

Government response to the Communities and Local Government Select Committee's report on New Towns (in follow up to the Ninth Report of the 2007/08 Session)

Introduction

1. This memorandum sets out the Government's response to the Committee's follow up report on New Towns. The Committee concluded that:

Like our predecessor Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee, the Town and Country Planning Association and the New Towns Special Interest Group, we are critical of the Government for continuing to neglect the particular regeneration requirements of the New Towns. There remain two urgent and pressing needs. First, we must identify the steps which are needed to maintain the post-war New Towns as successful communities and good places to live. They were social experiments. By their nature they have special and particular needs. If those needs are not recognised, there is a danger that they will fall into social decay and physical dereliction. The Government cannot pretend that they are just like any other urban area of England. They are not. We recommend that the Government commission a detailed examination of the reinvestment needs of the New Towns. This is an essential first step towards ensuring that the significant investment in the New Towns programme and the social and economic benefits which have been gained from it, are not wasted.

Second, we need to learn lessons for the future. The Government has embarked on a massive regeneration programme, aiming to deliver 3 million new homes by 2020. It would be an act of folly not to spend a small sum on trying to learn the lessons of history in order to prevent past mistakes being repeated. Building on the desk-based research which has already been done, we recommend that further original work be undertaken identifying specific lessons for the long-term planning of current and future large-scale urban development such as the "eco-town" programme and the Growth Areas.

The Government's response

2. The Government welcomes the Committee's decision to follow up on its predecessor Committee's work on New Towns.
3. As the Government made clear in its response¹ to the predecessor Committee's report, it believes that by and large the New Towns have been successful. They have played an important role in creating better homes and environments, particularly open space, for over two million people and still have much to offer those communities. It believes they are still held in high affection by those communities that live in them.
4. However, the Government acknowledges that the New Towns, like all other towns and cities, have continuing investment needs to ensure that they remain attractive places in which to live and work. The Government also recognises the particular circumstances of the New Towns; for example the concentration of housing and infrastructure of a single period, and the consequent issues around managing and funding maintenance and improvements which may occur in a concentrated period, rather than over a longer

¹ Government's Response to the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee Report: 'The New Towns: Their Problems and Future', Cm 5685

timeframe as might be expected in other towns and cities. In addition, for some New Towns issues around the design and physical layout which, while desirable and reflecting best practice at the time, have proved inflexible and have not stood the test of time, and have helped create some of the issues that New Towns now have to deal with. Although these issues are not, of course, exclusive to New Towns.

5. The Government noted in its response to the predecessor Committee's report, Government's desire for New Towns to be 'normalised' and to ensure parity of treatment with other local authorities in national programmes on housing, regeneration and funding. This, however, is not to downplay the issues and challenges that they face. The Government also noted that the New Towns were capable of sustaining future growth.

Growth Agenda

6. Since the Government's response to the previous Committee in 2002, 13 of the 19 New Towns, and nine of the 10 Expanded Towns under the 1952 Town Development Act (list at Annex A), are now included in the Government's Growth Areas and Growth Points programmes, and are working in partnership with Government to deliver sustainable housing growth. These New Towns have embraced the growth agenda in support of their place-shaping role, setting out the vision for how they want their towns to grow, and how growth and expansion are at the heart of their long term plans and ambitions for regeneration and renewal.
7. Government is supporting the growth and regeneration plans of these New Towns, through encouraging the production of Programmes of Development, as the basis for accessing funding support. Programmes of Development act as infrastructure and business plans; they set out how New Towns plan to deliver sustainable growth, the vision and ambition for the area, and the standards they seek to achieve. They include the infrastructure required to support the New Town over the short, medium and long-term, and their partners in delivering, and funding this infrastructure.
8. Through their Programmes of Development the New Towns in the growth programme have set out a holistic approach to growth, looking not just at what physical infrastructure is necessary, but also what social, community and green infrastructure is required to support their growing towns, to benefit existing and future residents. They have assessed the impacts of growth on transport and how they are working to support the need for higher transport journeys, but also looking at how they can achieve a modal shift to more sustainable methods of transport. They have taken account of the environmental impact of their growth plans, and how they seek to address the problems of climate change through higher environmental and sustainability standards. They also look at how the New Towns will ensure excellent standards of design in the new developments they are planning.
9. To support the local authorities' role as place shaper, Government has removed the ringfencing and conditions around the Growth Funding that it provides, giving the New Towns and their growth partners control over how the funding is managed, what it is spent on, and when. Local authorities now have the freedom and flexibility to respond to changing circumstances and adapt their funding priorities to best meet local needs.
10. The Government is investing £832m to support the provision of necessary infrastructure to support growth in the Growth Areas and Growth Points over the period 2008-11. Funding

