

Place Building – Developing Homes & Communities

September 2025



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Photo Credit: Savills

Foreword

It is my great pleasure to introduce this summary report of the University of the Built Environment's *'Place Building – Developing Homes & Communities'* event, which brought together leading experts and practitioners from across the built environment to explore how place-based, people-centred and mixed-use developments can create vibrant communities. The University was delighted to host this important gathering, reflecting our ongoing commitment to advancing better placemaking.



As a leading specialist provider of multiple built environment specialisms, the University is uniquely positioned to help shape policy and practice in the built environment. We strongly believe in combining our educational expertise with real world research, professional insight and practical innovation in the built environment.

This event was just one facet of our efforts to make the whole sector 'place builders'.

We proudly partnered with Savills to more accurately quantify the benefits to residents of living in 'place build' settlements and are also working with The King's Foundation to create a model that will help others follow the principles that created the exemplar communities in Poundbury and Nansledan.

Finally, we have also been supporting The Stewardship Initiative as it seeks to raise awareness of the tax barriers to a placemaking approach.

We were delighted to have representatives from these organisations, amongst others, speak at the event and you can read more about their contributions in the following pages. I extend my sincere thanks to our partners, keynote speakers, panellists and all who attended for sharing their knowledge.

By drawing together the University's academic insight and the expertise of industry, government and sector leaders, we demonstrated the advantages of evidence-led placemaking and how it can be actualised. Therefore, I hope this report serves as a valuable reference in shaping better homes and communities.

Ashley Wheaton (HonRICS) (Hon FCABE)
Vice Chancellor, University of the Built Environment

1 Place Building – Developing Homes & Communities

Sector leaders underscored the importance of collaborative, community-focused approaches in creating sustainable and vibrant communities at the University of the Built Environment's 'Place Building – Developing Homes & Communities', event, which took place on Wednesday 7 May in Central London.

The event, the latest in the University's [INSPIRE](#) series, was co-hosted by the [Construction Industry Council](#), [The King's Foundation](#) and [the Edge](#), gathering experts from the built environment, planning and policy sectors to discuss innovative solutions to place-based challenges and best practices for scaling up successful residential house building and mixed-use sustainable developments.

PLACE BUILDING

Producing mixed-use, mixed-income, walkable and locally distinctive places that foster healthy and vibrant communities.



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INSPIRE

Influence for Skills,
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Education

Speakers: the need for, positive outcomes of and barriers to place building



*Dr Wei Yang OBE, CEO, Digital Task Force for Planning and Chair,
Construction Industry Council*

Keynote speaker, **Dr Wei Yang OBE, CEO, Digital Task Force for Planning and Chair, Construction Industry Council**, highlighted the scale of England's housing crisis, noting that more than 100,000 households, including 164,000 children, are living in temporary accommodation and that poor housing conditions cost the NHS £1.4 billion annually. She argued that one-size-fits-all solutions are inadequate and urged a strategic, long-term, place-based approach to addressing the crisis. Demographic shifts further exacerbate major housing challenges, with rapidly ageing populations in rural and coastal communities expected to increase by 25% by 2040. Dr Yang stressed that housing policy must integrate health, wellbeing and climate priorities, citing that nearly one-fifth of homes are in 'non-decent' condition and highly energy-inefficient. She called for joined-up, interdisciplinary collaboration supported by digital technology and advocated a shift towards circular economic models to deliver sustainable communities.

Dr William Bird MBE, CEO, Intelligent Health, emphasised how thoughtful community design and planning directly influence residents' health outcomes. He stressed that well-designed communities encourage physical activity, social interaction and engagement with nature, significantly improving overall wellbeing.



Dr William Bird MBE, CEO, Intelligent Health

Dr Bird shared insights from Intelligent Health's '[Beat the Street](#)' initiative, demonstrating that neighbourhood design encouraging outdoor activity substantially boosts trust and community connections, particularly in disadvantaged areas. He presented data showing stark differences in how residents perceive their neighbourhood's suitability for raising children, strongly linked to community layout and access to green spaces. Dr Bird advocated for designing places that foster regular physical activity, community involvement and nature engagement, asserting these design principles as foundational for achieving healthier, more cohesive communities.

