

‘Patient’ development approach can prevent mono-use commuter towns

Organic development over time with invested landowners and continuing conversation with communities can improve placemaking, study finds

A ‘patient’ approach to land stewardship and whole-place design can create vibrant neighbourhoods and avoid the flaws of mono-use housing estates, research has revealed.

The report [Placemaking Two – a stewardship approach to creating communities](#), was researched and authored by Future Places Studio and published by Adam Architecture and UK law firm Farrer & Co.

It considers how best to meet government targets for 300,000 new homes a year and questions the prevailing system of landowners releasing land to volume housebuilders seeking ‘a quick return on investment in a single use product’.

Instead the report advocates a ‘patient and collaborative approach to community development’ based on the idea that community building takes time and commitment over generations, with a slower return on investment.

Under this scenario, landowners would act as ‘custodians of place’ with an inherent affinity with any place they co-create, and a social and economic responsibility for its future success.

Patient developments are evolved organically over time, and ‘in conversation’ with local residents, businesses and landowners, say the authors, bringing ‘regenerative benefits beyond their physical boundaries and unlocking greater financial returns’.

To support this approach, the study suggests that local authorities could establish private-public joint ventures that recognise patient developments as essential delivery mechanisms for aspirations set out in local plans.

Furthermore, councils could ‘offer up land, or provide it on a leasehold to the developer against a share of the profit, sales price or a building license model,’ avoiding the need for developers to make costly land purchases upfront. Affordable long-term funding from the government, such as the Public Works Loan Board, could help finance the approach.

The authors call for stewardship models to be at least tax neutral compared to short-term land trading, and to include other incentives such as tax exemptions and reliefs for receipts under lease arrangements, and capital gains tax deferral to a point of future sale. They say a more streamlined planning process would also be required to make the system work.

Turning to whole-place design under the patient land stewardship model, the report encourages the creation of neighbourhoods that are ‘local and walkable’ with a blend of uses that keep them alive throughout the day. This aligns with the post-pandemic trend for home working and the need for a mix of options for things like social interaction, cultural and commercial activity, and efficient public transport.

Hugh Petter, design director at Adam Architecture, said: ‘Gaining public confidence in an inspiring long term vision of a distinctive and integrated new place, and with convincing secure delivery of that vision (as opposed to the usual dilution post planning), can enable a more informed design process that is tuned properly to local need.’

Pedestrian-friendly communities are ‘inherently more inclusive,’ say the authors, regardless of age or car ownership, as is the provision of a mix of home typologies, tenures and affordable options.

The report notes that patient developments are instinctively sensitive to their contexts, ‘with a deep-rooted respect for local architecture’, which means creating site-specific pattern books to define street character, building typologies, materiality, etc, to ensure new development resonates with the local vernacular.

And in a move away from spaces between buildings that are purely utilitarian, the study proposes that movement networks are instead conceived as social places in their own right and platforms for serendipitous exchange and chance encounters between neighbours.

‘There is clear evidence that better-designed places can build financial significant value over time, far outstripping the returns that are made through the fast return on investment and volume housebuilding, while delivering better social outcomes,’ said Petter.

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Words: Stephen Cousins