awards for individual locations for the period 2009/10 and 2010/11 were announced on 10 December² 2008.

11. The Government awarded £400m to Growth Areas from 2003-08, and awarded £200m to support transport schemes in the Growth Areas through the Community Infrastructure Fund from 2006-08. The Government is currently assessing bids for a further £200m from the second round of the Community Infrastructure Fund, with funding announcements expected in the New Year.
12. This is on top of the mainstream Government expenditure programmes that support places, including £2.2bn from the Department for Transport for transport schemes that support the growth agenda.
13. The Government is also providing additional capacity and support to these New Towns to deliver the growth agenda with funding to support Local Delivery Vehicles in five of the New Towns (and two Expanded Towns). These Local Delivery Vehicles (list at Annex B) have been established with local authority and local partner support, with the local authorities as key members of their Boards. Through use of Growth Fund awards, other Growth Areas and Growth Points are providing additional delivery capacity, where necessary. The type of delivery support ranges from a statutory Urban Development Corporation, Urban Regeneration Companies and local authority partnerships.
14. The new Homes and Communities Agency will be working with local authorities in the New Towns and across the country to support them in the delivery of their growth ambitions, and in the creation of a single investment plan to successfully bring forward local goals in a more integrated way.
15. Examples of how growth has helped support the regeneration and renewal of New Towns are at Annex C.

Learning and Eco-towns

16. The New Towns have helped shape planning policies over the last 60 years, and much of what they pioneered has already been incorporated into mainstream thinking. Following the predecessor Committee's report, the Government commissioned a literature review by Oxford Brookes University³, and research funded by English Partnerships and by the Institute of Public Policy Research⁴.
17. The Government has also been working closely with the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) since 2006 looking at new settlements. In 2007 the TCPA produced a CLG commissioned guide, *Best Practice in Urban Extensions and New Settlements*, which looked at planned town making and developments since the 1950's and their achievements. This work has contributed to the development of the Eco-towns programme, a modern concept of the New Towns to meet today's challenges of reducing climate change and increasing the supply of affordable housing and creating a modern legacy of exemplar developments for others to learn from, through the development of new technologies and

² <http://www.communities.gov.uk/news/corporate/1094244>

³ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/transferablelessons2>

⁴ Jim Bennett, *From New Towns to Growth Areas: Learning from the Past*, 2005, IPPR

practices. The Eco-towns will build on the lessons learned from the New Towns and other developments since, both here and overseas.

18. The Government has been working closely with the TCPA on the development of the Eco-towns programme. It has commissioned the TCPA to draw on their considerable experience and expertise and, as leading proponents of the New Town movement, to develop a series of worksheets on the delivery of important principles such as community engagement, water management and transport, which Government wants to see underpin each application for an Eco-town scheme.
19. These worksheets include specific best practice drawn on case studies from New Towns and other European examples and provide innovative solutions. The worksheets will help promoters and developers identify the Eco-town standards that such developments must meet.

Eco-towns Worksheet Case Study – Milton Keynes

The Community Worksheet looks at the example of Milton Keynes to illustrate the funding of community developments through contributions from the Milton Keynes Tariff, which will distribute funding for existing and new voluntary community activities and groups and also support area-based workers to work on community development. This will allow existing voluntary organisations and their staff to deliver a programme to welcome newcomers, develop community events, and provide information on the support and facilities already available in Milton Keynes.