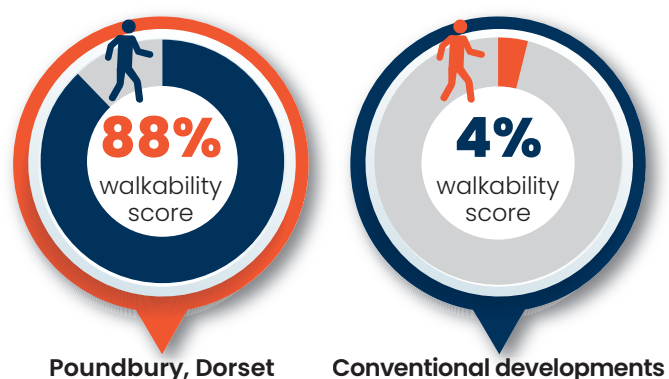
The next speaker, **Dan Hill, Research Analyst, Savills**, presented findings from [a joint Savills and University of the Built Environment study](#)¹, examining 71 new housing developments across the UK, each assessed using a comprehensive 'place score' reflecting key design elements



Dan Hill, Research Analyst, Savills

1. University of the Built Environment and Savills, *Health, Wellbeing, Education and Place Building*, published 14 May 2025. Available at: <https://www.ube.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Health-Wellbeing-Education-and-Placebuilding-Report.pdf> [accessed 15 August 2025]

such as green spaces, community infrastructure, amenities and retail provision. Higher-scoring developments demonstrated notably improved resident outcomes. Specifically, sites with strong place scores showed lower child obesity rates, fewer emergency hospital admissions and reduced premature mortality. Additionally, these developments exhibited better educational results, with primary and secondary schools consistently outperforming local area averages and significantly reduced crime rates. Dan explained that sites featuring robust green spaces, community amenities and thorough master planning particularly correlated with these positive outcomes, reinforcing the necessity of thoughtful design in future residential planning.



complex legislation and skill shortages. To address these, the Regional Building Hub model aims to establish regional networks, a digital knowledge hub and practical enabling services.



Ben Bolgar MVO, Executive Director of Projects, The King's Foundation

Ben Bolgar MVO, Executive Director of Projects, The King's Foundation, then outlined the '[Regional Building Hub](#)' model. This aims to grow smaller builders into larger consortia and to digitise and scale a place building approach which has been developed, tried, tested and refined by The King's Foundation over 30 years. Communities created via this approach are very different from those resulting from volume housebuilders, which are often monocultural and car-dependent. For example, Ben noted that the Duchy of Cornwall's development at Poundbury in Dorset had an 88% walkability score versus just 4% in conventional developments. Ben stressed the challenges facing regional builders, notably planning delays, lack of access to land, limited long-term funding,



Gail Mayhew, Co-Founder, The Stewardship Initiative

The final speaker, **Gail Mayhew, Co-Founder, The Stewardship Initiative**, carried on many of the themes raised by Ben, contrasting the UK's current housing delivery, driven by short-term economics, with a long-term 'patient-capital' approach. Gail proposed a 'master developer' model built on patient capital and integrated planning. In this approach, landowner(s) become equity partners in development. Mayhew cited examples such as Nansledan in Cornwall to show that long-term stewardship can yield better outcomes. She urged reforms: stronger public-private regional partnerships, tax incentives for land equity contributions and greater investment in up-front infrastructure, utilising institutional financiers, such as pension funds.

Panel discussion: enabling, realising & scaling up 'place building'

Following the speakers' contributions, **Dr Graeme Larsen, Associate Dean (Sustainability), University of the Built Environment**, chaired a panel discussion to examine how place building could be realised.

Opening the session, Dr Larsen framed the conversation around challenges raised throughout the day, especially the persistent hurdles in financing essential infrastructure early enough to ensure thriving communities.

