

# Better housing for the 21st century

A report by The Academy of Urbanism on how the problems of the English housing market may be solved by learning from successful places.

---

The Academy of Urbanism  
70 Cowcross Street  
London  
EC1M 6EJ

[info@academyofurbanism.org.uk](mailto:info@academyofurbanism.org.uk)  
+44 (0) 20 7251 8777  
@theAoU

Contact:  
Stephen Gallagher  
Director of Engagement  
[sg@academyofurbanism.org.uk](mailto:sg@academyofurbanism.org.uk)  
+44 (0) 20 7251 8777

Published 2019  
Unless otherwise stated, images provided by  
The Academy of Urbanism or Jon Rowland

Cover image Marmalade Lane, Cambridge,  
by developer TOWN

## **The Academy of Urbanism**

The Academy of Urbanism is a politically independent, not-for-profit organisation that brings together both the current and next generation of pre-eminent urban leaders, thinkers and practitioners. We embrace city management and policy-making, academic research and teaching, development planning and design, community leadership and urban change-making, arts and cultural development, infrastructure and engineering, property law and management, politics and media.

We work with places to identify and reinforce their strengths, and help them recognise and unlock greater success. Through our events, awards, activities and programmes we draw out and disseminate examples and lessons of good urbanism. We use the evidence we gather to promote better understanding of how the development and management of the urban realm can provide a better quality of living for all.

---

## A message to the government on emerging housing and planning policies

The ability to house its people is a fundamental responsibility of any government. It is something that we have debated and argued over for more than a hundred years. In the first part of the last century the public and private sector built huge new suburbs as our cities expanded into their surrounding hinterlands. Then in the second half of the century we put a stop to this by throwing green girdles (later renamed as Green Belts) around these cities, concentrating instead on the redevelopment of inner-city slums.

There was a period of frenetic council house building when we achieved the number of homes we needed, some of which were unpopular high-rise and deck-access council estates. The years that followed saw the emphasis shift to the private sector and the emergence of the volume house builders, but we failed to build the numbers required and we find ourselves today in a housing crisis.

This is not only an economic and social issue but it is also an urban issue, which is why it is a concern of The Academy of Urbanism (AoU). Housing is the main land use in most of our settlements and the way that we design and build housing has a huge impact both on the

quality of life of residents and the success of the settlement as a whole – whether it can be served by public transport; whether its town and local centres are able to thrive; whether it is able to foster strong communities; whether people are healthy; whether its businesses are profitable. These are all both housing and urban issues. At the Academy we are of course concerned about the quality of housing that we build. This is however only one of the issues that we focus on in this report. Just as important is where and how we build, the workings of the market and particularly the value of land, the variety of homes that we provide and the efficiency and speed of construction.

The results of poor housing policy has been the dearth of appropriate housing for different income levels. This has caused hardship for many young families but has also led to a widening gap between those who can access the housing market and those who rely on help to rent or buy. With the average age of entering home ownership now nearly 35, accordingly to MHCLG figures, basic aspects of family life and wellbeing are put at risk.

This report draws on the AoU's experience of working with hundreds of places across the UK and Europe, many of which have been shortlisted and assessed as part of its annual Urbanism Awards scheme. Drawing on this rich resource of learning, and in particular a series of case studies that have been the subject of awards, we make a series of recommendations to help resolve the way we provide housing and what sort of housing is provided.

---

We are encouraged by the national conversation that that is already underway on the issues but we strongly believe the quality of new housing in recent decades has been largely disappointing, despite a wealth of good advice and good intention, some of which was thrown away through political misjudgment.

Governments have put off dealing with difficult decisions on housing, allowing the issue to get worse. It is perhaps time to take a more radical view and establish a far-reaching and coherent approach to the provision of housing. At the root of the problem is a dysfunctional planning system, an industry dominated by a small number of house builders, and land that is overpriced. If we are to fix our broken housing market, it must be not just about substantially increasing output, but also creating many more great neighbourhoods where people would choose to live, not just have to live. A Royal Commission may be the appropriate vehicle to explore improvements to the process at governmental and local levels. This would meet the government's objectives, but would also secure investment that benefits all in the long as well as short-term.

The AoU has set down a series of principles through which to achieve sustainable development. These are based on our experience in the UK and Europe, and particularly with the City of Freiburg in Germany, and form the basis of this report. This document, *The Freiburg Charter*, together with its Manifesto principles, are set out in the appendix.

The Academy will continue to fight for better housing for the 21st century in a better urban environment through its principles of urbanism. The Academy stands ready to offer its collective expertise.

David Rudlin AoU  
Chair, The Academy of Urbanism

On behalf of The Academy of Urbanism  
Jon Rowland (Report Chair), Steven Bee,  
Esther Caplin, Dr Nicholas Falk,  
Janet Sutherland, Stuart Turner,  
Stephen Gallagher



*The Freiburg Charter, which was developed with the City of Freiburg in 2010 after it won the European City of the Year, explains how mid-sized cities can grow in ways that look good, secure community support and are truly sustainable. Community-based projects such as Ashley Vale in Bristol are showing the way in the UK in terms of self-build, as are schemes to renovate council estates such as Byker in Newcastle/Gateshead.*

---

# Checklist for delivering better housing for the 21st century

## 1. Reform strategic planning

Building in the right place on land assembled at the right price, supported by social and physical infrastructure, are the defining factors in setting a strong foundation for creating new communities.

- 1.1 Look beyond political or funding cycles
- 1.2 Plan an integrated framework to cut costs in the long term
- 1.3 Create a culture of collaboration
- 1.4 Build homes where they are needed, but supported by infrastructure
- 1.5 Reappraise the green belt
- 1.6 Freeze values on land within strategic developments
- 1.7 Sharing the uplift in land value to fund infrastructure
- 1.8 Address infrastructure cost and development density

## 2. Raise the standard of design

The standard of design – from masterplan to that of the individual dwelling – is in a rut similar to that which plagued the British car building industry of the 1970s. The impact of climate change is acknowledged, and so is the issue of sustainability, but little is achieved in terms of policy and output. Commitment to levels of quality and a commitment to learn from what works should be paramount, along with a drive to improve skills across the industry.

- 2.1 Plan for climate change
- 2.2 Commitment to Quality Charters and Performance Criteria
- 2.3 Insist on green development in the green belt
- 2.4 Change density rules
- 2.5 Incentivise good design
- 2.6 Learn from what works
- 2.7 Support design and review
- 2.8 Upgrade skills – the public sector
- 2.9 Upgrade skills – house-builders
- 2.10 Assemble skills from elsewhere in the short term

---

### 3. Open up housing markets

Who builds the vast majority of our houses is ultimately who shapes our communities. We believe that this should not be left to 10 or so companies, however effective they are deemed to be. Innovation is driven by competition, collaboration and diversity, and so the mechanisms should be put in place to encourage a greater number and breadth of housing providers.

- 3.1 De-risk access to funding
- 3.2 Open up access to data
- 3.3 Change procurement procedures
- 3.4 Swap masterplans for frameworks to promote diversity and certainty
- 3.5 Relax regulations to promote new forms of housing
- 3.6 Encourage prefabrication
- 3.7 Invest in new technologies
- 3.8 Promote serviced sites to attract a greater range of proposals
- 3.9 Promote different developers for different results
- 3.10 Back local authorities to build
- 3.11 Make use of bonds and land trusts

### 4. Make housing more affordable

Housing is linked to the wellbeing, health and prosperity of individuals and society. Yet homelessness is rising and the ability to own or rent a home is becoming increasingly prohibitive. Investment is urgently required to fund affordable housing and to provide for an ageing population, as well as new policies to make renting and owning a house more attainable for all.

