

NEW TOWNS TASKFORCE

Building new towns for the future

Interim Update

February 2025



Introduction

The New Towns Taskforce is an independent expert advisory panel appointed by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in September 2024 to support the government to deliver the next generation of new towns.

We have been asked to make recommendations to ministers on the location and delivery of new towns, with the objective of supporting and unlocking economic growth as well as making a significant contribution to meeting housing demand in England. We will deliver a final shortlist of site recommendations for potential new towns to MHCLG ministers this summer.

We are now halfway through the 12 months allocated by MHCLG ministers to develop recommendations for the government. This policy statement provides an update on our progress.

We welcome the announcement today that the government will provide support for the next generation of new towns in its upcoming Spending Review, which will provide certainty for this transformative programme.

The task that faces us today is both as ambitious and critical as that which faced the original New Towns Committee, established by the Minister of Town and Country Planning and chaired by Lord Reith. That Committee's work laid the foundations for our post-war new towns within a year, grounded in an understanding of the vital link between quality, affordable homes and the nation's health, education, and economic prosperity.

Today, 32 communities stand as a testament to that vision – home to millions of people who live and work in developed settlements that have overall transformed many lives for the better. The latest iteration of this proud tradition, our current new towns programme, is designed to tackle some of the most pressing challenges facing the economy today.



We are greatly encouraged by the appetite and desire to invest in the future of the country through this 'next generation' of new towns. Our national call for evidence, which we conducted to aid location identification, invited submissions for sites with the potential for at least 10,000 homes and received over 100 responses. London, the south east, south west, and east of England received the largest number of submissions, but multiple proposals were received from every region of England. The majority of the sites submitted were urban extensions to existing towns or cities, with a smaller number of proposals for new standalone settlements.

The responses have added to the department's and Homes England's existing knowledge about potential sites, and helped to highlight the opportunities and the challenges of delivering new homes at pace and at scale. The responses to the call for evidence will support the Taskforce's work going forward, and demonstrate the significant enthusiasm across the country to benefit from the distinct offer of this programme.

The case for new towns – creating thriving communities

We strongly support the government’s ambition for new towns to be thriving communities that people will be proud to call home. As the motto of the first post-war new town makes clear, “the heart of a town lies in its people”. This is a generational opportunity to address the fundamental challenges currently facing the UK economy which are being compounded by a significant shortfall in housing.

This shortage of housing is limiting labour mobility, worsening public health, disrupting education, and delaying family formation – each with its own economic consequences. For example, the most recent Census showed that the number of families in England and Wales with adult children living with their parents rose 13.6% between 2011 and 2021 to nearly 3.8 million. Adults were more likely to live with their parents in areas where housing is less affordable.¹

We believe that, if delivered effectively, new towns can play a crucial role in addressing these challenges; unlocking economic potential in constrained areas; promoting environmental sustainability through innovative design; and by accelerating housing delivery. Additionally, new towns should attract investment, stimulate job creation, and contribute to boosting regional productivity.

By providing a substantial number of homes, including social rented homes, we expect new towns will play a role in improving housing affordability over time. The planned nature of new towns offers an opportunity to better coordinate essential infrastructure and public services, creating communities where housing, transport, utilities, and healthcare are integrated from the outset.

¹ONS (2023), More adults living with their parents, Data and analysis from Census 2021, ONS website

The aims of the new towns programme

To achieve these benefits of new towns, the Taskforce has agreed that the high-level aims of the programme should be to:

- **unlock potential economic growth**, including through encouraging greater labour mobility and job opportunities, and promoting growth where it is currently constrained by the cost or availability of housing;
- **accelerate housing delivery** through the provision of new homes that people need, with a mix of housing tenures that support diverse communities and include affordable homes and high-quality social housing;
- **provide housing for strong communities** with the necessary infrastructure, services, and amenities – ensuring residents have access to education, healthcare, transportation, cultural and sporting facilities, and green spaces;
- **create environmentally resilient places** that support the government’s net zero agenda through sustainable design, nature enhancement, low-carbon infrastructure, and responsible development, including flood risk mitigation; and
- **contribute to transforming the way that large settlements are delivered**, including through longer-term planning and the approach to infrastructure provision and supporting the construction industry and related supply chains to expand and deliver more efficient outcomes.

Each new settlement should contain at least 10,000 new homes, as set out by the government – but likely significantly more where achievable. This is more than the private sector is currently bringing to the market independently and will facilitate a new system-wide approach to building large settlements.

