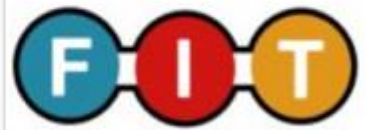


TRANSPORT FOR NEW HOMES



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Foundation for
Integrated Transport



How Transport for New Homes started.

‘New homes, new communities...vibrant places, healthy, low carbon, local, green, self-contained, walkable and accessible with public transport...’

Fine words...but what are we building in real life? Let's visit, talk to residents, take photographs and find out.

We initially obtained funding from the Foundation for Integrated Transport.

Let's see what is actually being built.





We visited a mix of
over twenty
greenfield
developments and
urban regeneration
projects in England.

Kidbrooke, SE London



We also went to the Netherlands to see new housing developments and heard how the planners, rather than developers, led the way. New local centres had lots of shops and places to eat, with new municipal and community provision. Out of town supermarkets were banned in the Netherlands in the 1970s because of their likely effect on town centres.

Back in England things were very different in terms of greenfield development. Local centres were hard to establish and community services limited. Nearly all places were all about driving. We tried getting to developments without a car. This was difficult and sometimes impossible.



When it came to greenfield development in England,
we were struck in our visits by one important
aspect...





This was just how much places were shaped by the car.

With 2 or 3 cars per home, it was not uncommon for 40% of the residential streets to be tarmac, with parking, driveways, roads and junctions taking up much space. Destinations such as 'local centres' and employment were generally built around the car, too – for example a supermarket and a large car park would be off a major road rather than within the estate.

The very small gardens and greenery
were especially marked.






More often than not, new development was associated a new link road, bypass or section of ring road. Big roads and roundabouts became the skeleton upon which to build the new area. Car-based sprawl was then built in – this then catalysed the ‘doughnut effect’ whereby town centre functions moved to fringe of town locations, including offices, leisure, residential accommodation for the elderly, eateries and so on.

An aerial photograph of a town. In the foreground, there is a large, modern building with a flat roof and several skylights, possibly a school or community center. Behind it, a wide, multi-lane road runs horizontally. To the left of the road, there is a new residential development with several rows of houses, mostly with red-tiled roofs. To the right of the road, there is an older part of the town with more varied building styles. In the background, there are more houses and some open land. The overall scene shows a mix of old and new urban development.

Other themes:

