

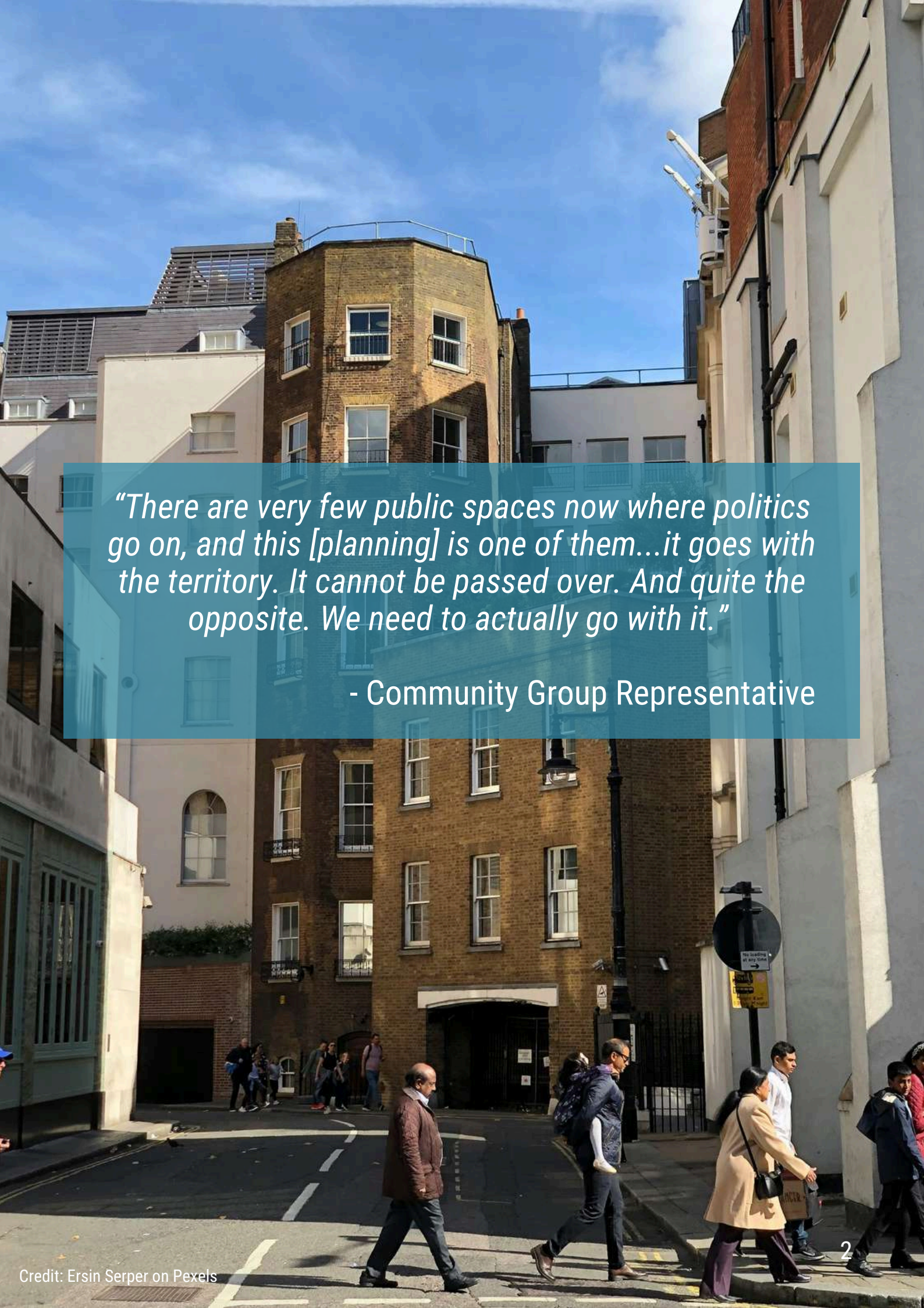
A high-angle, wide shot of a modern urban plaza. The ground is paved with reddish-brown bricks. Several circular stone fountains with water spraying upwards are arranged in a curved path. People are seen sitting on the edges of the fountains and walking. A tall, thin, green tree stands in the center. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

