

New Towns: Creating Communities, Building Trust

Realising the opportunity

A report by Stantec, with research by YouGov
November 2025





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Foreword

Changing the new towns narrative

The UK has a complex relationship with housing. The desire to have a home to call your own is embedded in the national psyche and is a critical part of many people's economic and emotional security. Right now, the focus of political attention on housing is at a level not seen since the middle of the twentieth century, and for good reason. The simple truth is that the UK doesn't have enough homes. We know that access to safe, secure housing is a critical element in better life outcomes, from health to education. By delivering new, comfortable homes in thriving communities, the opportunities and benefits will be transformative.

A home does not exist in isolation. It is part of a street, a community, a town. Quite rightly, the focus must be more than simply 'housing delivery'. It must include how we plan, design, and deliver settlements that will stand the test of time, thrive economically, and allow people to build the lives they want, with pride in their community.

As a business embedded in the work of creating new settlements, Stantec has a keen interest in helping to guide this mission. We want to see a new generation of vibrant, successful new towns. Given that public opinion will be a critical factor in shaping places that people want to move to and stay in, we have prepared this report to bring together insight from the public and from technical specialists within the development sector. We hope this will inspire and inform best practice in how we plan new communities – both those within the formal New Towns Programme and other new settlements across the UK – as well as help us assess the conditions for their success.

The findings are stark, and should focus all our minds on the task ahead. To create the new communities of the future it is clear that we as a sector have the opportunity to change the narrative around new towns and rebuild the trust of the public.

We can, and we must, demonstrate that we are listening to what people want and need from new development, that our visions can be ambitious, and that we deliver what we promise. The stakes are high, but the development industry is more than capable of meeting these challenges. Our recommendations in this report bring this thinking together: how to inspire true identity and pride; how to set up the right delivery models; how to embed resilience and longevity. What is paramount throughout is a focus on delivering healthy, happy communities.

Stantec sees first-hand the enthusiasm and expertise ready to meet this challenge and drive solutions. By listening and learning from the past, from the public, and from best practice across the UK and beyond, this New Towns Programme could be the critical moment that changes generations of lives for the better.

Brian Yates – Managing Director, UK & Ireland

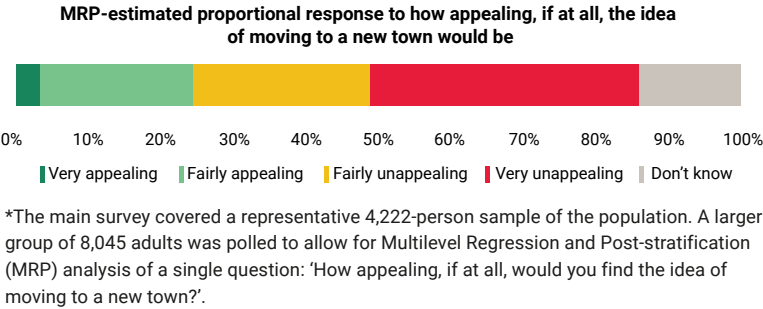
The Challenge Ahead: Changing perceptions of new towns

The government’s New Towns Programme is grand in ambition and scope, recommending 12 potential new town sites, and the hope that this is just the starting point for more to come. To identify the objectives and criteria for successful new towns, it is essential to understand the views of the people likely to be the residents, neighbours, and visitors to these towns.

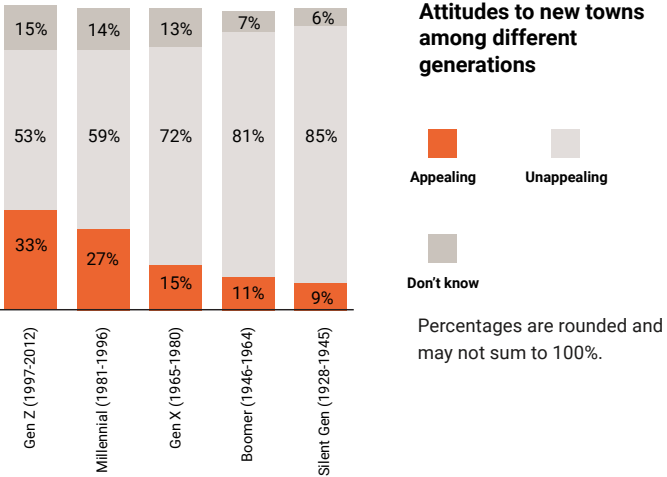
Stantec is deeply involved in the planning, design, and delivery of new communities across the UK and around the world. Given our stake in this topic, we commissioned leading public opinion and data company YouGov to research the British public’s perception of new towns*.

The representative survey has resulted in the data included in this report. Respondents were given a definition of the New Towns Programme as ‘the development of new communities comprising at least 10,000 homes, along with supporting infrastructure and amenities’, before being asked to share their views on new towns in principle and in practice. We used the term ‘new communities’ partly because several of the recommended new towns are actually extensions of existing settlements. Regardless, the principles of good development should apply. We used MRP analysis to project the findings to the question of how appealing people would find the idea of living in a new town down to the local authority level.

Given the well-evidenced need for new homes in our country, there is a need to change a large portion of the UK’s perspective to get them to engage with the New Towns Programme, and to convince them of the positives of good new developments, but how?



Our MRP findings suggest that only a quarter (25 percent) of Britons find the idea of moving to a new town appealing, while nearly two thirds (62 percent) find it unappealing. In raw terms, 25 percent of the population is more than sufficient to provide many happy new residents for the towns under development. Nonetheless, it suggests a high level of scepticism to new development projects, which may impact the political support such projects enjoy.