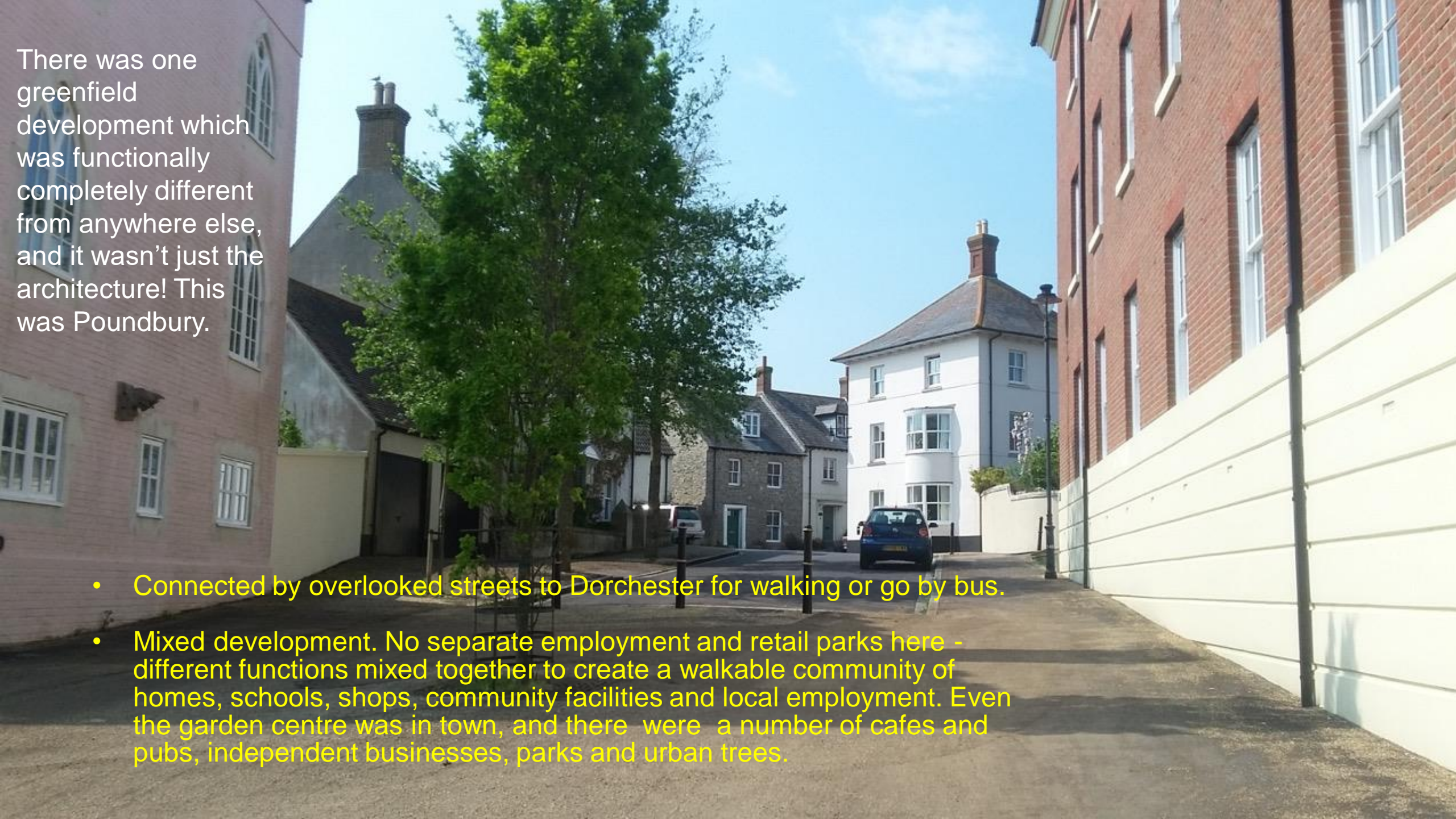
- Few places to walk or cycle to within or from the new development. Local 'round the corner' facilities very limited
- New homes often cut off by major roads and junctions
- Lack of safe and lit walking and cycle routes to and from the town centre – new area not integrated with existing town by streets but out on a new road.
- Fringe of town car-based sprawl threatened town vitality (or had already destroyed it!)
- Public footpaths into countryside cut off
- Stations too far away; buses often with long gaps and not through the new area itself



This was in complete contrast to brownfield sites developed for housing, where walking routes and public transport were all to hand. There was much less parking; some places had underground car parks. Good public realm and some modern interesting architecture.

There was one greenfield development which was functionally completely different from anywhere else, and it wasn't just the architecture! This was Poundbury.

- Connected by overlooked streets to Dorchester for walking or go by bus.
- Mixed development. No separate employment and retail parks here - different functions mixed together to create a walkable community of homes, schools, shops, community facilities and local employment. Even the garden centre was in town, and there were a number of cafes and pubs, independent businesses, parks and urban trees.



You can read our 2018 report about what we saw and our consequent recommendations on our web site at www.transportfornewhomes.org.uk. From the press coverage of our report we think a lot of people are interested in the problem of these cut-off car-based estates built in the English countryside.

Press coverage 2018:

Including (but not limited to):

- BBC News online (at one point ours was the most-read story)
- BBC R4 Today Programme
- The Guardian
- The Times
- Victoria Derbyshire (BBC2)
- BBC GNS (feeding into several local radio stations)
- Transport Extra
- Building News
- Transport Times
- Inside Housing
- Transport Network
- The Planner
- road.cc
- Local news sources including Yorkshire Post, Wirral Globe, Isle of Wight County Press, Uckfield News, Bournemouth Echo, Coventry Telegraph and more.



We weren't the only people thinking something was wrong.
Others were also on the case:

From the Policy Exchange Garden Village report by Lord Matthew Taylor:

'NIMBYs far too often get exactly the thing they fear: an ugly dense housing estate on their doorstep with added traffic and congestion on local roads, and council tax payers financing inadequate services. To make development more popular we need to recognise the NIMBYs have a point. We need to say so. And we need to do something about it'.