PLANNING WITH PURPOSE

A Values-Based Approach to Planning Reform

A high-angle, wide shot of a modern urban plaza. The ground is paved with reddish-brown bricks. Several circular stone fountains with water spraying upwards are arranged in a curved path. People are seen sitting on the edges of the fountains and walking. A tall, thin, green tree stands in the center. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

SUMMARY



“There are very few public spaces now where politics go on, and this [planning] is one of them...it goes with the territory. It cannot be passed over. And quite the opposite. We need to actually go with it.”

- Community Group Representative

Labour came to power in 2024 placing economic growth at the top of its mission-driven agenda for the next five years. Specifically, the Government is focused on accelerating housing and infrastructure delivery, with planning highlighted as both the lever for transformative change and the main obstacle to progress.

Planning is integral to realising the growth agenda. It is essential for creating economic, social and natural capital in the UK. Its multisectoral nature presents a real opportunity to tackle the complex problems our society is currently facing. However, it is no secret that the current planning system does not deliver the quality and scale of outputs necessary to meet society's needs. Moreover, distrust in planning processes and procedures also inhibits quality development from the get-go.

However, the complexity of planning stems not only from its bureaucratic procedures but from the competing values circulating within the system. They continuously tug at what planning should deliver and how – causing delay and lessening planning's ability to address long-term problems. We suggest that holistic reform must address the values that influence planning culture and governance.

Understanding what matters to key actors and getting them on board is therefore crucial for successful reform. Our Values-Based Approach to Planning embraces the complex and ambiguous nature of value circuits, engaging with 89 actors in London and the Wider South East. We do not shy away from the politics of planning but seek to deliver meaningful recommendations for reform by untangling the multiple competing values that circulate within the system.

In our report, we zoom in on three central aspects of the planning lifecycle - Community Participation, Land Use and Housing Delivery – to determine what a new generation of planning might look like and how we get there.



Community Participation

Credit: Sofia Marquet on Pexels

Labour's Plan for Change identified community participation in planning as a key barrier to achieving their economic growth mission.

They promise to speed up house building in the upcoming Planning and Infrastructure Bill by asking, "How, not if, homes and infrastructure are built". Effectively removing the ability of communities to object to specific sites, sparking concerns about the erosion of democratic accountability.

Keir Starmer recently sent a message to "the nimbys, the regulators, the blockers and bureaucrats" that "Britain says yes... whether you like it or not". This proclamation comes while simultaneously championing greater community power in the Devolution White Paper. The distinction between "communities" and "nimby's" showcases how different values seek to position local people.

Community participation in planning is often perceived as an obstacle to progress. However, it is a cornerstone of democratic governance and legitimacy.

Acknowledging the need to resource and deliver place-based solutions, we seek to explore where and how communities participate in planning and situate successful participation as a critical building block to increase buy-in, uplift communities, and achieve the growth agenda.

Top-Down and Bottom-Up Approaches

Community participation in planning exists within a delicate tension between top-down mandates and bottom-up empowerment. The distribution of power and the processes by which decisions are made and evaluated are at the heart of effective community participation. However, the Government's current plan to speed up delivery tilts this balance towards top-down mandates, potentially disrupting the intricate interplay between national directives and local aspirations.

The tensions between top-down and bottom-up approaches in planning governance are not merely a procedural challenge but a fundamental democratic conflict about power, representation, and legitimacy.

20%
**OF THE PUBLIC TRUST
DEVELOPERS**

Striking the right balance requires acknowledging the interdependence of national, regional, and local decision-making while embracing a blended model of democracy that combines the inclusivity of community-led participation with the accountability of representative structures.