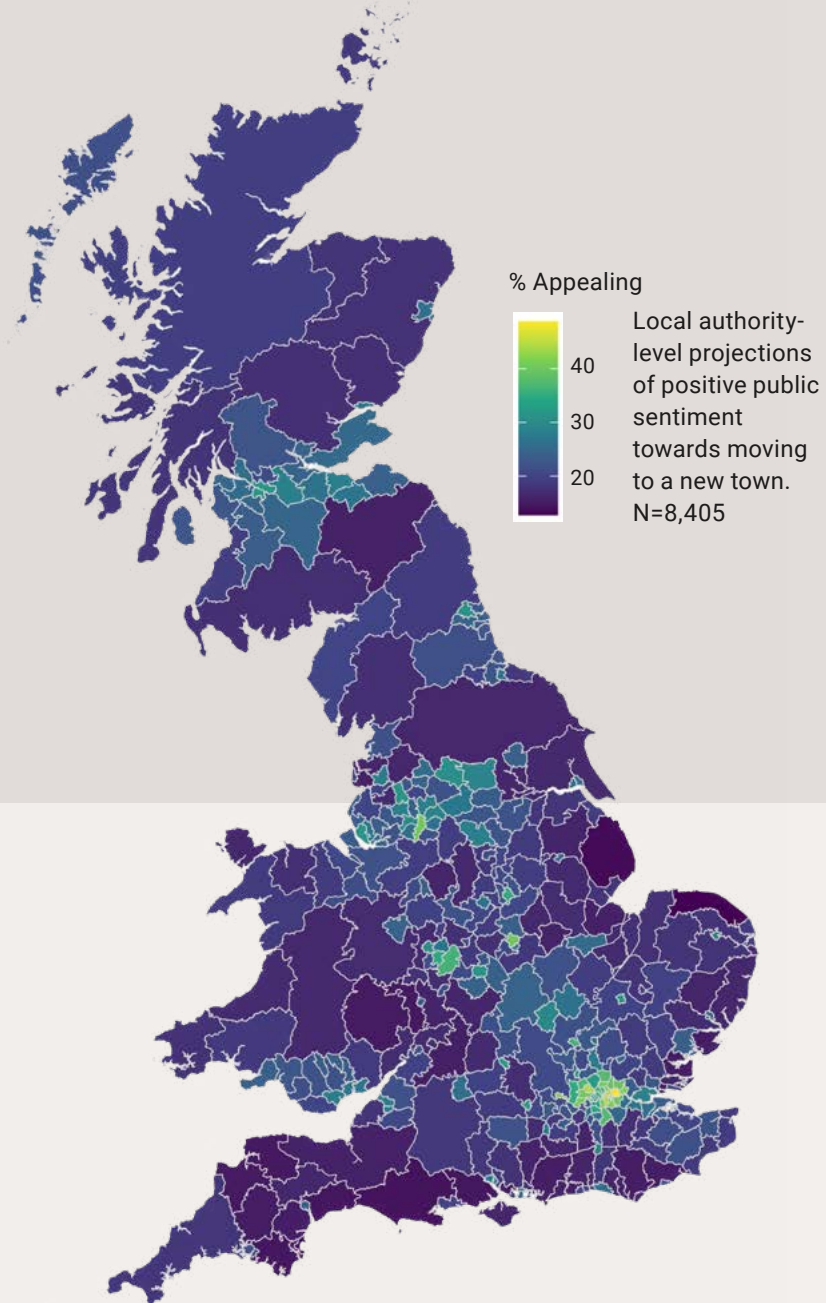


The Regional Picture

Positivity towards new towns tends to cluster around local authorities within some of the largest and most economically successful cities in the country. These also tend to be areas with poor housing affordability, and high levels of housing demand.

Of the 28 local authorities that reported ‘fairly appealing’ as the most common response (29.4 percent and above), 20 were within **London**, with other positive areas across **Manchester, Leicester, Birmingham, Nottingham, and Glasgow**. **Oxford and Cambridge** also reported relatively high levels of positivity, with 33 percent responding either ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ appealing.

Seven local authorities reported more ‘appealing’ responses than ‘unappealing’, with the most positive being **Newham** in London (net +14). **Brent, Barking and Dagenham, Slough, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, and Lewisham** were also net positive. While new towns would not in most cases be built within these authority areas, it demonstrates the high willingness of many residents of more urban areas to consider moving to newly built communities.



The percentage of residents who say moving to a new town would be appealing, projected down to the 349 local authorities.

The Public’s View: A lack of soul, or a chance for a fresh start?

New towns face a dilemma familiar to many in the development sector: public support in principle, but a scepticism or even opposition in practice.

When respondents were asked whether they would support a new town anywhere in the UK, there was a net positive response of +21 percent. Yet this fell to -4 percent if the town would be within 10 miles of where they lived, and -34 percent if within one or two miles. This trend was true even for younger demographics that tend to be more supportive of new developments.

While Gen Z (people born between 1997 and 2012) showed +42 percent net support for a new town anywhere, this fell to -23 percent if within 1 or 2 miles. Notably, only 33 percent of Gen Z found the idea of moving to a new town appealing, despite 61 percent expecting they would need to move out of their current home in the next 10 years. These likely movers are the potential home-buyers of the new towns of the future, but they are still reluctant to consider the option.

A key element of this scepticism lies in the perception respondents had about what a ‘new town’ really meant.

When asked what words best described a new town, the most common responses were ‘a housing estate’, ‘soulless’, ‘unappealing’, and ‘poor quality’—and this was consistent across all age ranges.

This suggests a fundamental disconnect between what the public perceives as a new town, and what the industry believes it will deliver – which could be at the root of the negativity and concern from people about development near where they live.

Respondents with a more positive view were also asked to explain why they found the idea of a new town appealing – reviewed by YouGov’s artificial intelligence (AI) language model to assess common trends. The most common reasons for the positivity included liking new build homes (24 percent of ‘appealing’ respondents), believing new towns would be better planned and have better infrastructure (16 percent), and believing they could be a chance for a fresh start (11 percent).

To what extent would you support or oppose a new town . . .

. . . anywhere in the UK?

SUPPORT	50%
OPPOSE	29%
Don’t know	21%

. . . within 10 miles of where you live?

SUPPORT	41%
OPPOSE	45%
Don’t know	15%

. . . within 1-2 miles of where you live?

SUPPORT	25%
OPPOSE	59%
Don’t know	15%

Percentages are rounded and may not sum to 100%.

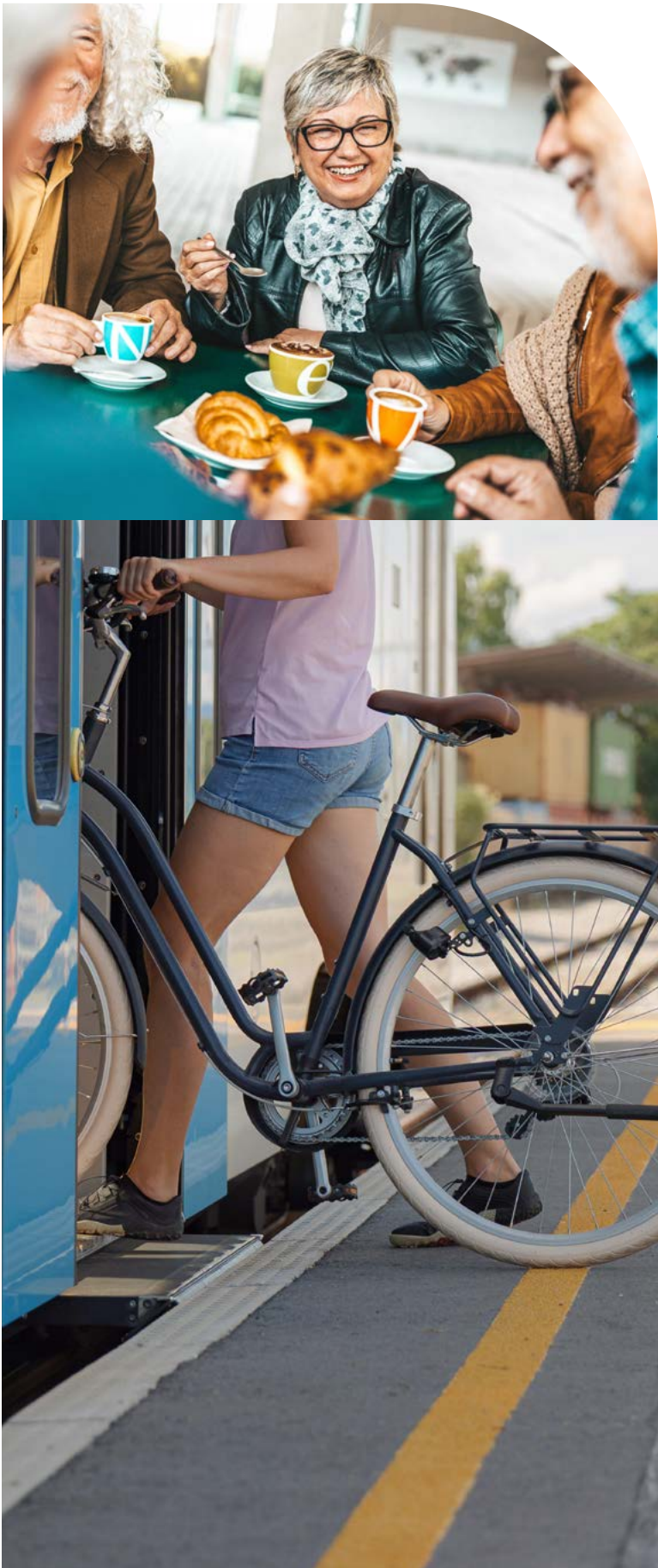


If looking to attract residents to new towns, the data suggests that those already open to the idea of moving will look for affordability, employment, healthcare, and public transport. Meanwhile, to win over the more sceptical audience, shops, amenities, and green space are essential.