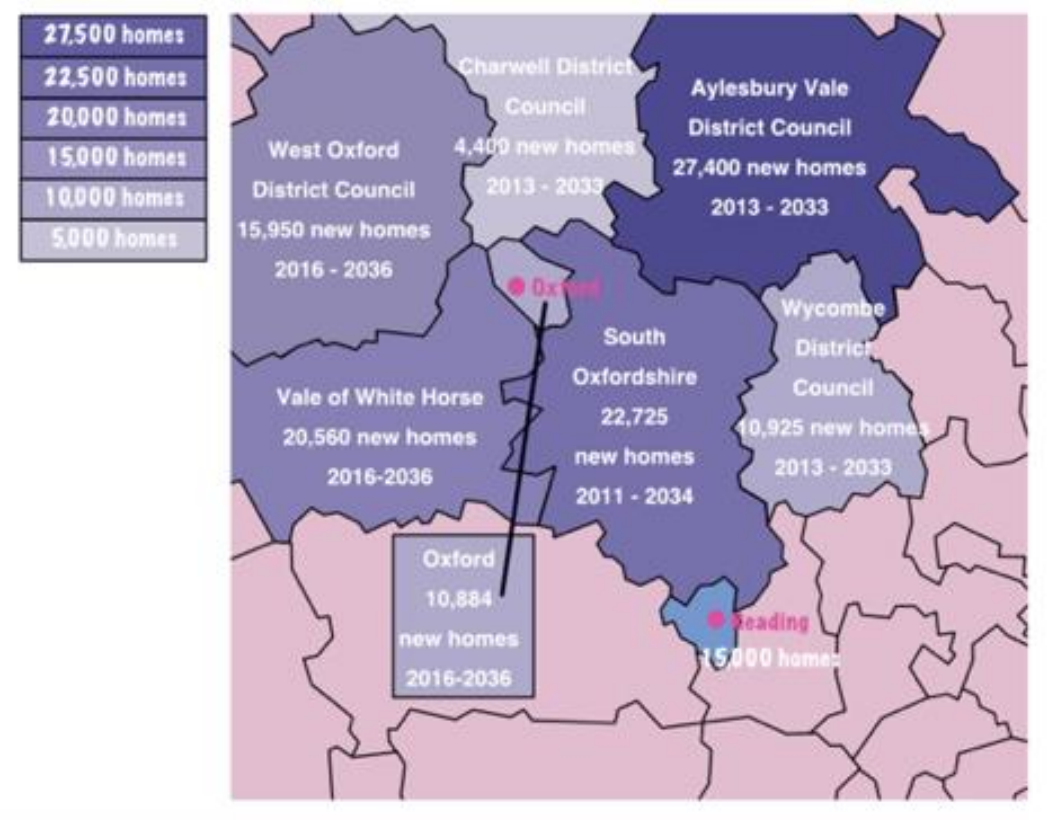
Garden Villages



Empowering localism to solve
the housing crisis

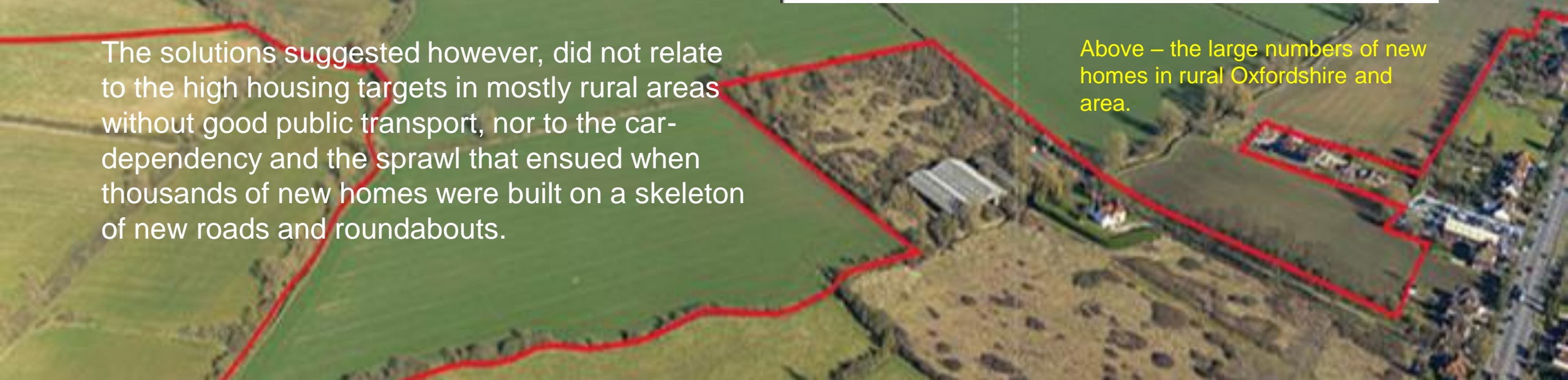
Lord Matthew Taylor
Edited by Christopher Walker





The solutions suggested however, did not relate to the high housing targets in mostly rural areas without good public transport, nor to the car-dependency and the sprawl that ensued when thousands of new homes were built on a skeleton of new roads and roundabouts.