Barriers in a Low Trust Environment

The current participatory system contains inherent barriers. These barriers – adversarial participation, legal defensibility over accessibility, and resource constraints – must be addressed to meaningfully transform community participation. Without clearer processes, adequate resourcing, and a shift toward inclusive, innovative engagement, participation will remain tokenistic and defensive.

Trust in the system is low, when it comes to large-scale developments, “just 2% of the public trust developers and only 7% trust local authorities” (Grosvesnor, 2019). “Critical junctures” for change occur when institutions lose legitimacy by failing to address significant issues. A fundamental challenge becomes how to (re)build a culture of trust.

As a study participant remarked:

“Mutual trust between all those involved – not just trust towards local authorities but also trust in communities and the political side of planning – is critical. The question is how to create this culture of participation and democracy?”

- Academic

70%
**OF THE PUBLIC TRUST
LOCAL AUTHORITIES**

When exploring how to build this culture, participants identified challenges throughout the participation lifecycle – upstream and downstream:

- Community participation in strategic planning can suffer from what participants described as the “black hole effect” – where communities contribute time and input but feel their voices have no real impact on outcomes.
- Who is engaged and how they’re engaged is a fundamental challenge. Participants discussed the over-consulted, consultation fatigued, and the “usual actors” monopolising power. A local councillor noted the incumbent advantage of groups who already live in a community and the importance of balancing decision-making to provide for “groups most effected” such as the homeless or overcrowded.

- Local authority representatives agreed that the confidential nature of pre-app exacerbated tensions between communities, developers and councils as it often presents a finished scheme for communities to review rather than to shape from the outset. This confidential process contributes to the perception that local authorities do not work in communities' interests as communities are not privy to the negotiation process.
- Across the private sector and community groups, participants felt frustrated and excluded from planning committees. While committee members often struggle to balance representing their community and adjudicating using the planning legislation.

"Is the planning system equipped to deal with things like environmental justice? [There's] not an answer [in the system], so how can we engage well?"

- Planning Association

- Participants noted that the future of community participation in planning increasingly hinges on the ability to strategically navigate climate trade-offs and prepare communities for the sacrifices required by a climate-conscious future. Yet, they do not see a way to resolve these inherent conflicts in the current system.

Towards a Culture of Trust

Community participation plays a critical role across various aspects of planning. However, the process for meaningful engagement remains unclear for both community groups and other stakeholders.

As one participant insightfully observed:

"We're constantly focused on outputs in planning. Yet I'm aware it is about us as a society, as communities. It's about legitimacy. It's about democracy. It's about policy. It's not just about the output of getting more housing, and getting stuff done. There's also this: people engaged in this process – in debate. It is part of what life should be about."

- Community Group Representative

This perspective highlights the potential for participatory planning to be visionary, laying the groundwork for a mission-driven approach to a better future. Rather than seeing participation as a barrier, it should be reframed with a focus on how the process builds communities, fosters a sense of belonging and ultimately shapes social and physical space. By fostering trust and reinforcing the role of participation, planning can better reflect democratic principles and ultimately achieve shared goals. We make the following recommendations grounded in the key concerns and values of stakeholders engaged in the participatory process.



Credit: Samuel Regan-Asante on Unsplash

1 Refraining from scapegoating community participation in planning.

Instead, **commission an official review to (re)establish best practices**, embed a blend of democratic mechanisms, and clarify the scope of stakeholders' participation, including increasing understanding of negotiable and non-negotiable aspects.

2 Strengthening democratic accountability in the forthcoming Devolution Bill.

Through the incorporation of statutory bodies such as **national-level public assemblies, evaluatory regional public bodies** in high-growth strategic areas and **local community assemblies** for continuous, transparent, actionable strategic engagement.

3 Adopting a broader definition of national strategic planning that incorporates community participation at a national level.

This definition would include economic, environmental and social spatial outcomes to **build a shared, actionable vision for the future** and support a mission-driven government at the national, regional and local levels.

4 Encouraging an iterative approach to strategic planning to investigate complex problems and provide innovative solutions.