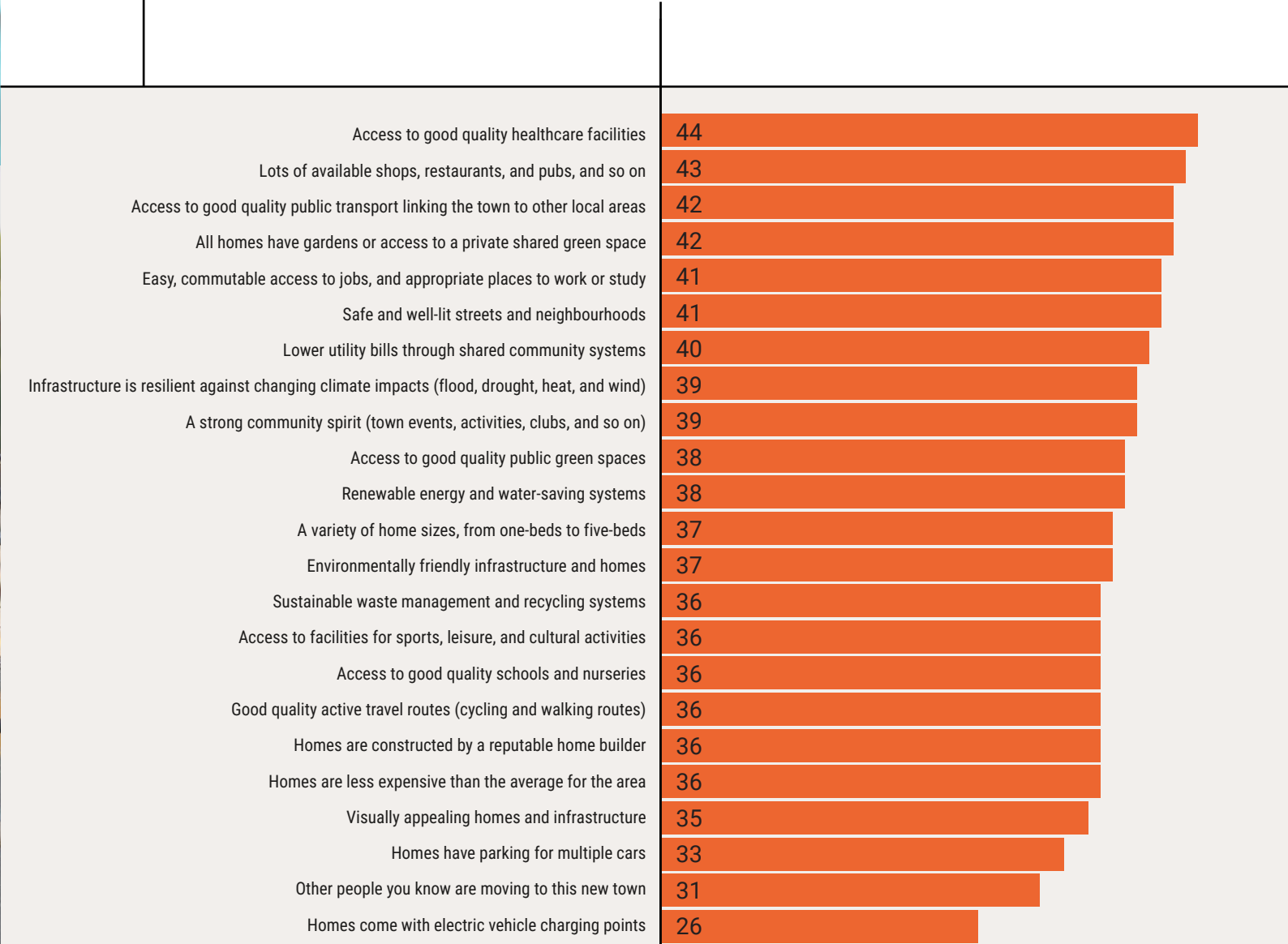
If we are going to deliver places that subvert negative expectations about new towns and change their perceptions, we need to know what might potentially attract someone to a new town.

To do this, YouGov used an approach called a conjoint experiment to assess which characteristics are most likely to draw people to a new town. As seen in the graphic on the opposite page, amenities, connectivity, local safety, and affordability of bills are aspects that scored most highly across all respondents. Access to private or semi-private green space was also a significant draw – much more so than aspects such as car parking.

Perhaps surprisingly, house price affordability was not a high-scoring factor overall. However, when just taking those respondents who said they would be likely to consider moving to a new build home in the next 10 years, house pricing becomes the second most important factor after easy access to jobs. Lower utility bills, access to healthcare, and good quality public transport also featured prominently.



What would draw Britons to a new town?



Figures represent the percentage of times the town chosen in the experiment featured the specific characteristic. Those surveyed were presented with a table displaying two hypothetical new town plans, each with three key characteristics, drawn randomly from the total list. Respondents were asked to pick which town they would be more likely to move to, should they be looking to move home. 'Neither' was also an available option.

Creating Thriving New Communities

By uniting technical expertise and creative thinking, Stantec is supporting the UK’s renewed focus on delivering housing and growth through the development of new communities.

As part of this mission, we have brought together a range of specialists from across Stantec and our public and private sector clients, as well as insights from global experience to identify the crucial elements that contribute to the long-term success of a new town and the practical steps to get there. The following sections of this report are the findings of these discussions.

A restoration of trust and credibility

One overriding takeaway from our research is that there is a distinct trust deficit in the development industry. Perceived failures of the past, have resulted in a reluctance to embrace the future. People find it hard to imagine themselves in a new town, and don’t associate these new communities with the life they envisage for themselves in the future.

If new towns are to succeed, they will need to offer the right conditions for people to build the life they want. As an industry, we will need to show that we can be visionary and deliver quality places with community and soul. Only through practical delivery and ‘demonstrating by doing’ will we start to rebuild credibility and change entrenched perceptions.