- 4.1 Fund affordable homes, not home ownership
- 4.2 Protect grants for social rent from market volatility
- 4.3 Ensure housing is key to health and wellbeing across society
- 4.4 Reform to the Private Rented Sector
- 4.5 New housing grants
- 4.6 Capturing land value uplift to fund genuinely affordable housing
- 4.7 Encourage new developers and new mechanisms
- 4.8 Revisit Cooperatives, co-ownership and other forms of development
- 4.9 Back Community Development Trusts and other new forms of stewardship



*A joint venture between developer Grosvenor and landowner and planning authority Oxford City Council, complimented by a forward-thinking design team. This is an example of development in the right place. It has been designed to integrate with adjacent communities in Barton, Headington and Northway through a*



*new junction on the A40 and enhanced pedestrian, cycle and bus transport links. As the largest new residential development in Oxford – it will deliver up to 885 new homes of which 40 per cent will be socially rented, a 10-acre linear park, a sports pavilion with a full size adult football pitch, a primary school and*

## **BARTON PARK, OXFORD**

### **Developers**

Grosvenor /  
Oxford City Council

### **Master-planners**

Terrence O'Rourke  
AECOM

### **Architects**

Pollard Thomas Edwards /  
Alison Brooks

*community hub – the scheme is setting standards in the city. During the construction, the scheme has provided significant local employment opportunities (so far over 15 per cent of the workforce were employed locally) and over 10 traineeship and apprenticeship opportunities.*

## **MANCHESTER LIFE ANCOATS MANCHESTER**

### **Developers**

Abu Dhabi United Group /  
Manchester City Council

### **Architects**

Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios /  
RTKL / Studio Egret West / Rafael  
Viñoly Architects

### **Ancoats: Finalist of the AoU Great Neighbourhood Award**

*In 2014, the Abu Dhabi United Group and Manchester City Council established the Manchester Life joint venture to create a development company capable of deploying the scale of inward investment required to*



*make a significant contribution towards achieving the city's residential growth ambitions for Ancoats and New Islington, and creating the necessary momentum for regeneration to take hold. Manchester Life is a developer and landlord that blends a deep connection to Manchester with global real estate development and*

*management expertise to deliver high-quality urban regeneration that establishes exciting and desirable communities. Since 2014, they have delivered nearly 1,500 new homes and 27,000 sq.ft of space for businesses within its first two phases, helping to write the next chapter of this unique neighbourhood.*

---

# I. Reform strategic planning

## Where to build

The issue of where to build new homes is hotly contested, but it should not be avoided. Should we safeguard the green belt as being sacred, or re-designate parts of it for development? And if so, under what conditions that would meet the legitimate concerns of the countryside lobby and those living nearby?

## Return to spatial strategies

If there is one lesson that the AoU has learned from its work with councils and communities, as well as the cities that are rated as great places, it is the need for a long-term strategic and spatial overview. In the UK, regional governance and government involvement seems to change from election to election. Decision-making is fragmented as the stakeholders have multiplied. This has both positive and negative implications. In some cases, communities find it hard to contribute because they lack adequate skills and funds – this is especially true in neighbourhood plans. At the other end of the spectrum the lack of regional context has made it difficult to fulfil the ‘duty to collaborate’ across political, agency and commercial boundaries.

## Assembling land at the right price

The AoU also believes land assembly at the right price is vital. There are many lessons from Europe where capturing the land value increase has simultaneously reduced speculation. Reforming the Land Compensation Act and enhancing council powers to compulsorily purchase land where necessary would also

enable the delivery of much more housing and better neighbourhoods by both private and public sectors.

## Working together

There are examples of long-term joint partnerships between public and private sectors, some of which are proving successful, which need to be replicated on a much larger scale. A promising example is Manchester Life, a partnership between Manchester City Council and Abu Dhabi United Group that featured in the Academy’s assessment of the Ancoats neighbourhood.

## Building next to infrastructure

Building new homes or neighbourhoods, as we have seen in countless scattered and peripheral places, is useless unless they are served by existing or new infrastructure. Transport, health and education services and jobs are critical to creating a place in which people thrive. Where this infrastructure does not exist, new communities should be planned to sufficient density and size that they underpin them.

## I.1 Look beyond political or funding cycles

Major development often takes many years between inception and delivery. Whilst many developers take a short-term fiscal view, the lack of strategy and continuity within local authorities creates uncertainty. The results are often a plethora of poorly located and serviced developments. This general short-termism works against a long term integrated and strategic approach to housing provision. The lesson from model cities in Europe is that continuity is important. The team charged with the regeneration and growth of Freiburg and



Images © Carl Spencer via Flickr



**DERWENTHORPE  
YORK**

**Developer**

Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust

**Architects**

Studio Partington (phase one)

*Derwenthorpe is a development situated approximately two miles to the east of York city centre. The design and planning for this new estate was undertaken by the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust (JRHT) and the building contract for all four build phases has been awarded to Barratt Developments. All homes built will meet or exceed the Code for Sustainable Homes level 4 standard. Hot water and central heating is provided by means of a district heating*

*biomass furnace system which is housed in the ‘Super Sustainable Centre’ in the middle of the site. Derwenthorpe will eventually offer 489 high-quality environmentally friendly and energy efficient homes. Careful designs mean this scheme will offer homes to suit the needs of all kinds of buyers. This will plug the gaps in the current market with exciting and environmentally conscious ‘homes of the future’.*

---

the provision of new housing through urban extensions was in place for over 25 years. The result is that the original democratic aspirations have been met. The objectives did not change every two to five years to accommodate political changes at local, regional or national level. The long-term improvement was nonpartisan and across political boundaries.

### **I.2 Plan an integrated framework to cut costs in the long term**

Social, economic and cultural sustainability are equally as important in the creation of good quality development that promotes the improvement of health and well-being, thus cutting the costs of social care. Compact and walkable neighbourhoods are the first step in what has been termed 'soft urban design' to increase the social compact between developer and customer. Here the inclusion of community development officers is starting to happen on larger schemes to help generate activity, a sense of community and reduce isolation. Developers should be encouraged to take longer term interest in their developments to ensure their social and cultural dimensions are addressed.

### **I.3 Create a culture of collaboration**

Strategic frameworks help de-risk and reduce long-term uncertainty for developers and investors. The differing experience of the 'city regions' of Oxford and Cambridge exemplify this challenge. In Cambridge, collaborative relationships between political bodies, a long-term understanding between the city council and major economic drivers and landowners has brought rapid economic growth and physical improvements. Whereas the inability

for the city region of Oxford to fulfil its role because of planning and political constraints is well known, which is making it difficult for the region to rise to the challenge of being part of the 'Southern Powerhouse' and knowledge arc between the two cities. Better regional governance would certainly help. The consolidation of LEPs, growth boards and other similar organisations would be a start, and the decision to jointly commission a growth plan is an important step, and could lead to a pragmatic, bi-partisan view of where and how development should occur. However, other well-tried mechanisms that are familiar in major programmes could be appropriate; such as Urban Development Corporations.

### **I.4 Build homes where they are needed, but supported by infrastructure**

The planning system currently requires a call for sites. These are often not in appropriate locations, often on green fields, lacking decent transportation links and far from jobs, social and health facilities. Sometimes these are owned by government agencies and other public sector interests. This opportunism, exacerbated by housing targets has led to some poor housing extensions to our market towns and villages. The AoU has looked at the successful new neighbourhoods and settlements and all have one thing in common: they are adjacent to existing towns that have appropriate infrastructure to absorb the needs of new residents. They are based around or have access to rail and other public transport; what has come to be called Transit Oriented Development. All housing development should be located where infrastructure can support it. This means near accessible road and rail routes, employment, as well as social, health

---

**RIESELFELD,  
FREIBURG, GERMANY**

**Landowner**  
City of Freiburg

**Developers**  
Over 120 Baugruppen co-operative building groups plus many others

**Freiburg: Winner of the AoU European City of the Year**



An extension to Freiburg built on former brownfield land in which the public sector controlled the process from the outset, rather than responding to the private sector. Land values were frozen at existing-use rates, allowing the uplift in value to fund infrastructure, including excellent transport links to the city centre via a tram. Sustainability has been key in both the development of dwellings and

long-term planning of the neighbourhoods – the provision of transport infrastructure has actively changed attitudes to car ownership. This is a truly mixed-use development with safe streets, a wide range of community facilities, connection to nature and a rich texture, making this a desirable place to live from a former sewage works. A notable feature is the provision of

social infrastructure in advance of the housing along a major transport extension. This made the development more attractive to its new residents, keeping them within the city boundaries. The average dwelling size is 90sq metres, which is larger than in the UK. Freiburg was winner of 2010 AoU European City of the Year award.



