

Placeshaping: Learning from 2020



Future Place is a Partnership which unlocks placemaking potential at a local level. Through interdisciplinary expert advice and capacity building, the Partnership supports innovative design solutions, delivery models and collaboration. Future Place is delivered in partnership between the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), Local Government Association (LGA) with Local Partnerships, Homes England, Historic England, the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) and focusses the resources and knowhow of these organisations to advance future thinking on regeneration and placemaking.

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Foreword

2020 was a year of sudden and profound transformations. The Covid-19 pandemic tested existing systems and processes to breaking point while new behaviours emerged, and existing trends were amplified. An expansive immunisation programme is now being implemented, hopefully making living with the virus more manageable. However, Covid-19 is leaving behind a changed landscape, and society now needs to adapt to the long-term transformations that it has set in play.

If the shock of the pandemic has cut across all of society, its impact on places has been particularly stark. High streets and urban centres – whose retail-centred model was already under pressure – have suffered disproportionately because of falling footfall and the growing take-up of online shopping. Meanwhile, the cramped living conditions of less well-off families have provided further evidence of the housing crisis, while the role played by local neighbourhoods in supporting the health and well-being of communities has once again been demonstrated.

Into this mix came, in August 2020, the publication of the Government's "Planning for the Future" White Paper which proposes the most comprehensive reforms to the planning system since its inception in 1947. The sector's reception of the paper has been guarded and some proposals will need further development. However, the call for earlier, more meaningful engagement with communities – and the more strategic role assigned to design codes moving forward – are welcome ideas so long as they are rooted in a holistic idea of design and place.

Sitting behind these transformations is the longer-term issue of the climate emergency and how we respond to it. This concern is felt particularly keenly in local councils who are not just at the forefront of the fight against the pandemic but also spearhead the government's commitments to the climate crisis, health and wellbeing. In addressing these challenges, authorities must develop new strategies for delivering a holistic, place-based response to the climate emergency. This already complex task is made all the more challenging by the lack of in-house capacity which has drained away from planning departments over the last decade.

The Future Place Programme is delivered by the RIBA in partnership with other leading placeshaping organisations – Local Partnerships, Local Government Association, Historic England, Homes England and the Royal Town Planning Institute and a direct response to local authorities' capacity deficit. Bringing together leading organisations working with housing, placeshaping and regeneration, the programme helps authorities develop new place visions and accelerates existing projects by working together with local communities and expert practitioners in a targeted manner.

Developed in response to the pandemic, this report sets out emerging strategies for dealing with the placeshaping challenges which have been thrown up by the combined impact of the public health, economic and societal crises. Insights have been generated through a series of activities conducted during the 2020 Future Place programme – including blogs, roundtables, and interviews – and will help authorities respond to the new reality created by the pandemic.

As we look ahead after this challenging year – and begin to plan for life outside of the European Union – this report from the Future Place programme offers important insights for architects, planners and other placemakers looking to shape better places with and for their communities.



Alan Jones, PRIRBA
January 2021



Professor Alan Jones, RIBA President

““ The Local Government Association (LGA) is the national voice of local government. We support councils across England and Wales to promote and improve local government, and raise national awareness of the work of councils. Our ultimate ambition is to support councils to deliver local solutions to national problems. We support a locally-led approach to planning and future place shaping in which councils and the communities they represent play a part in how places develop. The LGA does this in collaboration with local and national partners to facilitate the delivery of sustainable, high quality places. Future Place is an opportunity to bring together the collective skills and resources of councils, partners and their communities to design locally-led sustainable solutions that support local ambitions. ””

Councillor David Renard, Chairman of LGA's Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board

““ The key to successful place-shaping is partnership. For any place, be it a town centre, a high street, a village green, a conservation area or park, there will be a wide community of people who have a stake in making it a success. The local community, businesses, the local authority, national organisations and countless other people all of whom will possess expertise, enthusiasm and resources that directly aligned can be the ingredients that create success. That principle of joint, co-ordinated effort is reflected in the Future Place programme which brought the key national organisations together around this one issue – making places better. ””