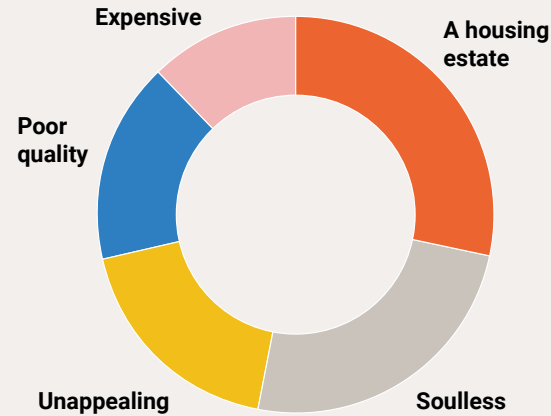


“Public trust in the construction industry has faced challenges in recent years. Rebuilding that trust takes time and commitment, as it can be easily lost but is vital for the success of new communities.”

Nancy MacDonald,
Regional Business Leader for Infrastructure UK and Ireland,
Stantec

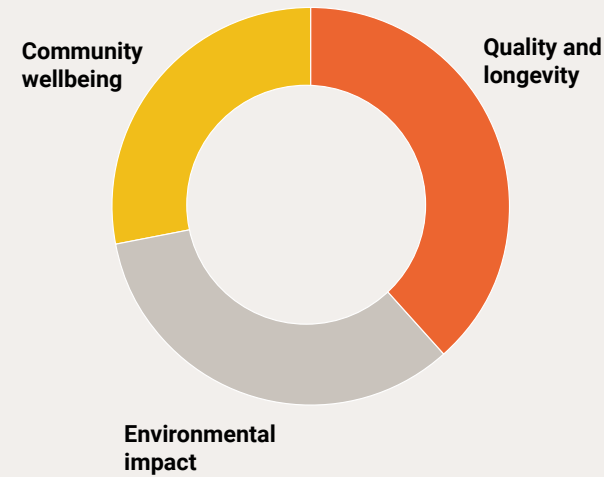


Which of these words best describes your perception of a new town?



Top five most selected answers shown. Respondents could choose up to five options from a longer list.

Which of the following, if any, do you think are most important to keep in mind when planning and designing a new town?



Top three most selected answers shown. Respondents could choose up to two options from a longer list.

What to focus on when planning a new town

Despite the research at first glance showing negativity towards new towns, there is a key underlying positive finding too. Across all demographics, there is a consistent view of the top three most important things to focus on when planning and designing a new town:

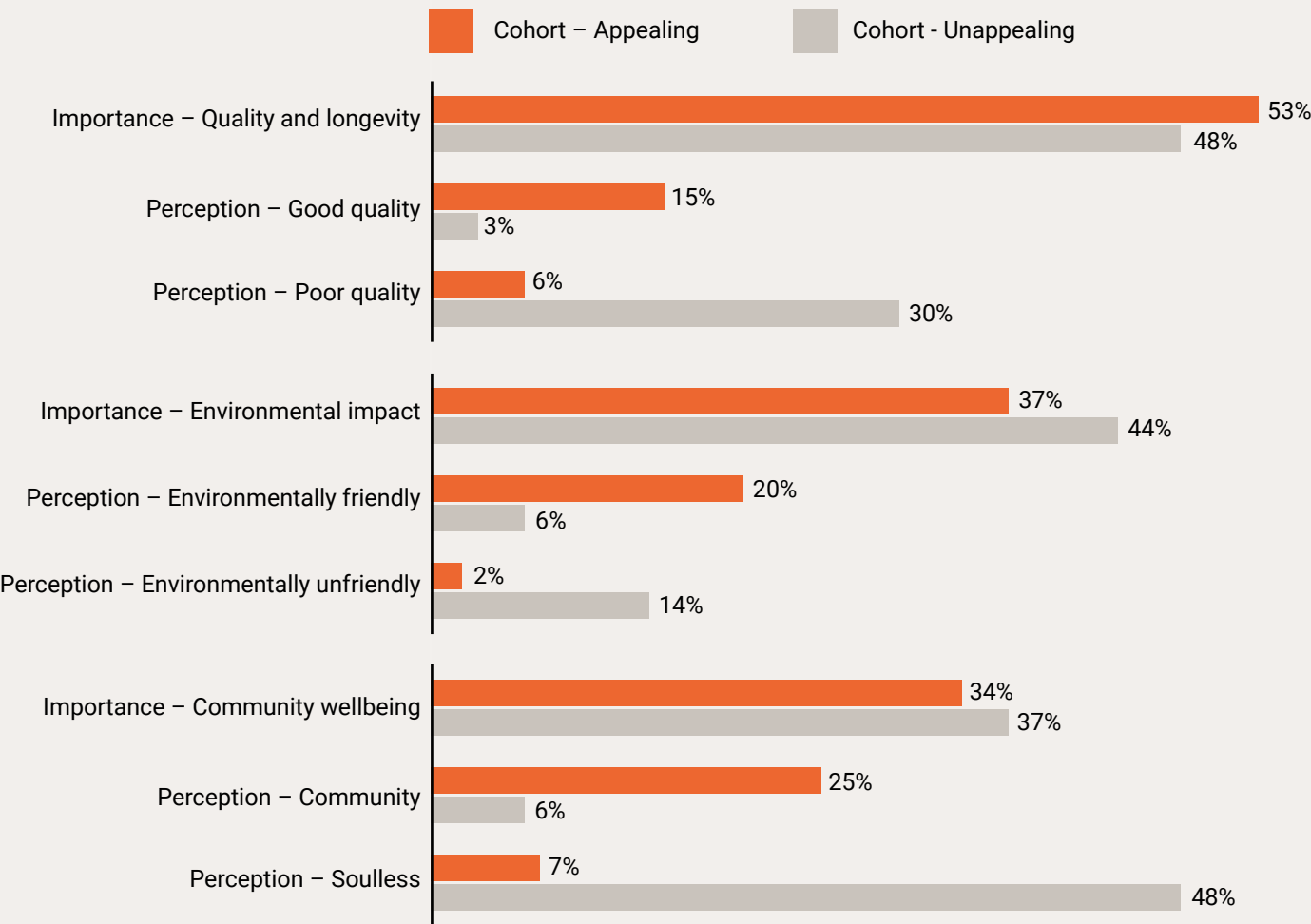
Quality and longevity

Positive environmental impact

Community wellbeing

As shown in the graphic below, whether respondents perceived new towns as likely or able to fulfil these requirements correlated strongly with their overall view of new towns as appealing or not to move to. We need to go further to embed these three key objectives into all future new towns.

Preferences vs Perceptions



Quality and longevity

New towns are ultimately places people will want to call home – to have pride in, build a life in, and foster a sense of belonging. Achieving this will require developers to take the long view, to anticipate the requirements and trends of tomorrow’s world, and to deliver quality on these new sites. This is essential to overcoming the reluctance of many to even consider moving to a new build home.

When we say quality, this doesn’t just mean the quality of design and materials, it also means the quality of the vision and masterplan. We need to endeavour for new towns that are more than just ‘housing estates’ – the term most associated with them in our polling. To be self-sustaining and attractive to move to, they should be economic engines and community hubs with strategic co-location of housing, employment, and amenities.

How likely are you, if at all, to purchase a newly built home (outright or with a mortgage) in the next 10 years?

Very likely	1%
Fairly likely	9%
Total likely	10%
Not very likely	22%
Not at all likely	62%
Total not likely	84%
Don’t know	6%



“The best new communities, like Brabazon, have to be the perfect mix of opportunity, strategic vision, land ownership, patient capital, sustainability, infrastructure, and excellent public realm. Success is about people wanting to live there for generations.”