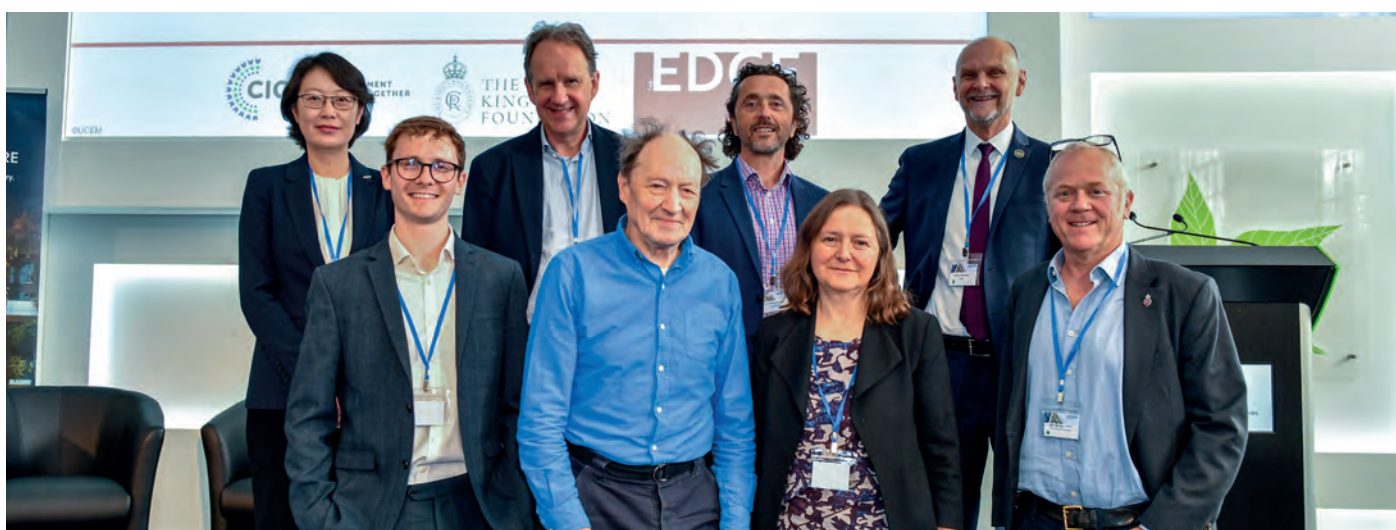
Ben Bolgar MVO, Executive Director of Projects, The King's Foundation, concurred, arguing that infrastructure should be defined widely, "*as everything other than the houses*". Ben noted that creating high-quality exemplars of place, such as Poundbury or Nansledan, required a long-term patient capital ethos that Gail Mayhew had referenced during her speech. Without such new economic models that favour continuing stewardship over short-term returns, developers will struggle to front-load the schools, parks, roads and social infrastructure that successful communities need. Fellow panellist, **Robin Nicholson CBE, Chair, Cambridgeshire Quality Panel**, echoed these sentiments, stating, "*the present economic model doesn't work. The separation of infrastructure financing from building financing is a critical flaw... planning is not the central issue*".



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Dr Elanor Warwick, Head of Strategic Policy & Research, Clarion Housing Group, stressed another critical infrastructure dimension often overlooked, namely the social element. She emphasised the need for both physical and social infrastructure investments, pointing out that true community-building involves funding not only visible assets such as bus stops or cycle routes, but also less tangible aspects like community initiatives such as tool libraries, bike mending workshops, skill exchanges etc. Elanor urged developers and planners to support "*the organisations which enable a lot of these things to happen*", highlighting the necessity of activities and amenities accessible to all, regardless of income or lifestyle constraints.

In response to Elanor's intervention, the Chair then pivoted the discussion to the nuances of mixed-tenure and mixed-income communities. Elanor explained that simply building diverse housing is not sufficient. She highlighted the complexity of social integration, urging developers to carefully avoid "*poor doors*" or relegating social housing to less desirable parts of a development.