Ian Morrison, Director of Policy and Evidence, Historic England

““ Creating great places and well-designed homes where people want to live is at the core of Homes England's mission. Our ambition is to create new neighbourhoods that are well planned, respond to the context of their surroundings, complementing the local character or forming a distinctive character of their own and, most crucially, serve the practical needs of their communities. We don't do this on our own. Homes England relies on its partners to deliver the homes and places the country needs. RIBA Future Places has helped to convene a multi-disciplinary group of place shaping organisations to help support local authorities with their ambitions. By bringing different skills, ideas and perspectives together, the Future Place project has driven momentum, creating a focus and a forum to share knowledge and work towards bespoke and locally-driven solutions that respond to the unique challenges of each place. ””

Leigh Johnson, Head of Design and Master Development, Homes England

““ At a time when the UK Government is placing increasing emphasis on design quality the RTPI is pleased to have supported the Future Place programme over the last two years. We celebrate the achievements on the ground and the vital involvement of local government and local government planners in leading place transformation. We look forward to engaging all relevant stakeholders further to achieve design excellence in the built environment industry. ””

Dr Wei Yang, President, Royal Town Planning Institute

Executive Summary

Future Place is a programme that unlocks placeshaping potential at a local level. By aligning the skills and resources of its Partners – Local Partnerships, Local Government Association, Historic England, Homes England, RTPI and RIBA – the programme acts as a catalyst to advance and implement transformational models on strategic issues facing our towns and cities, and thereby helps accelerate the transformation of places to the benefit of residents, communities and local businesses.

A capacity building programme was launched in 2019 and rolled out across five places in England: Bradford, Gateshead, Greater Exeter, Great Yarmouth, and North Northamptonshire. During that year, a wide range of placebased issues were explored, including community engagement, heritage and innovation-lead town centre regeneration, densification and active travel, and the planning and delivery of new towns. 'These were captured in [The Future Place report 'Unlocking the potential of places'](#) and disseminated via the [Future Place website](#).

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic – and in acknowledgement of the need for local authorities to focus on fighting the virus in 2020 – the Future Place Partners decided to pivot the 2020 programme towards a content-led model. This has enabled the Partnership to address some of the trends that have been set in motion or accelerated by the pandemic, and to explore the emerging forms of practice that have been developed in response.

This report is an outcome of those activities and is intended as a resource for communities, local authority officers and other practitioners working with placeshaping. It brings together insights from activities run as part of the 2020 programme, including informal interviews with local planning officers and architects, contributions from experts and practitioners to the Future Place blog series, and roundtable sessions organised with leading industry voices.

The report is divided into five chapters which set out insights captured during this year's programme: Community engagement, Design stewardship, Healthy places, Sustainable placeshaping, and Town centre regeneration. Each chapter includes a summary of insights relevant to that topic as well as tips for how to apply those principles in practice. Tips are also collated in a fact box for those scanning through the report to quickly access insights and tactics.

Naturally, there are crossovers between the insights set out in the different chapters. That is inevitable given the interconnected nature of places and communities. Collectively, though, the chapters offer a snapshot of the state of places and communities after a year of sudden and profound transformations.

As we recover from the public health crisis – and brace for the economic crisis predicted to impact society in the short to medium term – the concern for the well-being of communities and for well-designed places has never been more important.

By collating insights from our 2020 programme in this report, the Future Place Partners wish to invite stakeholders from across the built environment sector to help us start the hard but necessary conversations about what comes next for the future of places.

That work starts now.



Design for communities

The pandemic has demonstrated the role that places play in supporting community well-being and prosperity. This was perhaps best illustrated by the informal neighbourhood support groups that emerged during lockdown, yet other examples can no doubt be found. Resilience clearly is critical to communities – enabling them to cope with and recover from unforeseen circumstances such as a public health or economic crises. But how can we design processes and places that support it?