Above – the large numbers of new homes in rural Oxfordshire and area.



Instead, the Policy Exchange's Garden Villages report thought that "land value uplift" was part of the solution, noting:

'an acre of farmland that might be worth £8,000 could be worth around £400,000 or more once it has planning permission, even before any infrastructure is put in place, with the value uplift captured mostly by the landowner when they sell the land to the developer'

'Thus quality design and place-making all squeezed out because the price paid for the land makes financing quality and services 'unviable''





"Town and country must be married,
and out of this joyous union will
spring a new hope, a new life, a new
civilization."

Ebenezer Howard, Garden Cities of Tomorrow 1898

Then, in 2018, The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government released their Garden Communities prospectus. They encouraged local authorities and their private sector partners to come forward and tell them how they could deliver the government vision for new garden communities. Some funding was available to kick-start the process.

The government made much of the idea of the garden community outlined by Ebenezer Howard more than a century ago, but there was no analysis of the more modern impact of the car.



But would the government's garden communities idea work? Would the newly designated 'garden towns' become the green and healthy places hoped for? Transport for New Homes decided to go and investigate and produce another report.

We went to visit some of the designated 'garden towns.

Bicester

Aylesbury

Basingstoke

Ebbsfleet

Taunton

Didcot



It was a bit discouraging to see that many new greenfield estates in garden towns were based on the 'old model'.



But in Taunton Garden Town the newly built places on brownfield sites were more inspiring, and green! Plus you could walk into town or to the station.

And the 'garden villages'?

Many seem still to be progressing very slowly with nothing built yet, but the language and illustration of vision documents and masterplans was certainly trying its very best to move them in a 'sustainable' direction.

But it seemed odd, considering the emphasis on a self-contained walkable communities, that most garden villages were predicated on a bigger motorway junction, a new bypass or link road because of the massive amount of traffic anticipated. Homes England had money to facilitate this major road construction.

MOTORWAY: Here we go!

M5 – new J21a
for Churchill and
Banwell Garden
Villages

M5 J9 Ashchurch
and Tewkesbury
Garden Villages
up to 10,000
homes

M5 J28 enabling
Culm Garden
Village – up to
5,000 new homes

M6 J42 St
Cuthberts
Garden Village

Larger junction
for Bailrigg
Garden Village
M6 J33

M25 Improved
J6 for S.
Godstone
Garden Village

M40 new
junction for
Bicester Garden
Town south of
junction 9

Larger junction
for M4 J11 for
Grazely Garden
Village up to
15,000 homes

M11 J7A new
junction for
Harlow Gilston
Garden Town

Larger junction
M20 J11 for
Otterpool Park
Garden Village –
10,000 homes

Improved junction for
M27 J10 Welborne
Garden Village –
6000 homes

More traffic capacity
for M25 J29 and J27
as 'mitigation' for
Dunton Hills Garden
Village 4000 homes

These are just some of the garden communities asking for new junctions or larger motorway junctions to cope with the massive amount of extra traffic predicted from garden communities and associated development.

"The advantages of the most energetic and active town life, with all the beauty and delight of the country may be secured in perfect combination"

Ebenezer Howard, Garden Cities of Tomorrow 1898

We could see that Ebenezer Howard's idea of living was not easy to translate into the modern world....



...even though the modern garden community offered a kind of utopian place.

This example is from literature describing the vision for the Spitalgate Heath Garden Village, near Grantham and in association with a new southern relief road.



A VILLAGE IN A PARK

IMAGINE a Village in a Park, combining the very best of town and country.

CONJURE a vision of sustainable reality, with new homes, a business park, community hub with schools, healthcare and sports facilities and green public open space,

ENJOY connections to the neighbouring Grantham town centre along a new habitat-rich green blue corridor along the River Witham providing pedestrian and cycles routes.

DELIGHT in a community woodland park created in partnership with the Woodland Trust, offsetting housing and allowing inhabitants to interact with and enjoy their surroundings.

CREATE a place where face-to-face social interactions occur on a regular basis.

MIRROR the spirit of the original Garden City movement, not simply to provide homes and jobs, but to create a legacy of a socially balanced community that integrates employment, living and social interaction to provide opportunities for all.

... AND DELIVER
3,700 new mixed tenure homes in close proximity to 110,000 sqm of employment space, 4,000 new jobs and opportunities for existing high value knowledge business companies to expand and new companies to grow.