**NANTES  
FRANCE**

**Finalist of the AoU European City of the Year**

Nantes' Climate Plan has been the basis for much its recent urban strategy. Following the collapse of traditional industries a major regeneration programme was

initiated that continues today. The development of low energy transport and buildings has been accompanied by new tram systems, public realm, opening up the city to its pedestrians and cyclists, and the development of new homes, in particular in its new eco-quarters. The districts comprise housing, gardens, leisure and employment, built compactly on brownfield land.

They reflect low carbon criteria addressing many of the issues that face us in the UK, but use innovative place-making principles, new ideas on connectivity, street design, public space, housing typologies, and governance (long-term, bi-partisan and Metropole-wide). Nantes won the European Green Capital Award for its achievements.

---

and educational infrastructure. Building on brownfield sites is a priority but green field and green belt land should be considered for development in 'growth areas' – that is, cities with strong economies that would be held back if house prices are unaffordable to local people or if employees have to travel excessive distances to work.

### **1.5 Reappraise the green belt**

The AoU considers that in general the green belt should be protected, but with provisos. We suggest a reappraisal so that it forms part of an overall spatial strategy that takes full account of the nature and form of an accessible green belt, the priority of redeveloping brownfield city sites, and infrastructure investment. Much greater focus should be placed on compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of remaining green belt land. This is starting to happen in cities such as Cambridge, in which its North West developments are built on sites taken out of the green belt.

### **1.6 Freeze values on land within strategic developments**

The key to the success of widely acclaimed cities such as Freiburg in Germany, according to their former long-term director of development Professor Wulf Daseking, was being able to acquire major sites on the edge of the city at close to existing use value. These values were 'frozen' once the sites were identified for possible development in spatial plans. This gave the city freedom to plan for the kind of development that it wanted, rather than that which was dictated to it. In Nantes, France, agricultural land was purchased at existing use value 'plus' and subsequent

enhancement enabled site assembly, the introduction of a tram, public spaces and schools. Plots were sold with a very specific development brief requiring 50 per cent of affordable housing, including social rent and low-cost ownership. A sheltered scheme was one of the earliest phases, bringing old people living in the area into the new neighbourhood, to help establish it with the surrounding settlements. This is not new: Urban Development Corporations once used this mechanism and it needs to be rediscovered.

### **1.7 Sharing the uplift in land values to fund infrastructure**

Transport for London, and now the Greater London Authority, are investigating how to capture land value uplift to help fund new infrastructure. The most pertinent examples are the land value tax in Canberra in Australia; a 'split-level' rating to promote the regeneration of central areas of Pittsburgh USA; and the use of land value uplift to fund a new metro in the town of Orestad outside Copenhagen. Other European countries have national or regional public investment banks for funding local infrastructure and so do not have to rely on developers to fund most of the infrastructure as well as housing. In considering new policies, the government needs to review the system of development finance to help make housing more accessible.

### **1.8 Address infrastructure cost and development density**

In order to support relevant infrastructure, it is important to look at the implications for development density and design of housing types. In many cases, development remains as houses with parking on plots. This continues to

---

**NEWHALL,  
HARLOW,  
ESSEX**

**Landowner**

Newhall Projects Limited

**Developers**

(individual parcels):

Newhall Projects /

Barratt Homes /

Copthorn Bellway /

Linden Homes /

Galliford Try / Slo Living Ltd

**Masterplanner**

Roger Evans Associates

**Architects**

Proctor and Matthews / Robert

Hudson Associates / ORMS / Alison

Brooks / Richard Murphy / Roger

Evans Associates / ECD / JTP /

Shepherd Robson

**Newhall: Finalist of the AoU  
Great Neighbourhood Award**

*An enlightened landowner took long-term control, set standards and used solid professional design codes and procurement, all of which set the groundwork for a high-quality and sustainable neighbourhood. Each land parcel has been designed by different architects within the overall masterplan and design guidance, which has created distinctive neighbourhoods. Its commercial viability demonstrates that the housing market is more receptive to contemporary and innovative design than the big house builders would conveniently have us believe. The uplift in value across the neighbourhood*



© Planning Resource via Flickr



*allowed the installation of appropriate social and physical infrastructure. Crucially, housebuilder partners have been selected not just by tender value*

*but also by design quality. Newhall was a finalist of the 2017 AoU Great Neighbourhood award.*

---

promote car-dominated development. The AoU recognises that this crosses policy boundaries, but if we are to promote better levels of public transport and cycle routes, we have to look at the nature and form of development that is proposed. To pay for frequent connectivity, often requires higher densities and greater compactness of development. Current policies make this difficult and make green field development more attractive. The AoU's experience elsewhere would suggest higher densities, different typologies and different ways of dealing with the car. This has implications across a number of sectors including the conservatism of financial institutions and highway engineering.

## 2. Raise design standards

As the government now recognises through its National Design Guide, design, sustainability and space standards of dwellings need to be improved to create great neighbourhoods rather than just housing estates. This can be done through encouraging better development, widening procurement, increasing skills and learning from what works elsewhere. This means promoting design awareness.

### **General design quality**

Previous government policy has said surprisingly little about housing quality and design, sustainability and energy resource efficiency or housing typologies and density. The implication is that fixing our broken housing market is all about numbers alone.

Although the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provides an overarching basis for encouraging good design, the results in many of our newly built housing estates are unsatisfactory, due to poor policy, masterplanning, architecture, landscape and urban design, house-builders' development models and a lack of an integrated approach. The various environmental professions are often complicit in this.

### **Improving the culture of design**

It is widely noted the majority of housing is provided by about 10 companies, and in any one location there is often an oligopoly. There seems to be little in the way of a design culture within the British house-building industry. House builders often bid to buy sites that have planning permission, gained through land-agents obtaining outline permission. These are often hurried and poorly considered, and do not take account of likely requirements, which are expected to be negotiated away on grounds of viability. Such 'outline and access' applications end up as soulless estates because of the lack of design and performance criteria at an early stage. Where councils have refused planning permission on design terms, house builders have often risen to the challenge and improved the outcomes considerably. The local planning process does sometimes hinder an improved built environment. Local policies are often rigid, disjointed and do not respond to 21st century needs. It will be important to tackle current process, perhaps by Royal Commission, in order to improve the status of design quality.

### **Creating spaces for beauty**

There have been innumerable design guides in this country. These have been in circulation

Images © Ash Sakula



## **THE MALINGS OUSEBURN, NEWCASTLE**

### **Developer**

PfP igloo

### **Architects**

Ash Sakula

**Ouseburn: Finalist of the AoU  
Great Neighbourhood Award**

*In 2012, the government housing agency Homes England and Newcastle City Council entered into an agreement for PfP igloo to develop a number of ex-industrial sites in the Ouseburn for residential-led regeneration. Located on the bank of the River Ouseburn, in a steep-sided, ex-industrial valley, The Malings is designed to nurture a genuine sense of cohesion and engagement among*

*the inhabitants. The project was declared Supreme Winner at the 2016 Housing Design Awards, and in 2019 the project was acclaimed by the "Building Better, Building Beautiful" Commission as an example of beauty in British housing design.*

---

here and interestingly abroad where they have informed local planning authorities. The Urban Design Compendium, CABE's design and quality research and guidance documents together with encouragement from other design organisations still reflect an unwillingness by national and local government to incorporate the lessons learned within policy. Whilst we wish the Building Better Beautiful Commission the best in its endeavours to encourage developers to improve their outputs, unless the process is changed and developers are charged with meeting clear design and quality objectives, the current potential for improving our built environment is reduced.