In developing our recommendations, the Taskforce is considering both new standalone sites as well as expansion of existing towns and cities where new, well-planned and well-connected communities of scale could meet housing need, help unlock economic potential and reshape areas in need of revitalisation. This will ensure that government is in a position to begin this urgent work as soon as the Taskforce has made its recommendations and that work can start in some sites by the end of this Parliament.

Lesson learned from previous programmes

This new generation of new towns is part of a rich history of government delivery of large settlements in the UK over the past century. We are clear about the importance of learning from both the successes and pitfalls of these efforts as we shape recommendations for government for this new wave – helping ensure it achieves the vision and objectives set out above.

The Taskforce has undertaken a review of previous government programmes, including the post-1945 new towns and more recent Eco-towns and Garden Communities. Lessons from this review, which will help inform the Taskforce's final report, include:

- **Vision** – Delivery at scale requires a clear, locally-specific vision on what each town is seeking to achieve, grounded in local communities and clarity on the unique benefits of each town.
- **Community engagement** – New towns must establish clear and effective ways to engage the local community in the vision and goals for the area.
- **Site selection** – Location selection for new towns should be strategically rational, supported by existing infrastructure, and ideally with local support to ensure successful development. Additional infrastructure investment will be required to go beyond this approach.
- **Balanced communities and diverse housing** – Achieving balanced, resilient communities relies on appropriate housing stock, which includes development by SME housebuilders and secures a variety of housing types and tenures, including social housing provision.
- **Business creation, growth and employment opportunities** – New towns should be places where people can work and businesses grow.
- **Well-connected** – A new town must have effective public transport within the town itself as well as links to wider transport networks.
- **Environmental sustainability** – New towns must be ambitious in meeting environmental targets, including to achieve net zero, support climate resilience and encourage biodiversity, to ensure they are fit for the future.
- **Healthy and safe communities** – New towns must promote healthy lives and give communities access to green spaces, parks and nature.
- **Social infrastructure** – New towns must focus on building whole communities and ensure the provision of social infrastructure at the outset, including hospitals, schools, community centres, cultural and sporting facilities, and shops. Social infrastructure makes a place a desirable area to live. It also helps address disparities in human capital, promotes social cohesion, and enhances wellbeing and health.
- **Long-term funding** – This is essential for new towns, requiring sensitivity to development types and market conditions to attract private investment and ensure successful long-term delivery.
- **Stewardship** – A sustainable stewardship model must be in place from the outset, including clear governance structures to maintain infrastructure over the long term.

Building on these lessons, and to meet the government's ambition for new towns to role-model exemplary development, the Taskforce has developed draft principles, published today, which should provide the building blocks for every new town – with an expectation of ambition beyond this.

The next generation of new towns will...



VISION LED

have a clear long term vision for each town, with a distinct identity, so they become places residents are proud to call home.



HIGHER DENSITY

be built at a higher density that enables residents to walk to local amenities, take advantage of easier travel further afield and relax in shared, inclusive, open green spaces close to home.



BUSINESS CREATION, GROWTH AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

provide jobs for residents and enable businesses to grow, supporting the government's economic growth mission.



HEALTHY AND SAFE COMMUNITIES

promote healthy lives, providing communities with easy access to parks and nature.



LONG-TERM STEWARDSHIP

have a clear plan for maintaining the town through its lifetime, to ensure it continues to meet residents' needs.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

establish clear and effective ways to engage the local community in shaping the vision and goals for the area.



WELL-CONNECTED

have effective public transport within the town itself as well as links to wider transport networks and support cycling and walking.



BALANCED COMMUNITIES

provide a diverse range of high-quality housing with a range of housing types to suit the needs of a balanced community, including affordable housing and homes for social rent.



SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

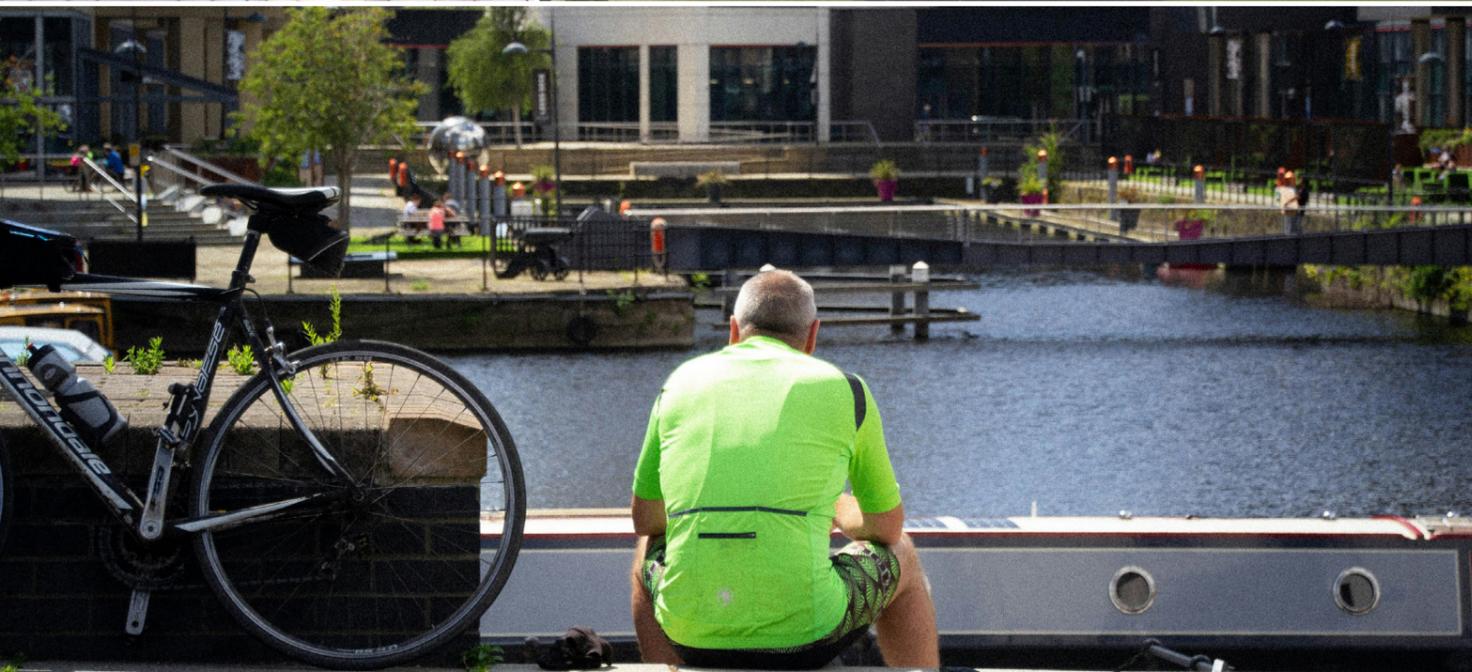
focus on building thriving communities, ensuring access to good schools, cultural and sporting facilities, healthcare and hospitals to ensure new residents have the facilities they need from the outset.



ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

support climate resilience and biodiversity and be ambitious in meeting environmental targets, meaning cleaner air, more parks and green spaces that are better for wellbeing.





Next steps – phase two of the Taskforce's work

The next stage of the Taskforce's work will focus on exploring locations for new towns, focusing on areas ripe for early intervention as part of a first initial wave, alongside the longer-term pipeline. Location selection for new towns should be strategically rational, supported wherever possible by existing infrastructure and ideally with local support to ensure successful development. We will also be undertaking further analysis to understand the impact of different delivery and funding models, as well as the approach to land acquisition and placemaking, to inform our final recommendations for government.

We are clear that the government will need to provide the long-term certainty that delivery partners need to support the development of new towns over the coming decades – and mitigate predictable constraints. In line with this, we will be working through priority policy issues over the coming months, including:

- the approach to affordable housing in new towns and tenure mix;
- exploring the powers, structures and financial models needed to achieve the delivery of new towns, including the impact of any upcoming reforms;
- the terms of land acquisition, including the contractual arrangements with local leaders and others with a stake in each new town location; and
- how to define the boundaries of new towns and capture the land value and how this can be done at an early stage.

The Taskforce is developing its recommendations alongside the government's ten-year infrastructure plan and wider industrial strategy and is working closely with other government departments who will be crucial for the success of new towns implementation.

In addition, the Taskforce will be running a series of events to understand what the public think the core components of new towns should be – to further test the principles we have published today. This will help ensure new towns are grounded in the views and experiences of those who live there.

By summer 2025, we will submit a final report to MHCLG ministers, in line with our Terms of Reference, which will include a list of places new towns could potentially be located, as well as wider recommendations on the funding and delivery of new towns.