Ric Hampton,
Regional Director, Bristol & South, Stantec

Brabazon, Bristol →

YTL Developments is transforming the historic former Filton Airfield - birthplace of Concorde and supersonic travel – into Brabazon. With 6,500 homes approved under the existing masterplan, of which over 300 are already completed and occupied, Brabazon is at the centre of the Taskforce’s recommended New Town for North Bristol.

Inspired by a revolutionary airplane that became an icon of engineering, Brabazon will feature homes of every type and tenure, while a range of creative workplaces will support up to 30,000 jobs at the heart of North Bristol’s world-leading commercial cluster. There will be new schools, community spaces, parks and public squares, while the supersonic new 20,000-capacity YTL Arena will put the city on the world stage for live music and entertainment. Over £100 million is also being invested to improve local infrastructure: A new railway station connecting Brabazon to Bristol Temple Meads will open in Autumn 2026.

Stantec has supported the masterplan planning application and delivered comprehensive townscape and visual assessments alongside ecological services. We have provided structural and civil engineering for The Hangar District – the first phase of new homes - as well as infrastructure design for the Arena and building engineering across disciplines for the historic Spitfire Hangar, now being transformed into a new local, social community space. We are also delivering structural, fire, and transport engineering for a new office building and multi-storey car park at Brabazon.



Alconbury Weald, Cambridgeshire

Urban & Civic’s new settlement of 6,500 homes on the former Alconbury Airfield is a clear example of how innovative approaches to phased delivery can help attract residents and build a new community even before the completion of the whole project. Each phase brings several thousand homes, but crucially also new schooling, shops, open spaces, infrastructure, and community facilities so that each element grows in parallel. Having invested heavily in deep engagement with stakeholders, the scheme has also pioneered an approach to attracting and sustaining successful businesses, inviting pop-up shops, cafes, and more on semi-developed sections of the site to meet residents’ needs at the early stages, which can then evolve into permanent thriving businesses as the project develops.

From the early concept stage and securing outline planning permission, through to supporting the delivery of key infrastructure on-site, we have provided engineering, transport planning, and environmental services to allow the early delivery of enabling infrastructure needed to serve this new community.



Councils, development corporations, and local champions

Achieving quality and longevity requires a careful assessment of the approaches to planning and delivering new towns. Above all, the planning needs to be vision-led and proactive. Masterplanners must look at the town as a whole and within its strategic and regional context. It should aim to align with existing local plans and emerging regional growth strategies where available, given the pre-existing thought and local input that has gone into them. This will help to govern the appropriate mix of homes with amenities, infrastructure, and employment opportunities.

This process can be helped by having strong local champions – such as mayors, councillors, and MPs – who can offer prudent insight backed by local knowledge, as well as being well-placed to reflect the rationale behind design and planning choices back to communities and local residents. This will help to build trust and show that the delivery process, while vision-led, is not ‘top down’, but is instead informed by local knowledge and will meet the specific needs of the area.

Looking beyond local stakeholders, developers should also engage with councils elsewhere in the UK that preside over existing new towns. They will have unique perspectives on what has worked and factors to consider from the early design stages.

“The role of councils in shaping the vision and tracking progress is key, particularly in applying centrally set standards at a local level and supporting the creation of meaningful communities rather than just housing developments.”

Roger Evans,
Public Sector & Frameworks Lead, Stantec

“A public sector-led new town development corporation offers the best opportunity to create a holistic, well-considered, and long-term vision for new communities.”

Rowan Gilbert,
Senior Town Planner, NHS Property Services Ltd

“If new towns are to be delivered at pace, embedding the core principles set out in this report, then their delivery vehicles need to reflect that. They must have the right powers, right funding, and right leadership. Development corporations with public-private partnerships have been a successful model in Milton Keynes, Peterborough, and many other places. But there is no ‘one size fits all’ solution.”

Michael Parkinson,
Director, Strategic Land, Stantec

“Flexibility is key. Providing a range of alternative routes to securing planning consent should enable each new town considerable flexibility to accelerate delivery. It’s become increasingly clear that a framework already exists to support this first wave of new towns, and potentially more beyond those recommended by the Taskforce, ones that could be brought forward in due course. Unsurprisingly, flexibility in the consents granted for new towns will also be vital to ensuring that delivery can adapt to unforeseen circumstances while continuing at pace.”

Michael Knott,
Regional Lead – Midlands and South, Stantec

Development corporations can help with coordination between developers, local authorities and other stakeholders such as service providers, from the outset. This approach and other similar long-term joint venture models are also likely to encourage the sort of long-term stewardship needed for new towns to thrive – where everyone has a stake in the project succeeding.

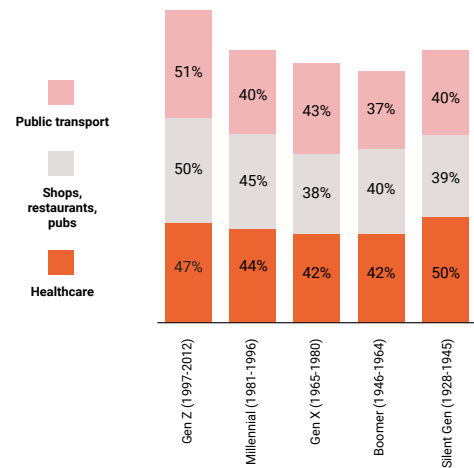
However, delivery must be the focus, and some of the Taskforce’s recommended new towns, such as Brabazon, are already well-progressed without a development corporation – but while still applying the key principles of public-private coordination. Different roads taken to the same objective. Nonetheless, for those just setting out on their new town journey, a development corporation is a tried and tested approach – not least because it will be a body able to offer continuous governance from the very earliest engagement and design stages through to occupancy and stewardship.

To succeed, development corporations must involve the wider community and local businesses and give them a real seat at the table. They work best when specific working groups are established (such as for transport or energy), involving the full range of stakeholders, which then feed back into the main body with real influence and authority.

Right infrastructure, right place, right time

Within the objective of ‘quality and longevity’, a core aspect is the standard and timing of the infrastructure provided within the new town that will allow it to grow, evolve, and thrive in the long term. In this context, we define infrastructure broadly, to cover transport connectivity, key services such as education and healthcare, greenery, and planting, as well as utilities such as water and electricity.

Attributes likely to draw respondents to a new town*



Both the data and our experience show that delivering this infrastructure early is essential when creating viable, successful communities. This is true in terms of both building long-term trust and incentivising good behaviours early on. Timing is critical. When delivered from the outset, social infrastructure attracts residents and builds confidence. Early delivery needs to apply to green infrastructure too, as plants and trees take time to mature. Plant nurseries or advance planting on-site may be needed to encourage a developed and attractive landscape by the time residents move in.

Investment and activation of space from the start helps to change the narrative and the operation of new communities. The story can shift from one of disruption to positive change and opportunity – fixing scarcity of provision, and driving health and wellbeing, whether through public transport or new woodland.

“Community immersion from the outset is essential to truly understand the place, its priorities, and local needs – including how new developments can connect meaningfully with existing communities. Without this, there’s a risk that plans are perceived as top-down impositions, leaving people feeling excluded and disengaged, as though they have no voice and the changes won’t benefit them.”