### **Establishing a better process**

There is often a mismatch between the goals of developers and popular aspirations to create new neighbourhoods that have a community spirit. The general 'institutional indeterminacy' has created uncertainty both within the public and private sectors. If the outputs are to be improved then the process needs to change so that better and faster decisions can be made. Then greater clarity can be provided to developers, councils and communities.

The AoU gives awards to 'Great Neighbourhoods' and its experience is that these are few and far between, especially in newly built urban extensions. It may well be that the starting point for developers is often the standard house type and not the 'place' or community, and for the council it is often the standard road, or density, rather than a clear aspiration for the common good. The results of this combination are some very bleak built environments. It is time to learn from councils

and developers who have achieved good design and great neighbourhoods.

### **Better quality will win support**

One of the reasons why local people in growth areas object to housing proposals is that they dislike the quality of development that is currently being built by most volume house builders. Poorly designed and built dwellings, poor masterplans and a lack of strategic thinking have all helped create a climate of NIMBYism that is difficult to overcome.

The winning 2014 Wolfson Economic Prize 'How to Build Garden Cities that are Visionary, Viable and Popular' argued that local support could be secured by building compact neighbourhoods, retaining green space with positive functions and ensuring good access between settlements. People are currently being asked to give up their green space for a poor return. Local residents ask what's in it for them if development such as typical volume-built housing is allowed in the green belt. The answer is often 'nothing' and a lose-lose situation is then created. Raising the standard and awareness of design needs better mechanisms to overcome these issues.

### **Space standards**

The UK has also been building the smallest houses with the most number of rooms in Europe. This has as much to do with cost of land, as a result of the way our housing is valued. Developers are producing houses that are governed by density rules of habitable rooms or dwellings per hectare; whereas elsewhere the norm is to use plot ratios. So a person wanting more space has to live in a small house with lots of little spaces.

Developers are also taking advantage of the



**HOMERUSKWARTIER,  
ALMERE POORT,  
NETHERLANDS**

**Masterplanner**  
OMA



*An exemplar from which the UK is taking inspiration and widely regarded as the largest and among the most innovative custom-build schemes in the world. A masterplan was developed, infrastructure was provided, plots were sold to individuals along*

*with very basic design guidance and a plot passport. This has encouraged individualism, which combines to create a strong identity. The result is that residents have delivered development that reflects the diversity of residents' choice. The complete*

*opposite to UK standard house types, which provide sameness and lack of identity. This is one way of addressing the UK's housing shortage and has been taken up at Graven Hill in Bicester (see page 25).*

---

recent loosening of planning regulations for converting commercial space to housing; and this has led to alarmingly poor space standards.

### **Building legacy**

House builders have strategic land departments that compete with each other and are adept in gaining options and other arrangements with landowners, which often determine the direction of growth of a city or town. Although most landowners are prepared to accept the deals presented to them by developers, a few landowners are very positive about the legacy they wish to leave, and set their own agenda for development, bringing together an appropriately skilled design and development team. Abode in Harlow, Essex, is a very recent exemplar (p13). Bournville Village Trust in Birmingham is an exemplar of long-term estate management.

### **2.1 Plan for climate change**

The AoU considers that more resilient places are required in the face of less predictable weather. Energy resource efficiency and real sustainable development built to reduced carbon, Passivhaus or similar standards could help raise quality and support the formation of new businesses. Sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS) can reduce the financial costs of flooding and add value to the landscape at the same time. New responses from the government are needed.

### **2.2 Commitment to Quality Charters and performance criteria**

Cambridge agreed a Quality Charter that laid out the design and development criteria for new growth. This has helped produce new housing as popular as the old, including award-

winning schemes like Accordia. Promoting such mechanisms for inspiring design quality could be relevant elsewhere in the country.

Government agencies such as Homes England (HE) have a role to play. Its previous incarnation, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), had a clear set of design quality criteria that developers had to follow. These criteria produced better housing development, but were removed from the HCA to the detriment of its output. It is positive that HE is reconsidering these design quality criteria to improve the quality of its projects. Lessons are slowly being re-learned.

### **2.3 Insist on green development in the green belt**

A neighbourhood plan for a settlement in the Vale of White Horse District Council has been suggesting another possible approach. In areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONB), greater care has to be taken in the design of development. Any land taken out of green belt for housing development could be similarly designated and have to meet higher standards. Housing in these areas would, for instance, be: carbon neutral or meet Passivhaus or similar standards that incorporate sustainable energy resource efficiency and healthy living criteria; procured completely differently and subject to design competition and review; strategically relevant to the growth of the city; and developed in such a way as to ensure that the rise in value of the land from current agricultural value to development value is ploughed into long-term provision of infrastructure. In other words 'green' development in the green belt.



## TELFORD MILLENNIUM COMMUNITY

### **Developer**

Homes and Communities Agency / Wrekin Council / Telford Council / Sanctuary Living / Wimpey Homes

### **Masterplanner**

Jon Rowland Urban Design / URBED /

### **Architects**

Lifschutz Davidson Associates / MWIA

### **Engineers**

ENTEC

The Millennium Communities produced many innovative ideas that responded to new concepts on sustainability, house-types, modern methods of construction, place-



making, traffic management and design. The award-winning Telford Millennium Community is one such example. The 40-hectare community consists of 650 dwellings of affordable housing live/work units, sheltered accommodation, offices, and retail and leisure facilities. The scheme

was planned to push the boundaries of sustainability. It tested new street designs, Modern Methods of Construction and put the community at its heart. Significant participation led to positive planning and design outcomes. A Community Trust now manages the site.

---

## **2.4 Encourage new developers and new mechanisms such as ‘Quality Zones’**

Examples of new approaches and new forms of delivery mechanisms that are now providing high quality housing need to be shared more widely. The partnership between Oxford City Council and Grosvenor for the new urban neighbourhood at Barton Park (see p7) was procured through competition and benefitted from well-designed housing by good architects and a development partnership with a long-term view. Importantly, it was guided through the planning process by a good masterplan, design codes, design advice and review. The scheme also benefited from key stakeholders visiting the Netherlands as a team. The designation of ‘Quality Zones’ that go beyond standard council policies could improve design and harness land values to create better and more distinctive places.

## **2.5 Change density rules**

A change in density rules would allow greater choice for consumers, allowing someone who wants to buy space to do so without the need to buy more rooms. Some house-builders are experimenting by customising elements of their standard house-types, but current planning policy makes this difficult. Space needs to be publicised along with energy consumption so that consumers can make valid comparisons.

## **2.6 Incentivise good design**

Viability and land values partly drive the end product, but there is a complex relationship between value, affordability, consumer expectation, cultural aspiration, property type, building form, amenity, car ownership, wellbeing

and geography. There are few incentives to produce good design, sustainable development and energy resource efficiency. Yet tax changes can influence behaviour. Lead-free petrol is a classic example. The government should consider how to use such mechanisms to promote better development. For example there could be fiscal rewards for designing to carbon-neutral, Building for Life, Lifelong Homes standards, and other good design criteria.

## **2.7 Learn from what works**

There is much to learn from looking at how other places – at home and overseas – deal with their housing issues. Telford’s Millennium Community (see p19) profited from ensuring that the developer, council and even the existing community leaders visited exemplars in the UK and Holland. The results are high quality designs that have been championed by the community – a high return for a small investment. Study visits to exemplars in the UK and overseas have been at the forefront of the AoU’s mission and have been organised for people in both the public and private sectors. But the system in the UK is so constraining that support from the government is essential to overcome the view that these visits are a waste of money.