Create a positive feedback loop based on lessons learned and provide space for an **open conversation on the pros and cons** of different options instead of relying solely on evidence-based critique.

5 Providing communities with the upfront tangible benefits of proposed developments

In particular, GPs, schools and other social infrastructure should be funded upfront through **Section 106 and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)**.

Land as a Resource

Credit: Erik Mclean on Pexels

While the role of land was deemphasized as a factor of production in the early 20th century, Labour's planning agenda recentres it as a key lever to kickstart the economy. It raises questions about how we get the best value from land with significant plans to reshape the land market. In particular, growing attention has been paid to land value uplift, capture and sharing as a key mechanism for financing long-term infrastructure investment.

However, when looking at land value capture, it is essential to consider a more holistic picture of the value that land provides as a resource. Indeed, by 2050, up to 4.4 million hectares (or 18% the total UK land area) of additional land could be needed to meet the diverse competing demands of the UK, raising fundamental questions about distributive justice (or how to fairly govern the wealth and resources of our planet) (Royal Society, 2023);

Given the limited supply of land, the Government is under pressure to fulfill society's diverse needs. In rethinking land markets, they should therefore imagine how key players can co-create value that extends beyond its monetary appreciation

Landowners play a pivotal role in shaping land use debates: understanding their rationales is integral to shaping market behaviour and to encouraging the pursuit of more progressive notions of land "value" through the development process.

Working within the current legal and political frameworks, we propose a nuanced approach to understanding land as a resource, exploring how various landowners value their land and how we might best facilitate their participation in value creation and sharing.

BY 2050
THE UK MAY NEED UP TO
4.4M
HECTARES OF
ADDITIONAL LAND

The Multifaceted Nature of Land's Value

The values espoused by landowners and the value that land holds for them are intimately linked to their relationship with land. Their sense of purpose as landowners determines the role that land plays for them – or its primary utility – and is key to understanding the trade-offs they are willing to make or actions they are likely to take.

The commodification of land as a good to be bought and sold often obscures the values underlying its headline price (social, environmental, symbolic etc.). In general, our findings reveal a multifaceted relationship to land across and within the public, private and third sectors. However, capturing and understanding land's multidimensional value remains challenging as there is no single mechanism for comparing value concepts. Indeed, decisions regarding land use cannot be collapsed into an elegant optimisation exercise. These decisions inevitably come down to important trade-offs and political choices.

Landowners across sectors are expected to deliver a set of public goods through their development schemes in line with the societal values set out by central Government. Study participants were in agreement that all landowners have a role to play in this regard.

Facilitating Landowners' Participation in Value Creation, Capture and Sharing

When asked how to best unlock “land value”, participants cited patient capital and the intergenerational approach of a landowner who engages with the needs of the local community as key elements for value creation. One housebuilder clarified that while financial value is the first value that should be generated, it is what makes more progressive forms of value possible.

However, several factors currently impede quality development and value creation. Participants criticised the complex, costly and time-consuming nature of current planning processes:

- Delays in local plan-making are a major brake – increasing risk for landowners and preventing local authorities from demonstrating their diverse development needs.
- The planning application process is a “painful” journey for many landowners. The cost of uncertainty often dissuades them from pursuing legacy projects resulting in “bare minimum” developments or nothing at all.

“Once you've lost the value of the things that really meant something to you and touched your soul, as it were, then it just becomes commodity.”

- Private Landowner



- Many public landowners have behaved similarly to their private sector counterparts in recent years due to their changing material conditions, selling off their land assets to secure much needed revenue.
- A number of landowners fear the public sector's overreliance on the private sector to deliver public goods e.g., affordable housing targets
- Some landowners identified vocal local minorities (NIMBYs) and planning committees as the biggest threat to development preventing planning permission:

"If the planners could start planning rather than stopping people trying to get planning done, you'd free up everything"
 - Private Landowner

- A high level of distrust is prevalent amongst many landowners in our sample. The quality of relationships and the level of trust between actors are fundamental to effective value creation – increasing the overall sense of ownership, legitimacy and deliverability of development processes.