Further research

20. The literature review undertaken to date is a strong starting point. The Government will commission further work to evaluate the successes and benefits that Britain's biggest planning experiment brought. It will be important to ensure that the wider lessons are evaluated in moving forward with the Eco-towns, Growth Areas and Growth Points programmes which form the basis for the Government's housing growth programme.
21. Whilst the infrastructure and assets of the New Towns are showing signs of ageing, the focus of research will be targeted towards social and retail infrastructure. By focussing on these two areas, and in commissioning further research, lessons and examples can be distilled for current growth programmes, including the Eco-towns and Growth Points programmes.
22. Local neighbourhood centres are critical to the success and vitality of neighbourhoods and provide a wider service centre other than simply providing a retail function. However, with increased reliance on the car to access local neighbourhood units, the function they perform can be usurped by the supermarket. The Government will therefore instigate research into retail patterns when the New Towns were planned and designed, and look at what innovative methods/models have been used to regenerate the retail function. This might look at the following key components:
 - Empirical data gathering on how New Towns have undergone significant renewal/regeneration since development in the 1950's and 1960's.

- Evaluation of the neighbourhood shopping unit model and of related social facilities and how such units assisted in providing a sense of community – what are the challenges they face today?
 - Scope the sphere of influence of regional shopping centres which have impacted on the primary retail function of new towns (particularly in Essex and Hertfordshire)
 - Identify what a retail model (dispersed or concentrated) might look like in a new community today.
23. The importance of social infrastructure in knitting together new communities cannot be underestimated. In order to engender a sense of community and place, early new communities were provided with community workers, as well as facilities which enabled people to meet and socialise collectively.
24. In order to provide a robust set of information and research in taking forward the Government's current growth programmes the following review should be undertaken:
- Desk based research into what social infrastructure was provided in each New Town.
 - Evaluate the critical factors which make up necessary community infrastructure in a modern setting and identify what lessons/methods can be applied to the Eco-towns programme.
 - Identify what changes in social/community infrastructure have occurred in the New Towns over the last 50 years and establish how successful these changes have been in terms of providing a social focus for communities.
 - Identify what can be done to reinvent failed or life-expired facilities which are needed to support and underpin the wider community.
25. The Homes and Communities Agency, with their expertise and specialist knowledge on housing and regeneration, will be critical in assisting and further developing this work. The timetable for taking forward this proposed work will be considered as part of the normal departmental business planning process.
26. There is now a wealth of guidance, good practice and legislation that has been issued since the establishment of the New Towns which is being used to inform decisions about how we build the new settlements of the future. This information is defining high-quality of places being built and more importantly impacting and improving on quality of life.
27. It has always been the Government's view that the New Towns be mainstreamed to ensure parity of treatment with other local authorities in national programmes on housing, regeneration and social inclusion. All towns have problems specific to their particular area, location, heritage, etc and New Towns are not unique in this. The needs of each local area need to be considered in each case and each will have particular regeneration requirements. There is no universal solution. Each location is unique, and what works in one place may not work in another. It is important that the many professional disciplines work closely together and pay close attention to the needs of the local area.

ANNEX A

ENGLISH NEW TOWNS COVERED BY GROWTH AREAS OR GROWTH POINTS

First Generation New Towns	
Hemel Hempstead	Growth Area
Hatfield	Growth Area
Harlow	Growth Area
Stevenage	Growth Area
Crawley	
Basildon	Thames Gateway Growth Area
Bracknell	
Newton Aycliffe	Growth Point
Corby	Growth Area
Second Generation	
Redditch	
Runcorn	Growth Point
Skelmersdale	
Washington	
Third Generation	
Milton Keynes	Growth Area
Warrington	Growth Point
Telford	Growth Point
Peterborough	Growth Area
Northampton	Growth Area
Central Lancashire (Preston – Leyland)	Growth Point