The AoU considers the more successful developments include retail and employment within housing areas, so that people are close to work. This adds to the neighbourhood vibrancy. Yet most councils want designated zones for different uses. Lifestyles are changing, and working from or near home will grow. Councils and house-builders need to think to the future and have a more flexible approach to catering for mixing uses.

---

**ASPERN SEESTADT and  
NORDBAHNHOF,  
VIENNA**

**Vienna: Finalist of the AoU  
European City of the Year**

*Aspern Seestadt is a new suburb of Vienna built on the former Vienna-Donaustradt airfield. It captures land value uplift to provide high quality social and physical infrastructure including a new metro line connecting it to the city centre. Higher densities, hidden parking excellent open space provision including allotments make this a highly sustainable development. The development also includes self-build, widening traditional levels of procurement. Vienna was a finalist of the 2018 AoU European City of the Year award.*

*New development on brownfield sites in the Nordbahnhof station areas of central Vienna mixes tenures and uses in the same building with the first four residential floors being subsidised social rent, and the top two privately financed. Together with ground floor commercial and community uses, this makes development more affordable and accessible.*



---

## 2.8 Support design and review

There are a number of different organisations to call upon to provide mutual support, training, workshops, design review and study visits to participating councils, including the Academy itself. BOB-MK (Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes) is a subscription service for all councils in this sub-region, which has been running for over a decade, and supports local authority officers involved in design and quality control; Design Council/CABE has a city design review panel programme that provides design assistance through review and workshops to a small number of councils. The eight not-for-profit design centres including Design South East, Places Matter! and Integreat, provide similar support.

In addition, some house builders are considering independent internal reviews to reduce the areas of contention with councils. All these and other similar mechanisms need further financial support if councils are to meet requirements for design review as set out in the NPPF. These should be part of the services covered by planning performance agreements (PPA) or planning fees, and could form part of a larger City Deal depending on locality.

## 2.9 Upgrade skills – the public sector

Where the local authority leads and is proactive in setting the strategic and development agenda, a more flexible approach is possible. Good planning is not about development control and ticking boxes to justify housing targets, but about enabling the right development in the right place. That is a strategic and spatial requirement that is no longer addressed by many councils. City

engineers and architects are very rare within councils, and forward planning has become an exercise in managing an imposed set of targets. Even design guidance and codes have become the responsibility of the developer: an opportunity to describe their standard house types. The skills needed to address these issues are now missing from most councils

## 2.10 Upgrade skills – house-builders

House builders often use their standard house-types as a kit of parts to 'place-make'. However, they too do not have the necessary 'place-making' skills, and with a few notable exceptions, little has been done to improve on this. House builders also have difficulties obtaining the appropriate site construction skills and better supply chains. Construction workers, badly hit by the recession, have often become independent operators. The increased pressure on housing production recently has resulted in a reliance on skilled workers from outside of the UK. The training up of apprentices in such a volatile industry is a challenge. This also applies to the suppliers.

## 2.11 Assemble skills from elsewhere in the short term

Councils need to gear up. Where they have become development partners or have arms-length development mechanisms the results are proving successful. Gateshead's Staiths South Bank, Cherwell District Council's custom build development at Graven Hill, and Cambridge's North West sector are all positive examples of different approaches, as is Norwich Council's award-winning Passivhaus scheme Goldsmith Street. There are large numbers of experienced ex-local authority officers who need to be brought back to work

**TOWN HOUSE**  
**New Islington and Irwell**  
**Riverside in Manchester /**  
**Smith's Dock, North Shields /**  
**Port Loop, Birmingham**

**Developer**  
 Urban Splash

**Architects**  
 shedkm

*Town House exploits modular design to create high quality, customer-designed homes that are procured according to specific needs and based around a shell design. The efficiency and precision of the world of product development is utilised by designing and building each dwelling in a factory off-site and delivering them fully*



*fitted. Thought has been paid to change conventional ideas of design, with high ceilings, super sound insulation, full-height windows and the freedom to specify the layout*

*differently from that of your neighbours. This is a model of development that is spreading around the UK and proving successful.*



**MONTPELLIER,**  
**FRANCE**

**Montpellier: Finalist of the AoU**  
**European City of the Year**

*Montpellier produced a spatial vision that connected the city with the Mediterranean. This required a mix of uses and tenures in new developments and created a consistent and long-*

*term public sector-led approach – what has been called “patient development”. Public-private special purpose vehicles helped to attract finance from commercial banks and maximised values and return both economically and socially. An example of good housing using prefabrication, which is the result of strategic decisions made by the local authority as part of an integrated approach to provide*

*substantially more housing based on capturing land value uplift and providing new public transport routes. This is a mixed-use development with ground floor uses and indistinguishable market and socially rented accommodation. Montpellier was a finalist of the 2017 AoU European City of the Year award.*

---

with young graduates, supplemented by secondments from the private sector or abroad. Where there is a complex and long-term job to be done and the skills are not available, it can be better to establish some form of corporate vehicle with staff seconded or recruited that have the necessary competence.

### 3. Open up housing markets

Much of the public sector in the UK is risk averse. That and the combination of a conservative mainstream financial sector comprising mortgage and insurance companies, reinforced by current professional advice, has helped create a sclerotic house-building industry often favouring the volume builder. The AoU's experience points to some market conservatism. A dwelling that differs from the standard house-builders' typologies will often require additional funding.

#### **Whose responsibility is it to build?**

Provision or enabling provision of housing is a government responsibility. Whilst the private sector can play a very useful part in providing housing, relying on it to meet the shortfall in numbers has not worked. Indeed, mass housing can be classed as part of the nation's infrastructure and should not have to count against the public sector borrowing requirement. In light of Britain's decision to exit the European Union it becomes even more important to use the backlog in the

provision of housing and local infrastructure to reboot the British economy. But this will be impossible so long as we rely on the current players alone.

#### **A strengthened public sector development role**

The figures suggest the fall in public sector housing provision has been responsible for the drastic shortage of accommodation that we are suffering from today. Analysis by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), backed up by the recent Building a New Deal for London for the London Housing Commission, shows that on average the private sector has been steady in the number of dwellings produced over the years. In the UK this appears to be some 125,000 and in London about 10,000 dwellings. The role of the public sector could be reinstated in a number of forms, whether through partnership, arms-length development vehicles, joint ventures or directly to help mend this broken housing market.

#### **3.1 De-risk access to funding**

Funding for small development and small building companies to encourage alternative development mechanisms should be de-risked so they do not have to put their collateral at risk. Our current institutional systems have exacerbated the poor quality and indeed quantity of housing. Risk management has led to the weakening of design and the values that are gained by good design, rather than residual land value and viability testing.

#### **3.2 Open up access to data**

Local land registry and other relevant information on house and land values should be more openly available to local communities



## GRAVEN HILL, BICESTER

### **Landowners**

Cherwell District Council

### **Developers**

Gravenhill Village Development Company (arms length); Self-build

### **Masterplanner**

Glenn Howells

### **Architects**

Various



Promoted at arms-length by Cherwell District Council, this 188 hectare former Ministry of Defence site is now available for 2,000 self and custom-build houses – a first on this scale for the UK. Design guidance, plot

passports and varying levels of completeness – from foundations through to shells – were developed by Cherwell District Council and provided in order to encourage new and inexperienced self-builders to deliver a

wide range of creativity within a coherent context. The scheme is being marketed with good transport links to Bicester and Oxford and with the addition of shops, a new primary school and other community facilities.

---

and councils, especially if the aim is to set up public-private partnerships to deliver large-scale new housing.

### **3.3 Change procurement procedures**

As outlined in the case study on page 23 the AoU is convinced that the way European cities such as Montpellier have grown so fast is down to their different approach to the procurement of both infrastructure and mass housing, where land was bought at existing-use value 'plus', enhanced with infrastructure and sold plot-by-plot with a specific development brief requiring 50 per cent affordable housing.