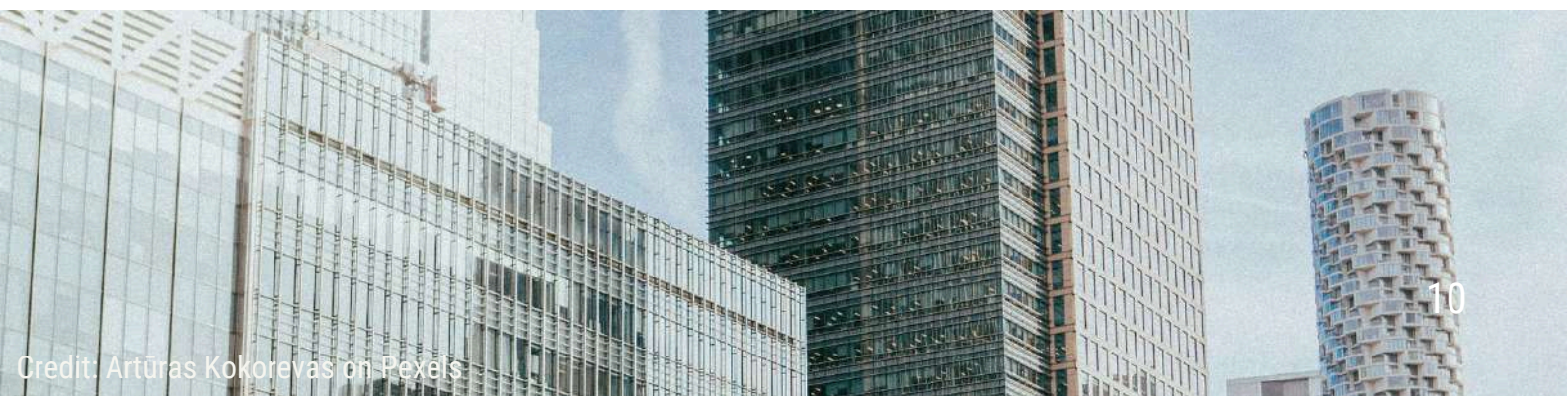
"I think the partnership model ... it is deeply relational and it's not transactional."
 - Community Land Trust

Towards a New Culture of Land-Use and Management

While there is clear ambition from Government to deliver sustainable objectives through effective land use, gaps remain between their aspirations and the practical policy mechanisms and financial structures in place to achieve them. A deliberate reshaping of the land market must be initiated in collaboration with landowners across sectors, creating an environment that fosters growth through their participation in value sharing.

Given the complex tapestry of landowners and the diversity of their needs and objectives, it will be important to take a multipronged approach to reform. It is also crucial to recognise that value creation is more than a means to an end and that more progressive or intangible notions of value, such as risk reduction, capacity-building, and partnership creation and consolidation can be unlocked within processes themselves.

The Government must adopt a proactive approach to holistic value creation, and in turn, encourage others to do the same. With this in mind, we grounded the following recommendations in the key concerns and values expressed by landowners throughout our research.



1 Increasing certainty for decision-makers and landowners by establishing a cross-cutting, integrated database on land-use.

This would facilitate **the creation of a national-level land use framework**, forming the basis for a national-level strategic plan.

2 Building trust in the public sector as an essential value creator and market shaper.

Reinforce the capacity of local authorities to **de-risk development at an early stage** and examine **how councils can process developer contributions** in a more strategic, transparent manner when reviewing viability guidance this year.

3 Making sustainable land use viable and attractive across various scales and financial situations.

Incentivise **multisector partnerships** and **improve access to sustainable finance for smaller landowners** to reduce the often preventative entry costs.

4 Better enabling public landowners to facilitate small-scale or community development.

Establish broader definitions of **“valued community assets”** in the forthcoming Devolution Bill and **“best considerations”** for the disposal of public land in line with an integrated duty of care to communities and climate.