One of the problems facing garden villages in the middle of the countryside in association with major roads, is how to get people to walk, cycle, and other sustainable modes of transport.

Public transport is hard to provide in rural locations.

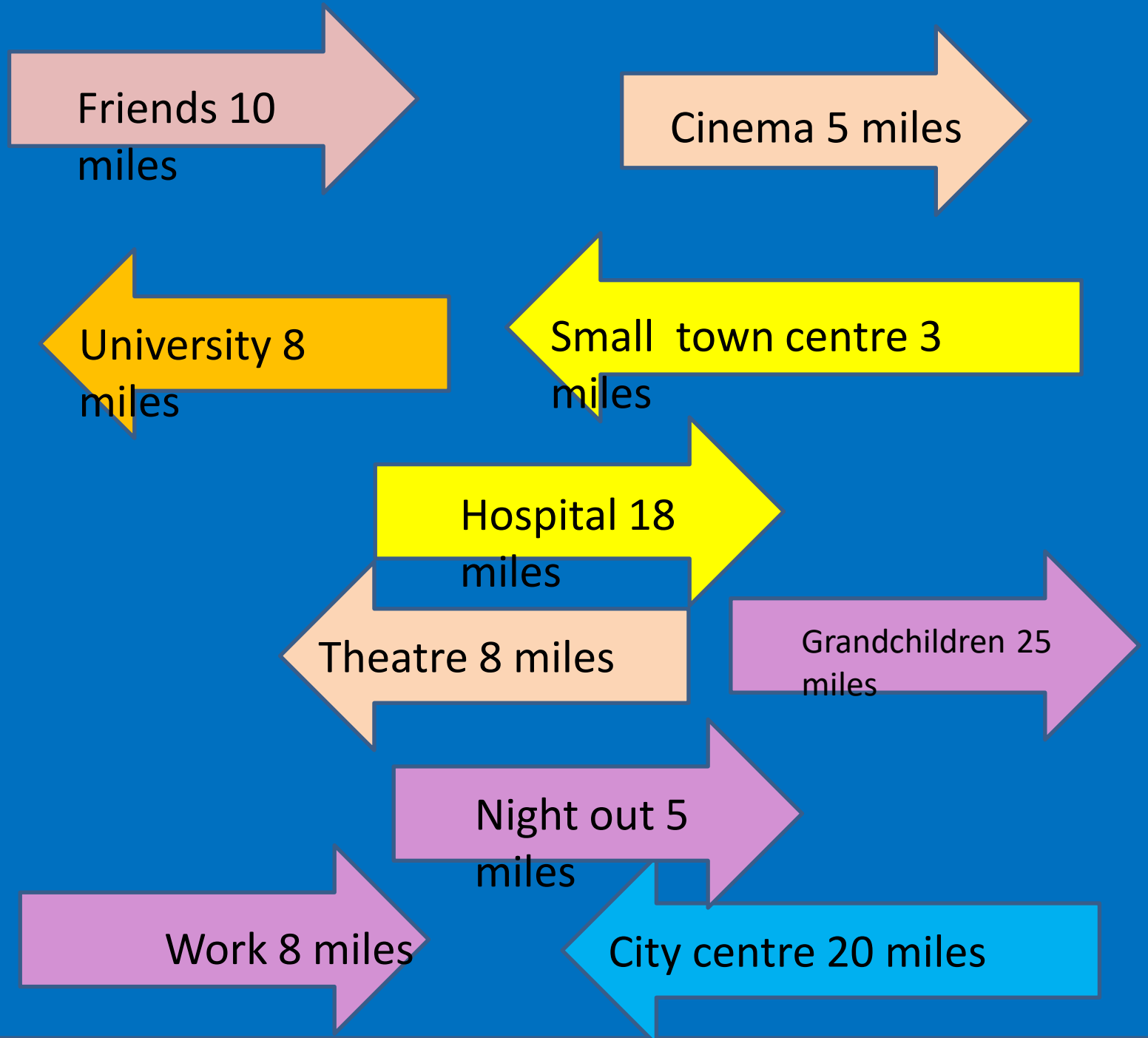
Now (in 2023) new ideas are being suggested by consultants, including electric bikes and scooter hire, car-sharing and car clubs, multiple car occupancy, accessibility scoring to inform parking provision levels, on-demand bus services. Green transport corridors over motorways and major roads are also in some cases part of the proposals.



