



How can new settlements be locally led?

Introduction

The Building and Social Housing Foundation supports bottom up approaches to housing problems, and actively examines how better policy and practice can provide improved housing for all. In the UK, BSHF has explored a number of different approaches to increasing housing supply, both through building new homes and making better use of the existing stock.

Following our Windsor Consultation in 2013 BSHF published [Creating the Conditions for New Settlements in England](#) which argues that *“(N)ew settlements offer the opportunity to create better places, which not only deliver housing, but provide a range of social, environmental and economic benefits that will help to address the challenges facing England today. These include a growing and ageing population, climate change and weak economic growth.”* (p.6).

The idea of building large scale new settlements, inspired by the garden cities and model villages of the past, while being far from new, has seen increased momentum this year. The [2014 Wolfson Economics Prize](#) question asks *“How would you deliver a new Garden City which is visionary, economically viable, and popular?”* The Department for Communities and Local Government published their [Locally-led garden cities: prospectus](#) in April 2014. The 2014 Budget saw the announcement of a [‘Garden City’ in Ebbsfleet](#). An initial suggestion from Michael Lyons as a recommendation in the forthcoming [Lyons Housing Review](#) is *“a new generation of “urban extensions”, modelled on the postwar new-town expansion”*.¹

While there is widespread agreement that a step change is needed in housing delivery, and that large scale settlements could be part of the answer, many observers of the current situation have expressed trepidation about how fully communities can be involved, often citing NIMBY activity as a reason to be wary. While there are indeed numerous examples of anti-development movements at the community level, there is a growing number of UK community led projects where creating (not preventing) housing for local people is the objective². During the 2014 Windsor Consultation (Scaling Up Community-Led Housing Solutions) participants examined how the community housing sector can gain momentum and greater recognition, and start to deliver more homes. Following this, and with the continued interest in large scale housing delivery, this article refreshes the principle of ‘New Settlement Partnerships’.

New Settlement Partnerships

In [Creating the Conditions for New Settlements](#) the Building and Social Housing Foundation proposes **New Settlement Partnerships** as a way of enabling large scale locally-led development with a more active role for communities. The model proposes an equal strategic partnership between community representatives, developers, landowners, local authorities and other stakeholders (according to the scope of the development). The function of the partnership is to act as a formalised body, with rights and responsibilities for all members (to ensure democratic representation), to develop proposals and solutions that best meet the needs of a particular area.³

The issue of representation for fledgling or unestablished communities is addressed through the introduction of a 'shadow board'; where members of existing communities manage the scheme on behalf of the new community in the early stages of new development. As the new community develops, membership of the partnership changes to reflect this.

The New Settlement Partnership framework suggests that developers and landowners are given the opportunity to play a longer-term role. Landowners could invest their land (or a part of it) in the new settlement, retaining a long term interest. Likewise, developers could adopt an investor approach by, for example, retaining a proportion of homes to rent (either directly or through an intermediary) rather than selling all properties outright.⁴

The model of New Settlement Partnerships carries an expectation of long-term involvement, mimicking the approaches of Milton Keynes Park Trust⁵ and Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation⁶ (which are endowed with income-generating assets, to sustain civic and practical functions for the benefit of the community). This long-term commitment would help to ensure that liabilities such as communal parks and gardens are more financially secure. New Settlement Partnerships could achieve this through registration as a properly articulated company – such as a Community Interest Company⁷ – capable of holding assets for the community in perpetuity.

The BSHF proposal for New Settlement Partnerships was released at around the same time as the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) proposal for Community Development Corporations; “a new form of area-based planning which seeks to combine the powers of the planning system, and in particular place-based delivery vehicles, with a much greater sense of social outcomes and community governance”.⁸ This model ties the principles of traditional Development Corporations with a strengthened role for the local community and has substantial potential. Detailed proposals of the legislative changes required to make Community Development Corporations a reality can be found in the TCPA publication, *New Towns Act 2015*.⁹

Conditions for local leadership

National support: A spatial framework which provides an overview of the challenges at national and sub-national level would allow local areas to coordinate their responses to a variety of housing and infrastructure challenges. Planning which recognises factors that cross local authority boundaries, for example travel and employment, can help people to see the bigger picture.¹⁰ However, international examples of locally led initiatives show that top down support is not always necessary.

Strong local leadership: Strong leadership “drives forward action, breeds confidence, reduces risk and widens participation”.¹¹ Local authorities are well placed to provide or support this.

Collaborative working: Partnership working from the initial planning stages would enable the development of a masterplan with a shared vision, and help to engage local people. Any new settlement should involve four key groups: landowners, local authorities, local communities and developers. Other partners can also make significant contributions, for example businesses interested in investing in the area.