### **3.4 Swap masterplans for frameworks to promote diversity and certainty**

Simplifying the planning process through such means as concept plans or briefs, parking standards and development capacity, tenures and typologies, help provide certainty and hence speed. These have been used by some local authorities to anticipate how a development is to be organised and sets the scene for planning applications. Similarly, rather than detailed masterplans that easily become redundant, we need development frameworks with a clear strategy, for plot ratios and mixing uses, to guide infrastructure and direct the location of new development. A more proactive rather than reactive role for local authorities, which sets goals, strategies and quality criteria and hence greater certainty, would make it easier for investors to take a long-term view.

This could be vastly helped by considering the use of quality mechanisms such as Germany's B

plan (Bebauungsplan), which encapsulates all the relevant criteria on a single document or plan. This sets development parameters, parcellation, typologies, location of open spaces and development and is used as a controlling document. Here, some councils use Regulatory Plans, with Design and Access Statements standing behind them. However, whilst the D+AS remains illustrative and aspirational the nature and form of development can lose its quality.

### **3.5 Relax regulations to promote new forms of housing**

Other forms of housing should be allowed and appropriate regulations relaxed. For example, Shell housing – the provision of a basic but unfinished dwelling – reduces finishing costs and allows greater individualism. Also core housing – provision for a basic minimal dwelling with the ability to expand over time to cater for changing family circumstances; and other hybrid and gradualist but individualist housing forms – could be tested.

'Home-working' is increasingly important and hybridity, flexibility and forms other than a standard house type could be critical to future 'placemaking'. Smaller developers, cooperatives and co-ownership schemes have a role to create a diversity of house types that match the different choices that the different sectors of the housing market make, whether for young families, downsizers, elderly and so on. Some custom built schemes are experimenting with these forms of development and again, demonstration programmes would help.

### **3.6 Encourage prefabrication**

There are currently few incentives for house builders to change their mode of operation:



**ASHLEY VALE,  
BRISTOL**

**Developer / Landowner**  
Ashley Vale Action Group (AVAG)

**Ashley Vale: Finalist of AoU  
Great Neighbourhood Award**

A former scaffolding yard in Bristol, became an exemplar of community control of housing development within a market economy – including the acquisition of land; planning and providing the infrastructure; and co-operative self-build development. It has become a national and international model of good practice. The first self-builders entered the scheme because it gave them an opportunity to own their own home. The building process encouraged people to share skills, knowledge and experience. There are a number of families with young



children and it is clearly a safe place for children to live and play and, therefore, attractive to families. There are also much older residents who have brought up families in the area and bring different skills to the community. Environmental

sustainability is one of the core values of the self-build project, reflected in the choice and reuse of materials and encouraging local biodiversity. Ashley Vale was the winner of the 2017 AoU Great Neighbourhood award.

---

neither financial nor qualitative. Some house builders have even reduced their research and development expenditure. With the rise in land prices, house builders can build fewer houses for the same returns. Capturing rising values and other fiscal incentives could provide some opportunities for funding off-site construction.

Organisations such as Constructing Excellence are trying to change the industry mindset, but prefabrication is not a panacea. It will take time and concerted effort to meet the quantity and quality criteria through off-site construction. Recently Urban Splash, a relatively small and focused developer, has worked with Shed KM to build prefabricated modular houses. Similarly Igloo, which is backed by Aviva, is experimenting with housing that can be built in factories to customers' requirements, just as happens when you buy a new car. The opportunity to consider fiscal mechanisms to further support offsite construction methods should be part of the housing agenda.

### **3.7 Invest in new technologies**

MMC can also fall short of expectations as the experience at Oxley Woods in Milton Keynes has shown. It will take some time for prefabrication to play its full role. So the government has a key role in creating the security to enable further progress to be made. This could be done initially through smaller developers working with Homes England and other governmental landowning agencies, as they once did, and through fiscal relief on research and development.

Factory-built housing needs to reach a critical mass to be viable, and private rented sector schemes could assist in bringing in others such as insurance or mortgage companies to play a

new role in housing. Nationwide Building Society and L&G Insurance are leading the way. Recent Chinese investment of £2.5bn in Your Housing Group's off-site initiative to build 25,000 homes is another way. The AoU's assessment of Montpellier's experience of prefabrication found that the city built some 3,000 dwellings a year. That figure could resolve Oxford's housing problem in 10 years. But then Montpellier has a spatial strategy, has bought appropriate land at a mid-point between existing use and developed value, and captured its rise in value. This has helped it create value with parks and infrastructure, fund a significant proportion of affordable housing, and secure an excellent transport system, employment, leisure and cultural uses.

### **3.8 Promote serviced sites to attract a greater range of proposals**

The provision of serviced sites, paid for as a proportion of the value generated as outlined in section 1, would not only widen choice but would also open up opportunities for small builders and community enterprises. The success of exemplary cities like the Dutch towns of Almere, can be credited to the provision of building plots within streets provided by the master developer – often the local authority or a company set up for the purpose. Land values are much lower because sites are not auctioned off to the highest bidder, but paid for when the homes are occupied, so that developers can be chosen for the quality of what they propose to build, not simply how much they are prepared to offer.

Other avenues for increasing housing numbers include opening up development to self-builders, cooperatives and co-ownership

---

## NORTH WEST CAMBRIDGE

### **Developer**

University of Cambridge

### **Architect**

Three different architects over phase 1

### **Masterplanner**

AECOM

### **Cambridge: Finalist of AoU Great Town Award**



© North West Cambridge Development

An example of positive collaboration between the landowner / developer and the local authority to create an urban extension to Cambridge for both the benefit of the city and university. It is a mixed-use development with a rich texture and

safe, inviting streets, built to high levels of sustainability. The new community will be home to around 8,500 residents and provide much needed affordable accommodation for university staff, as well as private housing, graduate accommodation,

research space and a local centre including a primary school, community centre, GP surgery, hotel, supermarket and local shops. Cambridge was a 2010 finalist of the AoU Great Town award.

## STAITHS SOUTH BANK GATESHEAD

### **Landowner**

Gateshead Council

### **Developers**

George Wimpey City

### **Masterplanners / Architects**

Hemingway Design / Ian Darby Partnership



© Corb2000

Staiths South Bank is a 760-home development on brownfield land on the banks of River Tyne, Gateshead. Residents are offered choice in terms of elevation and layout, and house types. The landscaped 'homezone' areas form a network of green links, in which pedestrian movement has

priority. Homes are clustered around landscaped communal courtyards containing further features, such as barbecues, to encourage communal activities. The development has been crucial in achieving improvements to the heritage and natural assets of the area, such as the reopening

of Dunston Staiths in 2015 and the Saltmarsh Garden in 2016. The opening of the Staiths Café by residents of the development has further acted as a catalyst to the vitality of the area and the development itself.

---

groups. Schemes promoting custom build or the experiences of HPBC (Housing People Building Communities) in Liverpool and other community build schemes show a way forward. Many councils and government agencies have an obligation to gain best value from selling their land. This is usually translated as the maximum price rather than optimising prices in favour of the 'common good'. This can act as a barrier to such schemes as Graven Hill which rely on land obtained at reduced prices. The work that Cherwell District Council is doing to establish a new settlement of some 2,000 self-build / self-managed custom-built houses at Graven Hill in Bicester could be one way forward.

### **3.9 Promote different developers for different results**

Government agencies should be encouraged to work with new and different forms of developer organisations to drive innovation. Lidl, the German super market chain that has 'disrupted' the UK grocery sector, is planning to build 3,000 homes in mixed-use schemes in London over the next three years. It will focus on affordable homes in line with its image. There is an opportunity here for players such as Lidl and even Ikea to apply the same innovation they have demonstrated in their primary markets. SME developers should also be encouraged with the aim of driving innovation and an understanding of what best reflects 21<sup>st</sup> century living. Other interesting initiatives see landowning insurance companies starting to engage with housing development.