Joanne Wheeler,
Co-Head, Policy & Places, UK Green Building Council

Infrastructure must be planned and funded early – if necessary, using delivery models like private-public partnerships to support timely and effective implementation. There needs to be balance and collaboration between the public and private sectors. Developers need agency and flexibility to deliver what communities need – but local authorities also need to be a core part of the planning process to offer local knowledge and set requirements for the development to meet.

The way we consider data and research in this context needs to change. The public can be sceptical of surveying done in the planning process as it doesn’t always match up with lived experience. The industry should be more alive to this. While remaining grounded in scientific data, the starting point should be the need to create places that promote happy, healthy lives. This should be the basis for the vision of the new town – passed from team to team through planning, delivery, and beyond. Decisions made throughout should be measured back against that goal. This will help developers to see social infrastructure as business critical. The social value and wellbeing that stems from it should be an integral part of the business case for infrastructure investment.

*Percentages show how often each of the following attributes was chosen from a wider list.
Access to good quality healthcare facilities
Lots of available shops, restaurants, pubs and so on
Access to good quality public transport linking the town to other local areas



Image credit: Mykola Romanovsky



Barking Riverside, London

In the coming decades, more than 20,000 homes will be delivered at Barking Riverside. This is a strong example of private-public collaboration, brought forward by a joint venture between the Mayor of London and London & Quadrant Housing Association. The funding and delivery structure has facilitated the preparation and remediation of land, as well as the provision of strategic infrastructure, place-making and community-building. The development is anchored on an integrated travel strategy, including the extension of the London Underground to a new station on the site, provision of Uber Boat by Thames Clipper services from a new pier, and the bus-based East London Transit.

Our involvement began in 2004, when we promoted the original site-wide outline planning application for 10,800 homes. As the market conditions and policy have evolved, build out continues within a flexible framework to adapt to changes in funding and incorporating lessons learnt as the community evolves.

“If it’s embedded in the design and long-term strategy, infrastructure can be delivered incrementally, supporting early residents and evolving over time to meet changing needs. For example, a bus lane connecting to a mobility hub can grow in time into a tram to a station. This approach is practical, and encourages greater public transport uptake over time as well as helping to balance cost, revenue, and subsidy as the demand profile grows with the service provision.”

Leigh Stolworthy,
Director, Transport Planning, Stantec

Positive environmental impact

A further interesting insight from our research is that when faced with specific characteristics of a new town, factors such as environmentally friendly infrastructure, electric vehicle charging, and sustainable energy did not feature as significant pull-factors, especially when compared to the provision of amenities, for example. Yet in the same survey, environmental impact scored highly in what respondents said must be considered for a new town – possibly due to fears of perceived loss of overall green space to development.

The conjoint experiment only reveals relative preference, so we might assume that if aspects such as infrastructure and amenities are assured, then environmental elements may become a higher priority.

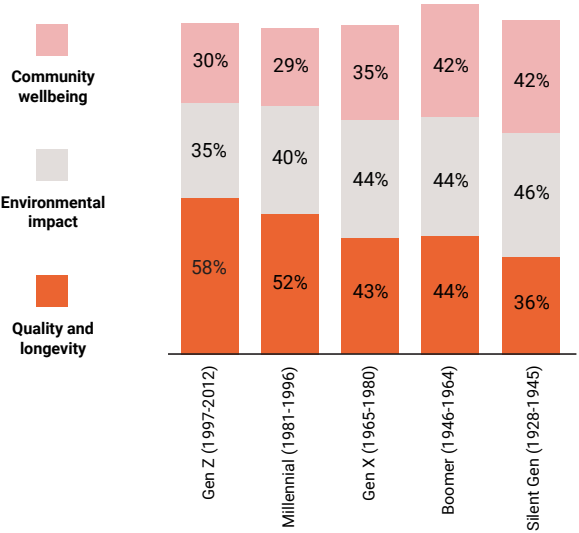
We also know as a sector that sustainability, climate resilience, and designing for a changing environment are non-negotiable for a truly long-term, thriving development. Sustainability ultimately underpins all three of our key objectives, as community wellbeing and longevity are dependent on a new town that is built to last.

The good news is that sustainability has few trade-offs in reality. People want walkable, convenient neighbourhoods. They want parks, green streets, ponds, and rivers. They want to live in warm, comfortable homes that don't leak and don't cost a fortune to heat.

As such, climate resilience must be embedded in these new towns. Green and blue infrastructure are core components of healthy, attractive places. They contribute directly to wellbeing, as well as offering 'nature-based solutions' to common issues like flooding and overheating. Tree-lined shady streets keep cool. Attenuation ponds and rain gardens can be attractive and mitigate flood risk.

The development sector needs to do more from the outset of a new town to educate and communicate the benefits of sustainable design and technology – from wellbeing to the potential for cheaper bills. By engaging residents in the process, we can foster a sense of ownership, rebuild trust, and create healthy, long-lasting places where people truly want to live.

Which of the following, if any, do you think are most important to keep in mind when planning and designing a new town? Respondents could choose up to two options from a longer list.



“We also need to push the boundaries of reducing water demand at a property and industrial level. We must design new towns to be efficient and minimise demand, while building in elements like on-site water harvesting from day one.”

Mark Tindale,
UK and Ireland Water Strategy
Director, Stantec

“Sustainability is the glue that binds every thread of a project, from water, energy, and landscape to transport and architecture, always striving to balance and deliver the best possible outcomes for people and place.”

Rebecca Lydon,
Sustainability Director, Stantec



“Ensuring that places remain adaptable and relevant many years into the future is a key challenge. Good design isn’t just about the buildings themselves – it’s also about the spaces between them. These areas must have the capacity to evolve as community needs and uses change over time.”

Jon Sandford,
Senior Manager, Design and Masterplanning,
Homes England

Adaptability and resilience

It goes without saying that building new towns will have an environmental impact. So, it is incumbent on us to design towns that will be resilient and be able to evolve and be relevant for years to come.

Even if delivering best practice as we currently understand it, we can’t predict everything, so we need flexible planning permissions to accommodate changing needs, climates, and technologies. For example, multi-use spaces and infrastructure that can evolve with community demographics and changing mobility approaches.

Another aspect to this resilience is creating a level of self-sufficiency and localised management of key resources such as water and energy. New developments at scale offer an opportunity to explore wastewater collection and treatment within the site. Distributed generation and storage of local renewable energy can also meet the needs of communities, helping to manage the extent of grid upgrades in the planning of future towns. Development corporations could explore setting up dedicated energy companies to manage funding and reinvest the proceeds back into community infrastructure.

“Adaptability is vital when creating places for today and the future - designing spaces with flexibility in mind means recognising that a single location could serve multiple purposes over time, and adapt accordingly to the changing needs of a town and its community needs. Whether the space is for a shop, a community hub, or something else entirely, long-term flexibility from the outset is essential.”

Holly Harcus,
Associate Director, Development, NewRiver REIT

The upfront costs of funding these solutions may be higher than traditional approaches, but given the potential benefits, developers and councils should explore a range of models to make them feasible. When considering whole-life operational costs and benefits, these investments can be worthwhile for public, private, or joint funding.