“What will Culm Garden Village be like to live in, how will transport and mobility help it be the best it can be and enrich people’s lives?”

Consultants tend to now concentrate on sustainable travel inside the development, hoping for 'self containment'. There seems little talk of new metros or trams or their equivalent, reaching out to new garden communities, or serving quickly expanding garden towns. But people will want to travel!

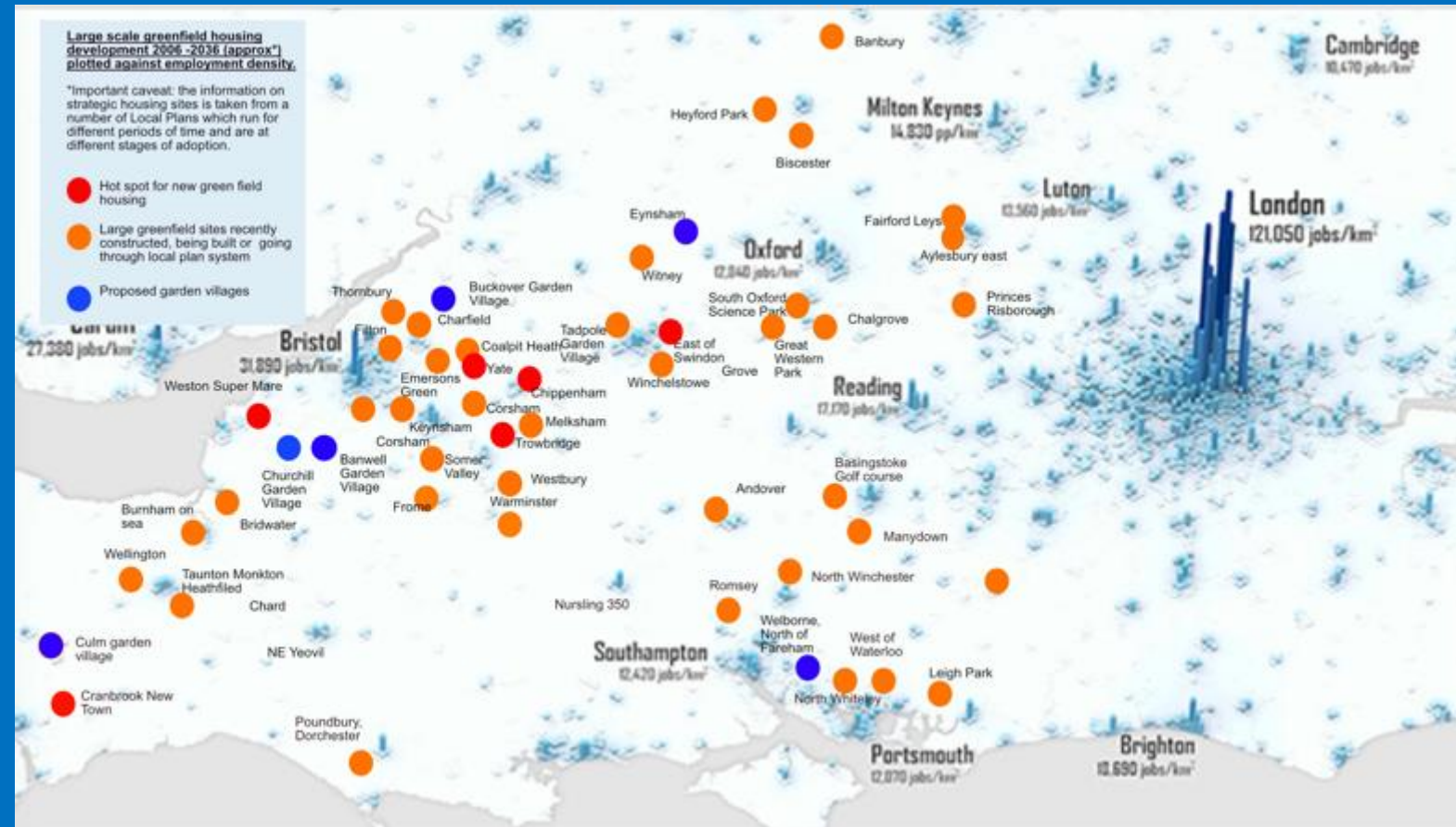
For those who don't drive or don't want to drive, the garden village may require a car to get out. Having to buy and run two cars is expensive...and choice is then limited if you are looking for somewhere to live.