Equality and accountability: Structures to ensure fair representation for communities during the process of planning large scale developments must be in place if local leadership is to take on any meaningful role. Partnerships should be formalised so that rights and responsibilities are clear. Examples of mechanisms to achieve this include Strategic Land and Infrastructure Contracts (SLICs)¹², Community Interest Companies¹³ or Community Development Corporations.¹⁴ A formal partnership also has the potential to encourage investment. For example in Milton Keynes, financial contributions from developers were met by government match-funding and a commitment on the part of the local authority to deliver the required infrastructure, reducing risk, increasing viability and enabling the prompt delivery of infrastructure.¹⁵

Conclusion

Heavy involvement of communities (outside of statutory consultation) in large scale development is rare in the UK. Internationally however, examples of the benefits of bottom up planning are more widespread. One of the better known of these is [Freiburg in Germany](#), World Habitat Award finalist (2013), which shows how community involvement in planning and development can contribute to the success of a place.¹⁶

Large scale developments such as garden cities, new towns or urban extensions have a far greater chance of success if local people have invested in their conception and design. While 80 per cent of people agree that there is a housing crisis in Britain, 45 per cent of people would actively oppose housing development in their local area.¹⁷ Opposition often relates to concerns that developments will not be of good quality or that infrastructure provision will not be forthcoming, putting excessive pressure on existing services.¹⁸ Efforts to engage more fully with communities through a formal delivery vehicle such as a New Settlement Partnership or Community Development Corporation could help to assuage some of the more common concerns of those opposing development. The Building and Social Housing Foundation supports bottom up approaches to housing problems as inclusive and enduring solutions, with far wider benefits than just providing homes¹⁹.

¹ <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/jun/05/labour-wants-caps-on-councils-borrowing-lifted-to-spark-house-builds>

² See for example <http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/community-led-development>

³ This proposal emerged from a consultation with experts from a variety of sectors, including landowners, local government and developers, at Windsor Castle in May 2013. Further details of the conclusions of the consultation can be found in BSHF’s publication, Creating the Conditions for New Settlements in England, www.bshf.org/published-information/publication.cfm?lang=00&thePubID=DA16820B-D4AE-52C7-70495EE78A4F3D3C

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- ⁴ Callcut, J. (2007) The Callcut Review of Housebuilding Delivery
<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120919132719/http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/callcutreview.pdf>
- ⁵ The Parks Trust Milton Keynes: www.theparkstrust.com/about-us/about-us
- ⁶ Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation: www.letchworth.com/heritage-foundation
- ⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/office-of-the-regulator-of-community-interest-companies>
- ⁸ Town and Country Planning Association (2013) Planning Out Poverty
www.tcpa.org.uk/data/files/Planning_out_Poverty.pdf
- ⁹ Town and Country Planning Association (2014) New Towns Act 2015?
www.tcpa.org.uk/data/files/NTA2015.pdf
- ¹⁰ Hamiduddin, I. & Gallent, N. (2012) Limits to growth: the challenge of housing delivery in England's "under-bounded" districts. *Planning Practice and Research*, 27(5), 513–530.
- ¹¹ Adams, D. and Tiesdell, S. (2013) *Shaping Places: Urban planning design and development* (Oxon: Routledge).
- ¹² Land Value Capture and Infrastructure Delivery through SLICs: www.tcpa.org.uk/pages/land-value-capture-and-infrastructure-delivery-through-slics.html
- ¹³ www.bis.gov.uk/CICREGULATOR
- ¹⁴ Town and Country Planning Association (2013) Planning Out Poverty, p.48
www.tcpa.org.uk/data/files/Planning_out_Poverty.pdf
- ¹⁵ Land Value Capture and Infrastructure Delivery through SLICs: www.tcpa.org.uk/pages/land-value-capture-and-infrastructure-delivery-through-slics.html
- ¹⁶ World Habitat Awards (2013) 30 Years of Planning Continuity in Freiburg, Germany
www.worldhabitatawards.org/winners-and-finalists/project-details.cfm?lang=00&theProjectID=9E884441-15C5-F4C0-9987741664F777CC
- ¹⁷ Ipsos-Mori (2013) Housing Crisis poll computer tables. Retrieved from www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/Polls/housing-crisis-in-britain-tables-jan-2013.pdf
- ¹⁸ National Housing and Planning Advice Unit (2010) Public Attitudes to Housing 2010
<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120919132719/http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/507390/nhpau/pdf/16127041.pdf>
- ¹⁹ Some of our earlier research in this area can be found at <http://www.bshf.org/ukhpp/scaling-up/> and international examples are available at <http://www.worldhabitatawards.org/>