5 Laying the foundations for a more long-term, intergenerational approach to land use and management

Mandate the **land commissions** proposed under the Devolution White Paper to **drive national conversations on the future of land** as a finite resource.



Housing Delivery

Credit: Olexiy Pedosenko

In recent years, housing delivery has faced a historic shortfall, particularly in London and the South East, where demand for new homes far exceeds supply. This imbalance has driven up house prices and created affordability issues, especially for younger generations. These challenges deter young, skilled workers from settling in productive regions, diminishing national economic output and increasing social costs.

The Labour Government considers this especially relevant for younger residents who are unable to afford home ownership. As a result, the Government has focused on reforms to the English planning system as the main route to increasing housing supply, to make housing more affordable as well as to stimulate economic growth.

While it is reasonable to view planning as a key area for reform, oversimplifying the issue is risky. The current planning system is the product of decades of incremental changes that have reflected shifting priorities and values over time.

Millennials at the Epicentre of the Perfect Housing Storm

It is well beyond our resource to solve the wicked problem of delivering sufficient affordable housing. Rather, we have sought to represent the experience and values of young people who are often the group most affected by the housing shortage.

As they are at the sharp end of the housing challenge, we sought their views on a range of planning policy to test their appetite for change and how they would reevaluate the planning system in pursuit of more affordable housing. Using a 'millennial jury' format, participants aged 25-45 discussed housing policies, such as the grey belt strategy and broader issues in London and the South East, offering their views on tackling the housing crisis.



Credit: Aaron Gilmore on Unsplash



Our study shows millennials advocate for housing solutions prioritising affordability, inclusivity, and sustainability, favouring secure renting, mixed communities, and "gentle density" over tall buildings. They call for ambitious reforms, such as abolishing the Right to Buy policy, greater devolution of resources to local governments, and balanced grey belt development that aligns with environmental goals. Tackling these challenges demands a holistic reimagining of housing and planning policies to promote sustainable growth, advance social equity, and align with the evolving aspirations of younger generations.

The Shifting Values of the Younger Generation

We compared government priorities with millennial perspectives, identifying both alignment and divergence. This generation advocates for innovative and inclusive housing solutions beyond simply building more homes.

Key findings include:

- Millennials prioritize secure, affordable renting and oppose the financialisation of housing.

"The purpose of the planning system should be to create sustainable homes that give everybody a good foundation for life and create new choices of homes that are accessible to all of us physically and financially". – Elevator pitch

- They support integrating social housing into mixed communities and suggest ambitious reforms to the Right to Buy policy, including its abolition.
- Our group favour "gentle density" that emphasizes livability and community cohesion over tall buildings.
- While agreeing on the need for strategic oversight, millennials advocate for greater devolution of resources to local governments.
- They call for a balanced approach to grey belt development that meets human needs without compromising the planet.

"The innovation is there. It is just that it is not enforced yet, and those moves are too slow and too small; it needs a sort of bolder step." – Director Architect

Against this background, we make the following policy recommendations to build a fair and sustainable housing future:

1 Integrating holistic design standards by improving the National Design Guide and National Model Design Code.

Prioritise **beauty that plays specific functions**, such as sustainability and community well-being, over rigid aesthetic standards.

2 Enhancing affordability, rental security, and tenure choices to remove financial barriers for the 25–45 age group.

Implement **stronger rent controls, prioritising affordable renting, and accelerating and funding alternative housing models**, such as cooperative housing and self-build projects.

3 Ensuring that local party politics does not interfere with land supply for housing delivery.

Introduce an **independent, third-party review of the Green Belt**.

4 Consider creating an “intergenerational commission” or a permanent “intergenerational jury” to better understand shifts in values among diverse groups.

This could provide insights into **important similarities and differences in attitude toward housing delivery and broader planning issues**, enabling more sustainable economic and social outcomes across generations.



