

Paula Palmer

Hello, and welcome to Stonewater's *On the Air* podcast. This is the second episode of Season 6. Today we're asking whether New Towns are really the answer to the housing crisis. The government's New Towns Task Force has identified 12 possible sites, but how much difference can they make, and what will it take to get them right?

To help me get the answers to these questions, I'm delighted to be joined by Lord Richard Best. He is cross-bench member of the House of Lords and Co-Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on New Towns.

We've also got Maurice Lange, analyst at the Centre of Cities, whose work focuses on housing and planning and has led the Centre's work on New Towns. From Stonewater, we have Matt Crucefix, who is our Director of Development, South and Southwest. Thank you all for being here.

Lord Best, welcome to our podcast, your career and experience within the housing sector and as a parliamentary member, is extensive, so we're delighted to have you. Can you tell us a bit more about why you're drawn to social housing and perhaps tell us a bit more about the APPG for New Towns?

Lord Richard Best

Life history, yes. I go back to the '60s. That's when I started, so I steal a march on everybody else. No, in the '60s, we had *Cathy Come Home*, this film that really brought to public attention the fact that homelessness was a big issue, and we still had serious problems. We thought we were past them in the '60s, and we weren't.

I tried to get a job at shelter and was told that there were no vacancies, but I found my way into a housing association. After a while, I became the boss of the National Housing Federation, as now is. I did 15 years trying to build up the housing associations with some... They grew, not entirely because of me, but they did go from more or less nought to a million homes during the time that I was around.

Since then, I ran the Rowntree Foundation for 18 years, which gave me a chance to put some of the thoughts I had into practise. Nice chocolate multimillionaire at the back of us who made it all possible. Thank you for eating all those Kit Kats and Smarties pastry.

Paula Palmer

My pleasure.

Lord Richard Best

They made the money. I'm now in parliament, so theoretically passing the laws that will affect everyone's lives down here in the House of Lords. I'm the Co-Chair of the New Towns All-Party Parliamentary Group. This brings together parliamentarians from both ends of the building, the lords and the commons, and all the different parties.

Basically, the MPs that represent the existing 32 new towns, most of them are signed up as members. It's a forum for them. We get Sir Michael Lyons, who chaired the Task Force for New Towns, to come and talk to us. Just this week, we've had Nick Raynsford, who is one of the task force members. We try and keep up with what's happening in terms of those new towns.

Paula Palmer

Getting to put all of that experience into practise and helping to shape what comes next. That's really good. We're grateful to have your insight on here as well. Getting into more of those details. The locations from the task force proposal mainly includes extensions to existing towns rather than completely new ones. What does that tell us about how government is defining a new town?

Lord Richard Best

They're saying that although quite a lot of the ones on the list, the list of 12, and indeed, two of the three ones that are going to start the show running, the first out of the blocks, all those ones are really expansions of existing urban areas rather than brand-new greenfield sites in the middle of nowhere.

Perhaps not surprising because you need to plug into the services that already exist rather than having to create everything from scratch. Building your transport links, if you're connecting with those that already exist, that's an awful lot easier than laying it all out for the future.

We've got Leeds South Bank in West Yorkshire. We've got Chase Park in London and Enfield in London. These two of the first three, the third one being a bit more greenfield-ish out in Bedfordshire. These are going to be distinct and have an identity of their own. This is stressed in the New Towns Task Force report.

Even though they're joined up to existing cities like Leeds and indeed London, they are going to have their own character and be different from each other, but different from the town where they already are an annex to. Nonetheless, they will make use of what's already there and be part of what's already there. They're trying to do both those things at once.

Paula Palmer

I guess certainly to make that more immediate impact, then there has to already be something going ahead. Otherwise, it's a long time coming to get these new towns.

Lord Richard Best

It's going to be a long time coming anyway. Frankly, these things take much longer than one ever wants. It's a 20-year project.

Paula Palmer

Crikey. Maurice, welcome to *On the Air*. Before I get your view on the proposed locations of new towns, do tell us some more about you and the Centre for Cities.