Back row, left to right: Dr Wei Yang OBE, CEO, Digital Task Force for Planning and Chair, Construction Industry Council; Dr William Bird MBE, CEO, Intelligent Health; Dr Graeme Larsen, Associate Dean (Sustainability), University of the Built Environment; Ashley Wheaton (HonRICS) (Hon FCABE) Vice Chancellor, University of the Built Environment. **Front row, left to right:** Dan Hill, Research Analyst, Savills; Robin Nicholson CBE, Chair, Cambridgeshire Quality Panel; Gail Mayhew, Co-Founder, The Stewardship Initiative; Ben Bolgar MVO, Executive Director of Projects, The King's Foundation

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Building and thinking about the integration of place and people from the very beginning can't guarantee success, but it gives it a much better chance.

Good integration, she said, requires design codes to mandate truly 'tenure blind design', right down to minor elements such as the design of door handles, to ensure affordable and market-rate homes are indistinguishable. Elanor encapsulated her vision, *"building and thinking about the integration of place and people from the very beginning can't guarantee success, but it gives it a much better chance."*



Ben Bolgar MVO, Executive Director of Projects, The King's Foundation and Dr Elanor Warwick, Head of Strategic Policy & Research, Clarion Housing Group

Ben Bolgar added that mixed-use developments naturally support social mobility and community vitality. The King's Foundation's experiences of their 'place built' developments showed how *"social mobility can occur more easily when there's affordable workspace for people to do what they're interested in."* Robin Nicholson then reminded attendees of a vital truth: economic vitality underpins successful communities, noting, *"it's the economy that makes it a great place."*



Robin Nicholson CBE, Chair, Cambridgeshire Quality Panel listening to Panel Chair, Dr Graeme Larsen, Associate Dean (Sustainability), University of the Built Environment

The discussion then turned to the contentious yet crucial issue of design quality and stakeholder engagement. Robin detailed the success of the Cambridgeshire Quality Panel, which uses a structured approach called the "four Cs" (community, connectivity, climate and character) to guide developments. He also elucidated the essential role landscape plays, suggesting *"character is roughly two-thirds landscape and one-third architecture."*

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Asked whether the UK should introduce mandatory design and sustainability standards, Nicholson cautiously supported mandatory monitoring, especially for climate-related standards, but warned against overly prescriptive approaches. Elanor added that true community commitment, not just ticking boxes, drives meaningful change, sharing how Clarion's team engages local youth early in the design process to foster sustainable long-term ownership and stewardship.

2 Key Takeaways

The insights shared throughout the event reinforced the necessity for collaborative approaches that place community wellbeing and sustainability at the heart of residential development. With discussions ranging from fiscal incentives to community engagement and regional strategies, the contributions highlighted essential considerations for creating successful, enduring communities. The following 'Key Takeaways' synthesise these central points, providing a strategic foundation for stakeholders to guide policy and practice toward holistic, inclusive and sustainable place building.

Takeaway 1: Emerging Evidence Base For Place Building

There is now data to demonstrate the positive effects that 'place built' developments have on their residents, showing a correlation between thoughtfully planned developments and lower crime, better health indicators and even improved school results. In particular, the quality and quantity of green spaces, community amenities, retail, as well as the degree of master planning, are most closely associated with better outcomes.

This is a powerful message for everyone involved in delivering new homes. By investing in quality place building from the outset, developers and landowners not only create desirable destinations but also secure long-term social value for residents and local areas.

Although this evidence base needs developing, it strengthens the case for prioritising place building in policy and practice, providing persuasive arguments for investment and support from stakeholders at all levels.



Sites with higher place scores more often have less deprivation, lower crime rates and better education outcomes than their local area average.

– Dan Hill, Savills



Takeaway 2:

Importance Of A Holistic Approach To Planning Communities

The event underscored that effective place building is about people as much as the built environment – integrating health, wellbeing and education into development plans, rather than aiming merely for a certain quantum of housing, is crucial for ensuring the long-term success of communities.

Holistic planning creates more resilient, vibrant communities. In practice, contributors to the event advocated for developers and planners to work closely with local authorities and service providers to ensure every new settlement includes the essential services and opportunities that allow communities to thrive.