Expanded Towns (1952 Town Development Act)	
Ashford	Growth Area
Aylesbury	Growth Area
Bletchley	Growth Area
Swindon	Growth Point
Basingstoke	Growth Point
Thetford	Growth Point
Farnborough, Frimley & Camberley	
Haverhill	Growth Area
Bury St. Edmunds	Growth Area
Huntingdon	Growth Area

ANNEX B**LOCAL DELIVERY VEHICLES IN THE NEW TOWNS**

New Town	LDV	Model
Harlow	Harlow Renaissance	LA Partnership (Ltd Company)
Corby	North Northants Development Company	Urban Regeneration Company
Milton Keynes	Milton Keynes Partnership	Urban Development Area
Peterborough	Opportunity Peterborough	Urban Regeneration Company
Northampton	West Northampton Development Corporation	Urban Development Corporation
Expanded Town	LDV	Model
Ashford	Ashford's Future	LA Partnership (Ltd Company)
Aylesbury	Aylesbury Vale Advantage	LA Partnership (Ltd Company)

ANNEX C

Corby

A new £40m 16,258 square metre shopping centre has revitalised Corby **town centre** improving the retail environment and providing food and entertainment uses. A further £100m second phase is planned.

The £32m Corby Cube, currently under construction, will provide a new 450 seat **theatre and library** as well as a one-stop shop for council services. The Corby Cube will be an iconic design that will help restore the heart to the town centre. A new £18m 50 metre international sized **swimming pool** is also being constructed next to the Corby Cube, which will also provide a gym, dance studio, café and crèche facilities and a health suite.

The 40,000 square feet Corby **Enterprise Centre** will provide entrepreneurs and expanding businesses with good quality office and workshop space as well as dedicated business assistance and facilities such as meeting rooms.

The re-establishment of **rail services** to Corby has been confirmed and a new railway station has been constructed. Services are due to begin in the New Year and it is estimated that it will help unlock £200m of commercial investment in the area.

A recent survey by Oxford Economics found that Corby was the town least vulnerable to the economic downturn.

Milton Keynes

Central Milton Keynes has been re-invigorated through better land use and building to higher densities. A new continental style **business district** has been created with two quality hotels, a World Trade Centre, restaurants and apartments set around a public square with a water feature and public art. The Pinnacle is a landmark 18,500 square metre office development scheme with retail units which has achieved BREEAM excellent rating.

Public transport improvements such as bus lanes, priority measures and the provision of real-time passenger information at bus stops providing a quality bus network across Milton Keynes.

The West End CMK development will provide 650 homes in addition to a **new school** with all weather sports pitch, **community facilities**, commercial and small business space and two new public squares.

Harlow

Harlow is embarking on the regeneration of the northern end of its **town centre** which will re-integrate the market square to the rest of the town, making it easier to move in and around the town. The 1.2 million square feet redevelopment will include new retail led mixed use development incorporating retail, leisure, commercial and residential units, along with improved public space and leisure activity transforming Harlow into a sub-regional shopping centre.

Harlow is also regenerating local **neighbourhood centres** at Prentice Place, Staple Tye and Clifton Hatch through the provision of additional housing, better health services, improved shopping and community facilities, including open space.

The new Harlow **Enterprise Hub** provides modern, supportive working environment for individuals and small businesses starting up, with up to 55 units available. The Enterprise Hub also offers business advice and support services as well as meeting rooms and video conferencing facilities.

Telford

A **regeneration strategy** for reshaping the Woodside estate focuses on housing areas which are to be redesigned to mitigate the effect of the Radburn layout of the estate. Limited demolition and new housing on infill sites will support this re-design work. In addition, there is potential for an estimated 1500 homes in the area, building on the existing regeneration strategy for Woodside.

Telford is taking forward improvements to **green infrastructure** and its town centre. Future plans include remodelling strategic highway junctions, and providing **new leisure facilities** for the town including a new library and medical centre.

Telford won awards in 2007 for the Telford **Millennium Community** and the major housing scheme at Lawley was one of the first Design Codes pilots and was developed through the enquiry by design process.