Consult at the brief-setting stage

It is critical to engage communities at the brief-setting stage before any design decisions have been made. An inauthentic engagement process is likely to lead to poor outcomes and risks alienating communities in the process. At the same time, finding a balance between community input and professional expertise is critical, something which also should be built into the engagement process from the outset. This is particularly important when it comes to addressing more technical aspects of the placeshaping process such as those related to project delivery, transport infrastructure provisions and sustainability measures.

Engage all demographics

It is important that all the demographics in the community are consulted in the engagement process. Certain groups, such as young people, are not often enough included in conversations about how places are shaped. An inauthentic engagement process is likely to lead to poor outcomes. Engaging with younger communities presents certain challenges but can be constructively addressed through the proactive use of knowledge-sharing and co-creation techniques. Innovative forms of outreach, such as the targeted use of social media and special-purpose apps to reach certain segments of the community, can also be helpful.

Design for inclusion

Places should be for everyone – irrespective of background or abilities – and it is critical that inclusion is built into the placeshaping process from the outset. In addition to ensuring participation from a representative subset of the community in consultations, engagement facilitators must make sure that the consultation format is designed to enable conversations around inclusivity, access and representation. A constructive way to build the concern for inclusion into the placeshaping process is to invite inclusion and access experts to join consultations, and to use proactive forms of co-creation with local residents to tease out design principles that can help further access and inclusion.

Consider digital forms of community engagement

The new planning White Paper champions digital engagement techniques, and this emergent form of consultation is likely to play an increasing role in placeshaping processes moving forward. Digital engagement platforms offer new ways of engaging with communities and local authorities; something that has proved particularly useful at a time of social distancing. However, the platforms currently available cannot replace physical engagement wholesale – and it is unlikely that this will ever be the case. Placeshapers should therefore explore blended forms of engagement – drawing on both digital and non-digital consultation techniques – and aim to augment existing consultation methods, rather than displace them. [The RIBA's blog on community engagement to community resilience](#) discusses some tactics for how that can be achieved.

Strengthen capacity building

When developing a place vision, councils and developers must consider how the vision can support the gradual development, and progressive in-sourcing, of skills into the community over time. Some places have successfully invested in 'support ladders' for local youths into certain professions and industries. The professions and career path appropriate to a given community will be informed by the composition of the community as well as existing and incoming industries and these will need to be mapped before an approach is decided. Tactics for how to do so are discussed in more detail in the [RIBA's blog on Architecture, Philanthropy and Placemaking](#).

“Communities understand their needs better than ever, and have clear, strong ambitions for their sustainable development and long-term prosperity. Creating great future places starts with councils, partners and their communities working together to design locally-led sustainable solutions that support local ambitions.”

Councillor David Renard, Chairman of LGA's Environment, Economy Housing and Transport Board

“It is important to find a balance between community and professional input. Too often the placeshaping process is skewed towards one extreme.”

Simon Bandy, Strategy Director Local Partnerships



Foundation for Future London, S.Y.N.C. project by Art Clubbers CIC © Rosie Woods



DESIGNING FOR COMMUNITIES – KEY TACTICS

1. Consult at the brief-setting stage

Communities should be consulted at the brief-setting stage before any design decisions have been made.

2. Engage all demographics

All demographics should be consulted in the engagement process, including youths and other groups sometimes referred to as 'hard to reach'.

3. Design for inclusion

Consultations should be designed to enable conversations around inclusive design, including specific concerns of access as well as wider community aspirations.

4. Consider digital engagement methods

The use of digital engagement platforms is encouraged by Government but these should be used alongside traditional engagement methods as part of a blended approach.

5. Strengthen capacity building

It is important to consider how the place vision can support the development of skills in local communities over time.

Design stewardship in large, complex developments

Large developments such as garden communities move through multiple stages before they are delivered. Due to the nature of the delivery process, that necessarily gives rise to complexity and a risk of drift or watered-down design ambitions over time. So how can we ensure that clear place visions, once agreed, are translated into high-quality places? What are some of the key principles of design stewardship for large complex developments?