Maurice Lange

Thanks, Paula. My name's Maurice. I work as an analyst here at Centre for Cities. We're a think tank working on local economic development issues. That means we think about housing, transport, governance, devolution, things like that. I've been at Centre two and a half years, and I work mostly on the housing side of things.

I led our piece of work, which tried to knit together this question of where would you put the new towns if you're thinking about from an urban economics point of view, and you're thinking about

them from a land value capture being one of the key things you need to be able to do in order to make them deliverable. I can talk a bit more about that as we go along, I'm sure.

Paula Palmer

Please do. Tell us about those locations, access to jobs being key to economic success, and therefore success of new towns. What is the connection when deciding where new towns should go?

Maurice Lange

I guess Centre for Cities, it's unsurprising that we start off with one of the key requirements being that they need to be connected to a city. That's not just because we like cities for no reason in particular. It's because our analysis of the geography of the modern economy is that you have the highest productivity jobs all locating in cities and especially bigger cities.

Firms that are more productive need to have large labour pools, which unnecessarily are in cities rather than in smaller towns. That's why you would see, in general, across the world, the economy of bigger cities doing better than smaller towns. That's why you see in the UK, that'd be our explanation for why towns in the UK are struggling.

We think it's really important that you attach it to the places which have the greatest strengths or where it could make a contribution to those places which have great strengths. It's either within or with good transport connections to existing cities.

Paula Palmer

We don't want to set them up to fail, do we?

Maurice Lange

Yeah. I think you saw that in the last round of new towns in that you had some... The initial wave was built all as overspill from London, and those have grown typically more over the last 50 years compared to the second and third wave, which were built in the north, which at the time was going through a period of economic decline and de-population.

If you look at those two trajectories, and then you look at today's geography, today's geography, looking forward, maybe isn't as north-south, but it's maybe a bit more city periphery than it was. You don't want to make mistakes of the past and building the places where the likelihood of economic success is lower.

Paula Palmer

Gosh. There's a lot of information there. Let's bring Matt in, last but not least to the conversation. Thanks for joining us. Perhaps you can help me get the best from our guests here because this is more your area of expertise than mine.

When we spoke previously, you also said that many of the proposed sites already had construction and infrastructure plans in place. Do you see this as a genuine transformation or simply a rebranding of those growth areas already?

Matt Crucefix

Thanks for having me on. I think really the answer is, as set out by Lord Best and Maurice, really, is a little bit of both. I think that there are very few completely stand-alone locations plans, but

that, again, also relates back to the need to deliver one and a half million homes in this parliament cycle and being able to integrate large volumes of homes into existing communities.

We know from history that completely new settlements can take years and years to establish before that housing growth really starts to kick on and for large swathes of developments to be built. You, of course, as we mentioned, need the infrastructure as part of that.

It really makes sense, I think, to latch on to existing infrastructure proposals such as for road and rail and build around new railway stations and hubs, for example, and then grow those communities which effectively bolt on to what's already there. That will help to drive infrastructure and regen benefits for those existing communities as well.

Paula Palmer

Thanks, Matt. Whether they're entirely new prospects or rebranded extensions, it's going to deliver an increased focus on making sure the area gets what's needed in terms of housing and new business and all the rest, isn't it? From a development point of view, what opportunities, or challenges even, do you think these proposed new towns present for housing associations?

Matt Crucefix

I think the biggest opportunity is a genuine attempt to meet housing need in given areas. We know that every local authority area that we work in has got huge amounts of housing need from either people that are registered as being in housing need or those that are renting privately, for example, but that won't be on housing waiting lists.

There's a scale to that delivery with new towns and uncertainty of programme for housing associations, and it helps us to establish long-term partnerships through those developments as well. Making sure homes are affordable and delivered and not lost through viability proposals is also going to be really important.

The new towns will give us an opportunity for local authorities to probably establish the amount of affordable homes that are required in those areas properly and push developers to achieve that. We know at the moment there's a shortage of delivery of Section 106 housing currently because a lot of housing associations don't necessarily have the financial capacity to deliver it. There's work that needs to be done in order to unlock that as well.