Lessons for the planning system

Credit: Tony Zohan on Pexels

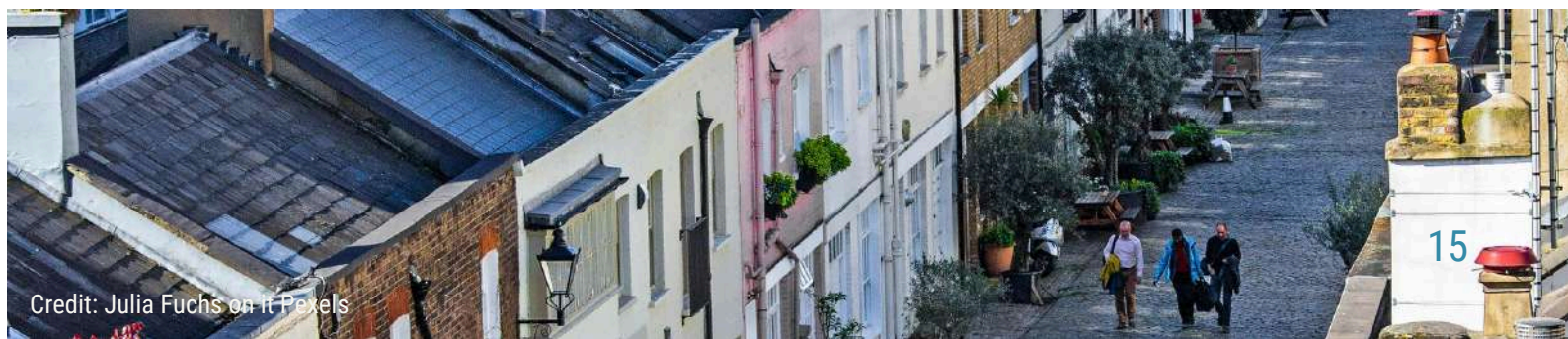
The complexity of planning stems from the competing values circulating within the system. How these values are balanced and interpreted shapes the places where we live and work. This complexity presents challenges but also allows us to get to the heart of “what we value” and “why” to offer a meaningful way forward for the planning system.

A Values-Based Approach provides a framework to uncover competing interests and bring trade-offs to the fore. While recognising that certain values are irreconcilable, a conscious focus on values can generate a more empathetic understanding of the compromises that must be made to drive institutional change.

We applied this approach to three key areas: Community Participation, Land Use, and Housing Delivery.

Designing the workshops around a Values-Based Approach enabled us to:

- **Examine how language shapes policy debates** and determines priorities and defines the framework within which we operate (including who has access to the planning arena).
- **Identify and unpack different types of “value”** (e.g. social value), getting to the root of why something is valued and what is at stake for specific stakeholders.
- **Recentre people and politics in the decision-making process**, focusing on planning as a key mechanism for collective engagement to achieve shared societal goals.
- **Create space to talk about the reality of implementation**, examining how policy is translated into practice by actors according to their varied interests and understandings.
- **Paint a systemic picture of different governance areas** across the planning system and the competing values influencing their effective management.



Credit: Julia Fuchs on Pexels

Our study revealed several common threads about what really matters for diverse actors confronting the current challenges of the planning ecosystem:

- Workshop participants highlighted the centrality of planning in determining how we live our lives and its value as an integrative mechanism to achieve a broad set of social, environmental and economic outcomes for the built environment. However, they noted that the planning system, as it stands, is outdated and in need of a bigger conversation about why it matters, what purpose it should serve and for whom.
- Funding constraints were overwhelmingly cited as the biggest barrier to achieving transformative change. Indeed, the propensity for fiscal centralisation and the limited possibilities for value uplift in certain geographies create a climate of scarcity for local authorities and communities. Tight margins prevent local government entrepreneurship and planning efficiency.

There is a big elephant in the room! I've been in rooms where developers and communities have been the progressive ones, and the local authority has been the [one] stopping anything from happening: not because they don't necessarily agree; but just because they don't have the capacity to do anything about it!"

