launched in 2015, particularly at Ebbsfleet Garden City, where they work with partners including the NHS to create healthier and connected communities with integrated and high-quality services. As set out above, the importance of health and wellbeing in new towns is a core element of the proposed placemaking principles.

### *Infrastructure and Digital Planning*

45. New towns provide a rare opportunity to plan holistically from the outset via town-wide masterplans based on the proposed placemaking principles, ensuring that

homes are delivered alongside the infrastructure that communities need. As set out above, the placemaking principles are clear that all new towns should have the necessary infrastructure in place needed to create a successful place. This includes social infrastructure and transport connectivity, but also the necessary digital infrastructure required for a 21<sup>st</sup> century new town.

46. The scale and delivery model of new towns also means they can accommodate a wider range of housing - market sale and rent, affordable housing, specialist accommodation and self-commissioned housing - within a single, coherent masterplan. This presence of multiple housebuilders in one new town building out different sites also increases the competitive pressure for them to deliver on quality and customer service.
47. New towns can unlock land in areas which are otherwise unlikely to be released under the current planning system and co-ordinate public and private investment around long-term delivery programmes. Any uplift in land value arising from planning decisions and infrastructure investment can then be reinvested to support the provision of affordable housing, community facilities, and other essential public services.
48. The Taskforce report made clear recommendations that the delivery of new towns should benefit from the increasing digitalisation of the planning system. It recommended that digital innovation should be systematically applied to transform planning, delivery and monitoring processes, fostering new ways of working and enhancing collaboration across stakeholders and statutory consultees. As highlighted by the Taskforce, there are particularly good examples of this already happening, including by specific developers such as *Citu* in the Climate Innovation Hub District within the proposed Leeds South Bank site.
49. The Department is working to ensure that opportunities to take innovative approaches to digital planning can be maximised across all sites which will form the final New Towns Programme as well as how it can be embedded across the delivery of other large-scale developments.