However, I think that the new towns and the wider infrastructure that that will bring will inevitably attract alternative investment, for example, for maybe for-profit RPs, as well as traditional RPs, which could provide a stimulus as well to help them to grow those houses and help people in need.

Paula Palmer

They've already put some proposals forward, haven't they? About how many homes or how many of the homes should be rented or social, haven't they? Obviously, there is going to be a look in for housing associations, but I guess it all needs to add up with the financial numbers, as well as being able to deliver those homes.

Lord Richard Best

That's good news about the division between market sales and affordable housing of different kinds. 40% affordable housing is the marker with 20%, half of that, 40%, 20% of the total for social rent, which is where we really need more homes.

Those numbers are really encouraging. If they set a new standard that other people can apply elsewhere, if they give a lead to local planning authorities in other places, then that'll be not a revolution, but a major change from really grubbing along and doing very little in the social rent market at all.

Paula Palmer

Lord Best, Green Belt reform is back in the headlines with suggestions towards the idea of a Grey Belt, reusing land that is perhaps poor quality or ugly that is in that Green Belt area, like your disused garage sites or closed businesses, for example. Can you tell us more about that? What are your views?

Lord Richard Best

I think it isn't a matter of wholesale change of encroaching big time into the Green Belt which is so precious. It's a matter of nibbling where there are opportunities, where there's transport links, because you're not going to nibble enough to create your own hub. If you're not careful, it's going to be too small, the encroachment. Go where there already is those transport links, particularly rail.

There are opportunities. I think we mustn't overestimate them. This isn't going to contribute huge numbers. We've got 1.5 million homes as the target. We all know it's going to be incredibly difficult to get anywhere near it. The new towns are not going to contribute all that many homes in actual sheer numbers. 10,000 to throw is the minimum, but it's going to take 20 years to get much up to that and much past it.

Maybe in the next 10 years, 60,000 homes in new towns. That's not a huge amount out of the 1.5 million. They have to be very special, I think, to make it worth all the time and effort we're all going to put into this.

Paula Palmer

Thank you. Maurice, your research also suggests that the Green Belt hasn't really helped deliver many affordable homes. What alternative approaches have you seen or come across?

Maurice Lange

I guess there's a number of different pieces of work that we've done around the Green Belt over the years. One was specifically linked to our New Towns project. We were looking at finding sites that were within proximity to existing cities. Then you go, okay, so this is a sensible location based on its existing infrastructure. Then you go to what extent is that impeded by the existence of the Green Belt or not.

Some cities don't have Green Belt, but most of the larger ones do. 90% of the sites around London, for example, were on Green Belt. What we also found is that that isn't a significant chunk of the overall Green Belt.

The Green Belt is so massive as a plot of land, or it's far more than one plot of land. That 90% of sites being blocked by Green Belt is only 7% of the total London Green Belt. Those ratios apply to different extents in different cities, but broadly that's a good rule of thumb. 90% of sites being blocked, 10% of the Green Belt being taken up if you built on those locations.

I think that's a bit of a challenge as these new towns are rolled out is to what extent are you going to have some upfront strategic redesignation of locations, or are you going to have to rely

on what the Green Belt mechanism does, which is, describe Green Belt nibbling in policy terms, but it doesn't actually put it on a map. That can be better or worse depending on who you are and what your prerogatives are.

Paula Palmer

Thanks so much, Maurice. That's really interesting. I like how we're all getting caught onto this term of nibbling. Lord Best, turning to funding. It's going to be an enormous cost to government, or if we think of it in the terms of actual spend when we come to it. How do you think we can overcome some of the financial and regulatory barriers that might hold back new town delivery?

Lord Richard Best

Most of the money is going to come from people buying themselves, getting an individual mortgage, which pays for itself over time. Some of it will come from private investors investing in the social housing landlords and getting their money back over a period of time out of the rents that get paid.