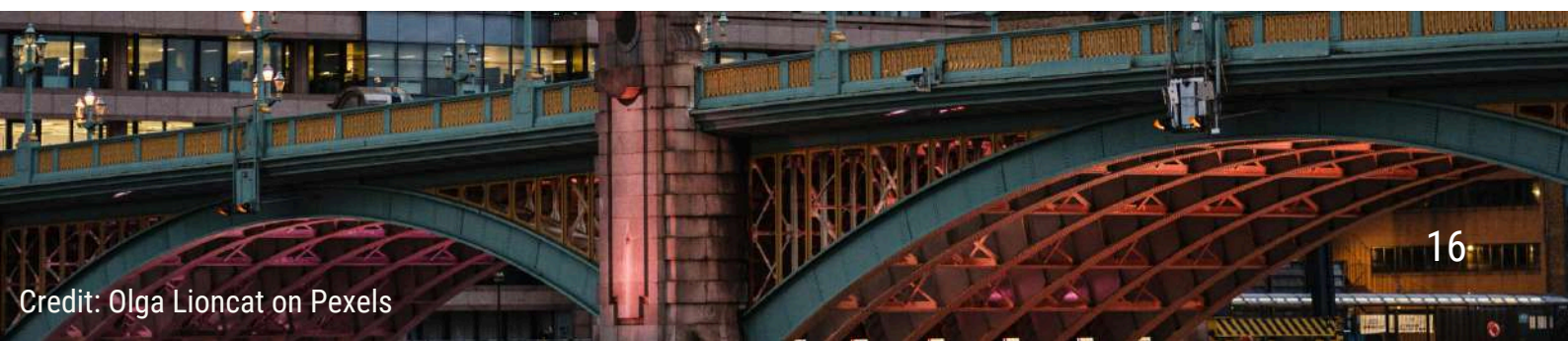
- Community Researcher

- We found a shared desire to work towards a common vision, whether to achieve positive community outcomes, manage land as a limited resource, or deliver quality housing at scale. Strategic planning exercises can offer stakeholders an opportunity to establish a common vision, working through trade-offs in an effective and collaborative manner. We support Labour's establishment of a universal strategic planning framework but urge them to foster a culture of continuous and "negotiated collaboration" as part of this process.

"...when we talk about values in the UK, we're becoming a lot more atomised as people... I'm just wondering if, culturally, we have to do a lot more work around common good"

- Housing Association Representative

- The planning system lacks legitimacy. Across workshops there was dissatisfaction with the planning system's inputs, processes and outputs. Engagement with planning is often compromised as people do not feel their values are heard by the system. Indeed, people's concept of fairness is often impacted by the "painful" journey of the planning process. Moreover, it is no secret that the current planning system does not deliver the quality and scale of outputs necessary to meet society's needs. With this in mind, we recommend:



1 Establishing a renewed sense of purpose for the planning system through open and deliberate conversation about its remit.

A national forum for regional land commissions could also provide an inclusive space to develop a shared vision of the next steps for holistic planning reform.

2 Providing sufficient resourcing for the planning system.

Loosen constraints for local government borrowing, expanding their revenue-raising powers to equip them with the capacity to adopt long-term entrepreneurial approaches.

3 Reimagining the strategic planning process to foster a culture of continuous and “negotiated collaboration”

Engage key actors in conversation about their roles and responsibilities, and the inevitable trade-offs needed to work towards a shared vision.

4 Building trust and legitimacy in the planning system.

Ensure that planning processes are easy to navigate for all stakeholders and strengthening evaluation mechanisms through citizen juries - centring future evaluation metrics on social outcomes.

Oram Policy and Research Fellows

Meg Hennessy

Land Use Lead

Olexiy Pedosenko

Housing Delivery Lead

Liz Williams

Community Participation Lead

Advisors

Dr. Nancy Holman

Associate Professor of Urban Planning

Dr. Alan Mace

Associate Professor of Urban Planning Studies

Dr. Erica Pani

Assistant Professor (Education) of Local Economic Development and Planning

For more details on findings and recommendations as well as key references please see the full report available below



THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