Taking a step back

Taking a step back, Transport for New Homes has looked more generally at the problem of where to build and how to build in England. It's a complicated subject but our concern is that housing numbers dominate rather than properly considered physical and social geography.

When we overlayed major in 2019, new greenfield housing on a job density map plotted by Centre for Cities, a very dispersed pattern of development was very much in evidence across the area we first plotted. This seems to be continuing.

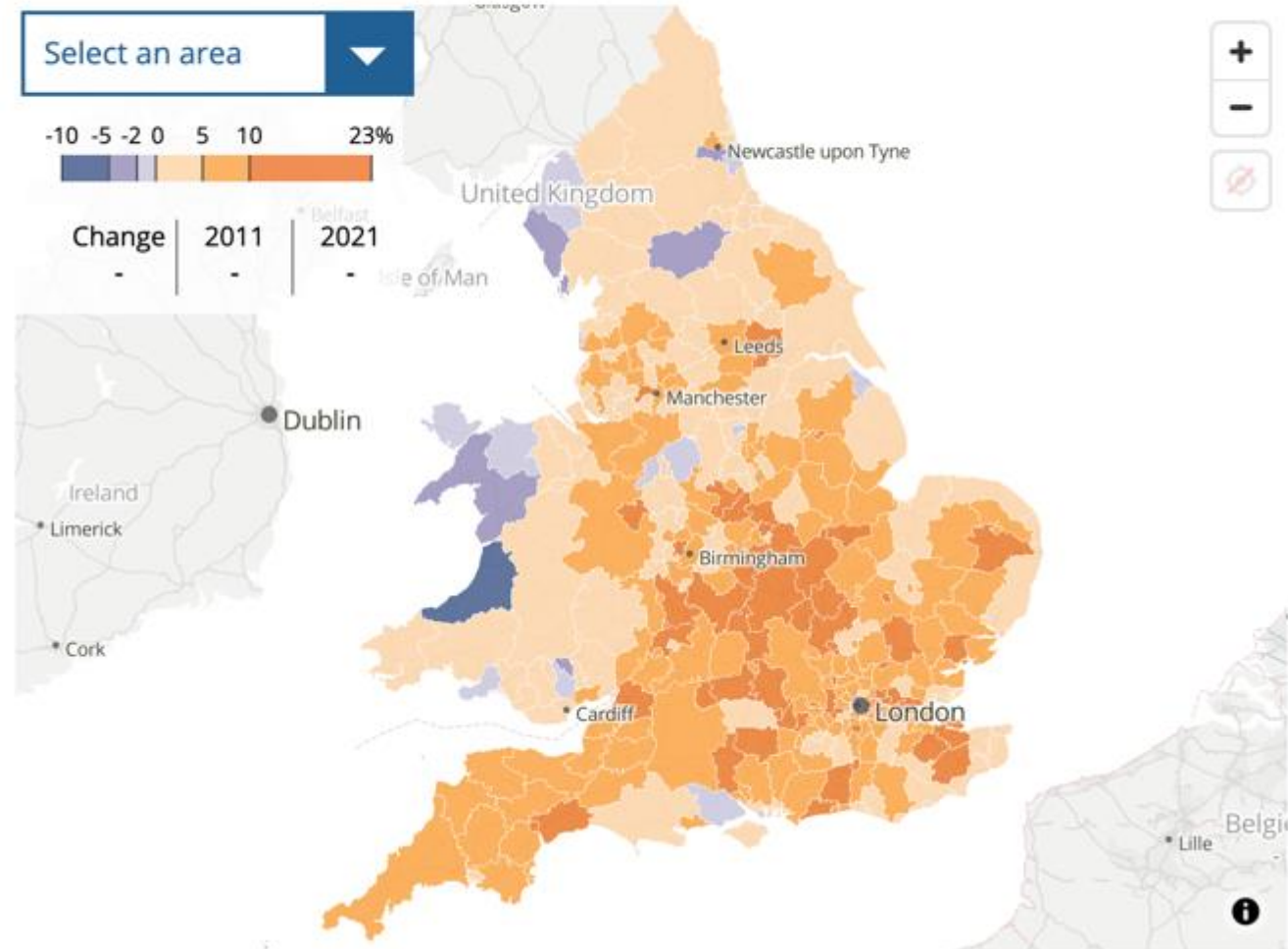


This trend to build away from urban centres can also be seen from the 2021 census report on Population and household estimates, England and Wales.

Figure 3 from the report shows population change 2011-2021. This is an interactive map and allows you to see just how quickly a number of rural areas are growing and a number of urban areas are not.