Only a residual portion relates to the grant that is needed to make the sums stack up. I think that the grant needed is going to be a great deal less in these new towns than it is for the little small sites here and a small site there that we do at the moment. Because you've got the operation at scale, you're going to buy the land more cheaply.

Because we're doing a with the hope value when we're able to buy for a new town, we're going to be perhaps only spending a third as much on the site at the first place than we would have done buying little pockety bits here and there and everywhere. It brings savings with it to operate at scale.

I think the new towns will be good value for money. That makes the headroom, provides the opportunity for the green spaces, the amenities, the schools, and the whole infrastructure that goes with the housing. It makes the space for it if you're doing it at the scale of a new town.

I think it's a money-saving exercise in terms of getting to our 1.5 million homes. We'll get there faster and cheaper if we have some new towns on the go.

Paula Palmer

Maurice, do you think you could add to this? When we were researching this episode, you spoke about how government might structure financial support and land value capture. I don't know what that means. Perhaps you could explain that to me. How are we going to make them more viable?

Maurice Lange

As Lord Best was describing, most of the money to fund the things will come from the people buying houses. When you're thinking about it, obviously, you need to spend money to build houses up front, but then you get the money when you sell that house.

What land value capture is, is if you were, let's say, building for 100% private development and then all other public goods, like all of your parks, all of your roads, all of your social housing was to be delivered by government, for example, then a private developer would deliver the private housing and sell it at market price. Let's say it's £500,000 a home or whatever. Let's say it costs £200,000 a home to build that home. If no land value capture mechanisms at play, then the

300,000 there then goes to the landowner because that's the amount that the private developer will be willing to purchase that land for. Does that make sense?

Paula Palmer

Yes.

Maurice Lange

To simplify it, there are maybe two different mechanisms by which you can do land value capture in this situation. One is through Section 106. Instead of saying that the public sector would cover all of those public goods, you place an obligation on that private developer to deliver those public goods. That would then reduce the amount of money that will go to the landowner because the cost to the private developer would go up, and they would agree to deliver the roads, agree to deliver some affordable housing or whatever.

An alternative way is the way that Lord Best described it, which was, you have the public sector being able to buy the land at a low cost without hope value, for example. Instead of 300,000, they might buy it for 30,000 or much less per home. Then on top of that, they would then incur the cost of delivering public goods like roads and parks. Then they would sell the plots of land to a private developer who would buy them for the amount that they could still make a profit while selling a house at market value.

It's a little bit complicated, but basically what this means is that the amount of land... Land value capture can deliver quite a lot. Instead of money going directly to a landowner, whoever that happens to be, some of that money, at least, is clawed back, and you get the delivery of public goods.

The mechanism that Lord Best described is potentially the one where you guarantee that you're getting maximum land value capture because the state can buy land at a cheap cost as long as they have the capacity to coordinate all of the other stuff that needs to go on to make the development happen, which I think is a bit of a question mark because that requires some government funding to have a development corporation set up with lots of people who are capable and able to run the thing.

But then I guess then there's the second question, which is the amount of land value capture is determined by the difference between the cost of delivering a home, so the bricks and mortar cost of it, and the amount that it will then sell for. The amount of land value capture you could get on any given site varies significantly across the country, depending on what the costs are and how much you'd sell the house for. Have you all followed through that?

Paula Palmer

I think so, just about.

Maurice Lange

I think I'd be more pessimistic than Lord Best has been about new towns in general. Some of the new towns, some of the locations that the government has gone for are going to be able to deliver purely through land value capture, a lot of public goods and other ones, particularly when they're urban regeneration, so the costs go up are going to require quite a lot of government grant to get going.

Paula Palmer

Gosh, there is so much more to this than I ever imagined. Matt, let's go to planning. Probably a bugbear of yours, a challenge in the development world. There's reform coming, I think, and then the Autumn Budget talked about more planning officers. But what changes do you think will make the biggest difference to delivering new homes at scale?