A key insight discussed during the event was the need to reconsider traditional approaches to infrastructure. Rather than being viewed as a physical necessity, it should be seen as an opportunity to enhance community life and sustainability. An especially overlooked aspect of place building addressed at the event was the crucial role of social infrastructure (i.e. communal spaces, networks, relationships and community programmes) that underpin and strengthen the social fabric of a place. Crucially, this support needs to be in place from when residents first move in.



The purpose is not about numbers; it's about health and wellbeing.

– Dr Wei Yang OBE, Construction Industry Council



Takeaway 3:

Tax Reforms Needed To Unlock Large-Scale Place Building

Current tax rules often disincentivise the long-term investments required to facilitate the holistic planning approach discussed in Key Takeaway 2. Therefore, high-quality, large-scale placemaking remains financially challenging for landowners under the current policy landscape, so targeted tax reforms are needed. Although beyond the scope of this report to explore reforms in detail, some examples of changes could include:

- **Land pooling tax relief:** Create a statutory relief allowing multiple owners to pool land without immediate tax charges. Under this proposal, Capital Gains Tax (CGT) or Stamp Duty Land Tax (SDLT) on pooled plots would be deferred until the final sale of homes to occupants, aligning tax liability with the actual receipt of proceeds. This change would remove upfront costs when land is consolidated, facilitating the creation of larger communities constructed across land owned by multiple owners, vital if we are to deliver new homes in sufficient numbers.
- **Eliminate double taxation in partnerships:** Adjust SDLT and CGT rules to avoid taxing the same value twice in development company structures. For instance, provide an SDLT exemption for initial land transfers into a joint venture company aimed at building housing. Likewise, treat the eventual sale of homes as if made by the landowners directly for tax purposes. This could be achieved by elective pass-through taxation, meaning profits are taxed once as capital gains in the hands of landowners, rather than first as company profits and again on distribution.

These reforms are deliberately targeted and low-cost. They largely involve deferring tax or foregoing a tax charge that is currently acting as a barrier to development and which often never materialises if the development doesn't go ahead.



Landowners face complex, punitive taxes if they attempt to remain involved in development, discouraging the stewardship approach that successful places require.

– Gail Mayhew,
The Stewardship Initiative



Takeaway 4:

Regional Building Hubs Can Catalyse Nationwide Place Building

A standout idea was the potential of the Regional Building Hubs (RBH) model to support small and medium-sized builders in scaling up the delivery of sustainable, thriving communities.

RBH can challenge the volume housebuilding orthodoxy, which all too often forsakes the place building ethos, by enabling locally led development built on stewardship principles.

The RBH model is being piloted as a platform – part physical, part digital – that brings together local builders, landowners, suppliers and communities to collaborate on housing development. By coordinating regional planning expertise and by sharing best practice, RBH enable small and medium-sized enterprises to construct ‘place built’ developments, which they may have otherwise lacked the understanding or capacity to implement.

Finally, the RBH model is scalable and replicable. With central support, a network of Regional Building Hubs could be established across the country, each tailored to its locality but linked through a common digital platform for national knowledge exchange.



Regional Building Hubs are part of a vision to create healthy and vibrant communities by coordinating a network of regional builders, landowners and materials suppliers with a scalable building system that guides their place building.

– Ben Bolgar MVO,
The King’s Foundation



Takeaway 5: Community Engagement Is Essential For Effective Place Design

Placing communities at the heart of shaping design codes and architectural aesthetics is essential to delivering successful places. Genuinely engaging residents throughout the design process not only fosters a greater sense of ownership and pride but ensures that new developments authentically reflect local character and respond to community needs. This approach moves beyond traditional consultation towards active community participation, giving people meaningful opportunities to influence designs from the outset, rather than reacting to pre-defined proposals.

Participants advocated for mechanisms like community-led design workshops and collaborative charrettes, enabling diverse local stakeholders (including residents, businesses and civic groups) to articulate preferences and design aspirations.