### **3.10 Back local authorities to build**

Local authorities must be able to raise funds for development using their assets as security. The AoU considers that councils should be able to commission housing and should be central to enforcing well-designed developments. But councils need resources to help government meet its housing goals as well as its statutory duties to contribute to the quality of the built environment and life. The staffing cuts need to be reversed through a recognition of the contribution that a good built environment makes to the general health of the population, education and economic well-being. This might mean an adjustment in the current model of the local authority. Pilot projects could be used to test a more appropriate form of delivering high quality housing that reflect the government's ambitions for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **3.11 Make use of bonds and land trusts**

Borrowing restrictions should be revised so that councils can issue bonds, and allowing them to keep all Right-to-Buy receipts. Housing associations have been doing this on a large scale. Community Land Trusts and Neighbourhood Land Trusts, and various forms of trust have been shown to build significantly more housing without public subsidy. Could some of the Local Enterprise Partnerships and Growth Boards who are currently involved in strategic development be encouraged to set up such a public private partnership, as mechanisms to address housing need? Should it have powers similar to some of the recent Development Corporations?



## DEVONPORT, PLYMOUTH

### **Local authority:**

Plymouth City Council

### **Developers**

Devon & Cornwall Housing Association /  
Devonport Community Land Trust / Linden  
Homes / Redrow Homes / RIO (Real Ideas  
Organisation) / Hertford Investors

### **Community Groups**

Devonport Regeneration Community  
Partnership / Friends of Devonport Park

### **Masterplanners**

Matrix Partnership (Storage Enclave) /  
LHC (Gun Wharf, Ker Street, Granby  
North) / ADG (Mount Wise)

### **Architects**

LHC / Le Page / ADG / Trewin

### **Devonport: Finalist of AoU Great Neighbourhood Award**



The density and grain created in the Devonport estates in Plymouth reinforce the quality of the urban environment. New housing, whose layout incorporates coherent street and block layouts (often reviving original neighbourhood street plans), contribute to an attractive sense of place. The housing and tenure mix is

designed to diversify the range of occupiers from the previous total of 75 per cent council housing. One housing area, Gun Wharf, has been awarded a 'Gold' category Building for Life standard and a 'Secured by Design' award. Devonport was a finalist of the 2015 AoU Great Neighbourhood award.

---

## 4. Make housing more affordable

Affordable housing is starved of funds. CIH (Chartered Institute of Housing) analysis shows that just £8bn of the £51bn earmarked until 2020 will fund affordable housing. The remainder is focused on supporting the private housing market. This at a time of rising levels of homelessness and when the CIH projects that 250,000 of the cheapest social homes will be lost between 2012 and 2020, whilst the lower benefit cap puts an additional 116,000 households at risk of homelessness, which has nearly tripled in the last decade.

### Providing for an ageing population

Affordable housing is about more than social housing. Vulnerable and older people – including a provision for an ageing population – need to be considered much more thoughtfully at all price points and tenures, as well as specialist housing and lifetime homes in lifetime neighbourhoods. These should be considered in the short term with regards to the problems currently caused by uncertainty on funding of supported housing.

### Securing social balance

Housing needs to be affordable by the key workers who keep our towns and cities running. It also should enable young people to build up savings. Other countries have done far more to keep housing in balance with changing needs as is set out in a series of case studies for Shelter largely based on AoU award winners.

### 4.1 Fund affordable homes, not home ownership

The level of new genuinely affordable homes being provided only replaces a very small portion of the loss of existing social homes through Right to Buy and conversion of social rent to affordable rent, as well as disposal of existing stock. The Chartered Institute of Housing estimates that between 2012 and 2020 we will lose over 199,000 existing social rented homes. The government's current approach of directing over 80 per cent of housing investment towards home ownership should be reconsidered.

### 4.2 Protect grants for social rent from market volatility

Small amounts of housing grants are now becoming available, but in recent years there has been no grant for social rent. The small amount of new social rent provided has been funded by cross subsidy by housing associations from open market sales. As the housing market in London slows, dependence on open market sales becomes problematic and is slowing delivery of new affordable homes.

### 4.3 Ensure housing is key to health and wellbeing across society

There is growing evidence of the hardship caused by the current lack of affordable housing, compounded by welfare reform and restrictions on eligibility for support with rent. This has a huge personal cost to long-term mental health and wellbeing, as well as the financial cost to households and the very significant costs to the local authorities providing temporary accommodation.



**MARMALADE LANE  
CAMBRIDGE**

**Land Owner**  
Cambridge City Council

**Developers**  
TOWN  
Trivselhus

**Cambridge: Finalist of the AoU  
Great Town Award**

*Marmalade Lane is a co-housing scheme of 42-energy-efficient homes in Orchard Park, Cambridge. The site was identified for co-housing by Cambridge City Council and the group that formed around it appointed developers TOWN and Trivselhus as partners. The scheme uses TOWN's custom-build approach allowing residents to customise their*

*units within a set of parameters. It includes a common house with dining room for communal meals, as well as laundry facilities and guest bedrooms, and a large shared garden for food-growing and play. It has won several awards achieved in three distinct areas - sustainable housing, custom build and co-housing.*

---

#### **4.4 Reform to the Private Rented Sector**

A major cause of homelessness is eviction from the Private Rented Sector, often because the rent has gone up and can no longer be afforded. A growing part of the private rented sector is becoming effectively 'slum' housing for poor people. Small amounts of housing grants are now becoming available, but in recent years there has been no grant for social rent. The small amount of new social rent and the dependence on open market sales is slowing delivery of new affordable homes. In a period of changing lifestyles, where work, play, and living are starting to merge in a number of sectors it may be time to encourage employers to provide rental housing to workers close by, as part of a campus, and / or to mix employment and living. This could be tailored to the income levels of the employees and simultaneously reduce expenses like travel for employees.

#### **4.5 New housing grants**

As we have outlined elsewhere in this report, local authorities are now beginning to provide new homes again through Local Housing Companies and joint ventures, and the government's relaxation of borrowing rules is very welcome and will enable the scale of this to increase substantially. However Right to Buy leaves many local authorities concerned about the potential loss of new homes. Provision by the government of substantial levels of housing grant for investment in new social housing would provide a better form of investment than continuing subsidy through housing benefit, plus all of the extra costs of supporting vulnerable or homeless households.

#### **4.6 Capturing land value uplift to fund genuinely affordable housing**

Having pegged land values at existing-use levels, capturing the rise in land values can provide genuinely affordable housing (at social rents or equivalents) as part of mixed developments with homes of differing tenures spread throughout. This can reduce the need to set aside land for 'affordable housing' and instead cater for a much wider group of people such as key workers, first time buyers, down-sizers, the elderly and so-on.

#### **4.7 Revisit Cooperatives, co-ownership and other forms of development**

Pilot projects on government or council owned land should be encouraged to enable both individuals and groups, co-ownership and co-operatives to design and build housing to suit specific needs that address a 21<sup>st</sup> century lifestyle. A good example is Springhill Co-housing in Stroud and Ashley Vale in Bristol (page 27) – both were finalists in the Urbanism Awards.

Lessons can be learnt from Zurich, where cooperatives are very involved in providing accommodation that is affordable, accessible and suitable for 21<sup>st</sup> century city living, despite the housing market in Zurich being very expensive. The vacancy rate in Zurich is very low and, finding a space to live is hard. Yet rents only rose by 13 per cent between 2004 and 2013. Some 45 per cent of households are occupied by a single person, and the average living area is 35sqm per person, with 39sqm in not-for-profit housing compared with 53sqm in private housing. In one of the most expensive and desirable cities to live in the world,



On this page © London Road via Flickr

## **GOLDSMITH STREET NORWICH**

**Land Owner / Developer**  
Norwich City Council

**Architects**  
Mikhail Riches / Cathy Hawley

*The city of Norwich held an international RIBA Competition in 2008 to select architects and the right scheme for the site. After development had been on hold since the financial crash, the city decided to develop the site of 100 new homes, with about 50 individual houses and 50 flats. The design seeks to re-introduce streets and houses in an area of the city*

*which is otherwise dominated by 20th century blocks of flats. The scheme is dense and low rise, and is low-carbon and certified Passivhaus. The scheme won the 2019 RIBA Stirling Prize for the approach to design of social housing that is generous in terms of quality, with individual details and overall planning receiving attention to long-term durability.*



---

cooperative forms of housing have been used for over a century to enable a wider range of people to access affordable housing, often enlivened by commercial ground floor uses.