Otterpool Park, Kent

Otterpool Park will be a new garden town of more than 8,500 homes around the historic Westenhangar Castle near Hythe. Integrating around an upgraded train station, the development enables car-free connectivity – part of an overall vision of a community that promotes healthy, active, and sustainable lifestyles. The town is also planned around new high-quality green spaces and active travel routes to enable people to explore, play, and socialise. It embraces nature-based solutions, incorporating a wastewater treatment works with wetlands and landscaping that will become a destination for learning and recreation, while delivering nutrient neutrality in this sensitive catchment. Using battery storage and solar panels on a microgrid, the town will also benefit from local, sustainably sourced energy that will provide up to half of the town’s electricity demand on-site.

Working with a team of specialists and stakeholders, we are providing engineering design and environmental services. Our services will also include managing the design of roads, delivery of the wastewater treatment works, drainage, earthworks, heritage, utilities, and environmental mitigation necessary to get the development at Otterpool Park Garden Town underway.



“The concept of energy-as-a-service, combining distributed energy generation, storage, smart controls, and consumer interaction, has huge potential. When applied to new communities, energy-as-a-service models could reduce bills and reduce the burden on local electricity networks, while supporting low-carbon goals.”

Ben Bowler,
Technical Director, Renewable Energy,
Stantec

Community wellbeing

The health and wellbeing of communities – physical, social, economic, and mental – is at the very heart of what we mean by a thriving new town. We have already touched upon elements of this, such as the benefits of green spaces and the provision of infrastructure and amenities. Yet there is one less tangible factor that is essential to a happy community: the soul of the area.

It may come as no surprise that every demographic in our research considered ‘soulless’ the word that most came to mind when describing a new town. We need to change the narrative if the latest era of new towns can hope to succeed, giving people the facilities and amenities they need and helping people to take ownership of them to build their own community and ‘soul’ organically.

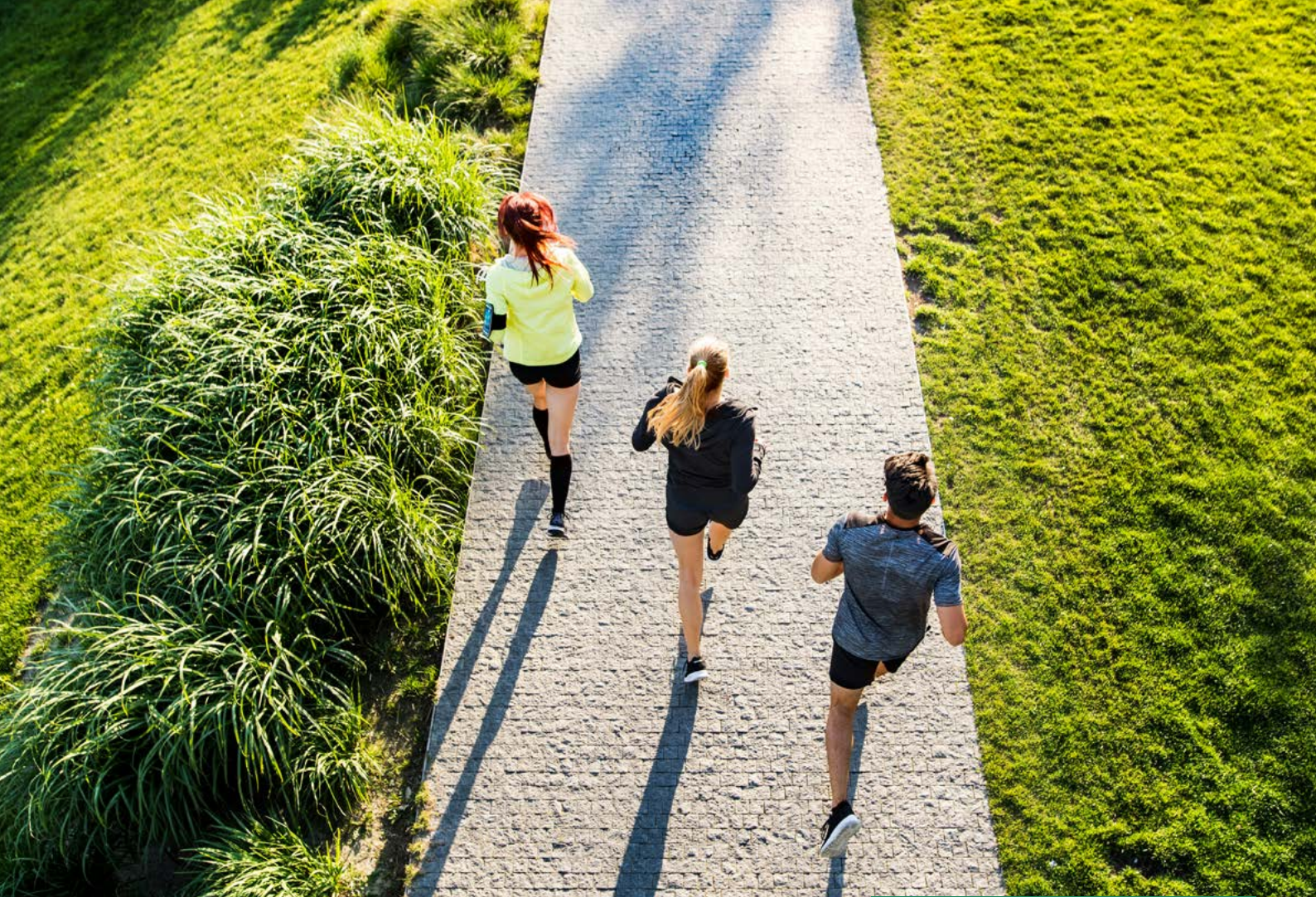
Identity-building

Our new towns should learn from the best placemaking examples from recent years, including those spotlighted in this document, to cultivate distinct identities that residents can connect with and take pride in. This identity will grow and evolve out of the community itself, but there are ways we as a sector

can encourage this. For example, we need to assess and respond to the landscape in our designs, delivering distinctive places both in natural and architectural terms, landmarks, and features that people identify and relate to.

Developers will not be able to absolutely predict what might drive identity in a place beyond the core essential requirements, so they need to offer freedom for communities to develop and evolve. It is important to have a vision for the place, but also to focus on the outcomes more than exactly how people might get there, allowing different journeys and paths to develop. For example, if you want a thriving high street, rather than defining its uses and make-up, you can set low barriers to entry, allowing pop-up businesses to set up and experiment. This flexibility and competition will allow the businesses that suit the community and residents to thrive and become permanent, while in the meantime maintaining a bustling, vibrant high street.

Percentage of respondents who described a new town as ‘soulless’						
	Generation					
	Total	Gen Z (1997-2012)	Millennial (1981-1996)	Gen X (1965-1980)	Boomer (1946-1964)	Silent Gen (1928-1945)
Weighted sample	4,222	616	1,191	1,086	1,224	105
Unweighted sample	4,222	395	1,095	1,110	1,493	129
Soulless	35%	31%	31%	38%	39%	40%



↑

Linmere, Bedfordshire

This major urban expansion project of over 5,000 homes was focused from the outset on prioritising social value, health, and wellbeing, particularly through early and consistent engagement with the local authority and community stakeholders. Walkable neighbourhoods were key to Stantec’s masterplan, anchored by co-located community, social, and recreational uses delivered early in the development lifecycle that serve as a focus for social interaction and exchange. More than 30 percent of the site was developed as parkland, with active travel routes designed to foster closer links between new and existing residents.