Matt Crucefix

Well, I think it goes without saying, probably planning could have its podcast because there are so many different facets to it. And then so many different challenges to overcome. I think in the context of new towns, the establishment of new towns is a great way to try to make the planning process in those areas more effective and efficient because you've got the pre-established position that you are going to be delivering that amount of homes in that area.

In terms of being able to achieve the planning consents that are required, you are pushing an open door. The planning process at the moment is complex. We go from positions where we have local authorities that are struggling to demonstrate the land availability for the amount of housing need and growth that they need to project, which means that often we end up in situations where more often than not, housing developments are won via appeal processes on housing land supply arguments, which sometimes means you end up with developments in the wrong places and not where the local plans intended.

Simplifying the plan process, simplifying the way that we assess the need and also how we allocate land appropriately over a long period of time is really important to ensure that ultimately the right sustainable developments that local communities and people want is going to be built. Unfortunately, it is positive news to have more investment in planners, but on average, I think it works out maybe one or slightly less than one planning officer per local authority area, which isn't necessarily enough to deal with the huge weight of pressure being put on planning services across the country. The reforms that we have to try to speed up the processes, to try to propose, to try to remove some of the barriers, particularly around the planning committee processes and trying to almost delegate some of the approvals more often so that less things end up at a planning committee will help to encourage more applications to be processed and hopefully speed up delivery.

It's really important right from the start that we're collaborating on not just with housing associations, but developers, people who live in existing towns and communities, and also local councils around where the right developments for each town and community should be.

Paula Palmer

Thanks, Matt. Lord Best, one of the aims for the APPG, I think, is to examine how best to support new town future residents, and design is key to creating communities that will last. What principles do you think should guide how these new towns are built and planned?

Lord Richard Best

Can I just say something about the planning which Matt was talking about? I think it isn't going to be satisfactory for a new town to work on that Section 106 system. That doesn't really work. With a new town, you're operating at scale, and you will have, I think we will have in all cases, a development corporation, a publicly-accountable body set up by the government in terms of the new towns. They will get their planning consents much more speedily because they have planning powers of their own, the new towns. We're going to whistle through the planning

system for a change instead of waiting for years for things to happen. We're not going to rely on the house builders being forced to do what they don't want to do.

We're going to build that into the process, divide up the land. The house builders can do their own thing over there, but over here, we want the Housing Association to do something. There, we want some housing for older people. We want some student housing over there. Here, we want a park. All this through a master plan for the new town, overseen by a development corporation. I think this is a good model, and it's a fast-moving model compared with the system we've got at the moment, doing things in dribs and drabs with endless delay along the way.

Maurice Lange

One of the observations I've made about that is that ultimately, the new towns are only going to be a small proportion of overall supply, even if they get going as quickly as they could possibly do. But all of the benefits that you've just spoken about are true and completely valid. I suppose that speaks to what they are, which is a cookie cutter out of the rest of the system and why the government would want to make them... They've recognised a problem, I suppose, in that development doesn't happen as quickly as you'd like it to happen. It doesn't happen in the locations you'd like it to. It doesn't happen with the level of public control over the delivery of amenities as you would like it to.

Great that the new towns, if they get the backing that they'll need to, to be as public-led as you've described. Do that. But then I suppose the question that I'm posing is, what more could we do to make that a change that occurs more systemically? We have more, as you said earlier, Matt, one extra planner is not going to give local planning authorities the ability to look like that developer corporation, even a little tiny bit. I think one question for the government is, if you're going to back the new towns, great. But how can you push beyond that to turn the rest of the system into something which has the same virtues, even if it isn't as big and as public-led in all circumstances?

Lord Richard Best

I think an answer to that, to Maurice, who I agree with entirely on this, is that you can have development corporations just for a particular place, for Devon or for Manchester or wherever, with the mayor setting them up or the combined county authority. We're having this devolution bill currently in Parliament, and it's going to speed on its way the development corporation model, streamlining the way that we do it. I think government has woken up to the fact that we need a new model, not a reliance on a handful of an oligopoly, as we say, of major volume house builders. Let's get out of that being held to ransom by them and create these development corporations not just for new towns, but for major developments in other places as well.