#### **4.9 Back Community Development Trusts and other new forms of stewardship**

Enable house builders to diversify to provide greater stewardship over the long term, similar to London's Great Estates. Such a move would encourage better public realm, better quality of housing and better 'place-making'; in other words, the right dwelling in the right place for the right length of time. For this to happen it needs ambition, brokerage and the ability for public and private sectors to work more closely together, with continuity and consistency of approach over time: the ABC of successful place-making. Where council adoption schemes or Section 106 agreements are failing, the role of Community Development Trusts in estate management merits exploration, especially as this could help change behaviour and overcome growing problems such as isolation on the part of older people or young mothers.

## **5. Conclusion**

The AoU believes that creating places in which people want to live, as this report has sought to show, involves far more than just constructing more homes. Rather, it is about building many more great neighbourhoods.

There is quite enough research to show what is wrong, and enough good examples both in the UK and abroad to provide the inspiration for a different approach. If we are to fix the broken housing market, and establish a new, more responsive and integrated approach, we must experiment with different ideas that have been shown to work. So by starting with spatial growth plans, using development corporations to mobilise land and infrastructure investment, raising private finance through bonds and various forms of trust, we can provide the serviced sites needed for a multiplicity of builders, catering for diverse markets. The government should pilot these aspects, especially within the Northern Powerhouse and Oxford to Cambridge arc, to test these issues before rolling out new policies.

The government and developers of all shapes and sizes should be building for both the environment *and* people. Reducing the environmental footprint of the building industry through regulation, individual properties through design and the occupiers through wider policy decision-making is of paramount importance as we prepare to face up to our changing climate. We urgently need a wide range of new approaches to support the independence of our ageing population, by building desirable specialist and general needs

---



## **HOMES FOR CHANGE, HULME, MANCHESTER**

### **Developers**

Homes for Change,  
Guinness Trust

### **Architects**

MBLC

### **Hulme: Finalist of the AoU Great Neighbourhood Award**

The Homes for Change scheme was developed by a housing co-op and includes 75 apartments along with a range of creative workspace, artists' studios, a café and even a theatre managed by a sister coop called Work for Change. The co-op developed the scheme as part of the Hulme City Challenge with their development partners the Guinness Trust working with the Architect MBLC. The scheme was conceived as a 'lifeboat' for people who had lived in the old high-rise and deck-access Hulme who feared that the redevelopment would destroy the creative community that had thrived there. It is indeed designed as a deck access block around a courtyard garden but with a door entry system that makes the decks private (unlike the old Hulme). Hulme was a finalist of the 2016 AoU Great Neighbourhood award.



---

homes to encourage more to downsize, including shared equity and affordable options for those with insufficient equity. This will bring benefits of freeing up family homes and reducing the cost burden on care and health services of older people who are inappropriately housed.

There should be action from government to shift planning as a profession away from development control towards a 'city planning' or 'urbanist' role that would actively guide and enable appropriate development in appropriate locations. An integrated approach to thinking about connectivity and movement, appropriate mechanisms and enabling policies to promote new ways of doing things is desperately required, whether this relates to improving design, facilitating new forms of venture, reducing the price of land and built development or promoting resilience.

The case for not only greatly expanding the supply of new housing but also making it more affordable is now so overwhelming that the search will be on for ways of building capacity. The Academy of Urbanism, through its 14-year-old Awards programme, has identified a wide range of good practice, from large European cities to small British towns. They provide a rich source of evidence, and, for example, were used to identify 13 sets of case studies for Shelter's Housing Commission. While the context can be very different, there are surprising similarities in the process used by the most successful towns and cities, for example in identifying the best locations and assembling the necessary land. With fresh interest in how to create beautiful places and also in what local authorities can do to play a

more proactive role, we hope that time will be taken to learn from those who have won or been nominated for awards, so that best practice is replicated much more widely.

**The Academy of Urbanism looks forward to working with the government and its agencies to repair the broken housing market and to introduce applicable strategies and mechanisms from exemplars both in the UK and abroad.**

## 6. Appendix

---

### 6.1 The 12 Guiding Principles of The Freiburg Charter

#### Spatial

- I Diversity, Safety and Tolerance
- II City of Neighbourhoods
- III City of Short Distances
- IV Public Transport & Density

#### Content

- V Education, Science & Culture
- VI Industry & Jobs
- VII Nature & Environment
- VIII Design Quality

#### Process

- IX Long-term Vision
- X Communication & Participation
- XI Reliability, Obligation & Fairness
- XII Co-operation & Partnership

<https://www.academyofurbanism.org.uk/freiburg-charter>

### 6.2 The Academy of Urbanism Manifesto

1. Successful urbanism is the result of a collective vision, realised through creative and enduring relationships between the community, government, developers and professionals involved in its design, delivery, governance and maintenance.
  2. The culture or cultures of the people and the ecology of the place must be expressed at a human scale and through both physical and social structures.
  3. The identity, diversity and full potential of the community must be supported spiritually, physically and visually to sustain a sense of collective ownership, belonging and civic pride.
  4. Vibrant streets and spaces, defined by their surrounding buildings and with their own distinct character, should form a coherent interconnected network of places that support social interaction and display a hierarchy of private, commercial and civil functions.
  5. There must be a permeable street network with pedestrian priority that gives maximum freedom of movement and a good choice of means of transport.
  6. Essential activities must be within walking distance and there should be a concentration of activity around meeting places.
  7. Places must provide a diversity of functions, tenure, facilities and services; have a mix of building designs and types; and include a variety of appropriately scaled districts and neighbourhoods.
  8. The social, cultural and economic needs of all inhabitants must be capable of being met without detriment to the quality of the lives of others.
  9. Security should be achieved by organising the urban environment in ways that encourage people to act in a civil and responsible manner.
  10. The pedestrian environment should be closely associated with active frontages at street level and there should be an appropriate intensity of use in all areas at all times.
  11. The design of spaces and buildings should be influenced by their context and seek to enhance local character and heritage whilst simultaneously responding to current-day needs, changes in society and cultural diversity.
  12. The public realm and civil institutions must be supported and protected by sound and inclusive processes that respond to the local community and changing economic and social conditions.
  13. Decision-making for the ongoing development and management of the urban fabric must engage stakeholders and the local community through public participation.
  14. Diverse, accessible, affordable and active villages, towns and cities will encourage successful commercial activity, promote prosperity and support the well being of their inhabitants.
  15. New and existing places must respect, enhance and respond to their local topography, geology and climate and connect to the natural environment within and around them.
  16. Urban parks and other landscaped areas should provide space for recreation, encourage biodiversity and help support a balanced environment.
  17. New urban forms should be capable of adaptation over time to meet changing needs and to promote the continued use of existing resources, including the built environment.
  18. The built environment must seek to minimise the use of carbon-based products, energy and non-renewable resources.
-

**Better housing for the 21st century**

The Academy of Urbanism  
70 Cowcross Street  
London  
EC1M 6EJ

[info@academyofurbanism.org.uk](mailto:info@academyofurbanism.org.uk)  
+44 (0) 20 7251 8777  
@theAoU

For further information please contact  
Stephen Gallagher  
Director of Engagement  
[sg@academyofurbanism.org.uk](mailto:sg@academyofurbanism.org.uk)  
+44 (0) 20 7251 8777