In these places, high housing 'targets' are often very high. Yet these are precisely the places where public transport is very poor, and where walking and cycling is often not practical. Not good news for sustainable transport.

Figure 3: Population change between 2011 and 2021, local authorities in England and Wales



Our concern is that at national level there seem to be a lack of a comprehensive integrated approach to spatial planning, especially with regards to transport, accessibility and carbon emissions. Much seems instead to be housing numbers.

This thought got us thinking about those housing targets and where they came from. From what we can gather:

1. It begins with population growth, in particular the national population growth predictions for England.
2. This is then translated to local 'household growth' numbers on the basis of local population trends – 'predict and provide' for each local authority on the basis of past trends. A 'baseline housing need' is calculated for each local planning authority over a ten year period.
3. An algorithm is applied to the baseline. This to increase the figures in unaffordable local authorities although there can be a 'cap' on numbers, especially if green belt is involved. The baseline may be also increased by local authorities and, it appears, by developers and their consultants.
4. Then – since 2020 – a 35% uplift is then applied for those urban local authorities in the top 20 cities, although it does not appear that there is a consequent reduction in more rural places.



5. There is a 'call for sites' by the local authority. Promoters and developers come forward with their sites.
6. Site selection is carried out as described in national planning policy (PPG) under 'Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment'.
5. As part of land promotion, developers do the master-planning and marketing of housing areas, demonstrating for example, how a range of adverse environmental effects can be 'mitigated' and new road capacity will be financed to unblock traffic jams.
6. On transport for greenfield sites it's mostly about traffic impacts or new roads to open up the land and even double up as a bypass. There are 'Transport Assessments' and 'Travel Plans' and 'Environmental Statements'.
7. Eventually the sites go into the Local Plan as 'housing allocations' including as a 'garden village' or as part of a 'garden town'.

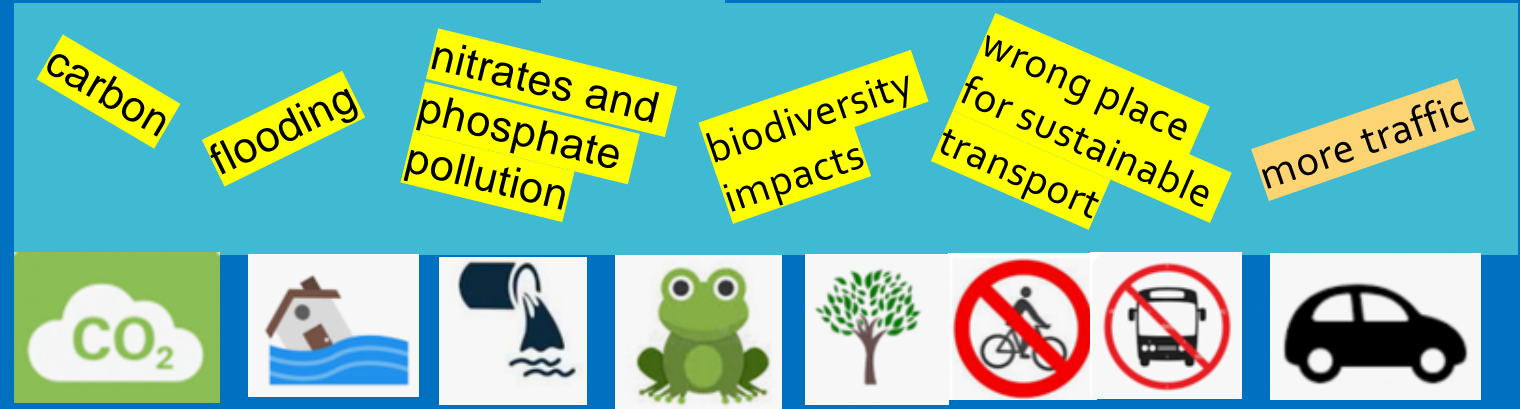


With high housing numbers – tens of thousands sometimes – in relatively rural authorities, ‘cowpat’ housing estates are selected to fulfill the targets. The ‘mitigation’ for building in these places does not come cheaply, and the sustainable transport is hard to provide. All the traffic is unpopular as are urbanising impacts on the countryside.

Upside-down geography!



It seems strange to let the housing numbers generated in the way described, lead the way to such an extent in terms of where and what we build. We decided this was a kind of 'upside-down geography'.



Transport considered far too late!!

What are we going to do? Can garden villages and towns work? Or is there a better way of building homes? Ideas welcome!