Maurice Lange

Yeah, I agree completely. I think there's also some other stuff that we at Centre for Cities talk about a lot, which is what you could do to make the rest outside of major development planning for public and private and housing associations, all more streamlined. We've done a lot of work looking at other countries and how you could reform our system.

Matt Crucefix

I think, Paula, just to add to that, I think ultimately with the new towns, when you draw a line around something and create a vision that's got a backing to it and also has a systematic

approach to how that's going to be delivered and approved is, what you're doing is also you're removing a lot of the politics that will go with a standard application for each local level, for small to medium to large housing developments, which causes delay in a planning process. But when local authorities at the moment are looking at their local planning process and how they decide on where they're going to allocate the sites that have come forward through the local plan.

Your politics is a huge player at a local level. Who is it going to upset, and which parties that were? Whereas at the moment with the new town's proposal, ultimately, we know the homes are going to be built there, and we know infrastructure is going to be built there. You've got an immediate impetus in that, and ultimately you can steam roll it through some of the smaller issues at points. No doubt there will be elements where things get held up, but it's certainly a good starting place.

Paula Palmer

Thank you, Matt, for summing that up for me. When we were chatting before, Lord Best, you were talking about the new homes that you'd like to see built. You were talking about lifetime home standards, accessibility and sustainability designs. Is there anything you'd like to tell us some more about that now?

Lord Richard Best

Well, this is not just for new towns, but generally, if we're going to build 1.5 million new homes, we better get them right. They've got to last at least 100 years. Probably on the current showing, they got to last about 400 years. I think that's how long the chart shows we need them for.

Maurice Lange

Three and a half thousand years at the current rate of demolition.

Lord Richard Best

It could quite. They'll never be demolished. Back to the pyramids, that is, they're the last things that didn't get demolished 3,500 years ago. No, in terms of quality, because it isn't just about the numbers, about the quantity, it is about the quality as well. There are some relatively straightforward things that government could get its head around, requiring through its National Planning Policy Guidance, which goes with a National Policy Planning Framework that government issues. It could be a bit cleverer in terms of design, urban design, the things that we want, the layouts of places, what we call place making.

We're building in the green spaces, building in the cycle tracks, building in the amenities that you need. But a simple straightforward one is to change the building regulations to make all new homes, what we call lifetime homes, which the government agency Homes England is busy imposing, quite rightly, on the social landlords. We could do the same for all of the private sector providers, the builders, the house builders, the developers. This accessibility means creating homes that will last a lifetime. Whatever happens to you, you won't be thrown out by the home by those three steps up to the front door, that bath that you can't get in and out of.

Paula Palmer

It just adds another problem along the way, doesn't it? It's just another new home to find if that's the situation.

Lord Richard Best

Quite, or expensively adapted later when you've only just built it. The same with those sustainable aspects. We're still building for heating systems run on gas. We know that we're going to phase out fossil fuels, gas as the way of heating your home. We're going to move to electricity and have ground-source heat pumps and other new ways of doing that. Let's start now, not wait another 10 years before we implement what we know we're going to need.

Paula Palmer

Indeed. Matt, I'm going to come over to you because I know that's something that we're very driven by here at Stonewater. We hear about sustainable features, environmental aspects. How do we approach design and sustainability, and how do we balance the costs?

Matt Crucefix

It's a really good question. It's worth us pointing out that Stonewater, we believe, has been very much at the forefront, particularly with housing associations in terms of building homes that are fossil fuel free. All of our land-led schemes for probably the last two years or so, at least, maybe even three, have been off gas, utilising new sustainable technologies, which is really good. But that's been our... Interesting what Lord Best mentions there in terms of the retrofit element and the adaptation. Because as a landlord who's got a purpose in investing in those homes and investing in our customers, it's really important that our customers can stay in those homes and live their life there. The idea and prospect of us needing to rip out a gas boiler, for example, in 10, 15 years and adapt that property for the heating system is something that we want to get ahead of that and make sure that that home is warm, sustainable and affordable.