Define a clear vision together with communities

Developing a shared place vision through effective and genuine consultation is essential to delivering successful places and helps instil a feeling of ownership with local communities. Place visions should respond to the context of their surroundings, complement the local character – or form a distinctive character of their own – and consider how local economic and social life can be supported in the long term. The provision of transport and social infrastructure must also be considered to ensure that the community is appropriately supported and can thrive.

Ensure the vision is informed by technical expertise

While communities should be consulted, it is critical to find a balance between community input and professional advice. The inclusion of specialist knowledge is particularly important when it comes to some of the more technical aspects of development and delivery. Where the balance between community input and professional advice is drawn will vary from place to place, but it does need an affirmative decision early on. This will be determined by the purpose of the project and the outcomes required, but should include a clear idea of the end users and their needs.

Develop a comprehensive understanding of the place you are changing

Understanding local character and designing for it – for instance by using a specific material palette – can sometimes be the difference between the failure and success of a place. But while local distinctiveness is key, the concern for design must go beyond character. A well-designed place will include a host of other qualities, including the transport and social infrastructure needed to facilitate daily life, as well as green spaces for recreation. In a warming world, it furthermore is critical that place visions address – and mitigate against – the challenges created by the climate emergency.

Define processes for taking the place from vision to delivery

The concern for design should flow through every stage of development: from visioning through to delivery and post occupancy evaluation. To meet that challenge, landowners, developers and councils must ensure that appropriate quality assessment tools are in place to facilitate good design, and actively look to embed these into the conversations with project partners throughout the lifespan of the development. Among other things that will include masterplans, design codes, and design review panels. A proactive approach to monitoring and evaluation not only embeds quality in the development process, but also builds confidence and credibility around the scheme – something which, in turn, can help streamline the planning process. [The Designing new towns blog](#), explores some tactics on how to achieve this in more detail.

Monitor and evaluate the outcomes of development and use insights in later projects

Developers, architects and other placeshapers should put into place appropriate mechanisms to monitor design performance and user experience after the development has been delivered. This can be achieved the most efficiently by the active use of post occupancy evaluation on schemes, while insights generated in this way can be used in the design of subsequent developments.

The effective management and maintenance of places

Consideration needs to be given to the ongoing management and maintenance of any development. Steps should be taken to ensure that all elements that contribute to its success (such as the building and the public realm) are adequately maintained once development is complete. Effective management and maintenance strategies ensure that developments continue to function effectively, stand the test of time, and continue to serve and add value to local communities. What happens after a place is developed is as important as the development itself.

“Creating great places and well-designed homes where people want to live is at the core of Homes England’s mission. We are committed to showing leadership on design in the sector and are using our powers and expertise to drive up the quality and pace of development.”

Leigh Johnson, Head of Design and Master Development, Homes England



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DESIGN STEWARDSHIP – KEY TACTICS

1. Define a clear vision for development

Place visions should be designed to respond to existing and future spatial contexts, and to support local economic and social life.

2. Ensure the vision is informed by technical expertise

Communities must be consulted from the outset of the development, but a balance should be struck between community input and professional advice.

3. Work from a comprehensive understanding of design

The place vision should incorporate – but also go beyond – the concern with local character and palette, incorporating as well concerns for social, economic and environmental sustainability.

4. Put in place processes for taking the place from vision to delivery

Rigorous and clearly defined processes should be put in place to safeguard design as the development is delivered.

5. Monitor and evaluate the outcomes of development

Mechanisms must be developed to control and evaluate design performance and user experience after the project has been delivered.

6. The effective management and maintenance of places

Effective management strategies are vital in ensuring that developments continue to function effectively and stand the test of time.

Healthy places

The Covid-19 pandemic has clearly demonstrated the relationship between place and well-being, with some communities suffering disproportionately from the public health emergency and ensuing lockdown. How can we design places to improve personal and community welfare moving forward?