“You need to plan well, but also be patient. There is a trigger point when a place with the right balance of homes and infrastructure hits critical mass and they function as intended. It’s that point when people start to view them in a new way, and they begin to develop an identity.”

Alex Trott,
Urban Design Director, Stantec



“Communities need to be properly involved from the early design and planning stages, so towns can be co-designed with existing neighbours and potential future residents, including the next generation.”

Rebecca Crawford,
Director of Stakeholder Engagement
and Consultation, Stantec

Community engagement is also essential to creating thriving places that develop their own identity. At the root of some peoples’ scepticism of new towns is simple uncertainty. Existing developments are known entities and have existing infrastructure, culture, and heritage. Offering something new but uncertain can be a challenge, so it is made easier if stakeholders have a true role in the development journey and can see from early stages what the goals and end results are likely to be, and how they can shape them.

Engagement must be deep, crossing all demographics and harder-to-reach groups, and it must be long-lasting, starting from the earliest design stages and running into the long-term stewardship of the town. This should include aspects such as the visual and cultural identity of a place, from its street signs to its colours, branding, or even coat of arms above the town hall. Elements like this are often overlooked, yet they play a big role in helping people feel connected, fostering a sense of belonging and pride.

It’s also not just about residents. Local businesses and landowners are key stakeholders too and will have important and unique perspectives on the legacy of the town and what will help it to remain vibrant.

This will promote a sense of ownership and help people to have a stake in their communities and to want them to succeed. If residents feel the town, its spaces, businesses, and structures, belong to them, they will help it to grow and develop its organic identity. There are also more tangible impacts. Co-design tends to promote plans with more social interaction, cohesion, and community-building, such as prioritising playgrounds or community spaces, which bring people together, or spotting and avoiding design choices that might have led to anti-social behaviour.

It would be easy to look at some of the data in this report and assume that people’s negativity towards new towns means the projects will face high opposition and that engagement will be fruitless. The reverse is true. Beneath the headline data, people essentially have a common sense that new housing is needed, and a shared view of what good communities are and what would draw them to new towns. If we engage and communicate better and show through the first towns the exemplars of what is possible, there is no reason to think that support for new towns couldn’t become a mass movement.



Wichelstowe Community Development, Swindon

The new development being delivered at Wichelstowe is a product of a two-way public-private partnership between Barratt and Swindon Borough Council. The aim has been to encourage a true community, built around the mix of homes, employment space amenities, and schools. Key to achieving this has been the inclusion of play spaces, community orchards, and allotments, linked by active travel routes, which enable residents to come together and socialise. A defining feature of the scheme has been the early development of the district centre around the restored canal, which bisects the site and provides a walking and cycling route to the town centre. Notably, a new supermarket was delivered ahead of any housing in the Middle Wichel canalside area, establishing the centre as both a location and a destination, and acting as a catalyst for further development.

We provided interdisciplinary design services for Wichelstowe, starting with earthworks studies and canal restoration investigations. Our team then consulted on transportation, highways, and engineering design as well as landscaping and masterplanning.

“We often overlook the importance of involving professionals from socially focused disciplines as part of the wider development team. Those working in community engagement, communications, the arts, and similar fields should be brought in much earlier in the planning stages of new communities. Broadening the range of voices from the outset can lead to more inclusive and responsive outcomes.”

Julia Wallace,
Head of Strategic Projects, ATLAS –
Homes England

Our Recommendations for the Industry

Our research suggests we should embed the public's key metrics: quality and longevity, positive environmental impact, and community wellbeing, as three key criteria for assessing the success of new towns. How we interpret these principles and translate them into practice will be critical.

It is not simply a case of applying these recommendations to the sites recommended by the Taskforce. We need to look ahead to future phases, and also to the many new settlements being planned or delivered that are not part of the official programme.

Quality and longevity

- Plans must be vision-led and proactive, developed by engaging with communities and local stakeholders and bringing this together with technical specialists across all disciplines.
- The vision itself should be outcomes-focused, not output-driven, focusing on the principles we are aiming to achieve rather than prescribing the exact route to get there.
- Councils need to have a critical role in setting standards and monitoring progress, balanced with giving developers the freedom to deliver flexible masterplans that can evolve over time.
- Development corporations should be the starting point for new town delivery models, but a case-by-case approach is needed to bring together the public and private sectors and give wider stakeholders a stake in success.

Positive environmental impact

- Sustainability and climate resilience must be embedded in designs, and plans must be adaptable to future needs.
- Social value must be better measured and incorporated into the business cases and cost-benefit analyses that inform design choices.
- New towns should aspire to a level of self-sufficiency and localised management of water and energy to become exemplars of sustainable development.
- Nature-based solutions should be the default, creating attractive facilities that serve social purposes as well as technical ones.

Community wellbeing

- The principle of delivering healthy, happy communities must be paramount, with all future decisions relating back to this objective.
- Community engagement must be meaningful, cross-demographic, and consistent throughout the development process to build trust, improve outcomes, and allow for the organic development of local identity.
- Key infrastructure must be delivered early to build confidence, attract residents, and enable communities to thrive from the early stages of occupancy.
- The sector must better communicate the objectives of new towns, and the successes of delivery, to help change the narrative and generate a supportive movement in favour of the development of new communities.



Our Authors, Acknowledgements, and Methodology



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All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 4,222 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 19-21 August 2025. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all adults in Great Britain (aged 18+).

The key question, "How appealing, if at all, would you find the idea of moving to a new town?", was topped up to 8,045 adults, and Multilevel Regression and Post-stratification (MRP) analysis was conducted. Results are projected across all local authorities in Great Britain, with the multilevel model run with 3,000 iterations across 5 chains. The full MRP model process takes information gleaned from estimating a multilevel model between question response and respondent and area background and characteristics and projected these findings down to 349 local authorities. The model was built and designed specifically by YouGov for this project and question topic. The data cited in this report can be cross-referenced with the Excel data tables and local authority-level results provided as part of the project deliverables.

Acknowledgements

Our sincere thanks to the industry leaders who contributed their insights in a series of roundtable discussions.

- Rowan Gilbert** – Senior Town Planner – NHS Property Services Ltd
- Holly Harcus** – Associate Director, Development – NewRiver REIT
- Ian Laight** – Major Projects Director - Caddick Developments
- Jon Sandford** – Senior Manager - Design and MasterPlanning – Homes England
- Darl Sweetland** – Spatial Planning Manager – Anglian Water Services
- Dan Town** – Director – OSG Architecture
- Sinead Turnbull** – Planning Director – Tritax Big Box Developments Ltd
- Julia Wallace** – Head of Strategic Projects, ATLAS – Homes England
- Joanne Wheeler** – Co-Head, Policy & Places – UK Green Building Council

We would also like to thank YouGov for conducting the public opinion research that underpins this report.



Stantec is a global leader in sustainable engineering and environmental consulting. The diverse perspectives of our partners and interested parties drive us to think beyond what's previously been done on critical issues like climate change, digital transformation, and future-proofing our cities and infrastructure. We innovate at the intersection of community, creativity, and client relationships to advance communities everywhere, so that together we can redefine what's possible.