The design of that home is really important as well because there are additional costs to better design, let's say, at times. But as a landlord, it's around that long-term view of rather than continuing replacing things, well, actually, we won't need to change those components so quickly. The cost base changes for us longer term. Short term, the costs are higher, but ultimately it's really important with new communities and new homes that we look at these examples of, a, place making so that you've got a nice place where people want to live and sustain where they live in that area. But also make sure those homes are flexible.

Something else we've done for many years now is to have homework spaces in our homes that we build. But that may not be because our customers are working from home, it's because they've also got children that need to do their homework somewhere quieter and there are benefits for that.

It's really important that we think about not only the design of the individual home, but its energy requirements, so making sure it's sufficient and doesn't cost a huge amount to run, has a good impact on the environment. But also that the external area is somewhere where people want to live. That have got green infrastructure. Has got, again, cycleways. Has got trees and things that people can go out and play and enjoy and want it to look good and remain looking good for the foreseeable future.

Paula Palmer

Lovely. Thanks, Matt, for that extra detail. I think we can probably agree, wherever the new towns are going to go, there's going to be some opposition. How can we build public trust and support for these large-scale developments? Lord Best, let's come to you first. What do you think?

Lord Richard Best

Well, you're right. There's nowhere where you can put 10,000 extra homes, and everyone who lives all around are going to say, "Great, just what we wanted." Twenty years of disruption, lorries coming and going at all hours. It's impossible to expect local communities to applaud the idea of a new town on their doorstep. Let's start with that.

Don't beat yourself up as a housebuilder or a housing association if you do get some opposition, because that is an absolute inevitability. But yes, insofar as one can offer the local community that's already there more than they've got at the moment, this is a chance to redeem yourselves to some extent as providers of new homes. There are things you can do. I was responsible for the creation of a new community on the side of York. We call it Derwenthorpe, which is a lovely new development, 550 houses. We had a very, very vocal opposition to getting this off the ground. It did indeed take nearly 20 years to get the thing together.

But the things that appealed to people weren't always the things that we expected. We rerouted the bus so that it comes through the estate. We thought everyone would like the fact that there's going to be a better bus service. Loads of people said, "We never go on a bus. We don't want buses coming through." That wasn't what we expected. Just having amenities doesn't necessarily win you a lot of prizes. But having a decent playground, having a decent bit of parkland, having better transport links than you had before, these things will buy you some friends. Building in the wishes of the wider community around your development is very much part, I think, of proper place making. Do as much as one can, but don't expect everyone still to love you for it.

Paula Palmer

Excellent. Thank you. Maurice, what about you?

Maurice Lange

Anything on the place making side of things is definitely beyond my expertise. But I think something that we'd observe is that in other countries, planning systems that think more long term in a systematic manner tend to be de-politicised in a way. Because a lot of the decisions around where development is going to happen and what's coming down the track is made quite a long time in advance, and everybody knows that's going to happen.

Whereas the UK's planning system is very short-term and piecemeal in the sense that you have a local plan, but it doesn't make firm decisions about what's going to happen next. Then you have lots and lots of decision-making loaded up after someone submitted an application. By design, the UK system and the population, generally, have got used to the planning being through this adversarial process rather than at that further upstream, at that planning-making process where people get involved and go, "Okay, so we've got to work with this many houses for the next 10 years. Where are we going to put them? What are the trade-offs on making them taller or this place over that place?"

Then you get broader participation rather than more concentrated and focused opposition. But if you got people to make more decisions up front, which I think in some ways new towns are, you're working with this big parameter, which is a new town is happening, but then there's lots to be decided within that. If you get the whole system to work more like that, I think you'd have a

less politicised system. Notwithstanding, obviously, someone's always going to be annoyed when they thought they were living in a village of 600 people, and then suddenly it's a 20,000 home development. I agree with Lord Best on that one.