Plan for public health

Healthy places are the outcomes of clearly defined place visions and carefully considered implementation plans. It is crucial that public health targets are included from the outset of the visioning process and translated into proactive, deliverable plans. To ensure that health objectives are translated into outcomes that benefit communities, architects, planners and other placeshapers must be given the mandate to lead on the development and implementation of place visions, working together with public health experts and local communities.

Work across disciplinary boundaries

Cross-cutting partnership models, such as Future Place, can play a critical role in aligning diverse kinds of expertise in considered, proactive place visions, thereby facilitating effective forms of cooperation to support the delivery of healthy places. Healthy places flow from constructive cooperation between public health, social care and built environment professionals such as architects and planners. Only by bringing together the expertise and knowhow of these professions can such places be envisioned and delivered.

Include considerations for social infrastructure in health measures

Public health is a complex issue which encompasses physical as well as mental health concerns, and the concern for healthy places must therefore be conceived holistically. While health benefits can be ascribed to places that facilitate active travel or reduce emissions, the benefits of considered and well-designed social infrastructure – such as libraries, community halls, and leisure centres – must also be taken into consideration. The long-term impact on communities of poorly designed or poorly serviced places is well-documented, and it therefore is critical that placeshapers consider the social interaction needs of communities as they develop and implement their place vision.

Measure social value

To justify strategic investment in places, councils, developers and other placeshapers must clearly evidence the health benefits of the place vision. Putting in place clear measures for quantifying and benchmarking health benefits will help demonstrate the wider social value of the place vision, elucidating as well the return on the investment needed to deliver the vision. Measuring the social value that flows from a considered place can be difficult – and at the very least must include concerns for air quality, transport infrastructure, and social infrastructure – but resources such as the [RIBA Social Value Toolkit](#) provide a useful starting point for those looking for support.

Future-proof your places

To future-proof a place, the concern for healthy resident lifestyles must be aligned with other objectives including considerations for economic sustainability and climate change mitigation. There are in fact many overlaps with the concern for healthy communities and that of the long-term health of the planet. Planning for walkable neighbourhoods – and public transport infrastructure – will bring physical and mental health benefits to residents at the same time as it can help drive down carbon emissions. Approached in this way, the dividends of proactive visioning and placeshaping is paid out twice.

““ When designing post-pandemic cities, placemakers will have to bear in mind the simplest yet most important lesson Covid-19 has taught us: Healthy environments make healthy people. Healthy people, in turn, underpin economic vitality. ””

Aude Biquelet-Lock, Deputy Head of Policy & Research,
Royal Town Planning Institute



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HEALTHY PLACES – KEY TACTICS

1. Plan for public health

Clear public health targets must be included in the place visioning process and processes put in place to ensure these are translated into forward-looking designs.

2. Work across disciplinary boundaries

It is critical that the expertise and knowhow of public health and social care practitioners is overlaid with those of architects and planners to ensure the delivery of healthy, well-designed places.

3. Include social infrastructure in health measures

Placeshapers should take a holistic approach to the design of healthy places and include social infrastructure provisions alongside concerns for air quality and active travel.

4. Measure social value

Placeshapers must develop quantifiable quality measures to evidence the health benefits and social value of proactive place interventions.

5. Future-proof your places

Public health concerns should be aligned with other strategic objectives – including economic recovery and climate change mitigation – to ensure the future-proofing of place visions.

Town centres

The impact of the pandemic on already struggling town centres has been considerable. Even prior to lockdown, many were in trouble with vacancy rates steadily rising and footfall falling. But with structural transformations picking up pace, what does the future hold? How can places be adapted in ways that attract people and re-energise town centres?

Involve the local community in developing new place visions for town centres

To respond to the structural changes accelerated by the pandemic, some towns and cities will need to develop engaging new visions. A good way to start this process is to understand what it is about the place that works, and what doesn't and then work closely together with local communities and businesses on developing new and credible ways to celebrate what it is about the place that makes it special. This should include provisions for critical social infrastructure – such as sport fields, libraries, and other cultural spaces – which can boost civic pride and help re-energise overlooked areas over time.