A shared vision for design is absolutely crucial and unblocks so much.

– Robin Nicholson CBE,
Cambridgeshire
Quality Panel



3 Conclusion & Next Steps

Three key themes emerged from the 'Place Building - Developing Homes & Communities' event, with each being a key tenet underpinning the creation of happy, healthy, educated and vibrant settlements.

1. Creating thriving communities requires a shift from short-term housing targets to long-term, place-based stewardship:

Developments conceived with a holistic vision, integrating sustainable transport infrastructure, parks, retail, walkability and mixed uses, consistently deliver better social outcomes for residents. However, the message was clear: these resilient, mixed-use places only emerge when planners, developers and funders commit for the long term, beyond immediate sales.

2. Importance of engaging with and catering to local people and residents:

By involving residents, civic groups and local employers in design, planning and building, projects gain legitimacy and social cohesion. For example, the Regional Building Hubs model was presented as a way to link small and medium-sized builders with local landowners

and communities. This underlines how targeted innovation (in co-design methods, pattern books or community-led housing schemes) can help the sector tap into resident insights and deliver more locally distinctive, affordable neighbourhoods that integrate housing options for all tenures and stages of life. Similarly, some element of initial support for community activities and organisations helps weave the social fabric of a locality.

3. Fiscal and policy reforms are urgently needed to enable place building:

Panellists urged the Government to remove existing tax barriers that discourage landowners from long-term partnerships (such as CGT, SDLT or IHT reliefs in land pooling and collaborative projects, desperately needed to deliver successful new communities at scale). Without such changes, the system continues to push landowners toward quick sales to major housebuilders rather than patient, community-focused stewardship. Indeed, current tax rules often inflict punitive tax outcomes on those who try to stay involved, discouraging the kind of stewardship-led approach needed for healthy, connected communities.



Building on these insights, stakeholders should consider the following actions:

- **Policymakers:** Reform the tax and planning regime, for example by removing the tax impediments to land as equity contributions. Pilot and fund Regional Building Hubs to test new delivery models and ensure development frameworks formally require long-term stewardship commitments from developers and landowners. Indeed, the Government's upcoming long-term housing strategy may present an opportunity for such reforms.
- **Developers and Landowners:** Embrace long-term partnerships: structure projects so that landowners retain a stake (via joint ventures, trusts or Community Land Trusts) and commit to post-occupancy management of community infrastructure and activities. Engage local people from the outset through participatory design workshops, resident advisory boards and cooperation with local housing associations.
- **Local Authorities:** Embed community co-design in statutory planning and ensure local plans incentivise mixed-tenure, walkable schemes that integrate schools, clinics and green space. Use planning briefs and local design codes to require developers to demonstrate meaningful resident engagement and long-term stewardship strategies. Support land pooling through enabling policies (e.g. Local Development Orders) and seek long-term infrastructure funding (from bonds or national levies) so new places are built with adequate utilities, transport and social facilities.
- **Institutional Financiers:** Provide 'patient capital' funding streams for place-building projects that can leverage wider benefits and invest in innovation, for example, through Regional Building Hubs, to foster a supply chain of local, sustainable construction firms.



Taken together, these steps will help replicate and scale up the successful 'place built' communities already established across the UK. By aligning policy incentives, engaging people and embedding the stewardship ethos, the industry can move from fragmented housing delivery to a true place-building approach. In this way, the sector can deliver not just more homes, but lasting, vibrant communities that evolve for future generations.

Acknowledgements



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The **Construction Industry Council** is the representative forum for professional bodies, research organisations and specialist business associations in the construction industry. CIC uses expertise to shape a built environment that delivers a better society and a better world, bringing built environment professionals together, sharing a collective interest in enhancing the industry for a greater positive impact and contribution to society.



www.kings-foundation.org

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The Edge is a built and natural environment think tank and network. It is multi-disciplinary in a landscape remarkable for its abundance of single-discipline institutions. Started as a means of creating a shared space between architectural and engineering institutions, the Edge encourages cross-disciplinary debate and campaigns for change that will improve outcomes for society.



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