Paula Palmer

Thanks, Maurice. That's great. We're getting to the end of our time on this episode, and I'm really starting to understand some of the finer detail of how new towns might work, and appreciate that they'll certainly need a lot of help to meet some of the demand for housing. Maurice, some argue that new towns are going to be too small to make a national impact. How do you see new towns fitting into UK's wider housing vision for 2030 and beyond?

Maurice Lange

In some ways I agree that they are a small part of the national picture and new towns as the answer to the housing crisis, absolutely not. There's lots and lots of other stuff. But then any small individual thing is going to be a small contribution to the big thing. I guess the insight that Centre for Cities has on this, it comes from our analysis of the last round new towns. What we find is two things. One is that the new towns and expanded towns programme were all amongst the fastest growing places in the UK at the time. They are definitely, as I think we've covered, for good reason, a really good way of delivering homes very quickly. If you have that public-led control, stripping out some of those private incentives to build slowly, et cetera.

But then also, if you add up all 20 of the new towns that were happening in the 1970s, they still only delivered about 5% of total supply in that decade. That's the way you should think about it. There are ways to speed up stuff that was otherwise going to be slower, but they're not your answer to the whole thing. They're the shining light which everybody else can do better as a result of, hopefully.

Paula Palmer

Thank you very much. I'm getting some nods around my screen, so I think people agree. Matt, just helping me sum up, what needs to happen to ensure new towns become vibrant, self-sustaining places where people can truly thrive?

Matt Crucefix

I think to start with, I think what I'd say is probably actions speak louder than words, ultimately. We all too often hear through planning where things have been, opportunities have been missed, and the house builder hasn't built the local park and everybody's waiting for the schools to be built. I think it's a real opportunity with new towns to get a lot of that infrastructure in place to make those places so that the wider community that's already established there that's been bolted onto, for example, can see some of the benefits. Let's open some of these parks and open spaces and take some of those developer contributions that are going to be part of this makeup and establish those communities, establish the benefits of these new towns really early. That's going to have to go hand in hand with them being the right places for economic infrastructure, for the people to be able to access work, transport, and also education.

With those three things and making a start early in terms of the things that you're putting into those estates and new communities to make them places that are attractive and people want to

go to, then they will, as we said earlier, be good beacons and good barometers for how all developments should really be built in the future.

Paula Palmer

Thank you, Matt. Before we finish, one final thought from each of you. What's the one single most important thing that will determine whether new towns succeed or fail?

Maurice Lange

I think it's going to be the amount of backing that they get. We've heard we've got 12 locations. I think all of them should get backing. I think they're all in decent locations, at least from my ivory tower. Whether or not they make a big impact is just going to be about, if we only do one or two of these, then they're going to be vanishingly important. Whereas if we did all 12, then maybe they can be the thing that we've all been talking about today, which is the beginning of a new model of development in the UK. We've got to wait till March, April to find out exactly how much backing they're going to get, though.

Paula Palmer

Thank you. What about you, Lord Best?

Lord Richard Best

I absolutely agree with Maurice. I think we need the people who will comprise the planners, the master planners, the delivery experts. We need really good people to come together to create these development corporations upon which we're going to depend. The best of the best we're going to need to make these exemplars really work. Recruitment of an inspiration for the people who are going to in turn inspire us. I think make the offer a good one and let's get the best people.

Paula Palmer

Brilliant. Thank you. Matt?

Matt Crucefix

I think alongside the scale, they need to be providing a good legacy for good quality design, whether that's through design codes or really establishing what we believe new housing estates and communities should look like. That should then be the model for not just on a large mass scale of a new town, but also for small, medium developments also.

Paula Palmer

Thank you very much, everybody. I look forward to seeing how this all unfolds over the next couple of months, years, 20, maybe. But we'll see whether what you've had to say comes to fruition. Thank you to Lord Best, Maurice, and Matt for joining us. It's been a pleasure. Thank you to everyone for listening. I hope you've enjoyed it. We'll see you again soon for another episode of *On the Air*.