Look to the past to plan for the future

New place visions should draw on local historic character – pairing this with insights about the community's aspirations. Building on that local character, the features that make places special will help town centres attract both people and investment. The vision from [Great Yarmouth's regeneration of their waterfront created from the 2019 Future Place Programme](#) – is one example of how this can be achieved. This principle also sits at the centre of Historic England's High Streets Heritage Action Zones programme.

Support local businesses during difficult moment of transition

The impact of the pandemic has accelerated the trend of reduced demand for retail in urban centres. Instead these spaces will need to reflect the changing needs of their local community, by including a greater mix of offers for a wider range of demographics. Delivering adapted and revitalised town centres requires all high street stakeholders to work in partnership to help ensure that change understand and reflects that local need. Whilst central Government investment is being made available this will be vital for many places.

Consider new uses to foster 'living local' spirit

The pandemic has accelerated the rise in internet use. This increased reliance on online shopping and the reduction in the need for people to visit high streets and town centres mean they must adapt and become places people want to visit. Mixed use town centres expand the reasons for coming into the town centre, whilst steps to develop and improve the quality of the environment make them more appealing places to visit. Pop ups and meanwhile-use (more on which below) can also be used strategically to transform the experience of town centres and test new ideas.

Test new ideas with strategic meanwhile-use schemes

Meanwhile-use projects in existing structures or on vacant plots can provide authorities and placeshapers with creative options for responding to increases in vacancies caused by the pandemic. Meanwhile use creates room for experimentation and can be a way to open up city-making to groups who are not normally invited to contribute. Places to be explored include empty shops, underused parking lots, sites awaiting demolition, and office buildings struggling to find a long-term occupier. [The RIBA's blog on How to make use of vacant spaces after Covid-19](#), explores strategies for how to achieve this in more detail.

“High streets that place heritage and character at the core of what they offer tend to be more desirable. Businesses want to be based there, people want to live and visit there.”

Owain Lloyd-James, Head of Places Strategy, Historic England



© Historic England



TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION – KEY TACTICS

1. Involve local communities in developing new place visions

Authorities and developers should work closely with local communities to create visions that celebrate the character and history of the place.

2. Look to the past to plan for the future

When developing the vision it is important to draw on existing local character – pairing that with insights about the community's forward aspirations – to build a credible bridge to the future place.

3. Support local businesses during difficult moments of transition

Be proactive in offering support to businesses and other tenants who are in temporary financial distress because of the pandemic.

4. Consider new uses to foster 'living local' spirit

It is important to explore new, more diverse uses in city centres, widening the offer to include cultural offers as well as shopping.

5. Test new ideas with strategic meanwhile-use schemes

Meanwhile use schemes can be used to trial new occupations of a space, boost existing activity, and engage local communities in the process.

Sustainability

The pandemic has challenged communities on multiple counts, yet it has also demonstrated our ability to take collective action in the face of sudden, complex challenges. As we begin to look beyond the public health crisis, it is critical that we plan for a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery. But how can local authorities and other placeshapers make the pivot towards engaged and purposeful climate action?

Invest in human resources to build capacity

Capacity-building, knowledge-sharing and upskilling have critical roles to play in the push to achieve sustainability goals. Investing in human capital is key to accelerate our journey to zero carbon and galvanise climate action within the built environment sector. To build the sector's capacity for delivering solutions to the crisis, it is furthermore important to break down siloes across disciplines and sectors. The climate emergency is complex and calls for truly collaborative and multi-disciplinary approaches.

Share knowledge and facilitate existing expertise

While capacity building is necessary, it also is critical to acknowledge existing resources, particularly within local authorities. Some authorities already have energy system experts, officers who have measured the council's carbon footprint before – as well as landscape architects and passivhaus experts. These practitioners hold critical knowledge in their field and about the local community they serve, but often sit across multiple departments and teams. This can at times make it difficult for authorities to take joined-up action. Enabling local authority officers to find experts in other parts of their organisation with shared goals can therefore often be a big step towards facilitating collective action.

Plan for low-carbon

Developing low-carbon schemes does not need to come at an additional cost. With proper training and upskilling – and by securing the inclusion of the right expertise at early project stages – low-carbon developments can deliver long term savings, contribute to community wellbeing and thereby reduce pressures on local authority services in the future. As part of the push towards sustainability, authorities and developers should look at options to adapt and re-use first before considering building and increasing their capacity to measure carbon performance. Carbon accountancy can support strategic decision making by helping placeshapers identify where they can have the biggest impact. This can in turn enable teams to obtain support for proposed activities across the organisation, thereby driving purposeful action.

Explore circular economy design principles

Local authorities and developers must explore creative ways of engaging with the climate crisis, including what is known as 'the circular economy'. Pivoting towards a circular economy is essential to accelerate the drive for a green recovery and can help create new jobs while protecting essential ecosystems. Circular design principles can be embedded into every product or process and at every scale. This is about designing for disassembly and reuse rather than demolition and disposal. It is about sustainable and smart resource management, ensuring waste is retained at its highest value along the supply chain.

Develop proactive adaptation tactics

In addition to reducing the processes and emissions that drive and accelerate climate change, local authorities, developers and other placeshapers must look to adapt to the changes that inevitably it will cause. By adapting to known climate risks – such as flooding, drought and overheating – they can help establish more resilient communities and protect the most vulnerable in society. This will in turn help reduce the burden on existing social safety nets, such as healthcare, and can bring cost savings to authorities and local taxpayers.

“ The starting point for sustainable development should be a joined-up approach which harnesses the different skillsets of the sector and engages communities in processes of genuine consultation and co-design. ”

Aude Biquelet-Lock, Deputy Head of Policy & Research at the Royal Town Planning Institute



Northstowe landscape, House by Urban Splash, CGI by © Uniform



SUSTAINABLE PLACEMAKING – KEY TACTICS

1. Invest in human resources to build capacity

Authorities and other placeshapers should invest in human capital to accelerate the pathway to zero carbon and galvanise climate action within the public sector.

2. Share knowledge and facilitate existing expertise

Enabling local authority officers to find experts in other parts of their organisation with shared goals can often be a big step towards enabling collective action.

3. Plan for low-carbon

Authorities should look to build their capacity to measure carbon performance across various workstreams, thereby allowing officers to identify where they can have the biggest impact.

4. Explore circular economy design principles

Authorities, developers and other placeshapers should look to integrate circular economy principles in their placemaking activities to drive a green recovery, create new jobs and protect essential ecosystems.

5. Develop proactive adaptation tactics

Authorities, developers and other placeshapers should also look for ways to adapt to climate change, establish more resilient communities and protect the most vulnerable in society.

Summary of lessons learnt

Challenges

- Development and regeneration must be grounded in strong place visions, informed by the aspirations of the local community, available built and natural environment assets, jobs and skills.
- Creative and blended engagement methods must be developed to ensure communities are consulted and feel represented in future place visioning processes.
- Measures to support physical and mental health must be built into the visioning, design and delivery of places – as must concerns for sustainability and climate change mitigation.
- New models for town centres must be explored to enable high streets to respond to the structural transformations accelerated by the public health and economic crises.
- Local businesses in particular must be supported in the transition that the economy will go through because of the economic crisis.

Recommendations for architects, planners, developers, local authorities and other placeshapers

- Local communities should be consulted at the brief-setting stage and all demographics, including youths, engaged in consultation and the co-creation of place visions.
- Consultations should be designed to facilitate conversations around inclusion, access and representation, but must also include professional expertise, for instance on delivery.
- Clear monitoring and evaluation processes should be put in place for large developments to maintain design quality as the scheme moves through the various phases of delivery.
- Frameworks for proactive collaboration across professional boundaries on the design and delivery of healthy places should be explored and put in place.
- The design of places should be considered as part of a wider jobs and skills strategy for local communities recovering after the pandemic.
- Existing expertise and resources should be mapped within placeshaping organisations to facilitate effective climate change mitigation as part of forward-looking development and regeneration.



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